

GSS Coding and Naming - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The GSS Coding and Naming policy was implemented on 1 January 2011. This change affected all users and producers of statistics and ONS Geography received many enquiries about the new policy. To make things easier and point you in the right direction please see the frequently asked questions below. If you cannot find the information you need please contact [ONS Geography](#).

Section 1 - General questions
Geography types:
<p>Q. What geographies are covered by the new coding?</p> <p>A. The geographies covered are listed in the Register of Geographic Codes (RGC). New codes have been allocated to admin, health, electoral, statistical building block and other geographies in the UK.</p>
Register of Geographic Codes:
<p>Q. The RGC only lists the geography entities, doesn't it? For area instance codes do I need to use the Code History Database (CHD)?</p> <p>A. Yes, that is correct; the RGC provides an overview of the geographies available under the new coding structure. The CHD contains all the individual instance codes.</p>
<p>Q. The entity codes are on the RGC but what do they mean? For example what exactly is E14? Is it Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies used in the 2005 or 2010 general election?</p> <p>A. E14 is the entity code for Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies in England. The Code History database includes data current from its creation date of 1 January 2009. The Geography Listings option contains both the latest WPCs, as at May 2010, and also the 2005 WPCs (still current in 2009). It is possible to search by date in the database and historic codes are defined by the termination date field.</p>
Code History Database – functionality and availability:
<p>Q. What information is available from the CHD?</p> <p>A. The CHD provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geography Listings of codes and names, by date, since 1 January 2009• Geography History of all changes to codes and names, by year, since 1 January 2009• Geography Hierarchies where one-to-one relationships exist, by date, since 1 January 2009• Geography Constitutions i.e. Wards to Parliamentary Constituencies, Health constitutions as at the end of year.• Geography Equivalents providing previous ONS, DCLG and DH code and name equivalents since 1 January 2009• Geography Information including Statutory Instrument Information, metadata and other useful information
<p>Q. Why isn't the CHD readily available to download direct from the ONS website?</p> <p>A. The CHD is a large MS Access file of approximately 25MB and is stored on a separate page on the ONS website. Unfortunately, due to the limited bandwidth of the ONS website it is necessary to supply customers with a URL by email to ensure downloads are monitored and intermittent.</p>

Q. How up-to-date are the CHD and RGC?

A. The CHD and RGC are not updated and re-published to a specific timetable at the moment. However, ONS Geography will publish a new version when large scale administrative, health or electoral changes take place. For example a new version was published in May 2010 when the new Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies became operative on the date of the General Election.

We will also publish a new version 2 – 3 times a year to take account of ward and parish changes although it should be noted that finalised boundaries are not available until the end of December for the given year. In line with the NS Geography Policy ward changes coming into effect at any point in a given year (Jan – Dec) will only be reflected in statistical outputs from 1st January of the following year.

The CHD and RGC are versioned with the month and year of publication and ONS Geography informs all previous recipients of the CHD each time that an updated version has been published.

Q. Is the CHD compatible with other versions of Access? My version of Access is earlier than 2002; can you provide the CHD in earlier versions of MS Access?

A. The CHD is compatible with MS Access 2007 and we can supply earlier versions on CD Rom, please email ons.geography@ons.gsi.gov.uk.

Q. I require information on Equivalent codes but I don't have MS Access so how can I get hold of this information?

A. Please email ons.geography@ons.gsi.gov.uk and we will provide you with a MS Excel file.

Lookup files:

Q. How can I find the new codes for a chosen area or geography?

A. There are [Lookup files](#) in Excel format providing basic lists of old to new codes for the most frequently used current geographies. These lookups have been extracted from the CHD but if you can't find the geography information you are looking for please email ons.geography@ons.gsi.gov.uk to request access to the CHD.

Q. The Lookup files only provide current codes. How can I find out what codes were used before the Government Reorganisation in 2009?

A. The CHD includes this information. Please email ons.geography@ons.gsi.gov.uk to request the URL to enable you to link to the database. The database is in MS Access 2002 format.

Codes produced by other organisations:

Q. How can I obtain information on geographies that are not managed by ONS i.e. DCLG managed electoral wards?

A. ONS have allocated the new codes on behalf of, or in agreement with, some entity owners. Scotland allocate their own codes and have been using the nine character format since 2004. The CHD contains former, equivalent codes where applicable i.e. for DCLG and DH. For example the codes for Hartlepool are: current GSS code - E06000001, old style ONS code - 00EB, DCLG code - H0724 and DH code - V089.

Code changes:

Q. Do boundary changes always necessitate a new geography code?

A. If the change is due to an official statutory process and there is a Statutory Instrument (SI) relating to the change the area will be recoded as a new instance.

