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Summer madness



Headline from Sunday Express website published in July this year at:

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/nature/487186/British-weather-heatwave-Britain-hotter-than-the-mediterranean>.

“Hotter than the Med: Britain set to sizzle in 86F heatwave that will last TWO WEEKS”

The article by Sarah Westcott says:

“The mercury could even climb as high as 86F (30C) in some areas and swathes of the UK are likely to bask in the high 20s.

This compares to just 70F forecast for Barcelona and the South of France where it will hit 77F in Nice.”

Interesting that although temperatures are shown in Fahrenheit (with the first mention given a Celsius conversion), the first sentence mentions the “high 20s” (without showing the measurement unit).

Does this show that the Express acknowledges that their audience understands the Celsius numbers? Is so, why perpetuate the use of Fahrenheit?

Annual conference review

Chairman's report, 2014

(This report is written behalf of both the former Chairman, John Frewen-Lord, and myself)

Review of the year

UKMA's past year, 2013/14, has been dominated by two issues, which are described in more detail below:

the public opinion survey and its accompanying report, "Still a mess"

the application for charitable status.

Apart from these there has been little to disturb the complacent acceptance of the UK's measurement muddle of "one country, two systems". Once again, it has been increasingly difficult to interest politicians, the media or the general public in discussing the issue.

A renewed attempt was made to interest the CBI, the Engineering Employers Federation and other key stakeholders in supporting our case for completing metrication, but once again the response was that while the present muddle is a minor nuisance, these bodies can cope with it and they don't wish to become involved in what they see as a "political" issue.

A more promising initiative was the launch of the Magna Carta 800 campaign (MC800). UKMA members need no reminding that it was Magna Carta that called in 1215 for "one measure throughout our realm", and it is hoped to stress this point as the celebrations get under way next year. UKMA has secured a place on the organising committee, and an article by our then Chairman appeared in the MC800 newsletter.

There is little to report on the retailing front. The current "two systems" muddle continues to be entrenched, partly in all probability because many Trading Standards Officers continue to turn a blind eye to transgressions of the Weights and Measures Act and the Price Marking Order in so far as they concern trading and pricing in imperial units in street markets. On the positive side it is pleasing that the Consumers' Association ("Which?") has persisted with its campaign for more transparent pricing based (as it is legally required to be) on metric units.

UKMA news - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association

The public opinion survey and report, "Still a mess"

As discussed at last year's Annual Conference, the Committee agreed a brief for a survey of public opinion and usage of measurement units. Three polling companies were invited to submit proposals in accordance with the brief, and after some negotiation, the Committee accepted the proposal of YouGov, and this online survey was duly carried out in two stages in September and November 2013.

It was disappointing (though not unexpected) that the survey found that a majority of the public does not support completion of metrication (and that there has been little change since 1979!). However, arguably the most important finding of the survey was that the basic assumption behind the Government's measurement policy is false. Government inaction has been repeatedly justified on the basis that since 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. The survey gives the lie to this convenient and complacent assumption.

Through the good offices of our patron, Lord Howe of Aberavon, copies of the Executive Summary of the report were sent to the Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet and a number of replies received. Further details of the survey and these responses will be reported to the forthcoming Annual Conference.

Charitable status

As reported last year, it had not been possible to apply for Charitable Incorporated Organisation status until the beginning of this year. This deadline has now passed and the Committee agreed in January to make a formal application. In the event it proved to be more bureaucratically complex than anticipated, but the application was finally submitted in May and we now await the response of the Charity Commission. If the application is approved, it will be necessary to elect trustees and hold an AGM of the new body - after which it will be possible to wind up the current UKMA and transfer its assets (and members) to the new charitable organisation.

Research

One of the difficulties faced by our campaign is the lack of authoritative research evidence about metrication contrasted with the abundance of myths and misinformation peddled by opponents and in the media. UKMA has therefore devised an outline "shopping list" of research proposals and tried to interest appropriate research institutes in seeking funding for such research.

Unfortunately, once again I have to report that there has been no response to our proposals. This may be because the issue is viewed as "political" and hence unlikely to fit into Government criteria for obtaining funding.

Individual actions

As in previous years, individual members have also continued to pursue their own separate initiatives. In addition to writing to newspapers etc, they also acted to persuade local Trading Standards Officers to take action against non-compliant traders (several members), getting local Councils to price goods and services in legal measures, and pestering local traders and supermarket managers to display prices correctly. Terry Simpson again deserves special mention for his attempts to get local authorities and other public bodies to comply with Weights and Measures law.

Media

We continue to be faced with largely hostile or indifferent media.

