Gaelic Names Liaison Committee
Orthographic Principles
January 2006

Introduction

The Gaelic Names Liaison Committee was formed in 2001 to bring together bodies with an interest in the Gaelic *orthography* of place names. In the course of providing advice to Ordnance Survey and others, the Committee found it useful to establish a set of orthographic principles to apply in order to ensure consistency. This document is the record of those principles.

The first version of these principles was written in 2001. This version has been developed from that first version in the light of experience gained from the GNLC's continuing work.

In order to provide consistency with the previous version, sections in this version have retained the same numbers that they had in the previous version. For example, Technical Principles 12 and 13 could have been absorbed into Technical Principle 16, but have been left in place, with cross-references added in Technical Principle 16 so that a decision based on Technical Principle 12 in the past can still be understood by reference to this version.

These principles are applied in those parts of Scotland where Gaelic *orthography* on Ordnance Survey maps is widespread. Along the margins of that area, names in Gaelic *orthography* become increasingly rare, and names frequently contain a mixture of Gaelic and non-Gaelic (i.e. Scottish Standard English and Scots) *orthography*. In these marginal areas the principles apply only to the part of the name in Gaelic *orthography*.

Throughout this document, terms in *italics* are described more fully in the Glossary of Terms.

General Principles

A.   To incorporate the recommendations made by the Parliamentary Glossary Project (Faclair na Pàrlamaid) in May 2001 (which includes the adoption of the spellings and forms of Cox 1991) and thereafter adopt the conventions agreed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. At the time of writing, these are the Gaelic Orthographic Conventions 2005 (**GOC 2005**). [**GNP**, 3.1]

B.   To ensure that common usage and evidence provided by historical form are both considered when defining the spelling and/or depiction of a name. [**GNP**, 3.1]

C.   To aim to achieve consistency of spelling where natural features share the same form of name, such as river, loch and mountain. [**GNP**, 5.1]

D.   To use the definite article wherever local usage dictates. [**GNLC** 6.10.00 (6)]

E.   The definition of Gaelic forms of street names is a local authority responsibility. However, the Committee may undertake to standardise Gaelic equivalents for *generic elements* such as Avenue, Crescent, Drive, Place [**GNLC** 16.3.01 (6)]

F.　　To aim to record any local tradition which led to naming. [**GNLC** 30.11.01 (8) + 8.3.02]

G.　　To correct obvious typographical error. [**GNLC** 7.6.02]

H.　　If a *topographic generic element* clearly in Gaelic *orthography*, such as abhainn, allt, beinn, coire, creag, gleann (and in some cases loch - see Appendix 1), is followed by a *specific element* (including an existing place-name, except one of Scots or Scottish Standard English origin), every attempt will be made to give a Gaelic form of the *specific element* e.g. Allt Glengoulandie becomes Allt Gleann Gobhlandaidh (NN7653), based either on reliable sources or on the representation in Gaelic orthography of the sounds indicated by the English orthography.　**NOTE**: in cases where the *specific element* has been consistently recorded by Ordnance Survey in Gaelic *orthography* but the *generic element* has not, then the *generic element* remains unchanged, and the orthographic principles apply only to the *specific element*. e.g. Dubhallt Wood (NJ3133) is to be written Dubh-Allt Wood.

I.　　For human-made and administrative features, the authority for determining the correct form of a name rests with other bodies (e.g. local authorities, owners), and that form will take precedence over these principles. [**GNP** A.2, A.3]

Technical Principles

1.　　With consonant groups having consonants of different classes (i.e. *palatalised* or *non-palatalised*), as at the junction of two distinct elements, the class of the consonant should be signalled by the class of the adjacent vowel [**GOC 2005** 2]. For example Buaile Ormacleit (NF8434). See also 4 below.

