The Refereeing Process

Ian Wanless

School of Mathematical Sciences
The referee’s job

- Quality control
- Check correctness
- Judge originality
- Judge importance
- Summarise for the editor
- Point out missing literature
- Gauge suitability for the journal
- Comment on language and readability
Who are the referees?

- Usually one or two experts
- Chosen by the editor
- Academics like you
- Volunteers
- Busy people
- Clever people
- People (sometimes biased, vain, annoying, incompetent etc.)
What does the referee get out of it

- Warm inner glow from doing their duty
- May learn something about
  - the subject
  - how to write papers
- Get news of discoveries earlier
- Kudos
  - Can put on CV which journals you’ve refereed for
  - Impress the editors
Pitfalls to avoid

- Stealing ideas
- Breaching confidentiality
- Revealing your identity
- Accepting something you aren’t interested in or qualified for
- Taking too long
- Conflicts of interest
  - Personal
  - Professional
- Imposing your prejudices
- Writing the paper for them
- Becoming a co-author
How to deal with awkward reports

- Let off steam
- Ask yourself why they said that
- Don’t argue with the umpire
- Make all changes that you can stomach
- Justify not making other changes
- Realise if one person has misunderstood, others will
- Be polite

Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as ‘quite an improvement.’
Do your referees a favour

- Structure your paper
- Make your motivation clear
- Write clear short sentences
- Introduce ideas in logical order
- Get feedback before submission
- If your English is weak, get assistance
- Beware ambiguity
- Proofread
- Proofread again!