



# UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a single rational system of measurement

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- Local Government Regulation (formerly LACORS) – had issued misleading advice, but subsequent correspondence had proved futile.
- Traffic signs – DfT had dropped proposal to require dual units on height and width restriction signs. Explanation to be sought. "Cost of signs" project deferred owing to potential cost and likely impact in the face of implacable hostility from DfT and media.
- Consumers' Association – meeting with Chairman – concluded that CA considered the issue to be low priority and that it could adversely affect their revenues. Project deferred for time being.
- Work programme included:
  - Style Guide;
  - application for charitable status;
  - improvements to website;
  - development of various means of communication (blog, Googlegroups, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube);
  - responding to Government consultations and media events.
  - Implementing our new objectives

## AGM/Conference



*King's College Strand Campus, venue for UKMA's AGM and conference - 2 July 2011.*

### Review of year

Robin Paice (Chairman) reviewed the previous year's work and events:

- Weights and Measures Reform - new government had confirmed previous government's de facto policy (i.e. maintain "two systems") - "Red tape challenge" likely to prove to be a "populist gimmick". Latest consultation "Empowering and protecting consumers" only concerned with administration – not substance.

### Charitable status

The Chairman then explained the rationale behind the proposed change to charitable status:

- Following the failure of our attempts to persuade either the politicians or major opinion-formers to "come out" and publicly support completion of metrication, we are clearly in for a long haul of public education (a classic charitable purpose).
- Charitable status would have some financial advantages and confer enhanced status with major donors and the media. In particular CIO status would give UKMA "legal personality" and protect both members and trustees from financial liability.

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Robin went on to outline the changes to UKMA's constitution that might be necessary in order to comply with the Charity Commission's rules (based on their draft "model constitution").

Significant changes could include:

- Objects (already dealt with at the AGM)
- Limited liability
- Eligibility for membership
- Members' decisions
- Quorum
- Role of trustees
- Appointment of trustees, election timetable
- Trustees' meetings, quorum
- Electronic communication
- Amending constitution (75% rule)
- Postal voting – independent scrutineer

The next steps would be:

- to draft the detailed changes to the constitution
- check with the Commission that our amendments are acceptable
- call an inaugural meeting of the new body to adopt constitution
- formally apply for registration as a CIO
- transfer assets of UKMA to the CIO
- wind up UKMA. (This is necessary since direct transfer of status is not possible).

In response to a question Robin agreed that a formal vote of all members of UKMA would be held before proceeding with the change).

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## **Implementing our new objectives**

Each Committee member led, in turn, a discussion on one of the six new objectives that had been approved at the AGM earlier in the day. These are education, research, consumer protection, road traffic signs, public health, and communication, in particular communication between those with specialist knowledge and the general public.

The presentations and subsequent discussions illustrated the wide range of problems that the UK faces in achieving a single rational system of measurement and the many different approaches that might be followed by UKMA in pursuit of this.

### **Style guide**

The Chairman then introduced the proposed new "style guide", which he described as "UKMA's major project for the coming year". Following last year's excellent presentation by Bill Lynch, the Committee felt the project needed to be split into three components:

a durable factsheet or reference card that writers could keep for handy reference;

an alphabetical online guide on our website

a printed booklet, incorporating and developing a) and b).

The project was generally supported and welcomed by members, and a number of suggestions were made, including:

- alternative formats (such as a Filofax version)
- an iphone app
- improvements to colour scheme and layout
- omitting some strictly "non-style" sections (e.g. temperature chart)
- more guidance on how to create symbols, halfspaces and superscripts
- other proof-reading amendments/corrections

### **Communication**

UKMA's various attempts to communicate were then discussed:

- Phil Hall explained the conversion of the UKMA website to "Content Management System" platform, enabling multiple authors to create and amend webpages.

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- Martin Clutterbuck asked what members would like to see in UKMA News, and said he was often short of material suitable for inclusion. This influences the frequency of publication (target being four per year). He said he liked to include examples showing incorrect usage but also consistent good practice. This includes areas such as the media, packaging (he requires grocery labels, containers, etc.) and promotion/advertising material such as catalogues, etc.
- MetricViews (UKMA's blog) (Robin Paice)
- Twitter (Tony Wilson)
- Facebook (Derek Pollard)
- YouTube (Derek Pollard)

### **UKMA's logo**

In the final, unscheduled session, the Chairman raised an issue concerning UKMA's logo. There had been criticism that the italic "m" was inappropriate since it conflicted with the strict rule that SI symbols must always be written in upright – not italic – font. Differing views were expressed, but it was agreed that if there were to be a change, the right time would be when (if) UKMA changed its status to a CIO.

