

Geography Policy

Standard Names and Codes

2023
National Records of Scotland (NRS)

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Background

The Scottish Government (SG) were first to introduce a new nine character coding system when they launched 2001 Data zones in 2004.

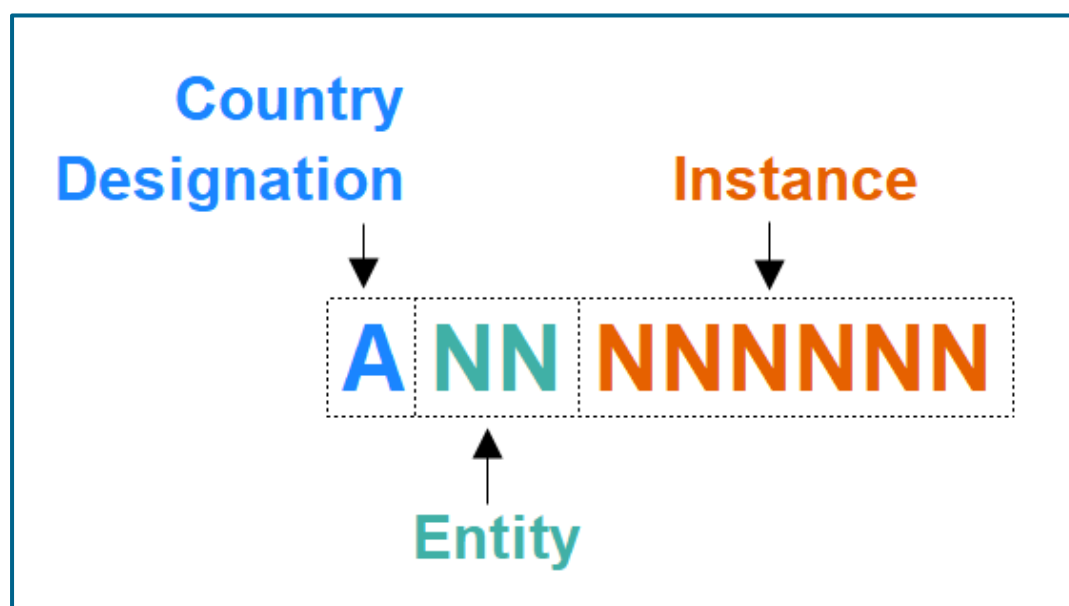
The Office for National Statistics (ONS) followed suit and the use of the nine character code now forms part of the Coding and Naming policy endorsed by the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) Geography Policy](#).

Pillar 2 of the policy advises that the coding and naming policy is for statistical geographies that are required for government administrative functions, legislation, or publication of official statistics.

Full guidance for the naming and coding policy is provided by the ONS, however SG Geographic Information Science & Analysis Team (GI-SAT) have produced a [policy document](#) that has specific reference to Scottish geographies.

GSS Code Structure

The heart of the policy is the concept of the GSS nine digit alpha-numeric code which divides into three elements.



- The first digit is a letter for the country designation, for Scotland it is 'S', however 'T', 'U', and 'V' are reserved for Scotland.
- The next 2 digits are numerical for the entity, this is the geographic area type (i.e., Council area).
- The remaining 6 digits are numerical for the instance, this is the individual areas that make up the geographic area type (i.e., Aberdeen City).

A real world example of this is S12000033 which translates to Aberdeen City Council area.

Main principles of GSS coding system

Coding changes will be due to actual boundary changes. These are either by UK/Scottish Statutory Instruments (SI) or an up-to-date dataset is made available (i.e. Census related geography).

Name changes do not constitute a change in code.

There is no imbedded intelligence, codes are not hierarchical.

- An exception to this is coding of Census Output Areas (OA) where we group OA by Council area to assist users with ranges. This also applies to Data Zones and Intermediate Zones which are based on OA that are produced by the Scottish Government.

Codes are not re-used.

Cross-border coding

Some geographies do not respect the border between Scotland and England (e.g., Travel to Work Areas – Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle). These geographies are given a cross-border status country letter of 'K'.

Scotland Register of GSS codes

The GSS codes are maintained and published in the Scotland Register of GSS codes by the Scottish Government's Geographic Information Science & Analysis Team (GI-SAT).

The Scotland Register of GSS codes is made available via the [Small Area Statistics page](#) of the Scottish Government website.

A flow diagram is provided within their [policy document](#) to assist decision making on whether a new geography requires a GSS code to be assigned.

Please contact GI-SAT if you have any queries on the Scotland Register of GSS Codes.

GI-SAT e-mail: gi_science_and_analysis@gov.scot

Information from the Scotland Register of GSS codes is fed into the UK wide code history database that the Office for National Statistics holds and distributes via the [ONS Geography Portal](#).

