Response to

Stewardship and Responsibility: A Policy Framework for Private Housing in Scotland

from UK Metric Association

0. Executive Summary

The UK Metric Association (UKMA) advocates the inclusion of accurate, standardised, metric dimensions and areas, together with a floor plan, as part of the proposed Single Survey.

The UK Metric Association is a single-issue organisation whose basic aim is the full adoption of the international metric system in the UK. We consider the appropriate use of metric units to be a clear and transparent form of consumer protection. This applies equally to the marketing of flats and houses.

Good consumer protection requires (amongst other things):
- A single, standard system of measurement units,
- Accurate and verifiable information, and
- A consistent method of presenting this information (section 1.1)

Scottish Executive's Home Improvement Task Force (HITF) has made a thorough examination of private sector housing in Scotland. Two specific proposals to help tackle issues with the housing market include the Single Survey and the Purchaser's Information Pack (sections 1.2-1.4). The proposed Single Survey goes some way to remedying current gaps or inadequacies in the information provided in the residential property market. However, the Scottish Executive's HITF report does not deal with the crucial issue of the size of properties.

Current practice in Scotland (as in other parts of the UK) is to describe properties in terms of the number of "bedrooms" (or sometimes "apartments"). This is inadequate since rooms vary in size and use, and the description "bedrooms" ignores rooms not classified as such. It gives little reliable information on the size of a property or the uses to which rooms can be put. Indeed a Scottish homebuyer is provided with less standard quantitative information than a buyer of a domestic appliance or motorcar. UKMA therefore proposes that there should be a standard method of accurately stating the size and layout of properties offered for sale (section 2.2).

It is proposed that the standard information to be provided should be in three categories:
- Mandatory information for all properties – e.g. room dimensions and floor areas
- Information which is mandatory if relevant – e.g. size of garden (of a house), floor level (of a flat)
- Optional information – e.g. date of construction/extension

It is also recommended that this information should be accompanied by floorplans of the property at 1:100 scale and of the plot at an appropriate scale, together with a northpoint (section 3.1).

UKMA considers that the additional cost of providing this information would be marginal to the substantive costs of the Single Survey. This is because, if the surveyor is already on site to assess building condition, the taking of room measurements would be a minor extra operation. Indeed, some of the required measurements are likely to be included in the existing proposal (e.g. external floor area for building insurance purposes, room volumes for the proposed home insulation and energy rating). Moreover, by using a modern computer-aided design (CAD) program, surveyors could quickly and economically translate on-site measurements into a basic floorplan (section 3.3).

UKMA recommends that any such information should be provided exclusively in metric units (section 3.4). This is because

- It is simpler to calculate and compare floorspace areas using metres and square metres (and hectares for very large plots) than using yards, feet and inches
- Fair comparison is facilitated if all sellers and buyers use the same system, without the added complication of conversion
- Most foreign buyers will only be familiar with metric units
- Drawings required for planning permission and building control must be expressed in metres and at metric scales
- Most prefabricated kitchen, bathroom and bedroom furniture, floor coverings and "white goods" are supplied in metric modules and dimensions
- UK law requires all official documents to be in metric units
- The British building industry has overwhelmingly used metric since the early 1970s.

The information should be presented at an appropriate and consumer-friendly level of accuracy (section 3.5).

UKMA proposes that all this information could be neatly summarised in a "Homelabel", which would enable buyers to compare properties quickly and easily. This would be similar to the sort of standard technical data which must be provided by sellers of electrical appliances and cars. An illustration of a possible design for a "Homelabel" is offered (section 4 and appendix).

Much of the above information would remain constant throughout the life of a building (unless building alterations are carried out), and where alterations do take place, there will normally be surveyors' or architectural drawings available (section 5.2).

UKMA is greatly concerned about the risks of making the proposed Single Survey a market-led initiative (section 5.3). Since there are no compelling reasons for some stakeholders to change from the current practice, the ability to achieve the improvement goals of the Single Survey is at risk. Instead UKMA recommends a clean and swift changeover from current practice with limited exemptions, plenty of public information on the benefits of change and sanctions for non-compliance. Last but not least compulsory, standardised information will have a big impact on the Scottish housing market by enhancing the transparency and accuracy of information provided to buyers.

1. Background

1.1 UK Metric Association (UKMA)

This response to the consultation on the *Stewardship and Responsibility: A Policy Framework for Private Housing in Scotland* is submitted by UK Metric Association (UKMA). UKMA is an independent, non-political, single-issue organisation which advocates the full adoption of the international metric system (SI) for all official, trade, legal, contractual and other purposes in the United Kingdom. UKMA is entirely funded by members' subscriptions and donations.

UKMA regards the appropriate use of metric units as a clear and transparent form of consumer protection. Consumers are best served through the application of the following four principles with respect to the use of measurement units:

- Standardised usage of units of measurement to allow accurate and transparent comparison of one offering with a competitive alternative
- Properly calibrated measuring instruments at the measurement stage
- Standardised unit prices if appropriate (e.g. price per square metre)
- A consistent way to represent price and measurement when labelling or advertising goods.

1.2 Housing Improvement Taskforce

Scottish Executive's Housing Improvement Task Force (HITF) has undertaken a comprehensive review of the condition of private sector housing in Scotland. Initially five areas were identified for review. One of these areas was scope for providing better information as part of the house purchasing process. Since measurement is highly relevant to the purchasing decision-making process, UKMA has focussed attention mainly on this issue.

