



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

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Metric Olympics



The London Olympics maybe a fading memory but the whole event was an amazing success. Usage of metric measures was almost complete. The only event where imperial measures crept in was the marathon.

This is what Wikipedia says of the standard distance for both men's and women's events:

"The 2012 Summer Olympics is the third to be held in London. The stated distance of the marathon at the London 1908 Summer Olympics – 26 miles and 385 yards, later converted to metric units as 42.195 kilometres – formed the basis of the standard distance adopted by the International Association of Athletics Federations in 1921.

Isn't it about time that the distance was changed to a completely metric value, rounded to say 40 km?

For more about the Olympics metric story see page 2.

UKMA progress towards charity status



From the UKMA Chairman,
Robin Paice

A reply from the Charity Commission.

I think we count as a "completely new organisation" for this purpose as we are currently neither incorporated nor charitable. So - if all this is to be believed - we might be able to apply from late November. Don't hold your breath.

"The latest information that we have from the Office for Civil Society is that they hope to lay the CIO regulations before Parliament in the middle of this month with the debates taking place in November. The CIO would then start to become available for charities to use from late November. Their introduction will be phased to help us manage demand, with completely new organisations being the first to be able to apply for CIO status. After this first phase we will start to accept applications from existing unincorporated charities that want to set up a CIO which will again be phased based on the income of the existing unincorporated charity. After this, charitable companies which wish to convert to a CIO will be able to apply (a separate set of regulations is needed to introduce these provisions, which we hope will go through Parliament next year).

OCS should be publishing an implementation timetable at the same time as the regulations are laid before Parliament. We will also be publishing additional information on our website during October."

Metric Olympics – continued



Here is a picture from Martin Ward featuring a metric distance sign being installed in front of Buckingham Palace during the London 2012 Men's Marathon

From MetricViews:

Those of us who were unable to get tickets have been able to participate in spirit (if we wished), and our thanks go out to:

- the athletes who delivered some great performances,
- the spectators who helped to create great sporting events,
- the volunteers who welcomed the world,
- Transport for London who brought all three together, and confounded predictions of gridlock on the roads and a melt-down of public transport,
- the UK construction industry who delivered the venues (more about them later)
- the broadcasters who brought the Games into our homes (more about them later too),
- and of course the organisers who ensured it all came together over the past two weeks.

The bid in 2005 to bring the Games to London included a promise to inspire a generation. There have certainly been many inspirational moments during the Games, and young people have many new role models to motivate and uplift them. What is more, the measures used in sport are the same measures used in teaching at school and in college, linking the inspirational world of sport to the sometimes-less-than-inspirational world of learning.

In our article on 27 July, we referred to the venues, delivered on time and within budget and 100% metric. Our view now we have seen them in action is – Wow! What an advert for Britain's design and construction skills in the two hundred or so metric countries around the world receiving video feeds of the Games. A sell-out for beach volleyball on Horse Guards Parade – who would have believed it?

The BBC took its video from Olympic Broadcasting Services (OBS) and made no attempt to disguise the fact that the measures used in the Games are metric. Comments on previous Metric Views articles have drawn attention to occasional slip-ups, but the overwhelming impression has been that metric rules. "Think metric. Don't convert" has generally been the principle. This over two TV channels, two extra Freeview channels, twenty four live channels, Radio 5, Five Live Olympics Extra and replay on line, covering thirty four different venues. The first real time media games.

This has made all of us in the UK potential winners. We have to earn our living in a metric world, and few who have viewed Games coverage can have been left in any doubt that imperial measures have had their day. We have also witnessed great sport.

So Metric Views' nominations for winners are:

- our younger generation,
- the UK construction industry,

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- the BBC,
- and us – the Great British public.

And losers?

These must include those who spent many hours on-line in unsuccessful attempts to obtain tickets, and also the reputation of the company that provided the ticketing software.

Our last article discussed metric myths and their demise. One myth is that the metric system has been imposed on the UK by Brussels. And on two hundred other countries competing in the Games, only 26 of which are in the EU? Surely not. Nor does being metric seem to have affected the performance of Team GB.

How ironic too that Andy Murray lost at Wimbledon in June, when speeds were measured in mph, but won in August when these switched to km/h.



No, this isn't Andy Murray, of course.

