



# UKMA news

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

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[www.ukma.org.uk](http://www.ukma.org.uk)

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## UKMA Committee 2018-19

The election of the Committee for the coming year will take place in May or June. If you are willing to stand for election to the Committee or would like to know what is involved, please e-mail the Secretary, [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk).

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## AGM and Conference 2018

The date and venue of the AGM and Annual Conference is still under consideration.

The Canada Water Library, London SE21, has proved perfect for our annual get-together for the past five years. However, it has been difficult this year to reconcile availability of rooms at the Library in late June and July with existing commitments of Committee members, and it is possible that the event will now take place in August or September.

A decision will be taken during the next two weeks, and members will be notified immediately. The Committee apologises for any inconvenience this causes.

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## A note from the Editor

Events have frustrated plans to publish two editions of UKMA News in the latter part of 2017, for which the Editor apologises.

This edition includes a report on last year's Conference, a story from the US about pirates of the Caribbean (not involving Johnny Depp), a reminder about the Prominent Peaks web site and a list of articles that have appeared recently on UKMA's blog, *Metric Views*. There is also information about UKMA and, on the back page, an application form for membership.

We are little wiser about the UK's future trading relationships around the world than we were a year ago, so UKMA News remains a Brexit comment free zone (almost).

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## **UKMA Annual Conference, 1 July 2017**

### **Notes of presentations and discussions**

A more comprehensive report on the Conference is available from the Secretary, [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk)

#### **Political situation**

There was general agreement that the political situation is confused. As a result, the future course of the stalled UK metric changeover remains unclear.

It was suggested we could we pick up and pursue single issues, for example estate agents' use of square feet and acres, and target obfuscation and those who aim to confuse.

It might also be possible to take stock by categorising activities: done, in progress and not started. Then identify areas where we can push, involving members and the Committee, and publicising these on the web site.

#### **Education officer (EO)**

John Frewen-Lord distributed a discussion paper he had prepared entitled, "An Education officer - do we need one?" listing five typical functions of EOs. He drew attention to our lack of resources, in particular for research, liaising with teachers and providing speakers.

Research would be an important part of the EO's remit. Research is necessary, for example, to quantify benefits (eg in industry) or to link PISA scores to arithmetical skills of users of old and new measures.

It was said that education is metric but, from primary school onwards, what is taught is often seen as disconnected from the real world. Could an EO influence this?

We heard that Alan Young, aka Dr Metric, who had done much work in this area and had spoken at an earlier UKMA Annual Conference, was in poor health. Subsequent to the Conference, we learned that Alan passed away on 15 July. The Committee are now looking into ways to preserve his legacy.

#### **Awards**

John distributed a discussion paper he had prepared entitled, "An awards scheme – would it help or provide a target?" This suggested four purposes of schemes, listed seven questions that need to be answered, and indicated areas where an award might be seen as having value.

There was a discussion of the risks involved. Any scheme would need to be carefully devised to neutralise a possible counter attack from those who are resisting change. Companies and/or products would have to be chosen carefully, and publicity targeted.

John suggested that the public has a positive perception of award schemes, and the media are hungry for stories. An area of activity could be chosen where there is perceived to be a problem, for example body height and weight. This would draw the public's attention to it. The criteria for the award would need to be objective, particularly if there were to be different levels, for example gold, silver and bronze.

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### **Social networking**

Tony Wilson pointed out that the members-only Google Group had seen less activity recently as discussion moved to public forums such as Metric Views and Facebook. He asked if we should give thought to winding it down.

He noted that postings on the Facebook page and group are not moderated, although we are able to take them down. Is this acceptable? And are we making the most of social media? There is little co-ordination between our web site and social media sites: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Metric Views. Would their impact be increased if we linked them, for example by putting a link to the Facebook page on the web site?

### **Web sites**

There was a discussion on the arrangements for hosting and maintaining our web sites and updating content. The issues raised are now being followed up by the Committee, and progress will be reported in the next edition of UKMA News.

### **Looking ahead**

John distributed a discussion paper he had prepared entitled, "Looking ahead – UKMA work programme". He said he thought the distractions arising from Brexit mean that we will not be able to get far with political activity for a while. Time would be better spent working in the background. His paper suggests five areas not related to Brexit where UKMA involvement might be more productive.

Following the discussion, John concluded by saying that "Global Britain" provides us with an opportunity. There will be a need for more metric not less. And "Finish the job" is a better message than "Going metric" as many people believe they don't like change.