However, there are exceptions; for example a minor boundary amendment might arise from on-the-ground surveys conducted by Ordnance Survey. Where these occur, and where they have not resulted from a new SI they will not be interpreted as a new instance and will not, therefore, be recoded. Only genuine boundary changes ought to result in new instances and new codes but ultimate responsibility lies with the owner of the geography. Please see the [GSS Coding and Naming Policy](#) for details.

Q. Do name changes alone mean a new code will be allocated?

A. No, if an area name changes without an associated change to the boundary or geography type the code will remain the same. There are a minimal number of name changes, usually to wards or parishes, and details can be found in the Name Change Information table under the [Geography Information](#) section of the CHD.

Codes included in the ONS Postcode Directory (ONSPD):

Q. Will the ONSPD include old codes after 1 January 2011?

A. No, the ONSPD will only include the new codes but lookups from new to old codes will also be provided to ONSPD customers. In addition to the ONSPD, a new product, the National Statistics Postcode Lookup (NSPL) was introduced in February 2011. This product supports the [National Statistics Geography Policy](#) of using output areas as a building block to other geographies.

Codes included in Ordnance Survey (OS) Boundary Line:

Q. When querying the CHD what date should be used to conform to the Ordnance Survey Boundary Line dataset?

A. OS Boundary Line is dated as at October of each year. ONS supply the names and codes to OS on an ad-hoc basis so that they can update the BL product.

It is difficult to state a specific date to conform to the OS BL product when querying the CHD; the closest date would be the 31 October for the given year but please note that we can't guarantee an exact match. ONS are usually informed of health, electoral and admin (local government reorganisation) boundary changes in good time to update the CHD. However, please note that ONS are not always informed of boundary changes for Wards and Parishes before the operative date so new names and codes are sometimes allocated retrospectively.

The Geography Listings section of the CHD has the option to view both live and terminated names and codes and also to search for 'live' geographies by a specific date. The Geography Equivalents table option also provides operative dates and termination dates.

Publishing and presenting data with new codes:

Q. Is it correct that electronically disseminated statistics should include area codes?

A. Yes, it is recommended that full codes are included in tables that are disseminated electronically. For further details on presenting data please see the [Presentation Order Guidance](#).

Q. Is the presentation order for new codes the same as for old codes?

A. Yes, codes don't affect the presentation order and this will remain the same as it is currently published in the Presentation Order Guidance.

Q. We are told the new codes must be included on relevant outputs published from January 2011. Does this mean 'new codes only' or 'new and old codes' if required?

A. New codes should be included in outputs published from 1 January 2011. To ease the transition to new codes it would be sensible to include a separate lookup for new to old codes for

reference. We don't recommend the publication of both new and old codes in the main output tables.
Publishing historic data:
<p>Q. Why aren't new codes available for all geographies?</p> <p>A. Nine character codes are available for widely used geographies current from 1 January 2009, the creation date of the CHD. New codes will not be allocated to historical/frozen geographies that will not change and therefore don't require maintenance.</p>
<p>Q. Is it acceptable to publish figures for superseded geographies using old codes i.e. 2007 data on 2007 boundaries?</p> <p>A. Yes, if there is a requirement to publish data for geographies prior to 2009 and new style codes are not available then old style codes can be used. However, if the 2007 data are being published to more recent boundaries, i.e. 2010 boundaries, then good practice dictates this must be noted in the metadata.</p>
<p>Q. What year do the new codes go back to? For example, if publishing time series statistics for 2001-2010, in 2011, which years are new codes available for?</p> <p>A. If publishing all years of data to their respective boundaries then 2001-2008 would have old codes and 2009-2010 would have new codes. It is important that codes match the boundaries and historic boundary sets are not available with new codes. If historic data is published to more recent boundaries please ensure this is noted in the metadata.</p>
<p>Q. When transferring or publishing data after 1 January 2011 will we need to recode ALL the geographies in historic datasets?</p> <p>A. After the declaration date area codes should be in the new format for publications and transfers of data. For historic datasets please see the previous answers. When transferring data it would be advisable to discuss the coding requirements with the relevant organisations.</p>
Implementation of the new coding:
<p>Q. Our system can't accept new codes so how can I implement the new coding?</p> <p>A. ONSG recognises that a few systems will be unable to adopt the new coding methodology by the declaration date and that some form of temporary 'bridge coding' will be required for those in this position while they strive to achieve full implementation. Consequently, for geographies that experience boundary change after 1 January 2011, ONSG will continue to produce new codes in the 'old style' format in addition to the correct and new 9 character code.</p> <p>The 'old style' codes will be recorded in the Geography Equivalents section of the Code History Database against the new 9 character code, along with appropriate metadata such as relevant termination and operative dates. This will provide a lookup from the new and current nine character codes to the 'old style' codes, thereby enabling business areas to publish data adhering to the GSS Coding and Naming policy. Users should note that it is planned to provide this service up until the end of 2013, but this is subject to review and resources being available.</p>
Exceptions to the GSS Coding and Naming policy:
<p>Q. Why can't I find new codes for LAU or NUTS areas?</p> <p>A. There are a few exceptions where it is not deemed sensible to move to the new coding system. The UK NUTS/LAU geographies, which form part of an established pan-European coding system administered by Eurostat are widely used and accord to good coding practice. It would, therefore, be completely illogical and unproductive to have a mirror set of codes. Postcodes are also excluded from the new coding system.</p>