2.　　Names consisting of two (or more) Gaelic elements should reflect this in their spellings. Where elements have become obscure a hyphen may be inserted. [**GOC 2005** 10]

3.　　Names with a final element derived from Norse -ey 'island' should be spelled -aigh [or –eigh] (NOT -aidh) to indicate the distinctive open 'a' pronunciation in the last syllable. [**GOC 2005** 11F + **GNLC** 8.3.02]

4.　　Replacing 'sd' with 'st' (**GOC 2005** 3A) does not apply at the junction of two distinct elements, e.g. Hìonnas + dal (from Norse dalr 'dale') = Hìonnasdal. [cf **SPNS** Gaelic Signage Committee 1.12.98]

5.　　HYPHENS AND CAPITAL LETTERS

　　a) Normal conventions [**GOC 2005** 5, 10] for hyphens and capitalisation within compound words to indicate stress will be followed.

　　b) An element following a hyphen will be capitalised.

　　c) Prepositions which appear in the middle of place-names are to be written in lower case e.g. Loch gun Tòin ('loch without bottom') (NH5350), a Tuath, bho Dheas. This does not apply where the preposition forms the first word of the specific which is itself a place-name. For example Feadan Eadar Dhà Bheinn and Loch Eadar Dhà Bheinn (NB0121).

　　d) The definite article ('the') appearing in non-initial position is always to be written in lower case, e.g. Allt nan Corp. The associated t- and h- in certain

grammatical forms are always to be written in lower case e.g. An t-Òb, Rubha an t-Sabhail, Sròn na h-Àirde Duibhe.

6.   Elided vowels and consonants will normally be shown (i.e. they will not be replaced by an apostrophe), apart from in the singular definite article a' e.g. Rubh<u>a</u> an Dùin, Achadh na<u>n</u> Seileach, Bail<u>e</u> a' Chnuic (see also Technical Principle 7).

7.   An element which is a recognisable word will be spelled as the standard form of that word (as defined in General Principle A) e.g. Ceann Drochaid, An Dùn Beag.

8.   The terminal genitive *schwa* -a, -e will be shown except where Ordnance Survey has previously recorded its loss, or where local reliable evidence (see General Principle B) clearly indicates its loss, e.g. Camas na Muice would be the expected modern form, but Ordnance Survey has consistently used Camas na Muic.

9.   A *euphonic* final vowel will be included where Ordnance Survey has previously recorded such a vowel, or where there is local reliable evidence for its use (see General Principle B) e.g. Locha Fada Ghasgain (NG6413), Locha Dubh (NF8272).

10.   Standard spellings for recognisable words (as per Technical Principle 7) and personal names will be used, rather than attempting to portray regional pronunciation. However, distinct dialect forms will be accepted.

11.   Spellings of *onomastic* items should reflect local usage. This includes the use of H in names of Norse origin which begin with h in Norse, and which are often represented on earlier Ordnance Survey maps as H, now more often, and inconsistently, by Th or Sh. e.g. Hèacla is recommended for Shecla, Hèabhal for Sheabhal, Hèisgeir A-Muigh for Theisgeir a-muigh (all on OS Explorer 452, 2003).

12.   The noun Àird, often appearing on Ordnance Survey maps as Ard or Aird, will be represented by Àird in both its senses of 'point' and 'height'.

13.   The noun geodha will be spelled without a length mark (**Cox 1991**, **Watson 2001**). However, when this element occurs in a Norse name borrowed into Gaelic, then it is spelled at the end of a word either as -geo e.g. Sloc Greiligeo (NL5679) (Berneray, Barra) OR as –geadh (e.g. Beirghsgeadh (NB1743) **Cox 2002**, 182; and Lag Stidhegeadh (NA9920)) depending on Ordnance Survey usage.