As a result UKMA has focused its comments on Chapter 3 and Annex B of the Final Report and Recommendations of the Housing Improvement Task Force.

The HITF report identified a number of issues that needed to be addressed in order to improve the operation of the housing market in Scotland. These included:

a) The need to encourage house buyers and sellers to be more interested in the condition of homes.
b) The relative condition of houses should be clearly reflected in the price.
c) Building on the strengths of the existing house buying and selling system in Scotland.

To deal with these issues, it is necessary to improve the quality of information on properties for sale. Two specific proposals are made in the report to improve this quality of information: a single survey and a purchaser's information pack.

It should be stressed that both proposals not only can be used to tackle the problems identified in the report but could potentially significantly improve consumer protection in the Scottish housing market. If introduced, the single survey and purchaser's information pack would represent a significant departure from previous practices. As a result UKMA thinks that there is an opportunity to demonstrably improve the working of the market for both buyers and sellers. It is therefore important to ensure that these new proposals are sufficiently holistic to provide maximum benefit to the Scottish public.

1.3 Aims of Single Survey

The HITF report identified a number of weaknesses in processes and conventions in today's Scottish housing market.

Firstly, a majority of purchasers rely on Scheme 1 valuations, which provide insufficient information on the condition of a property. If buyers rely on insufficient data, it is quite likely that a significant number will either not buy a property that meets their expectations or will get poor value for money.

A second problem is that many homebuyers need to pay for multiple surveys in advance of a purchase thereby incurring abortive costs. Worse still if buyers have a finite budget they are likely to be pushed towards opting for the cheapest and least adequate sort of survey.

The single survey proposal aims to transfer the commissioning of the survey from the buyer to the seller, thus permitting a single survey to be adequate for each home transaction. By eliminating the need for multiple surveys, it is cost effective to commission a much more thorough survey than the popular Scheme 1 valuation.

1.4 Aims of Purchaser's Information Pack

The second proposal is to make information, other than physical survey or valuation, available to prospective buyers. It is proposed that the purchaser's information pack include copies of documents including:

- Planning consent
- Building warrants
- Guarantees
- Land certificate
- Property management arrangements if necessary

1.5 Weights & Measures Legislation

The Weights and Measures Act of 1985 regulates transactions sold by reference to units of measurement. While this primarily applies to consumer items such as groceries and DIY supplies, we believe that this also applies directly to offering property rented by area. This legislation precludes selling items by the square foot as a unit of measurement.

There are other transactions where the sale price is not directly related to units of measurement, and which are thus not directly subject to the sanctions of the Weights and Measures Act. Nevertheless DTI's "Guidance to Business on the use of Metric Units of Measurement and the EC Units of Measurement Directive" (http://www.dti.gov.uk/ccp/topics1/guide/metricbus.pdf) states the following with reference to such transactions.

These transactions are therefore not subject to any express sanction under provisions in UK legislation that regulate the use of units of measurement. Business should, however, recognise that the scope of the EC Units of Measurement Directive is wider than regulated transactions. It provides for the use of metric units as the primary system of measurement from 1 January 1995 for "measuring instruments used, for economic, public health, public safety or administrative purposes" (Article 2), unless one of the derogations…applies.

The following are among the consequences that could follow for those non-regulated transactions that continue to use imperial units:

…

The validity of a non-regulated transaction involving the use of imperial units could be liable to legal challenge by a party that argued that the transaction could not be upheld or enforced.

Our view is that this advice applies to the majority of transactions involving the sale of residential and commercial property.

2 Choosing a Home

2.1 Location, Size and Condition

The purchase of a home is by far the most significant transaction that people are likely to undertake in their lives with major financial and lifestyle implications. Apart from budgetary limitations, the three critical factors that are likely to determine whether a property is desirable for the purchaser are location, size and condition.

Location is a well-known factor in determining a home purchase. A prospective purchaser is likely to assess factors such as locality of shopping, school or leisure facilities; access to public transport or to main roads; sources of noise and pollution as well as the general "feel" of a neighbourhood. Although some location issues e.g. distance to amenities can be measured, requirements for location are very individual and are assessed subjectively.

Size of a home is an essential consideration. A prospective purchaser needs to know whether there is sufficient accommodation and whether it is partitioned and laid out in a useful way. Similarly the size of a garden, garage or parking space is important for most purchasers.

Lastly the condition of a property is important. If repairs or remedial works are necessary these should be known, and either fixed or budgeted, before the purchase. If a buyer needs to reckon with further financial outlays to fix a home it is important that basic information is available to allow the incremental costs to be estimated.

In many cases buyers of residential property will wish to consider improving that property following a successful purchase. Common plans include kitchen refurbishment, new floor coverings and renewing the garden. A prospective buyer needs to estimate the budget required for possible improvements in order to assess the value of a possible property purchase.

2.2 Current Practice

Today's purchasers are reasonably well served with regard to information on location and condition. Estate agents frequently have information available on a locality and it is possible for a prospective purchaser to readily get a subjective feel for an area. Today, the condition of a property can be professionally assessed by contracting a surveyor to undertake a full building survey; however as noted above, unfortunately many buyers cannot budget for this due to the frequent need for multiple surveys.

In contrast to this, purchasers are not generally well served with information on the size or layout of a property. There is currently no standard method of providing this information.

