



# UK Metric Association

Campaigning for a **single** *rational* system of measurement

e-mail: [secretary@metric.org.uk](mailto:secretary@metric.org.uk)

13 January 2014

Mr James Harding  
Director of BBC News and Current Affairs  
BBC Broadcasting House  
Portland Place  
London  
W1A 1AA

Dear Mr Harding

## Re. BBC news style guide

The UK Metric Association has addressed the BBC's measurement policy in its response to the recent consultation by the BBC Trust on its review of News and Current Affairs. This response can be read at:

[http://ukma.org.uk/sites/default/files/UKMA\\_Response\\_to\\_BBC\\_Consultation\\_2013.pdf](http://ukma.org.uk/sites/default/files/UKMA_Response_to_BBC_Consultation_2013.pdf)

However, several of our members have raised particular concerns relating to the BBC news style guide which can be found at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/news-style-guide>

At its last meeting, the Committee asked that I point out these concerns to you.

You will probably be aware that SI, commonly known as the metric system, is used around the world, and is the primary system of measurement in two hundred or so countries. *Rules for SI are agreed internationally*, and if these rules are followed, then the information will be widely understood – “50 km” has the same meaning, not only in languages that use the Latin alphabet, but also in, for example, Greek, Russian and Arabic and in Hindi, Mandarin and Japanese.

The section of the BBC news style guide headed “Weights and measures” has recommendations that depart from the internationally agreed rules. I enclose the Committee's notes about these and its suggestions for amendments.

Our principal concerns about the BBC news style guide version of the metric system are:

1. Children will learn the international version of SI at school, including the use of symbols. This could be undermined when they encounter the BBC version.
2. News reports that follow the BBC version are less likely to be understood overseas than those following the international version.

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

Patron: The Rt Hon the Lord Howe of Aberavon, Kt, CH, QC



Both of these concerns seem to conflict with the BBC's core mission to inform and educate.

I have read that your new Director General is known to colleagues as "Global Tony" and wishes to increase BBC audiences worldwide. The use of international conventions would help with this mission. Furthermore, the BBC's lack of a professional approach to measurement matters, as exemplified by the news style guide, is unlikely to enhance its reputation worldwide.

I enclose a copy of UKMA's Measurement units style guide which provides further information.

Yours sincerely

Derek Pollard  
Secretary UKMA

Enc.    BBC news style guide with notes  
         Amended BBC news style guide  
         UKMA Measurement units style guide.