The point of this picture is to remind you of the use of service speeds shown in km/h at the Olympics tennis events.

The reaction of the Permanent Secretary at the UK Department for Transport (DfT) when seeing service speeds at Wimbledon in metric would have been interesting to observe. Perhaps his coffee ended up in his lap. The DfT has, of course, maintained for forty years that road traffic signs can survive in an ever-shrinking bubble of imperial measures, while the country and most of the rest of world continues with the metric changeover. But the DfT is not entirely to blame. During "Question Time" on BBC1 on 23 February 2006, politicians of all parties scrambled over each other to rubbish the idea that Britain should bring its road traffic signs into line with its neighbours. Now saturation coverage of the Games has brought metric measures into almost every home – if this were a public information campaign it would be worth almost as much as any reasonable estimate of the cost of changing the UK's road traffic signs. No wonder the DfT has taken a very low profile during the Games.

Philip Hammond, former Secretary of State for Transport, may also be regretting the remarks he made in June 2010 in connection with a proposal for dual height signage of over-bridges to reduce damage from vehicle collisions. He said:

"It's bad enough that Labour were hell bent on replacing feet and inches with metres."

Fortunately, Mr Hammond was not involved with the decision to bid to bring the 2012 Games to London.

We have already nominated the BBC as a winner. What about America's NBC, which also took video feeds from OBS? It is rumoured that NBC paid \$4.38 billion (yes billion) for the rights to broadcast the Games in the USA. In an effort to recover its outlay, NBC has danced to the advertisers' tunes. It used metric for description but not for measurement. Thus it referred to Bolt's 100 metres sprint, but to Rutherford's long jump of 27 feet 3 inches. But America too must adapt to earn its living in a metric world, and NBC has wasted an opportunity to familiarise the American public with metric measures and to introduce them to the realities of international

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measurement. So we nominate the American public to the list of losers from the Games, even though the USA tops the medal table.

So Metric Views' nominations for losers from the Games are:

- those caught up in an unsuccessful quest for tickets,
- anyone who hopes to benefit from metric myths,
- the UK Department for Transport and its former Secretary of State Philip Hammond,
- and the American public.

London Olympic 2012 marathon lap distances

The table below is from an article in Wikipedia describing the marathon route for the London Olympics.

Notice that the last three laps are all 8 miles long, the first lap adding on the odd 2 miles and 385 yards. It seems that when planning this event, thought was not given to dividing laps into even numbers of kilometres, say 4 x 10 km with a last finish leg of 2.195 km. Many local running events nowadays are for distances of 10 km, so wouldn't that fact influence the planning of the biggest of them all?

Why is it so hard to stop thinking in terms of miles?

From Wikipedia:

"The last three laps are identical and are exactly 8 miles (12.875 km) each. The first lap, which only incorporates the south-western section of the route, is 2 miles and 385 yards (3.571 km) long.

A summary of the course and associated distance points is given below:"

Lap	Distance		Mile points	Kilometre points
	km	mile		
1	3.571	2.2	1,2	None
2	16.445	10.2	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	5, 10, 15
3	29.320	18.2	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18	20, half-way, 25
4	42.195	26.2	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26	30, 35, 40

50 years of Celsius weather forecasts – time to kill off Fahrenheit for good?

Fifty years ago, on 15th October 1962, British weather forecasts switched over from the Fahrenheit scale to Celsius. Fifty years on, some parts of the British media inexplicably cling on to Fahrenheit measures, and the UK Metric Association (UKMA) says it's time to kill off Fahrenheit for good.

The UK Met Office has used the Celsius scale - formerly known as "centigrade" - in its work since 1st January 1961, to allow for greater international co-operation and because of the convenience of the scale. As the Met Office reported in 1962, this "led to the consideration of the desirability of introducing it in weather reports and forecasts for the general public."

With the agreement of industry and the government, the Celsius scale was given after Fahrenheit from January 1962 as an interim measure, and then from the 15th October, Celsius became the primary unit given, with Fahrenheit retained as a secondary unit to aid the transition "for a period of several years."

The Met Office is to be commended for accomplishing the change to the metric system of measurement so rapidly, in sharp contrast to some other parts of the government, such as the Department for Transport, which is still, fifty years later, dithering even about adding metres to safety-critical warning signs.