Property advertisements commonly give the number of "bedrooms" (or sometimes "apartments"), but this information is of limited value since rooms can vary greatly in size and use. When room dimensions are provided, they are sometimes given in imperial measures, sometimes in metric, and sometimes in both. Where, exceptionally, a floor plan is provided, it is normally accompanied by a disclaimer "not to scale", which means that the plan cannot be reliably read in either imperial or metric dimensions. Floor areas are rarely given (even though they are common practice in commercial property advertisements).

As purchasers do not normally have the opportunity to take their own measurements or to draw their own floor plans, they are forced to rely on their memory of one or sometimes two brief visits, together with such (unverified) information as the estate agent may provide. This situation could reasonably be described as "buying a pig in a poke".

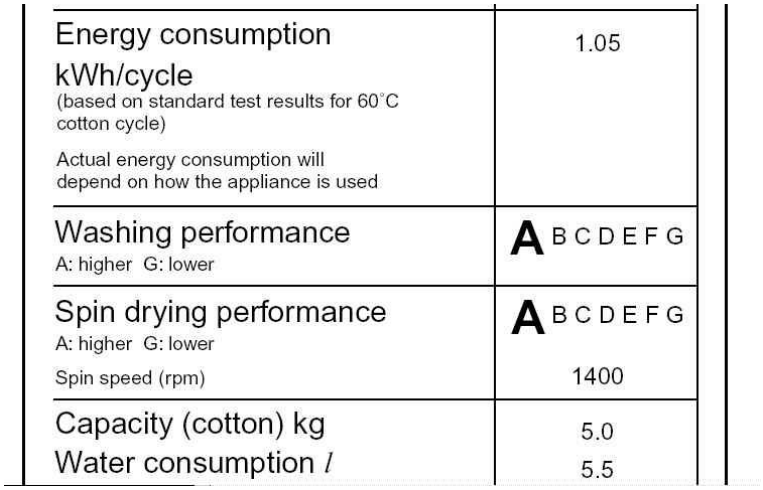
The fact that prospective buyers are not necessarily complaining about the size data they receive is not an indication that they are well-served. Indeed it is probably an indication that the Scottish (like the English and Welsh) market provides consistently poor information and consumers are not even aware of what could usefully be provided. Property buyers in countries as diverse as Australia, France, Germany and the United States are used to receiving standard information on the size of residential properties. Scotland sadly has fallen well below international norms.

2.3 Finding Property on the Worldwide Web

A new way of searching for property is to use the worldwide web. Most Scottish property websites permit searches of residential properties based on location, price and number of bedrooms only. As already mentioned the number of bedrooms may not be a very suitable indicator of the size of a property. Furthermore some purchasers may have specific ideas about the floor-space and garden-space that they would like. Unfortunately the lack of standardised measurement of areas in a property of sale hinders searches based on desired area. The use of the worldwide web for marketing property would be helped by a standardised and professional approach to measurement.

2.4 Comparison with Other Purchases

With regard to size information today's home purchaser is considerably worse off than purchasers of washing machines or cars. Most household appliances are sold with an Ecolabel. This label provides standardised measurement information on the capacity and energy consumption of an appliance. The label allows these quantities to be taken into account as part of the purchasing decision. An extract from a washing machine label is shown for illustration



Energy consumption kWh/cycle (based on standard test results for 60°C cotton cycle) Actual energy consumption will depend on how the appliance is used	1.05
Washing performance A: higher G: lower	**A** B C D E F G
Spin drying performance A: higher G: lower	**A** B C D E F G
Spin speed (rpm)	1400
Capacity (cotton) kg	5.0
Water consumption *l*	5.5

Similarly somebody buying a vehicle will find key technical information about the vehicle described in the Vehicle Registration Document V5 under section D.

2.5 Single Survey Proposal

The current proposal for the Single Survey (in Annex B) addresses a number of key issues such as the condition of the building and services. A very welcome part is the introduction of an energy assessment using the Standard Assessment Procedure.

It is, however, unacceptable that the proposed Single Survey contains no information on the size or layout of the home. This is a serious omission as the size of a property is one of the most crucial factors in deciding on a house purchase. This would have the unfortunate effect of preserving the inadequate status quo with regard to size and layout information to the detriment of the Scottish buyer and seller.

3 Proposal for Improving the Single Survey

3.1 Standardising Size and Layout Information

The proposed introduction of the Single Survey is an opportunity to both streamline home transactions in Scotland but also to provide enhanced consumer protection. UKMA therefore proposes that the definition of the Single Survey be extended to include standardised size and layout information.

There are some measurements, internal and external, that are extremely important to potential home purchasers. These should be provided as part of the Single Survey and are listed in sections 3.1.1, 3.1.2 & 3.1.3. The view of UKMA is that there are three categories of measurement:

a) Measurements that should be compulsory for all residential property sales;
b) Measurements that should be compulsory <u>if appropriate</u> for a sale;
c) Optional measurements that are useful to prospective buyers but are not sufficiently important to be mandatory.

3.1.1 Essential Area Information

Two measurements that are essential to adequately describe the size of a property are internal floorspace and, for properties such as houses and garden flats, the area of the plot on which the home is built.

Internal floorspace is an essential indicator of whether a home provides adequate accommodation for a prospective buyer. Although indicating internal floor area is rarely, and inconsistently, quoted when selling residential properties in Scotland, it is normal practice elsewhere in Europe, in North America and Australasia.

