

Royal Institute of British Architects

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy:
Choice on Units of Measurement: Markings and Sales
August 2022

The Royal Institute of British Architects is a global professional membership body driving excellence in architecture. We serve our members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. Being inclusive, ethical, environmentally aware and collaborative underpins all that we do.

The RIBA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

We recommend that the construction and real estate sectors should be excluded from a choice in units of measurement. There is a need for metric consistency in the construction and real estate sectors to ensure standard working within UK projects and internationally. This is important for health and safety, climate commitments, consistency, and the UK architecture sector's international reputation.

1 b) Are there any specific areas that you think should be excluded from a choice in units of measurement, and why?

Yes. There is a need for metric consistency in the construction and real estate sectors to ensure standard working within UK projects and internationally.

1 c) If an item is sold in imperial measures, should there be a requirement for a metric equivalent alongside it?

Yes. This should be a minimum requirement for products and services provided within the construction and real estate sectors to have a metric equivalent alongside imperial.

2) What would be the consequences of your business having the freedom to sell products in imperial measures, if you wished?

There is a need for metric consistency in the construction and real estate sectors to ensure standard working within projects. This is important for health and safety, climate commitments, consistency, and the UK architecture sector's international reputation.

Ensuring our buildings are safe

Should some manufacturers decide to sell their products in imperial measurements – construction and real estate professionals will be required to perform calculations to convert materials into



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metric. If these calculations are performed incorrectly this could have a negative impact on a building's structural integrity, leading to health and life safety concerns.

We have whole generations who have never learnt and therefore understood the imperial system. Getting to grips with the imperial system will cost time and money – and risks mistakes being made unnecessarily.

Addressing the climate emergency

The RIBA's own [2030 Climate Challenge](#), which asks architects work towards net zero whole life carbon for new buildings by 2030 by reducing operational energy, embodied carbon and potable water usage, sets metric unit targets. Moving away from this would complicate and undermine the work the construction sector is already undertaking to work towards net zero.

International reputation

In 2021, UK architects' revenue from international work was £535 million. With majority of exports going to countries outside the EU, British architecture is a global success story. As the UK negotiates a new relationship with the rest of the world – opening new markets via trade agreements is critical. Most countries across the world, including many Commonwealth countries, use the metric system – moving away from this in the construction and real estate sectors could negatively impact the ability for the UK to export architectural services.

In addition, construction products that come from Europe are key to ensuring a thriving construction sector – it only takes one material to be unavailable to impact work on a building site. This is especially important when considering the UK housing crisis and the climate emergency. Many products used in sustainable buildings, for example, come from the EU. If the UK construction and real estate sectors are working in imperial measurements but European construction products are in metric there is a risk that consumers will be unable to find the best deals – having to do calculations to understand which is the best value for money.

3 d) Do you have experience of buying solely in imperial units?

No. The construction sector has worked in metric units since the late 1960s.

4) What potential impacts might there be on regulatory activity, including any costs or benefits?

As mentioned above, having some construction products or materials in imperial measurements could lead to health and safety risks. This is extremely concerning given the increasing competence requirements for the sector following the tragedy at Grenfell Tower in 2017. Moving to imperial measurements risks undermining the work the sector is doing to upskill and meet new regulatory requirements.