14.   **PERSONAL NAMES IN PLACE-NAMES**
a) The treatment of personal names beginning with Mac or Nic (and Ni', to be expanded to Nic, according to Technical Principle 6) follows **GOC 2005** 11E: i.e. if it represents a surname or family name there is no space after Mac/Nic and internal capitalisation e.g. MacAilein, NicDhòmhnaill. However, if it represents a patronymic (i.e. literally X son of Y, or Y daughter of Z), then it is to be written Mac Ailein, Nic Dhòmhnaill. If there is any doubt, and the name following Mac (genitive Mhic) or Nic is relatively rare or unusual, then the name is to be written as if a patronymic. The decision as to whether rare or unusual will partly depend on the area in which the name occurs; partly on evidence

supplied by local tradition (written or oral), especially as preserved in the *Ordnance Survey Object Name Books*.

b) The spelling of the name Mac-a-phì is a special case, supported by historical evidence.

c) Names with Gille- and Maol-. In the absence of a clearly articulated or consistently adhered to spelling-convention for these common categories of Gaelic personal names, the following convention will be used: Gille- and Maol- will be spelled with no space and no internal capitalisation, thus Gillechaluim, Maolìosa etc. (e.g. Sgeir Maolìosa, NM7532).

15.   final -chd to be spelled c in words such as bac (for bachd), leac (for leachd), sloc (for slochd).

16   **COMMONLY OCCURRING INDIVIDUAL WORDS AND NAMES**
- acairseid and acarsaid will be used, depending on the predominant form used by Ordnance Survey data in any given name.
- Aineort, recommended spelling for Ainort and Eynort.
- àird see Technical Principle 12.
- annaid ('old church, mother-church') to be the standard spelling, not annait
- bodha ('reef, rock in the sea') to be the standard spelling, not bogha
- -dal: as a general rule the element derived from Old Norse dalr 'valley' is to be rendered dal when it occurs in an uninflected name; with the insertion of genitival i (-dail) when it occurs as part of an existing name which is itself qualifying another element. e.g. Bearnasdal but Bruach Bearnasdail (NF6402). However, where Ordnance Survey has recorded -dail in an uninflected name with some consistency and/or if it reflects local usage then this is retained.
- geàrraidh to be the standard spelling, not gearraidh (see for example **Cox 2002**).
- geodha see Technical Principle 13.
- giuthas to be the standard spelling, not giubhas.
- Grianamul, recommended spelling for the commonly occurring name of Norse origin for a small green island, spelled variously Greanamul, Grianamul etc. (see **Stahl 1999**, 207).
- mèirleach ('thief, robber') (genitive and plural mèirlich) to be the standard spelling of this word, as opposed to meirleach (meirlich) or meàirleach (meàirlich).
- -siadar or -seadar: In Lewis the standard form of this element derived from Old Norse setr/sætr is siadar (see for example **Cox 2002**), and seems to be the predominant form elsewhere. However on Sandray (by Barra) Ordnance Survey and **Stahl 1999** have or imply Gaelic Seadar and Rubha Sheadair. Therefore both forms are acceptable, depending on local usage.
- sìthean ('small fairy hill') to be the standard spelling, not sidhean (see **Cox 1991**).
- srath to be the standard spelling, not strath.
- uamh to be spelled as it appears in Ordnance Survey data: either uamh or uaimh.

References and Abbreviations

Cox, Richard A. V., **1991**, *Brìgh nam Facal* (Gairm Publications, Glasgow).

Cox, Richard A. V., **2002**, *The Gaelic Place-Names of Carloway, Isle of Lewis: Their Structure and Significance* (Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies).
Dwelly, *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary*, E. Dwelly 1901-11 (9th edition 1977).
GNLC, references are to minutes of meetings of the Gaelic Names Liaison Committee.
GNP, Ordnance Survey Gaelic Names Policy v1.2, March 2003, http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/aboutus/reports/namesgaelicen.pdf
GOC 2005, Gaelic Orthographic Conventions 2005, http://www.sqa.org.uk
SPNS Scottish Place-Name Society.
Stahl, Anke Beate, **1999**, 'Place-Names of Barra in the Outer Hebrides', unpublished Ph.D., University of Edinburgh [covers place-names in the whole Barra island group, i.e. all islands from Barra southwards].
Watson, Angus, **2001**, *The Essential Gaelic-English Dictionary* (Birlinn, Edinburgh).
Watson, W. J., **1904**, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty* (Inverness).