There are several ways in which floorspace can be specified:
1. Gross external floorspace
2. Gross internal floorspace
3. Effective internal floorspace

Gross external floorspace is a measure used by insurers to prepare quotes for building insurance purposes. However, for a prospective homebuyer, it is often a rather crude indicator of the size of the accommodation available *inside* the property.

A more useful indicator is internal floorspace, which is the sum of the internal areas of every room in the home. Since rooms are routinely measured when a property is put on the market the only incremental effort is the calculation of the areas.

In some properties, the internal floorspace may not fairly represent the amount of usable accommodation. Specifically, oblique ceilings can reduce the *effective* floorspace of a property. When measuring the area of rooms with oblique ceilings, UKMA recommends that the "effective area" should be calculated based on the area of floor with 2.0 m or more ceiling height

UKMA therefore recommends that the consumer is best served if provided with plot area, gross internal floorspace and effective floorspace.

3.1.2 Plot Information

The plot area is not required for many flats that are sold. However, plot information should be compulsory for garden flats or for commonhold flats where shared plot ownership is sold with the flat.

In addition to the total plot area, the following measurements are relevant for prospective buyers:

a) Plot dimensions
b) The footprint area of buildings on the plot
c) The driveway area.

The footprint and driveway areas allow a prospective purchaser to put into context the remaining usable area.

3.1.3 Internal Dimensions

Key internal dimensions include:

a) Internal dimensions of rooms
b) Heights of any low ceilings
c) Internal floor area of each level in the property
d) "Effective" floor area of each level in the property.

UKMA considers that it is essential to properly take account of low ceiling heights. Low ceilings – while charming in old properties – may be inconvenient for some purchasers. UKMA recommends that if ceiling heights are lower than 2.2 m, that the ceiling height is measured and specified in the Single Survey report.

3.1.4 Layout Information

The layout of a building can have a significant impact on its utility. The layout is best described using a floorplan that shows each level in a suitable scale. UKMA recommends that as a standard a 1:100 scale is used for representing residential property layout.

Additionally it is valuable to provide information of how a home fits into the plot with which it is sold. The orientation of a property can have a significant effect on its desirability in terms of sunlight and shade. In addition to a floorplan, it would be valuable to supply a plan that shows how a home is located with respect to the property boundary. Such a plan should ideally include:

1. A northpoint
2. A footprint of any buildings on the property
3. Location of a driveway or other parking space
4. Location of trees
5. Location of boundary fences and hedges.

A property if either recently-built, sold off-plan or recently-extended should have up to date architectural drawings available. Subject to satisfying any copyright restrictions, these drawings could be submitted as part of the Single Survey.

3.1.5 Access Information

Access information, while not normally needed for houses is an important consideration for flats – other than on the ground floor. It is necessary to indicate whether access is by stairs or by lift and whether the access is suitable for disabled people.

3.1.6 Additional Information

Some information may be useful for potential property buyers but should not be compulsory. Examples of such information include:

a) Year of build or extensions
b) Noting high ceilings as a room feature e.g. those over 3 m.
c) Dimensions of low, narrow or wide doors
d) Dimensions of large patio windows/doors
e) Dimensions of a terrace
f) Elevations of highest and lowest points on a plot relative to a reference point.

3.2 Providing Size and Layout Data

Unless up to date architectural drawings are available, size and layout data should be independently and professionally surveyed. The data can be gathered on site at the same time as an inspection for the existing proposed Single Survey requirements. Many of the UKMA-proposed compulsory measurements overlap with measurements that are necessary for building insurance and for the energy efficiency assessment.

In the event that recent architectural drawings are available, they should be accepted as an alternative source of layout data for the single survey; the surveyor may simply confirm that that the drawings are current and extract the relevant measurements from the drawings. Since the copyright of the architectural drawings will be with either the architect or housing developer, it is desirable that the Scottish Executive negotiates standard prices for the home layout drawings with RIBA.

3.3 Cost Implications

UKMA acknowledges that the provision of verified information on dimensions and areas, together with the drawing of an accurate floor plan, will add to the cost of the Single Survey. However, UKMA considers that this cost need not be significant in relation to the obvious benefits.

The cost would primarily be the additional time required for a surveyor to perform the following operations:

- Take measurements of internal dimensions (typically, two measurements per room) while on site and record them (preferably using a hand-held computer), and
- Input this data into a standard Computer Aided Design (CAD) programme.

Neither of these operations need be particularly time-consuming. There will be no additional travelling time (as the surveyor will already be on site), and to take measurements at the same time as inspecting condition of windows, damp proof courses, floorboards, etc would become automatic (rather like a doctor taking a patient's blood pressure while investigating other symptoms). Back in the office, the use of a CAD programme to draw out the recorded data would be a minor extension to the completion of the standard report form proposed in the Government consultation document.

UKMA therefore believes that the marginal additional costs of our proposals could easily be absorbed and would provide a significant benefit to Scottish buyers and sellers.

3.4 Why Metric

Although it is common practice for Estate Agents to provide size information in imperial units, UKMA strongly recommends that size information in the Single Survey be exclusively in metric units. There are four practical reasons for doings so:

1. Consistency with planning practice
Any plans for new buildings or extensions must be submitted for planning permission using metric dimensions in Scotland. Building regulations are specified in metric units. Since building

plans could be used as part of the Single Survey it is essential that there is consistency between measurement units used to describe a home and those used in plans.