However, despite this early and rapid switch to Celsius-first forecasting, at the time of switchover, there was no timetable for the withdrawal of the Fahrenheit secondary measure. Says UKMA Chairman Robin Paice, "The officials at the Met Office in 1962 would almost certainly be incredulous at the prospect that, fifty years later, some media outlets would still be using Fahrenheit, and in some quarters, even as the primary scale. Two generations have now passed since Celsius was introduced, and yet we still see occasional headlines, normally in hot weather, about the temperature given in Fahrenheit."

UKMA believes that with fifty years of Celsius weather forecasting now behind us, it is time for the British media to ditch Fahrenheit for good. "Media outlets should reflect on how they reported decimalisation; "new

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pence” are almost a decade younger than the Celsius temperature scale, and yet no newspapers feel the need to convert pence to shillings in their reports, and rightly so; why cling on to an even more obsolete temperature scale?”

The Met Office declined an invitation to comment.

1948 adoption of Celsius

Extract taken from the CIPM:

“From three names (“degree centigrade”, “centesimal degree”, “degree Celsius”) proposed to denote the degree of temperature, the CIPM has chosen “degree Celsius”.

This name is also adopted by the 9th CGPM.

CIPM, 1948 and 9th CGPM, 1948”

So, the use of the word “centigrade” was put into the obsolete category 64 years ago and yet some people still use the term. What does it take for the message to get through?

The Cardinal's Hat calls time



Picture of 'The Cardinal's Hat' pub taken from Google's street view.

From MetricViews:

A pub in Worcester, that for ten years served draught beer by the litre, has now closed due to rising costs.

“Pint taken”, the newsletter of the Worcestershire County Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) recently reported as follows:

“For ten years Worcester has been able to claim to have something quite unique. A pub selling Austrian beer by the litre! However, with rising costs, (the landlord) Andrea Limlei decided not to renew her lease and now, sadly, the Cardinals Hat is shut.

“When Andrea and her husband took over running Worcester's oldest pub and started selling beer in litres they did not realise what they had let themselves in for. They were thrown into a major battle, which made the national papers, with trading standards who said the pub could not serve its imported lager in litre measures saying that beer could be sold only by the pint or half!”

Trading standards eventually dropped the case, saying that enforcement of this aspect weights and measures legislation does not have a high priority. Readers of Metric Views may have encountered this elsewhere, in particular in relation to the imperial pricing of fruit and veg in street markets. But, in the end, it was not regulation but economics that caused Ms Limlei to say “Time”.

UKMA takes the view that we do not need “specified quantities” at all for draught beer and cider, provided that the quantity and alcoholic strength are stated and the unit price per litre is quoted. The excuse offered by successive UK governments is that without fixed imperial sizes for beer, drinkers would not be able to

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calculate their alcohol intake – although curiously this argument does not apply to wine and whisky. In reality, the arithmetic is much easier with rounded metric quantities than with imperial units.

The claim that the sale of draught lager by the litre in the Cardinals Hat in Worcester was unique is not one we have heard before. There are plenty of other areas around the country where Trading Standards departments do not see enforcement of certain aspects of weights and measures as having high priority, and perhaps our readers are aware of other pubs and bars in the UK where draught continental beers are sold in continental measures with impunity.

A response from one reader to a 'lively' discussion:

Ken Cooper says:

2012-10-07 at 18:06

Before the Cardinal's Hat closes, Andrea decides to contribute yet another set of new myths to the metrication debate. You could never accuse her of shying away from publicity!

"Trading Standards Officers.....threatened Mrs. Limlei with jail"

Penalties for breaches of the Weights and Measures Act are set out at section 84. Jail is reserved for the most serious offences (inspector disclosing trade secrets, fraud in use of weighing equipment). At most, if Mrs Limlei had been found guilty, the maximum penalty would be a fine. As such, it is highly unlikely that Mrs Limlei was threatened with jail – it makes for a better story though!

A more accurate version of events follows.

The Cardinal's Hat was taken over by Mrs Limlei in July 2002. A few weeks later, she was visited by Trading Standards. They sent her a warning letter stating - "You appear to have contravened the Weights and Measures Act 1985, therefore, it is the advice of this service that you replace your metric capacity measures with ½ and 1 pint government stamped capacity measures within 14 days of this letter. Should you fail to comply with the advice given to you, I will have no alternative to report the matter to the Head of Trading Standards for his consideration".

