



UKMA news

The newsletter of the UK Metric Association
For a **single** *rational* system of measurement

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Chairman Robin Paice
 Treasurer Tony Wilson
 Secretary Derek Pollard
 Other members Martin Clutterbuck, Phil Hall

As the number of nominations does not exceed the number of vacancies, there is no need for an election.

There remain two vacancies. If you might consider serving on the Committee but are uncertain as to what is involved, please do not hesitate to contact one of the present Committee members.

Notice of AGM

The AGM of UKMA will take place at 10:00 on Saturday 5 July 2014 at Canada Water Library, 21 Surrey Quays Road, London, SE16 7AR. The library is beside Canada Water Station on the Jubilee line, normally just 5 minutes from London Bridge Station. The Annual Conference will follow immediately after the AGM. The agenda for the AGM, the programme for the Conference and travel details for the venue will be sent to you in June.

UKMA Chairmanship

UKMA News regrets to announce that John Frewen-Lord has resigned from the Chair for personal reasons. Many thanks to John for his contribution to the Association, and we hope to hear from him in the future.

The Committee has discretion to fill the vacancy, and in view of the closeness of this year's elections, appointed Robin Paice to the Chair for the remainder of the year.

See the next section for details of the elections.

Election of Committee members for 2014-15

Following discussion at recent AGMs, the Committee is pursuing charitable status for UKMA under new rules for charitable incorporated organisations (CIOs). It is unlikely that the decision of the Charity Commission on our application will be known before July, so it is necessary to proceed under our current constitution with elections to the Committee for the coming year.

The following nominations were received for officers and other members of UKMA's Committee for the year 2014-15:



London Overground and Jubilee line stations

Annual conference

Real progress has been made since the last Annual Conference. The survey was a major project undertaken on behalf of UKMA and there is much to discuss.

All members are welcome to attend and there is much to discuss. Please come and join in!

Proposed agenda items:

- The public opinion survey and report "Still a mess"
- Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) application - progress
- Magna Carta 800th anniversary celebrations
- Traffic Signs Regulations and General directions (TSRGD) revision consultation – Tony Wilson's survey and report
- Consumer Rights Bill

Plus usual items: communication (blog, website, twitter, facebook etc); media; individual actions

Metriation survey by YouGov

Since the last Annual Conference, the Committee of UKMA has worked on a project to carry out an opinion survey of public attitudes to completing metriation. The purposes of the survey were:

1. to obtain a better understanding of public knowledge of and attitudes to systems of measurement units
2. to establish whether hostility to completing metriation would be a significant factor in influencing voting intentions at a general election

The committee sought to use the information to persuade selected targets to be more helpful – e.g. demonstrate to political decision-makers that it is not a vote-loser (if it isn't); persuade companies to use metric in their publicity; persuade providers of education to teach metric units properly; persuade scientific bodies to state their support publicly, etc.

The survey was carried out by YouGov on behalf of the UK Metric Association in September 2013.

A report on the survey findings can be found at <http://www.ukma.org.uk/docs/sam.pdf>.

For readers' convenience, the Executive Summary is reproduced here:

- Government policy on metriation has failed. This is because it is based on the false assumption that, as children receive some metric education in maths lessons at school, they will grow up using metric units. Therefore, as the population ages, acceptance and adoption of metric units will grow until eventually the metric system will be the default system for all purposes.
Unfortunately, experience has not borne out this assumption.
- Based on this false assumption, and having achieved partial metriation in most fields of activity, successive governments have given up on trying to complete the conversion of the UK to primary use of metric units. No further action is planned.
- The UK Metric Association (UKMA) commissioned YouGov to carry out a survey of public understanding and use of metric and imperial units and of public support for completing the metric changeover. A follow-up survey also examined the salience of metriation as a political issue.

Key results were as follows:

- Half of respondents were opposed to completing metriation, with a quarter supportive and a fifth indifferent or noncommittal.
- Although younger generations were more supportive than the older, still 36% of the 18-24 age group were opposed.
- Where there are specific practical reasons for using metric units, the majority of the population prefer to use them
- However, where parental, peer and media pressures are strongly in favour of imperial units, all age groups continue to use imperial - including for personal weighing

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- Although there was a definite association between age and acceptance/use of metric units, there was still either a majority or a large minority of younger people who habitually use imperial rather than metric units for various everyday functions
- Thus the basic assumption that underlies Government policy - that metric education in school will lead naturally to a general acceptance of metric units for all purposes - is shown to be incorrect.
- It is concluded that, without Government action to complete metrication, the present dysfunctional muddle of two incompatible measurement systems - the "very British mess" - will continue indefinitely.
- This "mess" matters for several reasons:
 - To function effectively, an adult in the UK needs to have a detailed knowledge of two measurement systems. Yet the UKMA/YouGov survey showed that:
 - 76% of respondents were unable to answer correctly how many yards there are in a mile
 - 43% could not say how many metres there are in a kilometre
 - 33% of respondents were unable to answer correctly how many pounds there are in a stone
 - 38% did not give the correct answer when asked how many grams there are in a kilogram

These findings suggest that many adults in the UK are unable to understand or make use of the key information that is provided for their protection or benefit.