2. Consistency with the supply of home improvement materials

If a prospective purchaser is contemplating home improvements e.g. new kitchen units, new floor coverings or turf they will need to budget for products that are sold exclusively in metric units.

3. Legal

As noted in section 1.1 although home buying is a non-regulated transaction (in terms of Weights and Measures Act), the use of imperial units could mean that the transaction is subject to a legal challenge.

4. Consumer Protection

For consumer protection it is important to provide consistent, standardised information. This means that the information should only be provided in a single set of units. Calculating in metric is far simpler for the consumer.

5. Consistency with the Building Industry

Most practices of the British building industry ranging from roofing to plumbing have been metric since the early 1970s.

3.5 Presentation of Units

UKMA recommends that standard practices are specified for presenting "vital statistics" of a property. Both the units used and the precision of the data presented need to be standardised in order to support meaningful comparisons of property descriptions. UKMA makes the following recommendations:

a) Internal dimensions are presented in metres accurate to two decimal places (centimetre accurate);
b) Plot dimensions are presented in metres accurate to one decimal place (except for larger dimensions of > 50 m when rounding to the nearest metre is acceptable)
c) Areas are presented in square metres (m^2)
d) Very large areas (>10,000 m^2) may be presented in hectares to two decimal places.

Although architectural drawings specify dimensions in millimetres, the usage of metres proposed above is much easier for a prospective buyer to comprehend. Millimetre accuracy may be essential for designing a house but is more precise than necessary for a house buyer.

4 "Homelabel" Proposal

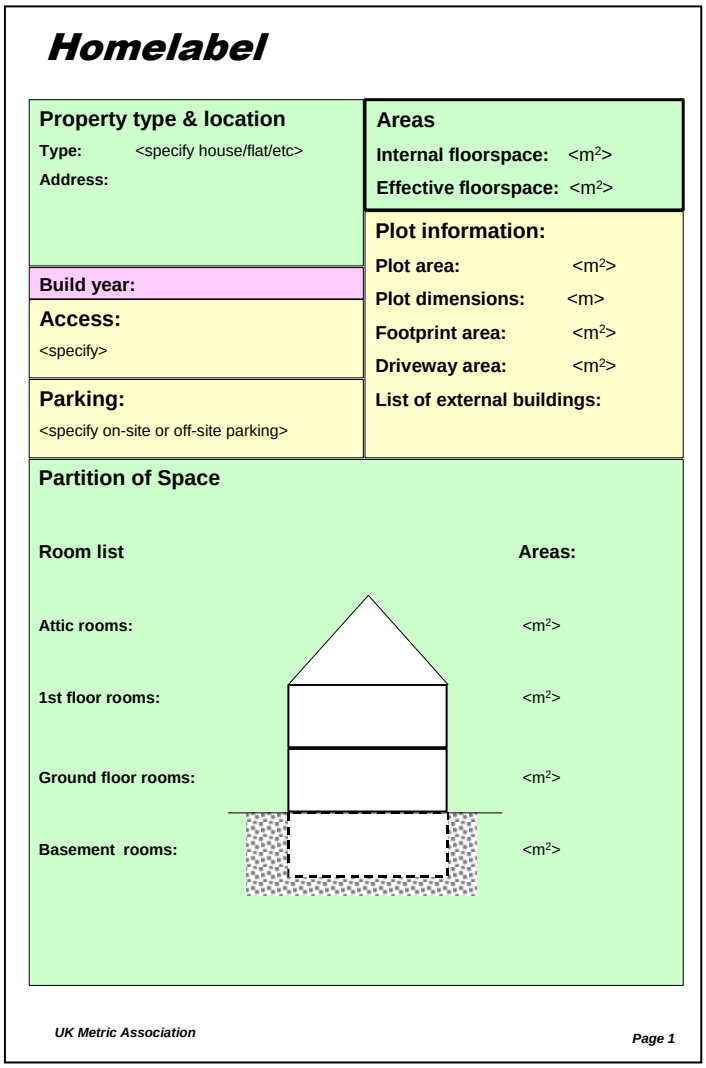
Since size-related information is important for prospective buyers to compare one property with another UKMA suggests that "vital statistics" of a property are presented in a standard format. This provides the purchaser with a transparent, consistent representation of information that allows ready comparison of one property with another. UKMA proposes that a *Homelabel* analogous to the Ecolabel for household appliances is used to summarise quantitative information on a property. UKMA thinks that for 99% of residential properties, the measurement information can be summarised in a standard label format on a single double-sided sheet of A4 paper.

The *Homelabel* should be included as part of the Single Survey report and used to summarise key measurements.

The use of standard measures such as internal floor area or plot area in the *Homelabel* can support providing home data electronically to prospective sellers. Residential property is increasingly marketed via the worldwide web. Property searches can be made efficient by using standard metrics as criteria with a property website search engine. If the measurements are standardised, consumers have assurance that they are comparing like with like.

4.1 Homelabel in a Nutshell

The format for the *Homelabel* shown below is intended to illustrate how it could work. It is not intended to be an actual design proposal.