I assume that Mrs Limlei then asked for a further meeting with Trading Standards. When they turned up for this meeting, they found that Mrs Limlei had also asked BWMA (and various press organisations) to attend.

BWMA's report of events includes the following: "They (Trading Standards) emphasised again in interviews to the press that at this stage they were not contemplating a prosecution. They claimed prosecution had never been mentioned in this case [NB This is accurate but the letter sent to Andrea was worded such that they could take the matter further if she kept on selling in litres]. The visit was amicable"

So, rather than "threatening Mrs Limlei with jail", Trading Standards had emphasised that they were not contemplating prosecution in the first place!

As I suggest above, Mrs Limlei seems to have a nose for publicity, and doesn't seem to be willing to correct any misconceptions that have arisen since.

The claim that the case came to nothing after it emerged Government tax on beer was calculated in metric measures is also nonsense. This claim dates from 2006, when Glasgow Trading Standards warned the West Brewing Company in relation to its use of litre glasses.

On that occasion, the bar owner was quoted as saying "Spirits and wine have to be sold in metric and I even have to pay my beer duty in metric."

Well, duhhhh. All sales of beer apart from draught beer are in metric amounts, so the tax paid will be on these metric amounts.

The tax issue is a total red herring. If any Trading Standards Department chose to instigate a prosecution for using metric measures to sell beer, I have no doubt that it would be successful.

However, as always, before instigating a prosecution, any Trading Standards department should take heed of the Lacors metrication guidance at paragraph 3.7. This states:

"3.7 In a few cases a trader may continue to use imperial units solely as a matter of principle, but in circumstances where there appears to be no detriment either to consumers or competitors. In such circumstances authorities need to consider carefully whether the public interest will be served by enforcement action which may not have an impact on consumer welfare or competitors. Authorities need to have regard to the provisions of Counsel's Opinion in relation to the duty to enforce, the relevant points of which provide that Local Authorities may not decline to perform their statutory duties under the Act. Thus, whilst they enjoy discretion whether or not to prosecute in an individual case, that discretion may not be used to justify a general policy of non-prosecution and must be exercised reasonably. Where attention is paid on a case by case basis to whether prosecution is in the public interest it is appropriate to take into account the amount of detriment suffered by the trader's customers or competitors."

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This advice is equally applicable to the situation in question, where pubs are using metric equipment to sell goods which must be sold in imperial measure.

However, "Trading Standards follow legal advice and exercise discretion not to prosecute" isn't as good a story as "I pay my taxes in metric so you're barred from prosecuting me"

Marginal gains

The recent performance of our Olympians, in particular the Team GB cyclists and their support team, is in stark contrast to that of the UK economy. We ask if there are lessons for the British government.

The UK economy faces a double-dip recession. Output is stagnant. The Bank of England's programme of printing money appears to have failed. Interest rates are at a record low, and can not be lowered much further. On 9 August, it was announced that the UK's trade gap widened sharply in June to its worst level since 1979, when comparable records began, and on 21 August we learned of a "surprise" increase in UK government borrowing in July.

The cause of these problems is due in no small part to excessive reliance since the 1980s on financial services and on North Sea oil and gas. Output of the latter is now declining, and we have learned that the foundations of the former were built on sand, with all the four largest British banks now in trouble, either bailed out by tax payers or at odds with regulators.

Rebalancing the UK economy towards exports may be a way out of this mess, and is one favoured by some politicians and economists. The strategy followed by Team GB's cyclists shows a way forward. The Team's performance manager, Dave Brailsford, has focused on "the aggregation of marginal gains", examining almost every detail of the sport, from the cyclists themselves to their equipment, including streamlining using wind tunnel testing of rider and cycle combinations, tactics, sport psychiatry, hygiene, and nutrition.

In its efforts to restore the UK's economy to health, the government could do worse than take a look at the strategy used by Team GB's cyclists. How about aggregating marginal gains from looking at a range of features affecting the UK's economic performance including, of course, the measurement muddle?