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## **UKMA - New financial year membership**

Dear member,

At the AGM on Saturday 2 July 2011, it was agreed to maintain membership subscriptions for 2011-12 at the same rates as the year just ended. These are:

- 1 year, standard rate: £15.00
- 1 year, concession: £5.00
- 3 year, standard rate: £40.00
- 3 year, concession: £12.00
- Life membership: £150.00

As ever, there are a number of ways of paying.

The simplest are to pay online - either directly to our bank account, or via the website. (Online banking is free to UKMA and therefore preferred, but the website is very simple to use and securely managed by PayPal.)

Our bank details are: Sort code 60-05-16, account number 16440846

The website renewal page can be found here: <http://metric.org.uk/subscription-renewals>

The buttons have the correct amounts to make life simpler for the majority; however, I know some of you prefer to add a donation, which is always appreciated - there is also a donate page if you want to pay online but also want to add an extra donation, this can be found here: <http://metric.org.uk/donate>

If you prefer to send a cheque you can send one directly to me at:

Tony Wilson

1 Isambard Place

London SE16 7DA

Please don't mark it as UKMA or Treasurer in case that marks it out for special attention within the postal system; at least one membership cheque didn't reach me last year (although I don't know how that envelope was marked, I just want to minimise the risk!)

Finally, if you are already paid up, thank you!

Regards,

Tony Wilson

UKMA Treasurer

## **Time to ditch the language of the past**

Here is a copy of an article by Ian Pigott in:



Friday 15 April 2011 09:20

*"Metrication took place in the UK in 1965. So why, nearly half a century after imperial measurements were supposedly deemed surplus to requirements, am I memorising formulas that convert 21st century units into language that my grandfathers used?"*



*I am currently enjoying my fertiliser training. As a part of the FACTS syllabus, we are expected to know how many hundredweight of fertiliser should be applied to an acre of wheat. I have a very bad memory for information that I don't regard as important (my wife often reminds me that a wedding anniversary once fell foul of this filter) and, as far as I am concerned, poles, perches, units, bags, and hundredweights certainly fall into that category.*

*So why is farming so reluctant to let go of imperial measures? It is time that we draw a line in the sand, agree that they made an important contribution to farming, but consign them to history. The longer we allow people to use these archaic measures the longer we enable them and handicap the farmers of tomorrow.*

*Regardless of Nick Clegg's disparaging remarks towards employing kin within family businesses, farmer's sons and daughters will play an important role in farming for many years. If the elders persist in talking "Farm Latin" it is fair to assume that their offspring will also converse in units, bags and acres. It is a vicious circle and the cycle needs to be broken.*

*But more vexing (and rather amusing) is the way our industry selects the unit of measurement depending on emphasis. If a farmer wants to describe the size of his farm, he talks in acres, unless it's over 1,000 hectares in which case I am told it is very gauche to talk acres.*

*When the farmer refers to his combine header, it is always in feet - but divulge how much diesel costs and litres are preferred to gallons as the chosen denomination.*

*Agronomists, GPS soil analysts and machinery manufacturers are all experts at this art. They will refer to performance in terms of hectares, but will price the cost of that performance in acres.*

*Our industry has been a world leader in the manipulation of measurement since decimalisation. The joy of this deceit is that it has no rules. It allows anyone to choose when and where they abuse - switching between imperial and metric like a chameleon to its environment.*

*Pub yields, the ones that we share with our drinking pals, but not with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, are the gold standard in measurement deceit. Fuelled by five pints of Old Codger, 4 tonnes/acre lacks flair for a good boast. It is far too easily trumped by a contrived metric card. Twenty-four hundredweight per hectare will win the annual wheat award in most village bars, though I am yet to hear*

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*of a better yield than the 49.5 bushels/rood bragged by a farmer in a pub on the Lincolnshire Wolds in 2009.*

*Even this magazine deliberated long and hard on its decision to quote farm size in hectares rather than acres. Perhaps the worry was that land agents would sue for defamation. No one likes others describing their crown jewels in a smaller denomination. I understand their reservation - to advertise land at £16,000/ha is eye-watering, but is it wrong?*

*If UK farming is an industry of the future, isn't it time we stopped talking in a language from the past?"*

### SI is an international standard isn't it?

SI symbols are intended to be internationally recognised, no matter what language is spoken or which character set is used for text.