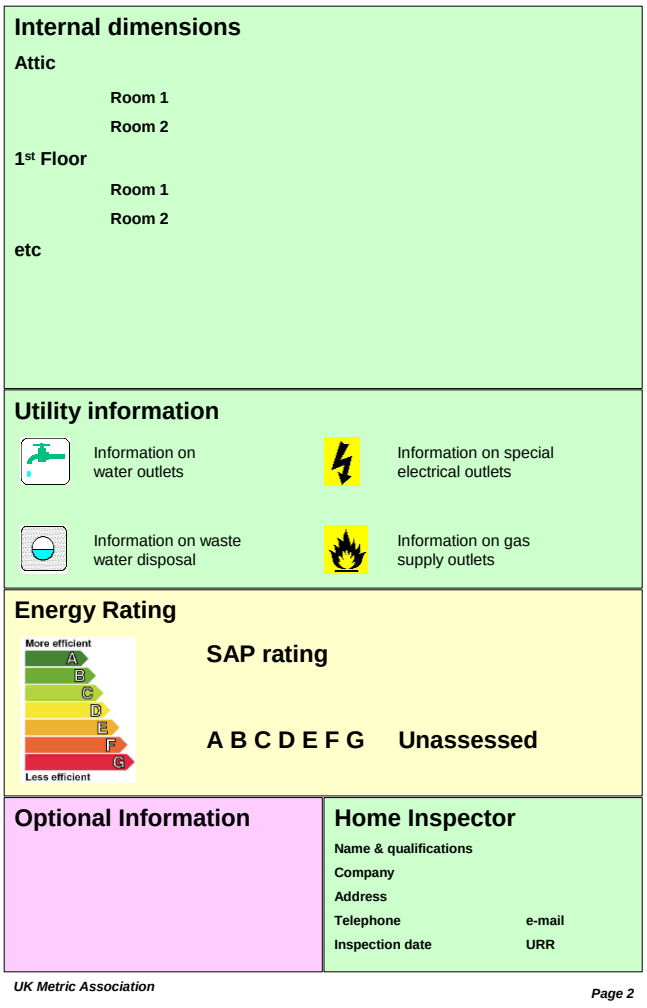
Boxes coloured in light green are for compulsory information e.g. type & location

Buff-coloured boxes are for information that is compulsory if relevant

Boxes in light mauve are for optional information.

A pictogram aims to illustrate the partition of space between different levels in the property. Obviously the pictogram will vary according to the type of building.

The pictogram helps to show how area is distributed and on which levels rooms are located.



Internal dimensions are listed by storey and by room.

The location of water and gas supplies can be indicated. The type of waste water disposal can be listed. The location of special electrical outlets e.g. cooker sockets can be identified.

Just as the Ecolabel includes an energy rating, it is logical to include an energy rating in the Homelabel

Like the HCR, the Homelabel should be only prepared by an authorised inspector.

4.2 Parking, Utility Service and Energy Information

Although the *Homelabel* is proposed to provide a quick user-friendly summary of the measurements of a property, there is no reason why additional information could not be usefully included for prospective buyers. In particular, UKMA thinks that parking, utility service and energy rating information would be usefully included.

Parking is an important consideration for many property purchasers. A *Homelabel* could usefully describe how many vehicles could be parked on the property and whether there were rights to use parking spaces in either communal areas or on the road.

Information on the links to utility services could be quickly summarised. Key information includes:

a) **Water supply.** Which rooms have water supplies? Are there any outside taps?
b) **Waste water.** Is wastewater drained through mains drainage or through a septic tank?
c) **Electricity.** Which rooms have non-standard power supplies e.g. cooker supplies?
d) **Gas.** Which rooms have gas outlets?

Since the *Homelabel* includes specification information on a residence, it can usefully incorporate the energy rating. The consultation document refers to both the SAP rating (1 to 120) and the A to G rating. Both ratings could be included in the *Homelabel.* Consumers would be used to seeing similar information given on appliance Ecolabels so this consistency is beneficial.

4.3 Illustration of Homelabel Proposal

To illustrate the flexibility of the Homelabel concept two fictitious examples have been created. They are: a) a 3-bedroom semi-detached house and b) a 2-bedroom flat. These examples are in the Appendix.

5 Additional Feedback

5.1 Properties Marketed "Off Plan"

Standardised size and layout information as proposed above, is relevant for almost every type of property. For properties marketed "off plan" it is especially important that consistent and user-friendly data is provided to prospective buyers. UKMA recommends that "Off Plan" properties are required to be marketed with a *Homelabel* and 1:100 scale drawings.

5.2 Longevity of Size & Layout Data

The HITF Final Report concludes that the Single Survey should have no prescribed shelf life. The additional measurement data proposed above will generally have a greater longevity than home condition data. Home measurement and layout data will only be outdated if structural modifications are made to a home.

5.3 Single Surveys – Statutory Requirement or Market Led?

The HITF Final Report takes the view that it would be advantageous if single surveys were introduced as a market-led, voluntary initiative. The Scottish Executive is hoping for a major shift in home buying and selling practices that would significantly improve the housing market in Scotland. UKMA is extremely concerned that this voluntary approach will be quite inadequate to achieve this major change.

Firstly, the voluntary approach only has a chance of success if *all* stakeholders (buyers, sellers and professional bodies) perceive a significant benefit in adopting the single survey approach. Buyers will undoubtedly benefit from the Single Survey approach since they potentially will receive much better quality information on a range of properties, but will only have to pay the surveyor's fee on the property which they eventually buy. However the buyers' benefit can only be realised if single surveys are offered on *all* available properties. Sellers, however, only have an incentive to commission a survey if the majority of other sellers in the market have commissioned Single Surveys and if they would therefore be at a competitive disadvantage by failing to do so. Furthermore if there is an only half-hearted commitment to the Single Survey, it is not clear that the Single Survey will be on offer from enough accredited professionals.