Glossary of Terms

euphonic: an adjective from Greek meaning 'good-sounding', in the sense of making something easier to say.

generic element: most places-names are made up of two elements, the *generic* and the *specific*. The generic element, always a noun, describes the general type of feature to which a place-name refers. Typical generic elements are Gaelic creag 'crag, rock', dùn 'hill-fort', gleann 'glen', rubha 'promontory, headland'. The generic is qualified by a *specific* element.

non-palatalised: see *palatalised*.

onomastic: to do with proper nouns (names). Onomastics is the study of proper nouns (names) of all kinds e.g. personal names, place-names, company names.

Ordnance Survey Object Name Books (OSONB). These contain the data collected by Ordnance Survey in the 19th century for the first edition 6-inch maps, with additional data for other Ordnance Survey maps of other scales. Full sets for Scotland are accessible only on microfilm at the Library of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh and National Archives of Scotland, West Register House, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh. For the Highland Council area, the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar area and pre-1975 Argyllshire they are also available at the Highland Council Archives, Inverness Public Library, Farraline Park, Inverness. During 2005, Fife Council has created a set of CD-ROMs containing images of all the Object Names Books for Fife and Kinross, which it is making widely available.

orthography: spelling system.

palatalised: A fundamental feature of the Gaelic spelling (and pronunciation) system is the concept of broad and slender vowels, which are also referred to as back and front vowels. The broad or back vowels are *a, o, u*, the slender or front vowels are *e, i*. The pronunciation of most consonants is different depending on whether they are beside a broad vowel or a slender vowel. For this reason a consonant or consonant group in the middle of a word must have either a broad vowel on each side or a slender vowel on each side. The consonant or consonant group beside slender vowels are called *palatalised* or slenderised, the consonant or consonant group beside broad vowels are called *non-palatalised* or non-slenderised. Note that in some

situations a group of consecutive consonants do not follow this rule (see Technical Principle 1).

schwa: the unstressed, 'neutral' vowel heard for example in English the, French le. It is written in the International Phonetic Alphabet as an upside down e.

specific element: most places-names are made up a two elements, the *generic* and the *specific*. The specific element, usually an adjective or noun, qualifies or describes the generic element, giving more information about the generic and distinguishing it from other places with the same generic. Typical specific elements are Gaelic beag 'small', dubh 'black', geal 'white', mòr 'big' (all adjectives). An example of a noun as a specific element is in Rubha an t-Sabhail 'promontory of the barn', where rubha is the generic, an sabhal the specific.

topographic: describing a landscape feature.

Appendix 1 – Loch as a generic term

In order to apply consistent Orthographic Principles, it is important to understand whether the generic element within a name is in Gaelic or Scottish Standard English orthography. This is difficult with the generic term 'loch' which is spelt identically in Gaelic or Scottish Standard English. Word order is indicative of which language is involved, but is not in itself conclusive, since Scottish Standard English has taken on the Gaelic word order of putting the generic first in many loch-names.

In the case of the generic element loch, which could be either Gaelic or Scottish Standard English, if it is likely from the context that loch in a particular name is Gaelic rather than Scottish Standard English, then the specific element is only written in Gaelic orthography if it is an existing name that is recorded elsewhere by Ordnance Survey in Gaelic orthography.

For example, Loch Insh in Badenoch, where there are many names of natural features still in Gaelic orthography on the modern maps, is believed to represent Gaelic loch, but because the settlement (and parish) name appears only in Scottish Standard English orthography, then the specific of the loch name is also in Scottish Standard English orthography, remaining Loch Insh, and not converted to the Gaelic orthography of Loch Innis.