Section 2 - Code History Database specific questions:	
Searching for geographies in the CHD:	
Q. How can I find a code if I don't know what type of geography the area is?	A. Select Geography Listings , search on Select All, View List. Highlight the Geography name field and use either the Sort A-Z or Edit/Find function.
Geography changes:	
Q. What previous Local Authorities make up Wiltshire UA?	A. These are listed in the Geography History section, search on Unitary Authorities, select year 2009, View List. View in 'split' instance form to list previous geography names and codes as separate records. Scroll down to Wiltshire or highlight the Geography name field and then use the Sort A-Z or Edit/Find function.
Q. My local Westminster Parliamentary Constituency code for Southampton, Itchen doesn't agree with the CHD. How can I find out the previous code?	<p>A. Select Geography History, search on Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies, select year 2010, View List. Highlight the 'Previous Geography Name' field and then use the Sort A-Z function to list the WPCs alphabetically. In this example you will find three records for Southampton, Itchen – code E14000426. If you scroll across to the left of the table you will notice that this WPC was split into three new WPCS:</p> <p>E14000901 - Romsey and Southampton North E14000956 - Southampton, Test E14000955 - Southampton, Itchen</p> <p>Scroll across to the right of the table to see details of the Statutory Instruments and the Operative date (6 May 2010).</p>
Q. I have noticed that Powys and Merthyr Tydfil are listed twice in the CHD. Are they duplicates, please can you clarify which code I should be using?	A. These UA boundaries changed in 2009 and the current codes are Powys (W06000023) and Merthyr Tydfil (W06000024). The records for former codes include a value in the Date of Termination field, 31/05/2009, in this instance. To extract the current names and codes only, use the Search Facility of 'Live' Geographies under the Geography Listings screen and enter the required date. If you require the current ONS codes and other 'equivalent' codes, for example CLG codes, please follow the instructions in the CHD User Guide under Section 8: Geography Equivalents. The CHD User Guide is located under the Downloads section of this web page .
Q. How can I be sure there have been no boundary changes to the area I am interested in?	A. If there have been changes to an area since the 1 January 2009 they will be listed in the Geography History section of the CHD where you can view both current and previous names and codes. Also as mentioned above, the records under Geography Listings will include a termination date if the geography has changed.
Geography families and hierarchies:	
Q. How can I find out which wards are in a chosen local authority?	A. Use the Geography Hierarchies option and select the relevant hierarchy, enter the required date and then View or Export the list.
Q. Will the CHD allow easy identification of hierarchies at different points in time e.g. in Jan.	

2011 could I find out what the LAD --> county mapping was on 30 June 2009 and on 30 June 2010?

A. Yes, you are able to search by specific dates using the **Geography Hierarchies** facility in the CHD.

Q. I live in Fareham. Which PCT covers this area?

A. This information is not available as a hierarchy on the CHD. Hierarchies are only available for geographies within the same theme but Fareham is an administrative geography and PCTs are health geographies. However, a look-up file for local authority to PCT can be provided by ONS Geography; please email ons.geography@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Supporting information:

Q. Can I view the SI for the local government re-organisation changes that took place in Cornwall on 1 April 2009?


A. Yes. Select **Geography Information**, then Statutory Instrument information. Select 2009 and View Information. Use the Next arrow to scroll through the available information and open the link to view the SI on the Legislation website.

Saving data into other formats:

Q. Can I extract tables from the CHD into another format i.e. Excel or CSV?

A. Yes. If you are using **MS Access 2002** select the required entity from the menu and click on Export List or if you are already viewing a table simply click on 'Export' at the top of the screen.

If you are using **MS Access 2007** an Information bar appears warning that certain content in the database has been disabled. To rectify this click on the Options button next to the warning message and then the radio button 'Enable this content'. To enable the export of data from the

CHD click the drop down arrow located to the right of the Microsoft Office Button  and select 'Customise the quick access toolbar'. Select the 'More commands' option and 'Export to Excel spreadsheet' or your preferred alternative. This will add an icon to the Quick Access Toolbar.

Either of these options will open an explorer type menu to enable you to save the file in a different format i.e. MS Excel, DBF, XML.

Q. I only require a small amount of data from the CHD. Can I select just a few fields to export into Excel?

A. No, you will have to export the entire table and then delete the fields that are not required from the excel table.