- Incompatible units used for comparisons
 - Mutual incomprehension
 - Conversion errors
 - Accidents
 - Costs
 - Failure to reap the benefits of past investment in metrication
 - Perception of the UK by foreigners
- Politicians of all parties need to recognise that
 - the policies of successive governments over the past 40 years have failed, and
 - Government action is needed to resolve the problem
- Specific action includes:
 - Declaration that completing metrication remains the Government's objective
 - Duty on public sector bodies to use metric units
 - Requirement to use metric units in advertising and product description
 - Conversion of road signs and speed limits
 - Better enforcement of existing rules
- The survey evidence shows that such a programme of action would be very unlikely to cost a government votes in the context of a general election.

Progress toward Charitable status

UKMA's secretary, Derek Pollard is managing the application for the Association to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, or CIO.

This is a definition of a CIO from the Charity Commission's website.

"A CIO:

- is a new legal form for a charity
- is an incorporated form of charity which is not a company
- only has to register with the Charity Commission and not Companies House

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- is only created once it is registered by the Commission
- can enter into contracts in its own right and its trustees will normally have limited or no liability for the debts of the CIO

The CIO was created in response to requests from charities for a new structure which could provide some of the benefits of being a company, but without some of the burdens.”

The UKMA has submitted the following objectives for its application to become a charitable organisation:

The objects of the CIO are for the public benefit:

1. to advance education in, and understanding of, the International System of Units (SI), commonly known as “the metric system”
2. to advance understanding of the science and practice of measurement by sponsoring, commissioning or publishing relevant research
3. to advance consumer protection by promoting consistent and transparent pricing, labelling, product description and advertising of goods and services
4. to improve road safety by promoting the use of signage that complies with the best international practice and standards through the use of internationally understood units and symbols
5. to advance public health and safety by promoting the exclusive use of SI units of measurement throughout all branches of public and private sector healthcare, sports and health and fitness clubs and the emergency services
6. to remove unnecessary barriers to communication, especially between scientists and the general public, and hence advance public understanding of science, by promoting the use of the International System of Units as the default system of weights and measures for all purposes in the UK

Magna Carta 800th anniversary – UKMA involvement

The following article, approved by Lord Howe, patron of UKMA has been submitted to the Magna Carta 800th anniversary committee for inclusion in their website:



We celebrate here the 800th anniversary of Britain's first charter of human rights, the Magna Carta, which included the proclamation that there should be “one measure of wine throughout our whole realm...and one measure of corn...and one width of cloth”. Before then and ever since, every civilized society has recognized the need for one set (and only one set) of standard measures.

Even after all those 800 years, British weights and measures are in a mess. We still do not have that single set of standard measures for all purposes. We have litres for petrol and fizzy drinks, pints for beer. There are

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metres for athletics, but miles per gallon for cars. We use the metric system for work and school and yet, all too often, feet and inches and pounds and ounces are still in general use.

Many people describe their weights in stones and pounds whereas doctors and nurses in the NHS will have measured and recorded those same weights in kilograms. Petrol and diesel are sold in litres but, since road distances and speed limits are based on miles, most people have difficulty working out the fuel efficiency of their vehicle.

This muddle does matter. It can increase costs, confuse shoppers, lead to misunderstandings, cause accidents, but especially it wastes our children's education which can put them at a disadvantage in later life.

So how did Britain get into this mess? Because we've been dithering for almost 150 years! As long ago as 1862, a House of Commons Select Committee unanimously recommended the adoption of the metric system. A century later, in 1965 the decision was taken to go metric over the next ten years.

In 1979, alas, the Government (of which I was a member) foolishly decided to go slow on the whole process. So we're still stuck half way and the rest of the world has moved on. Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, South Africa, India, Jamaica have all completed the change.

Plainly we can't stay where we are, with two confused, competing systems and it would be madness to go backwards. The only solution is to complete the changeover to metric - and as swiftly and cleanly as possible. It is long past time for us to summon up the will to get ourselves out of the present wasteful, untidy mess.