Geographies on the Scotland Register of GSS Codes

Geographic areas (as at September 2023) are summarised below:

Entity	Entity Name
S92	Country
S00	Output Areas
S01	Data Zones
S02	Intermediate Zones
S03	Community Health Partnerships
S04	Regeneration Outcome Agreement Areas - Scotland
S05	Regeneration Outcome Agreement Areas - Community Planning Partnerships
S06	Regeneration Outcome Agreement Areas - Local Areas
S07	Regional Transport Partnerships
S08	Health Board Areas
S09	Scottish Enterprise Regions
S10	Urban Regeneration Companies
S11	Strategic Development Plan Areas
S12	Council Areas
S13	Electoral Wards
S14	United Kingdom Parliamentary Constituencies
S15	European Electoral Regions
S16	Scottish Parliamentary Constituencies
S17	Scottish Parliamentary Regions
S18	Registration Districts
S19	Locality
S20	Settlement
S21	National Parks
S22	Travel to Work Areas
S23	Police Force Areas
S24	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
S25	Community Justice Authorities
S26	Community Health Partnership Subareas
S27	ISD Health Board of Treatment
S28	Census Detailed Characteristics
S29	Census Local Characteristics
S30	Local Administrative Units 1
S31	Local Administrative Units 2
S32	Scottish Police Divisions
S33	Broad Rental Market Areas
S34	Workplace Zones
S35	Civil Parish
S36	Island Groups
S37	Integration Authorities
S38	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
S39	Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Senior Officer Areas
S40	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Delivery Areas
S41	Scottish Marine Regions
S42	Local Resilience Partnerships
S43	Regional Resilience Partnerships
S44	Local Planning Authorities
S45	Built Up Areas
S46	Built Up Conglomerations
S47	Non-Standard Geography Categories
S48	Scottish Island Regions
S49	Agricultural Parish
S50	Agricultural County
S51	Agricultural Region

Exceptions to GSS coding policy

There are a few exceptions where the GSS coding structure is not applied.

As stated earlier, a change to the boundary via an SI or revised dataset would produce a new GSS code. However, boundary revisions by Ordnance Survey that form part of their ongoing quality assurance for their BoundaryLine™ product is not interpreted as a change to a boundary that would require a new code.

The codes are not hierarchical with the exception of certain geographies such as Census Output Areas where we group by Council area to assist users with ranges.

GSS codes are not allocated to historical/frozen geographies that won't change and don't require maintenance (generally geographies created prior to the introduction to the system, such as Health Board Area 1995).

- The exception to this is Civil Parish as this geography has not changed since 1930 and is the only consistent geography that official statistics can be produced for across Censuses it was agreed it should be converted to GSS code structure.

It is also not required for specific types of geography:

- Postcode – while used as a statistical geography, there is no current requirement to apply GSS codes to any of the postcode geographies (Postcode Area, Postcode District, Postcode Sector, or Postcode Unit).
- Island – statistics (total population and household counts) at individual island level are only available at each Census, there is no current requirement or demand for GSS codes to be applied.

GSS code introduction in NRS Geography products

Look-ups from the old coding system to the new system were included as part of the 2011 Census Indexes.

The Scottish Postcode Directory, and Census Indexes supply name and code look-up files per release.

Presentation and Naming

With regards to Scotland, in general the presentation of entities or groupings of entities (for example, wards within council areas) is that the order of presentation at each level of the grouping hierarchy is alphabetic.

The names used should be consistent with what is recorded in the Scotland Register of GSS codes.

There are a couple of caveats on this in regard to two Council Areas, City of Edinburgh, and Na h-Eileanan Siar as described below.

City of Edinburgh

Should be styled alphabetically under 'C'. The official name given to the area under the jurisdiction of the City of Edinburgh Council is 'City of Edinburgh'.

While in the past it has been commonplace to style this as 'Edinburgh, City of', current guidance states that this shall be styled with its official name to avoid issues caused by punctuation characters and the potential for mis-matched columns.

Na h-Eileanan Siar

Should be styled alphabetically under 'N' to avoid complications with grammar (it would not be appropriate to style this as 'Eileanan Siar, Na h-' as this loses meaning in the Gaelic language).

The name for the area as recorded in the code register is Na h-Eileanan Siar, which is the preferred English variant for the area of the Western Isles expressed by the Council's Gaelic Committee. A further complication exists in that the formal legal name put forward by the Council (effective from January 1st 1998) is the similar Na h-Eileanan an Iar, which is also used for Parliamentary Constituencies. Both the preferred and legal Gaelic forms are considered acceptable.

Note that 'Western Isles' is an acceptable English variant (as is used in Health Board boundaries), but it is preferred that the Gaelic form is used where possible.

Further guidance

More detailed information on presentation and naming policy in Scotland is available in GI-SAT's [policy document](#).