With the withdrawal of the European Union from the metrication debate, there has been reduced opportunity for the tabloid media to run "shock, horror" stories and metrication has largely dropped out of the news. Consequently, there has been little opportunity to make our case.

A minor exception to this occurred in January when a diligent Daily Mail journalist discovered that some local authorities were phasing out "rods" in favour of square metres as a measure of the area of allotments. It is not clear where the initiative had come from (if indeed the story was true), but subsequent comments on social media sites suggested that the general public did not take the issue very seriously.

Lord Howe again used the opportunity of the Queen's Speech debate in the House of Lords to make the case for completing metrication, but unlike two years ago, when he made a similar speech, his brief contribution got little coverage in the mainstream media. It was, however, the occasion for a phone-in programme on BBC Radio West Midlands, when opponents of metrication were given free reign with no opportunity for a response by UKMA. Such is balance.

As a matter of practice, UKMA now copies most MetricViews articles to the media.

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Communication

In order to carry out its educational mission, UKMA relies on effective communication – both internal and external. I deal with four methods below:

(1) Googlegroups forum

The majority of UKMA members are now signed up to Googlegroups, and I would again urge all members with an internet connection to join. It costs nothing, and is a way of keeping up to date with current developments and (if you wish) to join in discussions. You can opt to receive emails as they are written, or you can receive a weekly digest, or you can choose to view them on a website at a time to suit you. Unlike our blog (see below), it is private to registered members. While we cannot give an absolute guarantee of security, this means that most sensitive or confidential issues (or plainly nerdy issues!) can be freely discussed with like-minded colleagues. If you wish to join, please contact Phil Hall on web@metric.org.uk.

(2) Newsletter

During the past year the Newsletter has again been edited by Martin Clutterbuck, who has produced issues at approximately quarterly intervals, and I am grateful for his contribution. The Newsletter includes news reports and opinion articles, as well as more mundane information of interest only to members (e.g. venue of AGM). Martin has included material borrowed from our American counterpart, the USMA, as well as contributions from individual members. I hope that it is particularly useful for those members who do not use the internet.

The Newsletter has now been going for 11 years and a total of 38 issues have been published. These have now been assembled in an archive, and they can be read on UKMA's website at <http://www.ukma.org.uk/newsletters>.

(3) Website

The website continues to be developed, and two new sections have recently been added: the newsletter archive (referred to above) and an index and archive of consultations on measurement issues that UKMA has responded to. The latter will be expanded as resources permit, and can be visited at <http://www.ukma.org.uk/consultations>.

If/when the Charitable Incorporated Organisation is established it is hoped to revive the Website Working Group to plan and implement further new initiatives, including UKMA's second website, "Think Metric!"

(4) Blog ("MetricViews")

Traffic on UKMA's blog, "MetricViews", has declined slightly this year. 34 articles were published, compared with 43 and 39 in the previous two years, and the number of comments was 391, compared with 660 and 631 in previous years. The decline was partly due to a hiatus in the late summer, when no articles were published, but at a time when there is little or no actual "news" concerning metrication, it has been increasingly difficult to find new topics without repeating the gist of previous articles.

The possibility of incorporating MetricViews into UKMA's main website remains an option for the future.

Thanks

As always, both the former Chairman John Frewen Lord and I would like to thank all members of the Committee for their support.

Once again, last but not least, I should like to thank Lord Howe. Apart from the occasional high profile speech, much of his work is necessarily low profile and at a personal level, quietly lobbying in the places where it counts - but it is very influential. It is enormously encouraging to have the support of so distinguished a patron.

And finally.....

I indicated last year that I wished to give up the task of chairing UKMA, and I was grateful that John Frewen-Lord volunteered to take over. Unfortunately, John was unable to complete his year in the Chair - which is why I found myself back in the hot seat.

For the time being I am prepared to continue as your Chairman but I cannot go on indefinitely (I am not immortal) and I hope that another suitable candidate will emerge before too much longer.

Robin Paice
Chairman, UK Metric Association

June 2014

Charitable status on hold

Following a discouraging response from the Charity Commission, UKMA's Committee has now decided to withdraw its current application for registration as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. However, the issue may be revisited if circumstances change.

Members may recall that on 10 February the Committee decided to seek registration and appointed six trustees of the embryonic "UKMA CIO". The advantages of registration were seen as:

- improved status and public recognition
- tax relief on donations received (including membership subscriptions)
- exemption from VAT
- discounts on purchases of goods and services
- "legal personality" (i.e. able to act as a corporate body)
- protection of individuals from personal liability

However, the initial response of the Charity Commission (which is a *regulator* rather than a promoter of charities) was not encouraging. In a detailed and lengthy email on 17 June, the Commission cast doubt on the value of education about the International System of Units and questioned the competence of UKMA to provide such education. It also pointed out that some of the stated aims of UKMA do not meet the legal definition of "charitable objects" (this being a reference to our Object of "consumer protection").