That is the reason for the use of a symbol rather than an abbreviation.

So how can this be justified at the French Open tennis tournament this year?



Fortunately, on another court at the same tournament, the correct symbol (km/h) was shown.

This may seem to be a very pedantic point since most French people, indeed most Europeans – even us in the UK, would know that this means kilometres per hour. However, if a standard is to be truly a standard, then surely, shouldn't it be applied consistently?

### Strawberries for tea?

Now it is summer time, how about some tasty strawberries to eat? In imperial measures according to all the media fuss from Asda!



These images were copied from a contribution to the [www.hotukdeals.com](http://www.hotukdeals.com) website. Many thanks to whoever posted it.

Notice – no reference to imperial measures anywhere, just the implication of 454 g.

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What sort of publicity stunt was Asda trying to pull?

From MetricViews:

*"ASDA downsizes strawberries – brilliant publicity stunt*

*Posted on 2011-05-30 by Erithacus*

*Reports in the tabloid media suggest that Asda has reverted to selling strawberries in "pounds". So what has really happened?*

*The Sun got the story first on Friday, 27 May, and ran it as follows.*

*ASDA is going back to pounds and ounces on fruit and veg for the first time in 16 YEARS.*

*From tomorrow shoppers can snap up a 1lb punnet of strawberries after customers asked for the return of imperial measures. Under EU laws, that would be 453.39 grams.*

*Asda said seven in ten shoppers still get confused by metric weights.*

*Buyer Andy Jackson said: "We have a steady stream of people asking us to put imperial measurements back on packs. We have taken a common-sense approach."*

*The EU rules came into force in 1995. Sunderland greengrocer Steven Thoburn was hailed as a metric martyr for his long campaign to continue selling bananas by the pound.*

*Asda will get round EU regulations by displaying metric measures next to the old imperial ones. A spokeswoman said it may extend pounds and ounces to other fruit and veg if the strawberry trial is successful."*

Well, that publicity stunt didn't last long!

This is what the current product looks like on their website 07 Jul 2011:



Looks suspiciously like 400 g  
(apologies for the blurry image)

This is the caption on the website - £2.00 (£5.00 / Kg) ASDA Strawberries (400g)

How do we tell them that the symbol for kilogram is kg not Kg and that there should be a space between the 400 and the g?

Perhaps a style guide would be a good idea.

## **"Can the economy survive without a national measurement system?"**

From MetricViews, posted on 2011-06-17 by Erithacus

*This was the question posed at a recent seminar organised by the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee in Portcullis House, opposite the Palace of Westminster. Typically, however, the keynote speeches skirted around the central problem.*

*The Parliamentary and Scientific Committee is described as "an Associate Parliamentary Group of members of both Houses of Parliament and British members of the European Parliament, representatives of scientific and technical institutions, industrial organisations and universities." It has over 300 individual or corporate members and thus represents almost the entire British scientific and engineering establishment in its relations with Parliament. The theme of its meeting on 15 February 2011 was: "Can the economy survive without a national measurement system?" so you might have thought that this would be a splendid opportunity to explore a solution to what is arguably the biggest problem of our national measurement system – namely that a large proportion of the population and the media use a different set of units from the official one. If so, you would have been disappointed.*

*The meeting was addressed\* by three impeccably qualified speakers, including the Managing Director of the National Physical Laboratory (the UK's National Measurement Institute), the Head of Materials and Processes Integration (Airbus), and the Director of Strategy, Measurement Research (LGC Group).*

*The content of their speeches\* (including the near obligatory quotations from Magna Carta and Lord Kelvin) was unexceptionable and will be familiar to most readers of this blog. These were some of the main points:*

*It has always been the responsibility of governments to define the legal units of measurement.*

*The National Measurement System (NMS) upholds a system agreed internationally in 1875 [system not identified, however]*

*All science and industry depend on the work of metrologists (measurement scientists).*

*"Measurement underpins the welfare of modern society and touches almost every part of daily life."*

*The National Physical Laboratory (NPL) is the custodian of the NMS – "the collective infrastructure of national facilities, expertise, knowledge, science, research and legal framework in the metrology field".*

*The NPL provides a consultancy service to over 2000 industry customers.*

*NMS provides Airbus with "robust, traceable standards which are essential for manufacturing; cross-sector best practice and knowledge transfer; manufacturing optimisation and product improvement; and innovative metrology for product improvement and new concept development."*

*Reliable measurement: "facilitates free trade through harmonised standards"; "underpins regulation" so that "parts manufactured in one country fit into machines in another country", "products tested and approved in one country can be sold in another country, without further technical inspection"; and "consumer protection is maintained."*