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### **How Pirates of the Caribbean hijacked America's Metric System**

At about this time of year, UKMA News is often able to reproduce an entertaining April Fool article, gleaned from the national media. This year, as April 1st is some way off, we offer an edited version of an amusing story from the US by Joe Palca. It was first appeared in December 2017.

"If the United States were more like the rest of the world, a McDonald's Quarter Pounder might be known as the McDonald's 113-Grammer, John Henry's 9-pound hammer would be 4.08 kilograms, and any 800-pound gorillas in the room would likely weigh 362 kilos.

One reason this country never adopted the metric system might be pirates. Here's what happened:

In 1793, the brand new United States of America needed a standard measuring system because the states were using a hodgepodge of systems.

For example, in New York, they were using Dutch systems, and in New England, they were using English systems," says [Keith Martin](#) of the research library at the [National Institute of Standards and Technology](#) (NIST). This made interstate commerce difficult.

The secretary of state at the time was Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson knew about a new French system and thought it was just what America needed. He wrote to his pals in France, and the

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French sent a scientist named [Joseph Dombey](#) off to Jefferson carrying a small copper cylinder with a little handle on top. It was about 3 inches tall, about the same wide and weighed 1 kilogram.

This object was intended to be a standard for weighing things, part of a weights and measure system being developed in France, now known as the metric system.

Crossing the Atlantic, Dombey ran into a giant storm. ‘It blew his ship quite far south into the Caribbean Sea,’ says Martin. And you know who was lurking in Caribbean waters in the late 1700s? Pirates. ‘These pirates were British privateers, to be exact,’ says Martin. ‘They were basically water-borne criminals tacitly supported by the British government, and they were tasked with harassing enemy shipping.’

The pirates took Joseph Dombey prisoner on the island of Montserrat, hoping to obtain a ransom for him. Unfortunately for the pirates, and for Dombey as well, he died in captivity. The pirates weren't interested in the objects Dombey was carrying. They were auctioned off along with the rest of the contents of his ship.

Ultimately, the kilogram made it into the hands of an American land surveyor named [Andrew Ellicott](#). It was passed down in the Ellicott family until 1952, when Andrew Ellicott Douglas, an astronomer, gave it to the agency that was the precursor of NIST.

It's worth mentioning that the kilogram has been redefined over the years, so the version Dombey was carrying probably isn't exactly the same mass as the modern kilogram, which is a platinum-iridium artifact stored in France. Even that object will likely become obsolete next year when the kilogram is expected to be redefined again — not as a physical artifact but instead as something related to a fundamental constant in nature.

Would it really have made any difference if Dombey had been able to deliver his kilogram to Jefferson? ‘We don't know for sure, but it seems like there was a missed opportunity there,’ says Martin. ....

So for now, we're stuck with Quarter Pounders and 9-pound hammers.”

The full story with illustrations appears here:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/28/574044232/how-pirates-of-the-caribbean-hijacked-americas-metric-system>

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### Signs of progress in London?

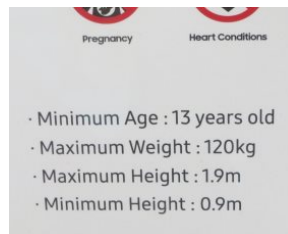


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### Theatrical metric

Ronnie Cohen has drawn our attention to a notice by VR Theatre that gives maximum weight for audience members in kilograms and maximum and minimum height in metres. He writes:

“It is encouraging to see an organisation going against the grain and resisting peer pressure to use stones and pounds for body weight and feet and inches for personal height. It is good to see that they are confident that customers will understand this information despite the strong tradition and custom to use imperial units for body weight and height.”



We wonder if the Theatre had received legal advice that health and safety information should be in metric and decided to heed it.

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### Prominent Peaks

Having said farewell to the Beast from the East and Storm Emma, our thoughts may turn to spring and the great outdoors.

In 2011, two UKMA members, Jim Bloomer and Roddy Urquhart, produced a web site listing UK peaks by prominence – in metric of course:

[www.prominentpeaks.org.uk](http://www.prominentpeaks.org.uk)

The site is for those who love the upland areas of the UK and wish to climb some of the best peaks. The web site is the one place where you can access information on the UK's peaks, linking to maps and satellite views. Peaks are classified by both height and prominence, which picks out the most significant peaks regardless of location or landscape. Because the site is concerned with prominence, most listed peaks should have good unobstructed views and be quite distinct from their neighbours.

The site enables you to tailor your own challenge and track your progress.

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### ‘Turn the UK fully metric now’

The owner and moderator of the facebook page, ‘Turn the UK fully metric now’, who is independent of UKMA, is looking for assistance. If you think you might be able to help, please leave a comment to this effect on the page.