Secondly, experience in Britain suggests that successful major changes are generally made through rapid and compulsory measures – especially if players who do not change potentially have a competitive advantage. The extremely difficult transition from £sd to decimal currency

in 1971 was achieved very successfully because of its swiftness, its compulsory nature and its extremely well executed programme of public information. In contrast the, mainly voluntary, British metrication programme was announced in 1965 and is still incomplete after 38 years. The metrication has been hindered by the lack of a quick changeover, the lack of extensive public information and the fact that some market players have had a competitive advantage in avoiding or delaying change.

There is a real risk that if there were a widespread boycotting on the part of sellers, or even by surveyors, of a voluntary Single Survey scheme that the whole initiative would fail. Such a failure would be immensely damaging, as the potential benefits of the Single Survey to Scottish homeowners would be eclipsed by the failure to convert cleanly and convincingly.

UKMA therefore strongly recommends that the Scottish Executive introduce the Single Survey through a compulsory changeover. The following key points are considered essential to a successful changeover:

1. A fixed changeover date after which the Single Survey is compulsory
2. A short transition period, during which Single Surveys are guaranteed to be on offer from the surveying profession, but during which the old system is still permitted to operate
3. Very limited exemptions from the duty to provide a Single Survey – e.g. private sales between relatives when administering an estate.
4. A campaign of public information to demonstrate the benefits of the Single Survey to all players in the market.
5. Sanctions for non-compliance.

UKMA is convinced that if the transition period is fairly short (e.g. 3-4 months), once Single Surveys are on offer there will be a rapidly growing incentive for sellers to commission them. Gathering momentum in the transition period will preclude difficulties on the changeover deadline.

Furthermore, UKMA is convinced that providing Single Survey information in a compulsory standard format, such as our Homelabel recommendation, will improve the transparency of information provided to buyers. It will therefore deliver an immediate perceived benefit to the market, thus accelerating public acceptance.

6 Conclusions

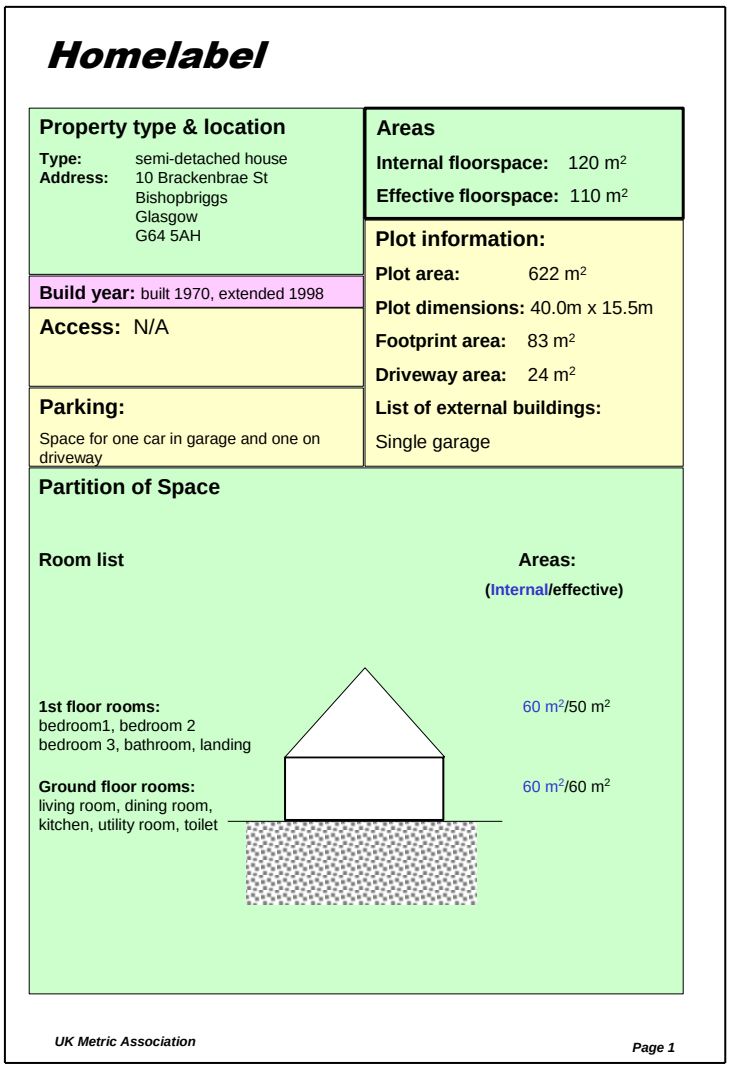
In conclusion, UKMA believes that the above proposals would be a modest and cost-effective extension to the Single Survey as proposed in Scottish Executive's Housing Improvement Task Force Final Report. The benefits in terms of enabling easy comparison of essential basic information about the size and layout of properties would be much appreciated by purchasers. UKMA believes that after a short period of familiarisation, the players in the residential property market would wonder how they previously managed without such a simple and obvious tool.

Appendix: Examples of a "Homelabel"

The following layout of a *Homelabel* aims to illustrate how vital statistics on a property can be presented in summary form.

Example 1: Semi-detached House

The following example aims to show how the *Homelabel* concept can be applied to a house where some rooms have oblique ceilings due to being in the roofspace.