*There are problems of lack of accuracy and of "standards, benchmarks ... and protocols."*

*The UK plays a leading role in BIPM, which "ensures world-wide uniformity of measurements and their traceability to the International System of Units (SI)" [at last it gets a mention].*

*So, all good stuff – except for one thing ...*

*The elephant in the room*

*Sorry to use this overworked cliché – but it really is appropriate in this case.*

*It beggars belief that a serious discussion about a "national measurement system" (NMS) can take place without reference to the unfortunate fact that a large part of the general population and much of the popular media (not to mention our official road signs) do not use our national measurement system but continue to use a random collection of units that have survived by chance from Roman and medieval times.*

*The scientists, engineers and industrialists will no doubt claim that their work is entirely metric. All their calculations, their research, their learned papers, their standards and specifications, their components, their measuring instruments are all wholly and exclusively metric. The disconnect with wider society (the argument continues) is not a problem for them and is not relevant.*

### But it IS a problem, and it IS relevant.

*It is a problem since scientists, engineers and industrialists need to communicate with and explain themselves to the general public and the media. They also need to persuade politicians to accept their advice and recommendations (e.g. on climate change, or BSE, or the classification of harmful drugs), and above all they need to obtain public funding for their research. In order to communicate and persuade effectively, they need to speak the same language and to use the same measurement units.*

*Science and science-based industries are controversial and are much misunderstood and misrepresented in the media, resulting in deep public distrust. Symptoms of this are the growth of non-scientific (or anti-scientific) medicine such as homeopathy or acupuncture, the drop in take-up of the MMR vaccine with potentially fatal consequences, the campaign against genetically modified crops and in favour of "organic" farming, the growth of "creationism" as a serious alternative to Darwinism in science lessons in schools.*

*It would of course be an over-simplification to suggest that the only or main cause of this gulf of incomprehension and distrust is that scientists (and most industries) speak metric, whereas many non-scientists, even if they are partly conversant with metric units, generally default to "traditional" imperial units. Yet the fact that scientists speak in a language (metric) that is perceived by many as alien and "unnatural" is an additional, unnecessary barrier that makes communication with non scientists even more difficult than it would otherwise be. The challenge is to make metric the "natural" language of everybody.*

*It is disappointing therefore that the three distinguished speakers at the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee seminar carefully ignored the "two systems" problem. By failing to address the issue – indeed, by pretending that it is none of their business – scientists help to maintain the gulf and thereby sell themselves short. One can only hope that some of the other participants – especially those who might have an influence on the Government – may be prepared to use that influence to persuade it to resume the stalled metrication programme and complete it as soon as possible.*

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## The National Measurement System

From: Department For Business, Innovation And Skills

*"The National Measurement System: Strategy Document: 2011 – 2015' published today (7 Jul 2011) sets out the action that Government is taking to support a National Measurement System (NMS) to meet the changing needs of business and society."*

The document defines the Government's strategy towards measurement technology (metrology), specifically its development and support.

*"The Strategy describes how the National Measurement Office (NMO) and the national measurement laboratories (NPL, LGC and NEL) will deliver leadership in measurement nationally and internationally, creating the right framework for growth and innovation."*

The following is taken from the strategy document.

*"NMO will, through the NMS Programmes, and in compliance with the Government's controls on marketing expenditure, undertake the best value, effective, essential knowledge transfer which will:*

- Connect technology-driven businesses (from multi-national to micro), and technically-based public sector organisations, to measurement expertise,*
- Support the application of measurement best practice,*
- Adapt to satisfy the changing needs for guidance and support,*
- Extend awareness of measurement knowledge and make it accessible to broader market-based audiences,*
- Translate the knowledge into more accessible forms,*
- Deliver the knowledge through channels with which users can readily engage,*
- Involve intermediaries (professional, trade, sector-based, regional) in reaching a broader audience."*

The document includes this statement:

*"The UK plays a leading role in the work of the Conférence Générale des Poids et Mesures (CGPM) which defines the basis of the International System of Units (the metre, the kilogram, the second, etc.) known as the SI."*

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There is also a banner section defining SI. This is the only reference to the units that form the basis of the measurement system.

From the UKMA perspective, it will be interesting to see how the NMO implements the objectives listed above. Obviously, the first one is directed at businesses but perhaps UKMA could become involved and assist with the others – what do you think?