TtUKfmn has always been supportive of our campaign.

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### You may have missed

Here is a summary of the articles posted on Metric Views, [www.metricviews.org.uk](http://www.metricviews.org.uk) , this year

“Alpine DIY and the generation gap.” Posted on 12 January. 7 comments.

“Diaries and a glimpse into the past.” Posted on 20 January.

“Acres made easy.” Posted on 27 January. 11 comments.

“Then and now” Posted on 2 February. 6 comments.

“Metric in Myanmar.” Posted on 8 February. 7 comments.

“A wrong turning that led British Leyland to a dead end.” Posted on 15 February. 3 comments.

“Olympics – metric in Winter too.” Posted on 23 February. 2 comments.

“The DfT’s duplicated reports.” Posted on 2 March. 4 comments.

If you read one of these articles and like it, then why not click the “Likes” button?

Draft articles for Metric Views are welcome and should be e-mailed to [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk) .

### Can you help?

The media’s focus on Brexit has, for the moment, diverted their attention from the UK’s measurement muddle, and gives us time to plan ahead.

The Committee is looking for volunteers who may be able to help in the following areas:

- Responding to calls to appear on broadcast media, for example local radio.
- Reviewing printed media for stories to link to our Twitter and Facebook pages
- Assisting with the production of material for uploading to YouTube.
- Editing UKMA News.
- Preparing web-friendly versions of UKMA News for PCs, i-pads, i-phones and android devices such as tablets.

If you think you may be able to help, please contact [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk)

### About UKMA News

UKMA News is published by the UK Metric Association, the object of which is to promote the full adoption of the International System of Units (SI), commonly known as ‘the metric system’, as the legal and default system of weights and measures throughout society in the United Kingdom.

The Editor welcomes your feedback and comments on UKMA News. To submit, or to unsubscribe to UKMA News, please e-mail [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk)

## **UKMA News - the newsletter of the UK Metric Association**

### **Where to find UKMA on the internet**

UKMA began as an internet forum, and the internet is our principal vehicle for carrying our message to the public. We now have:

The main UKMA web site, [www.ukma.org.uk](http://www.ukma.org.uk)

A factual web site, [www.thinkmetric.org.uk](http://www.thinkmetric.org.uk)

A blog, [www.metricviews.org.uk](http://www.metricviews.org.uk)

A Twitter page, <http://twitter.com/UKMetric>

A YouTube channel, [www.youtube.com/user/UKMetric](http://www.youtube.com/user/UKMetric)

These are available to all, not just members.

There is also a Facebook page and a Facebook group, open anyone who can log onto Facebook.

### **Membership of UKMA – a note for readers who are not members.**

An application form for membership of UKMA appears on the final page of this edition of UKMA News. The Annual subscription is £15 or £10 paid by standing order, concessions £5. The subscription year runs from July until the following June, but for members who join now their subscription will run until June 2019.

Benefits of membership include:

- Participation in a Google Group, open only to members.
- Participation in the annual election of the Committee.
- Participation in the AGM and annual Conference
- Election to the Committee

### **And finally**

There has been scarcely any progress with Brexit since the last edition of UKMA News. Its implications for the completion of the UK's metric changeover remain uncertain. UKMA's view is that, whether the UK remains in the EU's single market and the customs union or seeks new trading relationships, it will be essential that we use, are seen to use, and become thoroughly familiar with the measurement system used by almost every country around the world, a system that has the additional advantages of being simple, logical and comprehensive.



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### UKMA Membership application form

Thank you for your interest in joining the UK Metric Association (UKMA).

Please fill in your details below:

<b>Name</b>	
Home postal address	
Town	
County/Country	
Postcode	
Daytime telephone	
Evening telephone	
Mobile telephone	
e-mail address	

(Please delete below as applicable.)

I wish to support the UK Metric Association through membership.

I understand the objectives of the UK Metric Association (UKMA) and agree with them. I have received the Constitution of UKMA.

I agree that my participation in UKMA activities will be legal, ethical and consistent with its objectives.

I am willing to be contacted by e-mail at the e-mail address above

I enclose a cheque (payable to 'UK Metric Association') to cover:

Individual subscription of £15 (annual)

Concessionary subscription of £5 (annual)

I enclose a completed standing order form in favour of UKMA for £10.00 per year.

I have made a payment through Paypal using the UKMA web site, [www.ukma.org.uk](http://www.ukma.org.uk)

Signed .....

Date .....

Please return to Secretary, UKMA, 34 Wroxham Gardens, London, N11 2BA, or to [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk), from whom a standing order form may be obtained.