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# POLICY ADVISORY BODY

## *Background for discussion on .ltd.uk and .plc.uk SLD Rules for meeting 14 May 2008*

### 1. Introduction

The current rules for the *.ltd.uk* and *.plc.uk* SLDs have been in place for several years.

The Executive has recently received a small number of complaints about the application of the Rules. The complaints arise due to the fact that these restricted SLDs were intended to provide a specific domain name for UK registered limited companies. As the character set allowed in company names by Companies House is wider than that permissible in domain names, the Rules provide for the removal of any characters that would not be permitted in a domain name (i.e. to get to a combination solely of 0 to 9, a to z and -). However the application of the Rules leads to two inherent issues: first that a company may be entitled to a choice of *.ltd.uk/ .plc.uk* SLDs, and second that two companies with different names may be in competition for the same *.ltd.uk/ .plc.uk* SLD.

For example, Companies House will allow the registration of a company name "The ab & c's Company Limited" which would, under Nominet rules entitle that company to the domain name "abandcs.ltd.uk", "theabandcs.ltd.uk", "theabandcscompany.ltd.uk", "ab-and-cs.ltd.uk" etc. Similarly, both "The ab & c's Company Limited" and "A \ B and CS Limited" might be registered at Companies House and be in competition for the same domain name "abandcs.ltd.uk".

This paper provides some background information and figures in order that the PAB can review the current position and, if applicable, make recommendations to the Executive.

### 2. Current Rules

The current Rules, paragraph 10 set out the procedure for deriving entitlement to a *.ltd.uk / .plc.uk* domain name.

The following steps are carried out in the following order:

- The terms for "Limited", "Ltd" and their Welsh equivalents and their abbreviations are removed from the applicant company name
- "&" and "+" are replaced by "and"
- All punctuation marks are removed, "including the following: apostrophe; quotation marks; commas, full stops, colons and semicolons; exclamation, question, number and currency marks; parentheses, (square) brackets, and braces"
- Any accents are removed
- If the company name begins with "The", it may be removed
- The terms "Company" and "and Company" and their Welsh equivalents may be removed, including any abbreviations
- All spaces at the beginning and end are removed, and any gaps are reduced to single spacing
- Any remaining spaces must then either be removed or changed to hyphens

The Rules acknowledge that more than one company may be entitled to a specific *.ltd.uk / .plc.uk* domain name.

The key section for the purposes of this discussion is the third bullet point above, which does not explicitly deal with the "@" symbol, nor with "/" and "\". These characters are currently treated in the same way as punctuation marks.

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### 3. Registration Data

| Domain  | Total Registrations | Number with @ | Number with \ | Number with / | Percentage |
|---------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------|
| .ltd.uk | 13,124              | 190           | 85            | 9             | 2.1 %      |
| .plc.uk | 1,041               | 435           | nil           | nil           | 42 %       |

As can be seen from the above table, in absolute terms, the number of registrations is small.

### 4. Advice sought

The complaints made to Nominet in relation to the registration of *.ltd.uk* and *.plc.uk* names argue that the existing Rules have a loophole that is being exploited by a very small number of registrants who seek out available *.ltd.uk* or *.plc.uk* domains, and then register a shell company at Companies House whose name is similar to an existing company solely for the purposes of securing the SLD which ought to be reserved for the pre-existing company.

This may be viewed as contrary to the intention and purpose of such restricted SLDs and the interests of Nominet's stakeholders as a whole. Alternatively, it may be viewed as a market development in keeping with Nominet's generally liberal registration policies.

The PAB is asked to consider this issue, and advise Nominet. In particular, does the PAB consider the current situation satisfactory? If so, no further action needs to be taken. If not, what are the policy principles that need to be considered.

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