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English only

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**National standardization: treatment of names
in multilingual areas**

United Kingdom: Welsh language place names in Wales

Submitted by the United Kingdom**

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Introduction

Welsh is a Celtic language descended from the Brythonic languages spoken throughout Roman Britain south of Central Scotland. It is the oldest living language of Great Britain and one of the oldest languages in Western Europe. In post-Roman Britain the language retreated westwards into Wales in the face of conquests by Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon-speaking peoples. Differentiated from the q-Celtic Goidelic languages of Gaelic-speaking Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, the p-Celtic Welsh of Brythonic origin is closely related to Cornish and Breton.

The publication of the Bible in Welsh in 1588 did much to standardise the language and provide a basis for the development of the language as it is spoken and written today. The principal identifiable dialects are *y Wyndodeg* (the Vendotian of north-west Wales), *y Bowyseg* (the Powysian of north-east and mid-Wales), *y Ddyfydeg* (the Demetian of south-west Wales) and *Gwenhwyseg* (the dialect of Gwent and Morgannwy in south-east Wales).

Status of Welsh

At the start of the 20th century the Welsh language was spoken by almost half the population of Wales. The 1911 Population Census recorded nearly a million people who regarded themselves as Welsh speakers. For the greater part of that century the numbers of Welsh speakers declined as a result of migration from rural to urban areas for employment, the increased migration to rural areas of English-language speakers, the increased availability of English-language news and entertainment media and a general secularisation of Society leading to a decline in the numbers attending the chapel where so many traditional Welsh-medium activities were centred. By 1991 the number of people able to speak Welsh had fallen by half to just over 508,000, a figure representing 18.7% of the population.

In an attempt to arrest the decline in numbers speaking Welsh, a Welsh Language Society was established in 1962 and in 1967 the first Welsh Language Act permitted the use of Welsh in courts and in dealings with certain government agencies. A second Welsh Language Act in 1993 gave equality to Welsh and English and all Welsh people the right to deal in Welsh with public bodies. There emerged from this legislation a Welsh Language Board (*Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg*) which is responsible to the National Assembly of Wales established in 1999. Its aim is to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language.

During the past 30 years, supported by government legislation, the development of Welsh-medium education and an increase in the use of Welsh by the media, the Welsh language has shown signs of a revival. Significantly, the 1991 Population Census recorded an increase in the number and percentage of young people speaking Welsh. While the traditionally Welsh-speaking areas of north and west Wales still retain the highest percentages of people speaking Welsh, the largest numbers of Welsh speakers are to be found in the cities of south Wales.

Ordnance Survey Welsh Language Scheme

Following the passing of the Welsh Language Act in 1993, efforts are being made in all areas of government to promote the use of Welsh alongside English in Wales. In July 2001, Ordnance Survey (OS) published its Welsh Language Scheme to comply with this Act. This document was endorsed by the Welsh Language Board in June 2001 and covers all aspects

of mapping by Ordnance Survey which is committed to treating English and Welsh languages equally in delivering its products and services in Wales. To date, the collection of place names has been dependent on surveyors recording names from visual evidence or from proactive local authorities. This has resulted in a lack of consistency across Wales in both coverage and depiction.

Taking advice from the Welsh Language Board, Ordnance Survey is progressively building up its capacity to hold distinctive place names including aliases in common usage where they exist in large scale mapping datasets and to consistently depict names on maps derived from these databases.

The greatest effort in map revision is being concentrated on the popular Landranger 1:50,000 scale map series. These map sheets have a high proportion of bilingual names and include a Welsh-language legend and bilingual cover. The depiction of bilingual names on the map is largely dependent on the Ordnance Survey verifying that the names actually exist on the ground and are in use.

The text of the OS Welsh Language Scheme document is available to download in pdf format at <www.ordnancesurvey.gov.uk/downloads/gaelic/english.pdf> and the website of the Welsh Language Board is at <www.bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk/html/>.
