



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 May 2012
Original: English

Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and
on the progress made in the standardization of geographical
names since the Ninth Conference
(for distribution only).**

Report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

* E/CONF.101/1.

** Prepared by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names and the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain

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Summary

There is no national names authority in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, although both Scotland and Wales have Place Name Authorities. The geographical names as portrayed on hard-copy and digital products of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain are recognized as being the authoritative set of geographical names. Land and Property Services (LPS) performs a similar function in Northern Ireland. The present paper outlines the function of the Ordnance Survey as the national mapping agency and its role with regard to toponymy, highlighting developments since the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. It contains information on database management initiatives; geographical names products; and research projects including various methods of collecting vernacular names.

Geographical names for places and features outside of the United Kingdom are the responsibility of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) whose objectives are described in this paper. PCGN gathers information on names standardised by national authorities to inform the UK Government of appropriate names to be used on its products.

¹ Prepared by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names and the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain

REPORT OF ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Document prepared by the UK Permanent Committee on Geographical Names
with input from Ordnance Survey of Great Britain

National Geographical Names

Ordnance Survey www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk is the national mapping agency of Great Britain and as such is responsible for collecting geographical names information for national maps and geographic databases in England, Scotland and Wales. Land and Property Services (LPS) www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps performs a similar function in Northern Ireland. Ordnance Survey operates as a Government Department, Executive Agency and Trading Fund, producing digital data products and paper maps for business, leisure, administrative and educational use.

Names policy

Ordnance Survey names information is updated in the course of map product revision in consultation with local authorities, reliable organisations and expert individuals. Official names, which are typically those allocated to objects by local or central government, or the owners of the property in question, are therefore captured during this process. England has no place name authority, but Scotland and Wales have their own arrangements. Since 2000, Ordnance Survey has placed particular emphasis on standardising Welsh-language names in Wales and Gaelic names in the Gaelic-speaking areas of north-west Scotland. A Gaelic Names Policy² was established in 2000 and led to the setting up of a Gaelic Names Liaison Committee, with a Gaelic Names Liaison Officer appointed to assist Ordnance Survey in the implementation of the policy. A Welsh Language Scheme³, approved in 2001 and amended in 2006, sets out Ordnance Survey's commitment to the provision of information in Welsh. Ordnance Survey is working in collaboration with the Meteorological Office, Land Registry and Companies House (business register) to explore ways of providing a better service in Welsh at lower cost.

Database management

Historically place names were treated as cartographic objects, with the consequence that the recorded location of a name reflected its cartographic placement rather than the location of the named object. There have been inconsistencies among datasets at different scales and no single definitive set of names. It has not been possible to associate multiple names consistently with an object.

Ordnance Survey is investing in new database systems that will overcome these limitations. A new Geospatial Data Management System (GDMS) enables names to be associated directly with the objects they name, and the forthcoming Multi-Resolution Database Programme (MRDP) will include a names database that will hold all known names.

Products

Ordnance Survey makes a number of datasets available free of charge under the terms of an OS OpenData Licence⁴, including its 1:50 000 Scale Gazetteer. This Gazetteer⁵ contains some 250 000

² See <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/aboutus/reports/scotland/docs/namesgaelicen.pdf> and <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/aboutus/reports/scotland/docs/namesgaelic.pdf>

³ See: <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/aboutus/reports/wales/docs/welshlanguageschemefinal.pdf> and <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/aboutus/reports/wales/docs/cynllunialithgymraegternfynol.pdf>

⁴ See <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/business/licences/using-and-creating-data-with-os-products/os-opendata/index.html>

names taken from the OS Landranger Map series. Changes made to names in the OS Landranger Map production database are reflected in the Gazetteer. They include positional moves, improvements to cartographic representation and the addition of new names. An updated 1:50 000 Scale Gazetteer is made available in June of each year.

Address information from local authorities and Ordnance Survey has, for the first time, been combined into a national address gazetteer database as a single definitive source of accurate spatial address data for England and Wales. Ordnance Survey and the Local Government Group have entered into a public sector limited liability partnership, GeoPlace™ www.geoplace.co.uk, to manage the database and distribute products and services from it. Launched in autumn 2011, AddressBase™ products provide access to a definitive database of addresses in Great Britain for use by all parts of the public sector and the private sector, removing duplication in the public sector and providing more comprehensive and accurate information.

Research initiatives

Research in the area of the Semantic Web has resulted in a recommendation that all future gazetteer products should be published as Linked Data, which will make it easier for people and machines to explore the relationships among datasets published on the web. More information about Linked Data can be found at www.linkeddata.org.

Ordnance Survey's products and services reflect names provided through official channels and evidence on the ground, but the organisation recognises that knowledge of locally-used unofficial "vernacular" names is sometimes important; for the emergency services for example and increasingly for web searches. It aims to improve the information in its national gazetteer to provide a fuller view of the toponymic landscape than that which is available on the printed map. With this in mind, Ordnance Survey has initiated a number of research projects to determine which vernacular names are important and how to collect them efficiently. The results indicate that no one method of collection will be fully effective by itself, and that Ordnance Survey will have to employ several methods in parallel, including field collection by surveyors, web harvesting and crowdsourcing.

Foreign Geographical Names

Established in 1919 at the Royal Geographical Society, the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) is the United Kingdom's authority on foreign geographical names. It has a cross-government function to formulate and coordinate policies and procedures for the proper writing of geographical names for places and features outside the United Kingdom and ensure the implementation of those policies across the UK Government. It gathers information on names standardised by national authorities in order to carry out its principal objectives which are listed below:

- To establish and apply the principles by which foreign geographical names should be used by UK government departments;
- To develop, maintain, disseminate and promote policies and standards based on these principles;
- To supply geographical names advice and approved names in accordance with these policies and standards;

⁵ http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/products/50kgazetteer_open/

- To analyse developments and identify and evaluate key issues of toponymic and wider geopolitical interest using a range of sources, including those in different languages and scripts, in order to ensure the timely provision of appropriate geographical names and related geopolitical information;
- To improve cross-government awareness of geographical names issues, actively promote PCGN policies and procedures and ensure targeted provision of geographical names advice;
- To raise the profile of geographical names at the international level and improve working relations with other geographical names authorities and individuals with appropriate expertise.