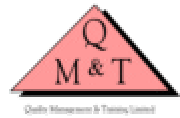


## QM&T June 2002 Newsletter

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## Quality of life 'needs improving'

Following the release of a recent survey, the UK government has admitted that it still needs to improve quality of life - people are living longer, but are not as healthy. The "Quality of Life Barometer" contains little new information, but is an attempt by the government to identify quality of life indicators for a checklist. Improvements have been made in areas, such as investment, education and employment. In education, for example, the percentage of 19 year olds with level 2 qualifications has risen from 52% to 76% since 1990. Air quality has also improved. However, there is still some room for improvement. Life expectancy has increased by 1.7 years to 74.6 years for men and by 1.1 years to 79.6 years for women. However, healthy life expectancy has risen by only 0.5 years to 66.9 years for men and remained at 68.7 years for women.

## In-flight air quality

In a recent article in Which? holiday magazine it was reported that there is a lack of research and in-flight testing of cabin air quality. It found that pilots reduced airflow to save fuel. Pesticides that sprayed around the cabin contained substances banned in the United States and there are no regulations on humidity or temperature. The Consumers' Association has warned that airline passengers' health may be at risk from the poor quality of cabin air. Little has been done to improve in-flight air. Although BAE Systems, has taken steps to improve air quality, there seems to be more action needed.

## Health websites

In a report published in the British Medical Journal, 3 separate surveys studying health websites, examining the quality and authority of available information. One study reported that the standard of information contained in public oriented sites had improved. However, another study concluded that apparently credible websites may not be accurate. And a third study found that most popular websites were not necessarily of the highest quality. It was concluded that although the quality of health information available on the web has improved, it still cannot be entirely relied upon.

## 'Quality' teas from India

India is the world's largest tea producing country, but the competition is fierce, with Kenya, Vietnam and Indonesia all selling at cheaper prices. Last year, due to a fall in tea exports, the Indian tea growers had to consider a different marketing strategy, which is to focus on the quality of teas. The falling price of tea has meant hard times for Indian tea growers. For example, a kilogram of top quality Assam tea in January 2002 was selling at approximately 12 rupees (18p) less at the auctions than three years before. However, tea production costs have increased due to fertilizer prices and wages of workers. Last month the Indian government offered tea growers a 50% cut in excise duty

and raised the import duty on foreign teas. However this may give the tea industry some hope, but some may feel it is too little too late.

## Airport Delays

It has been recently reported that thousands of UK air passengers faced delays after a technical problem at the air traffic control centre in West Drayton, causing temporarily grounding of planes across UK and controllers having to manually keep track of aircraft. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in a fortnight a computer handling flight data failed.

National Air Traffic Services (NATS) admits there was no safety risk, but an inquiry has begun.

After initial delays of up to two hours, most UK airports were able to operate a normal service by mid-morning.

Very recently the system broke down again in the run-up to the busy Easter bank holiday, and left thousands of travellers stranded in airports around the world. Although this was not caused by a computer failure, it was due to incorrect inputting of data.

These incidents are a further setback for the newly-privatised National Air Traffic Services (NATS), which has received a £30m bail-out from the government after running into financial difficulties following the events of 11 September.

## Computers Exposed

A recent study revealed that many companies are risking infection because of not updating their anti-virus software frequently enough. The next computer virus outbreak could hit British Businesses very hard. A survey carried out by security company McAfee has found that most companies are not protecting themselves against computer viruses. The research showed that only a third of businesses update their anti-virus software daily. 30% of companies update weekly, 10% update monthly and 5% only update when there is a major outbreak. Although computer viruses are constantly circulating on the net, year 2002 has not seen a computer virus outbreak on the scale seen in 2001 with the Code Red and Nimda viruses. Figures show that the numbers of viruses circulating and the numbers of computers being infected is constantly climbing.

## Electrical Waste

It has been recently reported that the European parliament has put through some amendments to the proposed The Waste Electrical and Electronics Equipment (WEEE) Directive. This will mean manufacturers will have to pay for the recycling of their own components only. According to previous proposals, manufacturers were jointly responsible for the handling of waste products. The WEEE Directive aim is to set minimum targets for the recycling of electronics equipment and establish rules for the safe disposal of unusable or obsolete products. In other words the polluter pays. The WEEE Directive will encourage investment in recycling firms, in logistics businesses, in collection agents, in cleaner extraction techniques. Manufacturers will be encouraged to find ways of making their goods easier to recycle and dispose of.

## NHS IT project

In a recent report in the Guardian newspaper the government has gambled £40bn on an IT project. The budget has given the NHS a new lease of life. The success of the government's plan in NHS relies on a single IT project, which will computerise the whole NHS on a national scale. Hospitals and GPs will have a network of systems installed that will allow patients to be treated anywhere in the country. Installation of this project is expected to begin in April 2003. However, the NHS has a bad track record for wasting money on failed IT projects. It finds it hard to run its computers on time. Last month, it missed 2 targets set out in the last IT master plan. One was for 35% of large hospitals to reach Level 3 of NHS electronic patient records and the other was for 60% of GPs to be able to get their patients laboratory results electronically, rather than have to wait for the paper work to arrive. The Audit Commission has also reported that it found nearly half of the hospitals in England and Wales were not able to collect enough data to know if they were meeting the

government standard on waiting times. It seems to be difficult for the NHS to become computerised, certainly harder than any other business and because of its size and complexity, it takes 2 years or more to buy new IT systems, which by the time they are installed, they may be obsolete. It seems that the larger and more centrally directed an IT project, the more likely it is to fail.

## Quality life for pets

According to a recent report, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) have put forwards plans for pets to have legal rights to a minimum quality of life. Pet owners will therefore have a legal "duty of care" to their pets and would face prosecution if they failed to provide enough food, water and space in their cages. This would allow the RSPCA to take the necessary steps to prevent cruelty, rather than having to wait until there is the evidence of harm, before they can act. It wants animal welfare officers to have a similar role as social workers, showing pet owners how to treat their pets better. For more information please visit [www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk).

## ISO Guide in Braille for the elderly and disabled

The first ISO document to be published in Braille for the blind is now available. ISO/IEC Guide 71, *Guidelines for standards developers to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities*, provides guidance for the elderly to be taken into account in standards under development. The guide is available from ISO Central Secretariat. The aim is to encourage the development of standards that improve the quality of life for elderly with disabilities, to reduce discrimination and also generate user-friendly products for the entire population. The guide was developed by a technical advisory group based on initial work carried out by ISO Committee on consumer policy (COPOLCO). This was done in partnership with the IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission) plus input from the European standardization bodies, CEN and CENELEC. For more information please visit [www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)