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### Bogus caller alert

From the National Measurement Office:

*“NMO has been alerted to a bogus caller claiming to represent a call centre employed by NMO and pursuing businesses over their “illegal” use of metric units.*

*Please be assured that NMO does not employ call centres and is not contacting businesses over alleged usage of metric units. Enforcement of weights and measures is carried out by local Trading Standards Departments who, likewise, are not running a call centre for this purpose.*

*If you are contacted by a caller claiming to represent NMO on this issue, please report this to us using the link below.”*

Who would even think of doing such a thing???

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### Food labelling: What does it say on the tin?

By Denise Winterman BBC News Magazine

**Guideline Daily Amount (GDA)**  
GDAs are guidelines for an average person of a healthy weight and level of activity

**Energy**  
Kilojoules (kJ) are the metric equivalent of kilocalories (kcal)

**Carbohydrates**  
Sugars are carbs, but some companies hide the amount of sugar by not breaking down the figure.

**Fat**  
Fat content is not always broken down. Saturated fat is particularly a concern

**Sodium**  
Salt is sodium chloride, but some products only label the sodium part. Salt content is roughly two and a half times that of sodium

NUTRITION INFORMATION			
Typical Values	Per 100g	Per ½ can	GDA*
Energy - kJ - kcal (Calories)	309kJ 73kcal	640kJ 151kcal	2000
Protein	4.9g	10.0g	45g
Carbohydrate (of which sugars)	12.9g (5.0g)	26.7g (10.4g)	230g 90g
Fat (of which saturates)	0.2g (Trace)	0.4g (Trace)	70g 20g
Fibre	3.8g	7.9g	24g
Sodium	0.3g	0.7g	2.4g
Salt equivalent	0.8g	1.7g	6g



Source: Heinz

*“The complicated job of reading food labels is set to get easier thanks to a groundbreaking EU deal, but what are the key things that campaigners want people to look out for?*

*After years of argument, fierce lobbying and heated debate, the EU has agreed to bring in uniform food labelling across the 27 member countries. The rules mean labels on supermarket shelves will have to spell out energy content along with fat, saturated fat, carbohydrate, sugar, protein and salt levels.*

#### Energy

*It usually tops any food label - and can also be the start of consumer confusion.*

*When we eat food we convert it into energy which is used to perform bodily functions such as breathing, circulating blood, moving muscles and maintaining body temperature. This can be written in kilojoules, kilocalories and Calories - or all of them.*

*Kilojoules (kJ) are the metric equivalent of kilocalories (kcal) - like metres and yards and pounds and grams. A kilocalorie can also be written as a Calorie - the capital “C” distinguishes it from the calories used in science. Each kcal or Calorie is equivalent to 4.184 kJ.*

*The reason both measurements are put on labels is because they are used in different countries, says the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF). Also children often use kJ while adults use kcal. Any confusion is the fault of the different measurements countries use, rather than the food industry.”*

Apart from the confusion noted due to different measurement units, notice how confusion can spread from the attempt to explain kilojoules!

### **In memoriam: Pat Naughtin**

Supporters of completing metrication will be saddened to learn of the death of Australian consultant and campaigner, Pat Naughtin.

Pat died on 16 July 2011 after a long illness. His partner, Wendy, writes:

It is with great sadness that I write to tell you that my beloved Pat died on Saturday July 16.

He was diagnosed with advanced bowel cancer in March 2010, and since then has had chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and survived a large operation last year. Throughout he not only continued his correspondence and newsletters, he also gave talks to groups all over Victoria, some as large as 400 to 600 people, and some as small as 20, urging people to have a bowel scan. Bowel cancer has one of the best survival rates if detected early. Pat's Rotary club actively promoted scans and Pat helped in their promotion, but never had one himself.

In honour of Pat please have a bowel scan.

Wendy Pomroy

UKMA members who attended the 2007 AGM and Annual Conference will remember Pat's keynote presentation, in which he described Australia's successful conversion to the metric system in the 1970s. During his stay in England he also visited the British Library, where he unearthed a previously little known passage from Bishop John Wilkins' 1668 essay in which he proposed a universal system of measurement on decimal principles. Pat even managed to get the BBC's science correspondent to report the discovery, and the result can be seen in part of this newsclip:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2TQDCuNol4&feature=mfu\\_in\\_order&list=UL](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2TQDCuNol4&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL).

Pat also maintained a formidable website, <http://www.metricationmatters.com/>, and published a regular newsletter. It is to be hoped that the valuable material in Pat's website can be maintained in some form.

UKMA's condolences go to Wendy and their family.