

The net.uk SLD

Green Paper

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Introduction

The **net.uk** SLD is older than Nominet. As part of the recent Rules revision, questions have been raised as to the purpose and future of this SLD. I am chairing a PAB sub-committee meeting on 2002-08-13 to discuss this topic, and this paper is presented in advance to examine the situation and some of the options. At this point all opinions in this paper are my own unless explicitly attributed.

Feedback on this paper or the topic it addressed is welcome, and should be sent by email to pab-suggest@nominet.org.uk.

Present rules

The current rules for **net.uk** read:

Specifically, Nominet UK must be satisfied that the applicant for a Third Level Domain Name within the .net.uk Second Level Domain meets each of the following criteria:

- The applicant is an Internet Service Provider
- The applicant is either:
 - a company listed on the Register of Companies at Companies House under the Companies Act 1985 in Great Britain or on the Register of Companies at the Northern Ireland Companies Registry under the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.
 - or a United Kingdom government department , local government body, or associated government funded organisation
 - or a recognised academic institution geographically located in the United Kingdom.
- The applicant either:
 - be listed as a local IP address registry with a regional IP address registry
 - or have an Autonomous System containing hosts in the United Kingdom that is listed with a regional IP address registry and that is continuously reachable from major Internet exchange points.
- The requested domain name is the same as or a reasonable variant of the applicant's name.
- The applicant will use the domain in conformance with the RFC 1591 guidelines for NET domains.

NET

This domain is intended to hold only the computers of network providers, that is the NIC and NOC computers, the administrative computers, and the network node computers. The customers of the network provider would have domain names of their own (not in the NET TLD).

- The registrant will not use the domain for any service they provide on behalf of any other entity, eg the domain name may not appear in customer e-mail addresses or URLs.

Present situation

Numbers

Pre-Nominet names	87
Registered before current guidelines	262
Registered since current guidelines	192
Total	541

History

The current guidelines came into effect on 1998-03-07. Pre-Nominet, the practice seems to have been that the Naming Committee "knew an ISP when they saw it". Nominet initially required the applicant to appear to be an ISP, usually with "Net" or "Internet" in their name, and from 1997-06-27 required them to include the following text in the application:

The registrant affirms that they are a network provider and agrees to use this domain name strictly in accordance with RFC 1591 and the rules for domain names registered in the .net.uk namespace.

The domain name was also checked to ensure it was a reasonable variant of the company name.

Recent applications

Based on recent applications, it would appear that:

- about 70% are clearly not eligible for a **net.uk** name;
- about 5% apply correctly and are allocated a **net.uk** name;
- about 5% fail to include all the required details, but are eventually successful;
- about 20% meet some of the criteria, believe they are entitled to use the SLD, but have their application rejected, often because they fail the LIR or ASN test.

This last category take the most time to deal with - often well over a man-hour - because they will not accept the initial decision and believe the rules are "wrong".

What's wrong?

The obvious question to ask at this point is why it is necessary to change the rules. There are a number of reasons that have been proposed.

- The corresponding gTLD (**.net**) doesn't restrict applicants.
- The rules are not well specified (e.g. what *is* an ISP?)
- The rules are unfair (e.g. the requirement to be an LIR or ASN discriminates against lower-tier network operators).
- The rules take a lot of effort to enforce (applications have to be vetted by hand).
- The rules are not being enforced anyway (allegedly some **net.uk** domain names are being used in ways not permitted by RFC 1591).
- The SLD is under-utilised and more use should be made of it.

Possible actions

Here are some things that could be done with the **net.uk** SLD:

1. Do nothing.
2. Close the SLD to new registrations:
 1. cancelling all existing registrations immediately;
 2. cancelling all existing registrations at renewal or at some specific future date;
 3. allowing existing registrations to continue indefinitely.
3. Change it to an "open SLD" like **co.uk** or **net.uk**.
4. Amend the rules to counter some of the present problems while maintaining their spirit.
5. Amend the rules to give it a new purpose.

Of these, I believe that 2.1 can be dismissed out of hand as being unfair to the existing registrants. The rest should be considered, though I would suggest that, at the least, the rules should be tidied up (meaning that option 1 is effectively eliminated as well).

At this point, I believe that the right approach for the sub-committee to follow is to look at Nominet's rules for new SLDs. If we were inventing **net.uk** anew, how would these rules apply. Summarising the most important policy principles:

- A new SLD should have a Charter and a Community of Interest.
- These should be significantly different from those of any existing SLD.
- The name should be reasonably mnemonic.

Taking these three principles into account, I believe that options 3 and 5 are ruled out. No significant community of interest that needs an open SLD has been identified (duplication of **co.uk** is *not* a valid reason within the rules), nor has a specialised community. In either case, it would be unlikely that **net** was mnemonic for the purpose unless a name was specifically contrived. Any such communities of interest should be identified first and their own application crafted separately from this situation.

I recommend that the sub-committee draft a Charter, and a description of the Community of Interest, for **net.uk** as part of its work. If they find this is not practical, that would be a strong indication that the SLD is no longer necessary and that option 2 is the right one to take. On the contrary, if these documents can be produced then the SLD has a clear purpose and option 4 is correct. The sub-committee can then look at the spirit behind the rules and see what changes to wording are desirable.