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05/03/2024

Dear Chair,

Petition P-06-1369 Use only Welsh names for places in Wales

Thank you very much for inviting me to provide an update on the Commissioner's work in this field. As your comprehensive research brief emphasises, the Senedd has considered several petitions relating to Welsh place-names in the last few years. My predecessor, Aled Roberts, wrote to you on this subject in [December 2021](#) and the then Deputy Commissioner, Gwenith Price, along with Dr Eleri James, who leads my office's work on place-names, had the opportunity to give evidence to you in [March 2022](#). I do not wish to repeat the comments they made at the time. Rather, I think it would be more beneficial to update you on three significant pieces of work that have been accomplished in the interim:

1. Lake Names Standardisation Pilot Project in collaboration with Eryri National Park

When Aled Roberts wrote to you in 2021 he emphasised that standardising Welsh settlement names was our main area of work. The situation has developed significantly since then and we have gradually begun to extend the terms of reference for our Place-name Standardisation Panel as a result of a demand from organisations for guidance in relation to landscape names. Eryri National Park approached us to ask for specific help in this area, and this has led to a new relationship of collaboration with the Park to standardise the names of features in the landscape. A successful pilot project on lake names was completed last year and, following the Park Authority's unanimous vote to accept our Panel's recommendations, Ordnance Survey has agreed to update their maps with those forms, thereby correcting names that have been misspelt on maps for many years. We have now moved on to work on projects to standardise the names of waterfalls and passes. Working on collections of names in turn in this way allows us to see patterns and ensure a measure of consistency in our handling of different topographic features and

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we have enhanced our [National Standardisation Guidelines](#) as a result of the work. You can read more about our collaboration with the Park here: [Article - Eryri National Park \(gov.wales\)](#).

2. Re-establishing the List of Standardised Welsh Place-names

Following the serious cyber attack suffered by my office in late 2020, the infrastructure and content of the place-names database which supported the List of Standardised Welsh Place-names on our website was lost. As a result the data published on our website is currently rather elementary: [Standardised Welsh Place names \(welshlanguagecommissioner.wales\)](#). Nevertheless, it remains an extremely popular resource with well over a thousand users consistently accessing it each quarter. We have made great strides over the past year in developing and repopulating a new database and we are now in the process of designing a new user interface that will allow us to share a wealth of additional information with the public, including links to external resources such as Wikipedia and the List of Historic Place Names. We look forward to launching the new resource in the next financial year.

3. Advising Natural Resources Wales and others on site names

Writing and spelling names correctly from the start is far easier than correcting mistakes and changing habits after names have gained traction, of course. As such we welcome the recent opportunities to advise Natural Resources Wales on new site names, including the names of new car parks and forests. Natural Resources Wales' internal naming guide provides sound guidance to officers regarding their statutory duties in relation to the List of Historic Place Names but also emphasises that names need to follow the principles of our Standardisation Guidelines. As this work involves creating 'new' names, it has allowed us to creatively tap into our Panel's expertise beyond orthographic issues. We have also carried out similar work on behalf of Cadw providing them with advice on standard forms to adopt on their sites in Wales.

The need for further resources to achieve change

Beyond these developments many of the frustrations and challenges identified in the context of the previous petition remain. There is no statutory basis for my office's work in this area to date – we look forward expectantly to the proposed role we will have in the wake of the Senedd Cymru Bill, of course – and therefore providing advice and using the powers of persuasion are the only means we have of promoting standard forms. It was an encouragement to read in the Minister's letter to you [in October](#) that he also supports the [principle established by](#) our Place-names Standardisation Panel that if the difference between the Welsh form and the 'English' form consists of only one or two letters, the use of a single form is recommended, with preference being given to the Welsh form. This is a timely question as evidenced by the discussion about the Aberdyfi/Aberdovey forms last month: [Written Question - WQ91418 - Welsh Parliament \(senedd.wales\)](#). If organisations in Wales and beyond were to adopt this principle without fail it would be a significant step towards removing unnecessary dual forms on signs and promoting Welsh names. But until local authorities and other agencies are required to adopt standard forms, the status quo is unlikely to change.



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What has gradually changed, however, are attitudes towards adopting only Welsh names. The petition in question refers specifically to decisions by two of our own national parks, and there is little doubt that these strategic decisions have again placed place-names firmly in the headlines and reinforced and normalised the idea that Welsh names are to be protected, celebrated and promoted. It is clear that there is a growing appetite among the Welsh public to see Welsh names given greater prominence by public institutions, including [mapping agencies](#). But investment in this area will need to be increased to achieve that ambition. My office has begun to undertake a number of projects looking at landscape names, but it is fair to note that our current resources limit our ability to do justice to the field and to move this important agenda forward quickly enough to meet public aspirations and expectations.

I've selected a few highlights of the work for the purposes of this letter – and chosen examples that are directly relevant to the subject matter of this petition. There have been a great many other interesting developments in this field in recent years – including the extension of our role to advise the Foreign Office on standard Welsh forms of foreign names: [International place-names \(welshlanguagecommissioner.wales\)](https://www.welshlanguagecommissioner.wales). I would be very happy to meet with you if you would like to find out more about our work or to discuss any aspect of this update, of course.

Yours sincerely,

Efa Gruffudd Jones
Welsh Language Commissioner