

# Practice notes and comments

## SMM6

Speculation related to the publication date of a further revision of the Standard Method of Measurement of Building Works has been partially dispelled by a recent announcement by the Chairman of the Standing Joint Committee (SJC) that a sixth edition (SMM6) is "about to be published" – a cautious recognition, perhaps, of what can happen "twixt cup and lip"! Following the publication of the Fletcher Report (December 1971) on Measurement Conventions, the RICS and NFBTE – constituent bodies of the SJC – set up in 1973 an "SMM Development Unit" with terms of reference designed to produce:

1. A limited revision of SMM5 to incorporate the most pressing and critical of the many requests for amendment received by the SJC since that edition was published;
2. A thorough-going further revision to incorporate other agreed amendments not included in any official publication resulting from (1) above.

According to the SJC Chairman's announcement, SMM6 follows the general format of SMM5 – the most obvious deviation being the incorporation of Section N: Woodwork in the new edition in place of Sections N and P of the previous edition. Other modifications are also incorporated throughout the document. Alongside the publication of SMM6 it is intended by the SJC to provide a practice manual instead of the explanatory comments and clarifications published in respect of previous editions. Among the casualties resulting from the revised philosophy incorporated in SMM6 is the disappearance of the five-foot stages in the description of excavation work – which will now be described and measured with reference to its maximum depth in various locations. Further changes are introduced in respect of working space, planking and strutting and the establishment of the level of sub-soil water when the relative work is carried out. While SMM5 brought about the disappearance of "Rods", SMM6 makes a further change in established practice by eliminating "Reduced Brickwork". The foregoing examples are mentioned as typical and, of course, do not represent a comprehensive view of all modifications contained in the new edition.

It appears that the changes incorporated in SMM6 may be rather more extensive than intended when the development Unit was briefed in 1973. This being so, it now seems unlikely that the next comprehensive edition (SMM7) will emerge for some years from now. SMM6 will therefore have a fairly long life and, for some time, of course, will be effective on new projects while others, governed by SMM5, are still current. It is obviously in the

interest of all members of the profession to familiarise themselves with SMM6 as soon as it is generally available and (even though individually they may have wished that it went further – or not so far) to make it understood and applicable by all concerned in the measurement of building works. In anticipation of a possible question, the amount of detail which will be required in bills of quantities prepared under SMM6 will depend entirely on the type and quality of the relative work. Any further question concerning the possibility that additional fees should or should not be payable in respect of bills prepared under SMM6 will, no doubt, be overtaken by whatever may yet emerge as a result of the implementation by HMG of the recommendations in the recent Report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the provision of Surveying Services.

As a tailpiece, it is perhaps permissible at this stage to ask whether and, if so, for how long the SJC is likely to continue in its present structure. As may be seen in the history of the JCT, the right of other interested parties to be represented in decision-making processes must be accommodated sooner or later and it is to be hoped that due recognition of that right will emerge in a new and enlarged constitution of the SJC before the long-haul leading to the publication of SMM7 is advanced much further.



"For a start, here is the Preamble".