Space lost due to oblique ceilings is indicated by the difference between internal and effective floorspace

Footprint area includes the gross external floorspace of the house plus the external area of the garage.

The first floor is indicated by a triangle since effective area is lost by oblique ceilings

Internal dimensions

Ground Floor

Kitchen:	**3.51 m x 3.02 m**
Living room	**5.48 m x 3.51 m**
Bathroom:	**2.40 m x 3.02 m**

Room measurements specified, listed by level in the home

Utility information

Supply to kitchen, utility room, toilet, bathroom and bedroom 1

Cooker supply in kitchen

Septic tank drainage

Outlets in kitchen, utility room and living room

Details of the utility services are given. The fact that waste water goes to a septic tank is noted.

Energy Rating

SAP rating 51

A B C D E F G **Unassessed**

The energy rating is expressed both in terms of SAP and A-G scale.

Optional Information

1.85 m patio window in living room

The width of the patio door is provided.

Home Inspector

Name & qualifications

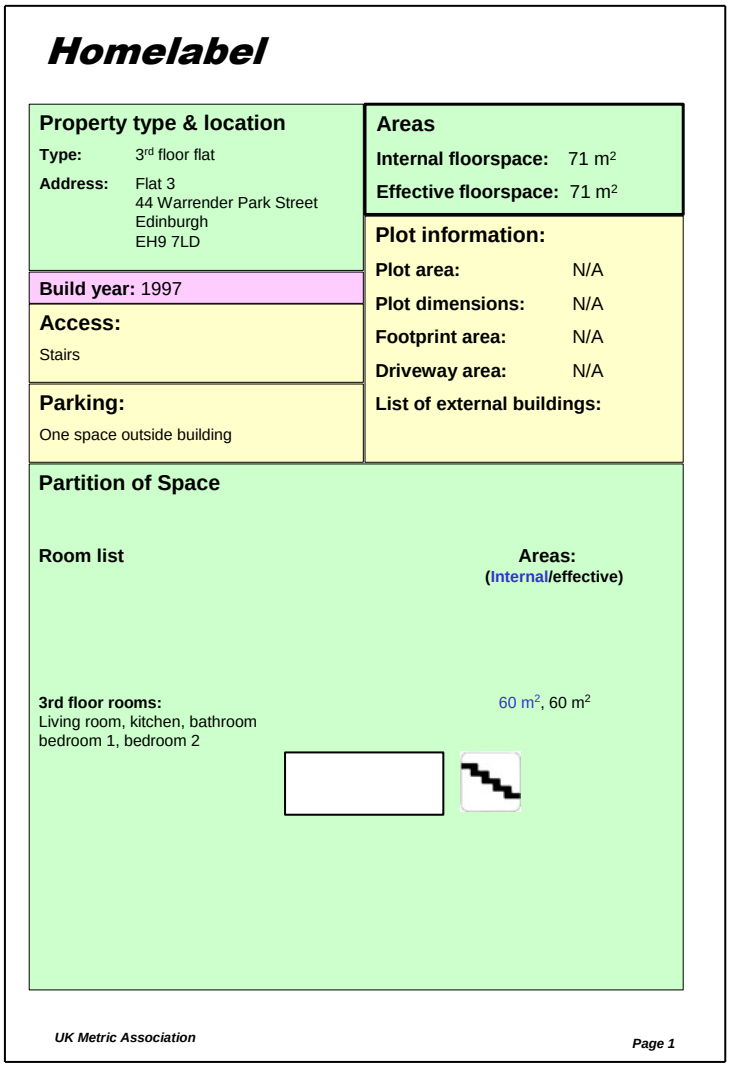
Company

Address

Telephone **e-mail**

Inspection date **URR**

The second example illustrates how the *Homelabel* concept can be applied to a 3rd floor flat which is sold with right to use a single parking space.



Homelabel

Property type & location

Type: 3rd floor flat

Address: Flat 3
44 Warrender Park Street
Edinburgh
EH9 7LD

Build year: 1997

Access:
Stairs

Parking:
One space outside building

Areas

Internal floorspace: 71 m²

Effective floorspace: 71 m²

Plot information:

Plot area: N/A

Plot dimensions: N/A

Footprint area: N/A

Driveway area: N/A

List of external buildings:

Partition of Space

Room list — **Areas: (Internal/effective)**

3rd floor rooms:
Living room, kitchen, bathroom
bedroom 1, bedroom 2 — 60 m², 60 m²

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The internal and effective floorspaces are the same. No area is lost due to oblique ceilings

The land on which the flat is built is not part of the sale. Plot information is not applicable

Parking rights are noted.

Pictograms are used to indicate access to the flat by either lift or stairs.

Internal dimensions

3rd Floor

Living room:	**3.50 m x 4.05 m**
Kitchen	**2.50 m x 3.25 m**
Toilet	**2.00 m**

Room measurements specified, listed by level in the home

Utility information

Water supply to kitchen and bathroom

Cooker supply in kitchen.

Mains sewage

No gas supply

Details of the utility services are given. The fact that gas is not supplied is noted.

Energy Rating

SAP rating

A B C D E F G **Unassessed**

The energy rating is shown as being unassessed.

Optional Information

Balcony accessible from living room size 3.0 m x 1.5 m

The existence of and dimensions of the balcony are provided.

Home Inspector

Name & qualifications

Company

Address

Telephone **e-mail**

Inspection date **URR**

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