The implications of this rebuff were discussed at UKMA's Annual Conference on 5 July and subsequently by the Committee. Consideration was given to 3 options:

1. Amend our application to respond to the Commission's objections
2. Withdraw the application - i.e. continue as we are
3. Split into a charitable and a non-charitable arm

Although it may have been possible to satisfy the Commission, some of the trustees felt that the advantages of registration did not outweigh the disadvantages and they no longer supported the application. It was therefore felt to be untenable to pursue the application further at this stage. Some thought was given to Option 3 (the twin track approach), but it was felt that UKMA was currently too small an organisation for this option to be viable.

It was concluded that, while we do not necessarily accept the comments of the Commission, we should withdraw the current application but leave open the possibility of revisiting the issue in the future if circumstances change.

Magna Carta 800 - Lord Howe's article now on-line

The article previewed in the UKMA newsletter for June has been released for publication on the Magna Carta 800th anniversary website at <http://magnacarta800th.com/articles/why-britain-should-go-metric/>

Here is a partial screen shot:



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The complete text is as follows:

"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 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/>

Many thanks to Mark Gill, Executive Director and Sir Robert Worcester Chairman, Magna Carta Committee for welcoming UKMA to committee meetings and for their magnificent support.

Please Note:

The hyperlink to our website works from the <http://magnacarta800th.com> website! Let's hope for lots of feedback!

Consumer Rights Bill – Chairman's proposal

The document, published below, illustrates our Chairman's proposed clause in the Consumer Rights Bill that would bring product description and advertising into line with the rules for package labelling and the sale of loose goods from bulk.

Package labels must give the metric quantity, with the option of a supplementary indication in imperial (e.g. 568 ml, one pint), and similarly, pricing of loose goods must be per metric quantity (e.g. tomatoes at £2.50/kg) with the option of a supplementary indication (£1.14/lb).

These rules do not apply to product descriptions and advertising, and therefore, although carpets have to be priced per square metre, it is legal to describe a carpet as measuring 18 ft 6 in by 16 ft 3 in without any metric indication. Worse, manufacturers and retailers often use incompatible units, even for products displayed side by side. So the consumer has to compare a 6 cu ft fridge to a 200 L fridge.

In the box below, a draft new clause seeks to remedy this anomaly. In order to deflect criticism from "imperialists" the clause permits supplementary indications, and the exact wording from the Units of Measurement Regulations (UoMRegs) and the Price Marking Order (PMO) documents are used.

A number of minor exemptions are included (such as TV screens and car tyres) since American influence has made imperial dimensions the world standard, and it may not be practical to outlaw them. There may need to be other exemptions, so the clause gives discretion to the Secretary of State to amend the list.

So, in summary the clause enables consumers to compare products on a like for like basis, using the same units as in the UoMRegs and PMO, but does not prevent anybody from using imperial units in addition if they wish.

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As regards enforcement, we would envisage that, as with the current practice with non-compliant street traders, the authorities would not want to create more "metric martyrs", and would only enforce against the major retailers, manufacturers, estate agents and advertisers.

NEW CLAUSE (to be inserted after current Clause 59)

60 Product description and advertisement

- (a) Subject to paragraph (b) below, where any specification, description or advertisement of goods, services or land or property offered for sale, hire or lease, or any instructions or maintenance manual relating to such goods or services includes one or more units of measurement, those units shall be:
 - (i). those set out in Schedule 1 of the Units of Measurement Regulations 1986 (as amended)
 - or
 - (ii). any multiples or submultiples of those units as set out in Schedule 2 of those Regulations.
- (b) Paragraph (a) shall not apply to products listed in Schedule 9.
- (c) Subject to paragraph (d) below, supplementary indications may be used in addition to the units authorised in paragraph (a).
- (d) Where supplementary indications are used
 - (i). in the case of a conflict between an indication of quantity expressed in an authorised unit and a supplementary indication, the authorised unit shall prevail;
 - and
 - (ii). the authorised unit shall appear first, and any characters employed in the marking of quantity in relation to a supplementary indication shall be no larger and no more prominent than those employed in the marking of quantity expressed in the authorised unit.
- (e) In this Clause
 - (i). an "authorised unit" means a unit of measurement specified in Schedule 1 of the Units of Measurement Regulations 1986 (as amended) or any multiples or submultiples of those units as set out in Schedule 2 of those Regulations.
 - (ii). a "supplementary indication" means one or more indications of quantity expressed in a unit of measurement, other than an authorised unit, which is used in conjunction with an indication of quantity expressed in an authorised unit.
 - (iii). "unit of measurement" does not include arbitrary sizes such as sizes of shoes or clothing, paper and stationery or eggs.
 - (iv). a "year" is not to be treated as a unit of measurement.

