EDITORIAL

Do you publish in the "list"? The "list" here refers to the ISI or Thomson Scientific impact factor list, which ranks a number of mathematical journals (and many other scientific periodicals, altogether more than 9,000) according to their impact factor. For a particular journal and year, the journal impact factor is computed by calculating the average number of citations to articles in the journal during the preceding two years from subsequent articles published in the collection of indexed journals in that given year. (It should be immediately noted that Thomson Scientific indexes less than half the mathematics journals covered by Mathematical Reviews and Zentralblatt.) Originally intended "not to be used without careful attention to the many phenomena that influence citation rates, as for example the average number of references cited in the average article. The impact factor should be used with informed peer review." [Thomson]*, the impact factor has nowadays become one of the most important (sometimes the sole) bibliometric data on which the quality of a journal—and by extrapolation, the quality of the articles and their authors—are judged.*

Research funding bodies, such as governments and research councils, increasingly rely on what they deem to be simple and objective criteria to assess the quality of research. One is expected to publish in good *journals. This is decisive for the award of a grant and for promotion prospects. Committees base their judgement of what is* good *on these bibliometrics rather than on "subjective" assessment methods such as peer review. Mostly because this approach is easier to understand and capable of handling large numbers of applications. However, there are serious problems with an oversimplified methodology to assess mathematical research—this has been pointed out by many before and is very impressively demonstrated in a detailed report commissioned by the IMU, which can be found at*

`http://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/IMU/Report/CitationStatistics.pdf`

The main Canadian research council NSERC write in their guidelines "Selection committees and panels are advised by NSERC to neither rely on numbers of publications in their assessment of productivity nor create or use lists of 'prestigious' or 'unacceptable' journals in their assessment of quality. The quality of the publication's content is the determining factor, not that of the journal in which it appears, and the onus is on the applicant to provide convincing evidence of quality." and "The ultimate tests of quality of any research contribution or publication are its significance and use by other researchers and end-users, and the extent to which it influences the direction of thought and activity in the target community."

Of course, it is each of us own decision where we submit our papers, and there are manifold reasons for choosing a particular journal. Even if oneself does not feel "bound" to the list, maybe your co-author insists on publishing in a periodical that it highly ranked. Maybe your head of department.

As editor of the Bulletin *I am glad that this journal is not in the list. And I hope that, in the medium and long term, enough people who have a say will agree with the IMU's statement that "Research is too important to measure its value with only a single coarse tool." and "If we set high standards for the conduct of science, surely we should set equally high standards for assessing its quality."*

—MM