THOSE concerned with the development of recreation management on sound principles will no doubt be disturbed by some of the statistics being bandied about the country.

ARM News heard recently of a Centre claiming in its local Press, attendances of 30,000 a week from a traditional pool, two-court sports hall, bowls hall and conventional ancillary facilities! Another smaller centre claimed almost 10,000 visitors when the most generous of calculations could not have exceeded 6000 given the available facilities.

Another Centre claimed over 1½ million visitors in just over a year without a pool, rink or ballroom! (Then followed on TV with a claim of 2 million a year). It doesn’t take a PhD to work out that even a banquet for 1000 every day of the year and 500 sightseers daily would not make sense of such a claim. A braver few claim to actually make a profit on the operation of their Centres. Whilst their claims appear in the Press, what little close scrutiny is possible suggests that it is the old story of statistics telling whatever you wish to tell. What is very disconcerting, however, is that a number of agencies actually take these claims on face value. A very senior officer of no less an organisation than the Sports Council quoted one Centre’s profit. One wonders what sort of factual corroboration went on before that pearl swept the country.

Let there be no misunderstanding that the usage of identical facilities can vary enormously, depending on catchment area and population, local political policies, management, opening hours, size of facilities and regional leisure traditions. All of these factors also influence the net cost of the operation to the authority. The local council’s philosophy for the Centre can alter such net costs by as much as a six figure sum. Some very broad guidelines, however, can be devised. The manager should be aware of the total numbers passing through his establishment, the percentage utilisation of dry sports facilities, and the actual numbers attributed to particular areas such as swimming pools or fitness rooms where increased use can particularly benefit net operating costs. To be unaware of these facts is surely to attempt to manage in ignorance of market demand and potential.

Some reliable statistics have been assembled to illustrate how outrageous a few of the claims have been, but also to provide some guidelines for those unfamiliar with statistics related to indoor provision.

(Part 2 of this feature will appear in the next edition—keep counting!!)