The 800th Anniversary of the Magna Carta can provide the incentive to re-energise the adoption of the 'one measure' doctrine. King John and the barons would all have approved of that.

To read more visit <http://www.metric.org.uk/>

Westminster walking route

From BBC online 10 Jan 14:

Westminster City Council has created a new 1.4 km walking route through parks along the Embankment. There are 11 signs along the route between the start of MoD gardens to Temple Garden via Whitehall Garden and Embankment Gardens.



Well done BBC for inserting space between number and symbol and well done Westminster City Council and BBC for using metres exclusively.

British obsession with conversions

It seems that we British have an obsession with conversions, making the acceptance of metric units for normal, everyday and personal measurement a difficult process. Why is this?

A recently overheard conversation between three mid-twenties women and (apparently) the mother of one or more of the 'twenty-somethings' went like this:

One young woman to the group – “my dog (it may have been something else) weighs 50 kilos”

The older woman “That's 100 pounds, what's 100 divided by 14?”

The older woman again, to non responsive younger women “What's 100 divided by 14?”

The older woman asked “What's 100 divided by 14?” a total of 5 times before one of the younger women used the calculator on her mobile phone to give an answer in stones – decimal stones of course!

What does this tell us?

The original measure was probably provided by a 'professional', maybe a vet, using their established business system of measures.

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The first response was a conversion followed by a question asking someone to perform a calculation that most people would not be able to do in their heads.

No one considered to ask whether or not 50 kilograms (rather than kilos, but that is another matter) indicated a good or a bad situation. No one commented on the value in stones either!

No one presumably had any benchmark to indicate to them how much 50 kg actually was.

The fact that the (dog or whatever) could have been over or under-weight was forgotten while everyone was side-tracked by a measurement-conversion problem.

How can situations like this be avoided?

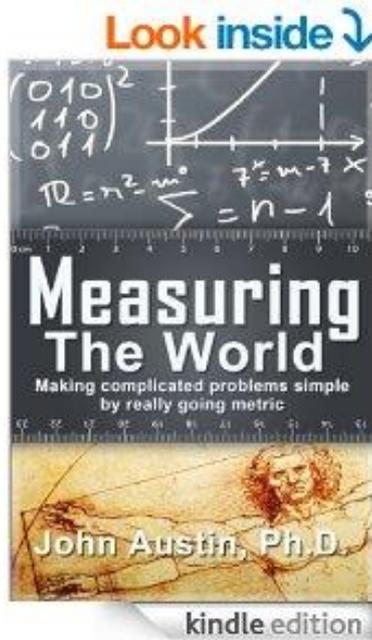
No doubt all UKMA members would wish them to be replaced with a genuine acceptance of, and comfort with, a single measurement language.

New publication explaining metrication

John Austin is a distinguished British scientist who spent much of his career in the USA. He recently returned to Britain and wrote to the UKMA secretary as follows:

"I have written a book on the metric system which might be of interest to your members. 10% of the profits will go to the UKMA."

You can download a preview and the book here <http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/BOOK89CEOC>



The book explains how the metric system is a superbly designed set of units which enables us to measure everything imaginable. Mass, length, time, and temperature are just the start. It explores ways that the metric system is an aid to the easy calculation of a host of practical problems and explains how painstaking work by talented scientists over decades has produced a practical and cultural legacy that rivals fine art for its beauty. The alternative, the Imperial set of units or US customary units are frequently shown to be confusing and inadequate. Yet their use persists in certain places. The book is published ahead of the fiftieth anniversary of the UK's commitment to switch to the metric system but that commitment is half-hearted at best. The USA and Canada (less so) continue to use inadequate units, in many cases to their detriment. The book is an encouragement to those still using Imperial or US customary units to convert to metric. It is also of interest to those who already exclusively use metric units to see where developments in making measurements can impinge on our daily lives and where the future of these units lies.

The Author, Dr. John Austin, has over 30 years' research experience on the upper atmosphere and has published over 80 papers in numerous international scientific journals. In addition John worked for 4 years as an Editor of the Journal of Geophysical Research, the premier Geophysics journal in the USA.

Is muscle really weighed in kilograms and fat in stones?



How ridiculous is this? Why should muscle and body weight, perhaps that should be fat, be measured differently?

This advertisement, seen at a health club and gymnasium shows that although much of the equipment and measuring devices may be metric, the thought processes of those selling the services, and presumably their clients, still default to imperial for those 'everyday' measures like personal body weight.

As shown by the UKMA survey results on page 2, education is not changing these habits.