It should be said that the reasons for completing the UK's metric changeover are not primarily economic. UKMA believes that a country needs only one system of measurement, not two, and that one simple system would benefit everyone in the UK, not just business. But we are also certain that completion of the changeover would give rise to improvements in economic performance.

Such gains have been described in numerous reports and recently in the speech by Lord Howe in the House of Lords, so we will repeat only three:

- School leavers have little facility with measurement of length and distance, having encountered a confusing mixture of imperial and metric when growing up, and so have to be trained to work in metric when starting employment.
- Misunderstanding, mistakes and disputes occur when parties to a transaction use different systems of measurement. An example is office and commercial buildings which are always constructed in metric but often advertised for letting in imperial. Furthermore, conversion of measurements imposes additional costs.
- Bridge strikes, caused by drivers unfamiliar with imperial measures, impose a direct and quantifiable cost on the UK economy for the damage caused, and an unquantifiable cost of delay and inconvenience for road users, rail passengers and freight operators.

David Kern, chief economist at the British Chambers of Commerce recently had this to say on the trade deficit:

"It is disappointing to see such a large trade deficit in June. Although the monthly figures would have been affected by public holidays, such as the Diamond Jubilee, it is worrying that the trade deficit in the second quarter as a whole was much higher than in the first."

There is no question that British exporters are facing major challenges as a result of problems in the eurozone, but the rebalancing of the UK economy towards exports is taking too long."

Forget the eurozone – this problem has been in the making since the 1980s.

If the UK government took up this challenge to look for marginal gains, could we expect the UK Department for Transport (DfT) to participate? The DfT must surely realize that the resources available for transport are dependent on the health of the UK economy. Is it too much to hope that it would make a contribution to improving the UK's economic performance by bringing the units on road traffic signs into line with those used in the rest of the economy? A marginal gain perhaps, but one that could be easily achieved.

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Or perhaps, like many others including some politicians, the DfT sees 'going for gold' as just too much trouble and would prefer instead relegation and a quiet life.

A couple of responses from readers:

Jake says:

2012-08-25 at 07:18

The cost of modernising Britain's road signs should be seen as an investment in the future of the country. Our road signs currently tell visitors and investors alike that we are stuck in the past and are not part of the modern world. This is completely at odds with what the government is trying to achieve and should be trying to achieve, namely showcasing Britain as a modern economy that is open to the world for business. Britain urgently needs to modernise and rebuild its economy. Politicians have wasted so much time already dithering and arguing over the issue of measurement units. I do not see Britain emerging as a leading 21st century economy and attracting the attention of the world's investors unless it makes this relatively small investment in its own future.

Helen says:

2012-09-18 at 20:28

Metric measures help people understand their environment and make political decisions that have the results that they want. I do advocacy for rail in the US, and most people can't read the reports that planners make, so they can't judge their decisions.

This has economic effects, but the impact of this is much broader than the economy.

When is standard metric not standard?

Your editor has recently sought a new door to replace one that was suffering from rot. The size of the door to be replaced appeared to be 805 x 2000 mm but how accurate can one measure an item of this size with a tape measure, even if it is a metric-only device?

Try finding a replacement at Wickes, B&Q, Homebase or anywhere else and what do you find? The only sizes that are 'standard' are 762 x 1981 mm or 838 x 1981 mm. Of course, the nominal dimensions are in inches but I am not going to mention them since this is an article about metric measures and standards!

Fortunately, a suitable replacement was found at a local Jewson builder's merchant and judging by the amount of dust on the covering had been in stock for a number of years!

So, what does 'standard metric' as illustrated by the product specifications really mean?

2XG Softwood



Product Specifications

Code	Title	Price	Size
52311	Dowel & Glued	£161	762x1981x44mm (2'6"x6'6")
52314	Dowel & Glued	£161	838x1981x44mm (2'9"x6'6")
52338	Dowel & Glued	*	826x2040x44mm (Standard metric)
52339	Dowel & Glued	*	813x2032x44mm (2'8"x6'8")
52348	Dowel & Glued	*	807x2000x44mm (Standard metric)

Speed limit sign in Florida, USA.

This is a contribution from Tony Wilson taken from Twitter.

This seems to be a 'one-off' and is shown on a left turn lane rather than the main carriageway.

In reality though, the USA is even less likely to universally change its road signs to metric than the UK.

