English irregular verbs:
I modernise parliament,
you gerrymander,
he reviews constituency boundaries

Dr Hugh Buchanan, MRICS
Secretary
Boundary Commission for Scotland
November 2010
The Gerrymander

- OED: “alter boundaries so as to favour one political party in an election”
House of Commons 2010

- 650 constituencies
  - 59 Scotland; 18 Northern Ireland; 40 Wales; 533 England
- electorates (2009) from 40,889 to 87,809
  - plus outliers: Na h-Eileanan an Iar (21,908), Orkney and Shetland (33,290), Isle of Wight (110,228)
- national average electorates:
  - England – 71,500; Scotland - 65,588; Northern Ireland – 64,486; Wales – 56,500
- votes per MP at 2010 election
  - Labour : 33,359; Conservative : 34,979; SNP : 81,898; Lib Dem : 119,933
- .. or is it more useful to measure electors per MP by party or population per MP by party or ....
Why variations?

- in electorates
  - over-representation of Wales (and formerly Scotland)
  - special geographical considerations
  - respect for local authority boundaries
  - electorate increase in England

- in party votes
  - differential turnout
  - Labour do well in Wales
Parliamentary Boundary Commissions

- separate for each of 4 home countries
- politically neutral and independent

- there are separate local government bodies
Scope and principles

- boundaries, not elections
- non-political membership
- independent of government

- established: House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1944
- Westminster reviews: Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986
Government policy objectives

- shorter reviews: Fifth 2001-04 (Scotland), 2000-06 (England)
- more equal electorates
  - more frequent reviews
  - stricter parity requirement
- reduced cost of Parliament
- votes of equal worth
Government proposals

- Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill 2010
  - 600 constituencies
  - all electorates within 5% of average
  - exceptions for Scottish islands, and constituencies larger than 12,000 km²
  - 5 yearly reviews
  - no local inquiries as part of consultation process
  - no constituency larger than 13,000 km²
Gerrymandering?

- why 600?
  - is there a party advantage in parliament size?
- fewer MPs to hold Government to account
- why Scottish island exceptions?
  - Isle of Wight, Cornwall, Anglesey, Retford (!)
- no local inquiries
- population or electorate?
Electorate v population

- electorate excludes
  - under 18s (or 17s)
  - foreign nationals
  - unregistered individuals
  - home movers
  - peers of the realm
  - those serving prison sentences
Electorate

- are you on the electoral register?
  - no
  - yes
  - more than once
  - don’t know
- head of household registration
- to be replaced by individual voter registration
Will it deliver the government’s objectives?

- wait and see ...
- will
  - reduce constituency electorate variations
  - speed up reviews: 2011-13, then 5-yearly
- won’t
  - remove party differential votes per seat
  - achieve perfect electoral parity
  - prevent ineffective votes in safe seats
But there are risks

- continuing change in constituencies
  - disrupt local political organisations
  - confuse voters
- fewer coterminous local authority and constituency boundaries
- loss of confidence due to no local inquiries
Geographic data

- **inputs**
  - current mapping
    - Raster - scales 1:250,000 to 1:10,000
    - OS MasterMap®
  - unit postcode polygons
  - electorate data
  - current and historical boundaries

- **outputs**
  - polygon datasets matched to OS MasterMap®
  - small-scale raster images of boundaries
Electorate by postcode

North Lanarkshire

Glasgow City
Constituency boundary on raster background
Constituency allocation

- determine UK electorate (outside Orkney, Shetland, Na h-Eileanan an Iar)
- divide by 598: electoral quota around 76,000
- allocate constituencies to each country
- proportionally
  - Sainte-Laguë method: $E/(2C+1)$
  - avoids rounding disputes
Constituency design

- calculate theoretical entitlement per local authority
  - if an integer, divide local authority into constituencies
  - if not an integer, combine with neighbours
- look for effective boundaries
  - major roads, rivers
  - wards
  - settlements
- count electors by postcode
Boundary Commission for Scotland

MSPs to face seat changes

Walach, Speaks out

Perth voting place dismissed as cr

Labour won’t speak out

Boundary changes in city’s

PRESS COVERAGE

McKernan
Scottish Parliament constituency reviews

- review completed May 2010
  - 73 constituencies (2 fixed - Orkney, Shetland)
  - 8 regions, each returning 7 members
- 4 rules: electorate, local authority boundaries, geography, local ties
- 4 week consultation period
- local inquiries
- reviews every 8 - 12 years
Contact details

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Boundary Commission for Scotland
Overall process

- design constituencies
- publish proposals for consultation
- revise and republish proposals
- finalise recommendations
- submit report