Schedule 9 (relating to Clause 60, paragraph (b))

Exemptions from the requirement to display the units specified in paragraph (a)

- (i). The labelling of vehicle and bicycle tyres forming part of the moulding of the tyre
- (ii). The capacity measure stamped on glassware used for the dispensing of draught beer and cider
- (iii). The capacity measure indicated on returnable containers used for packaging liquid milk

The Secretary of State may, by order made by statutory instrument, with the consent of both Houses of Parliament, add items to or delete items from this list.

Please note:

UKMA is currently trying to find a "friendly" peer willing to move this new clause (unfortunately, Lord Howe is not available). If any member knows of a likely candidate, please let us know.

How Big is an Acre?

Alan Young, aka Dr Metric was the guest speaker at this year's UKMA Annual Conference.

His presentation focussed on the effects of our mixed use of measurement units on children's Mathematics, Science and Technology education.

Mr. Young calls Imperial units "Medieval units" and says that most of the units UK children see outside school are based on medieval technology.

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He shows in his booklet:

- Why metrication is so important
- The damage continued use of Medieval units is doing to our children
- Why we need to complete the metrication process as soon as possible

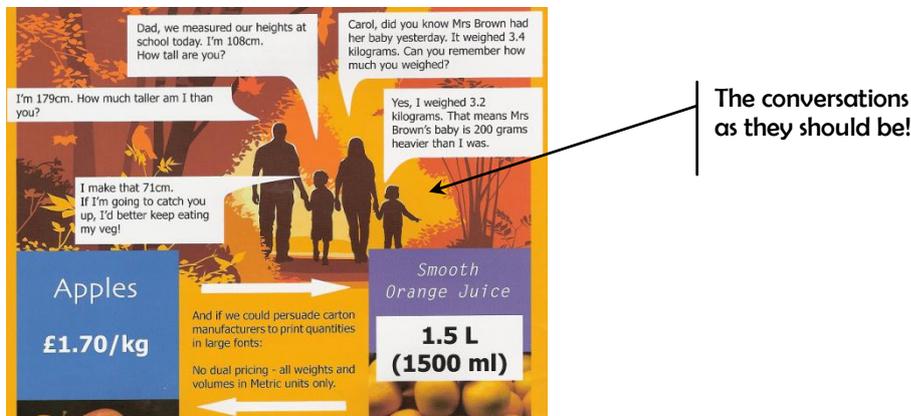
The booklet commences with many examples illustrating the measurement muddle that UKMA members will be familiar with and shows the importance of metrication.

Mr. Young uses his forty years experience of teaching Mathematics to show how youngsters in this country are disadvantaged, for example, by having to use confusing 'dual' scales.

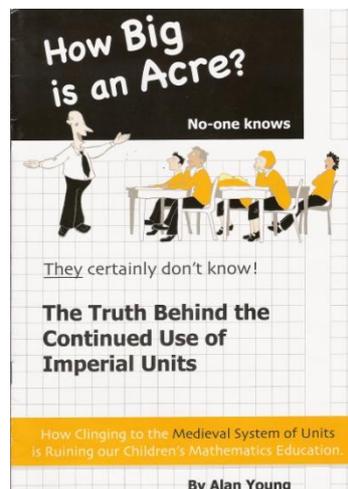
Most importantly, Mr. Young describes "Number Lines", "The Number System" and their relationship with the Metric system.

He also shows how conversations between parents and their children relating to measurements can be so unproductive when mixing the use of "Medieval units" by parents with their children's newly learnt metric units.

His vision of the future shows the same example with everyone using the same metric measurement language. The children now being fully engaged in the conversation and drawing constructive conclusions as illustrated here:



The booklet is a highly graphical easy read and may be obtained from the author himself at alanyoung@drmetric.com.



Did you know?

From the USMA website at <http://lamar.colostate.edu/~hillger/>

New York State is the only US jurisdiction that has not yet adopted the 1999 amendment to the Uniform Packaging and Labeling Regulation (UPLR) that permits the option of eliminating non-metric units from labels of products not regulated by the federal Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (FPLA).