

## A strong Irish voice in biobanking standards

“*Involvement in standards can be formative in your career, giving you close-up access to international heavy hitters in your industry. It’s quite amazing.*”

EMMA SNAPES, EMMA SNAPES BIOCONSULTING



# NSAI

## Shaping standards that support future research

*An interview with Emma Snapes of Emma Snapes BioConsulting*



Biobanking – the collection, processing, storing, and retrieval of biological samples and their associated data for analytical purposes – is vital to medical research. “*Biobanks*

*are actually future-proofing,”* Emma explains. “*They’re helping tomorrow’s research. As you put samples and data in place, you have to predict what’s necessary for their future applications.*”

By contributing to international biobanking standards, Emma helps enhance the quality of research on which future treatments and cures will depend.

### **A pursuit based on trust**

With experience across species and domains, when Emma became head of biobanking at UCC’s INFANT Research Centre, there was no international standard to distinguish good biobanking practices.

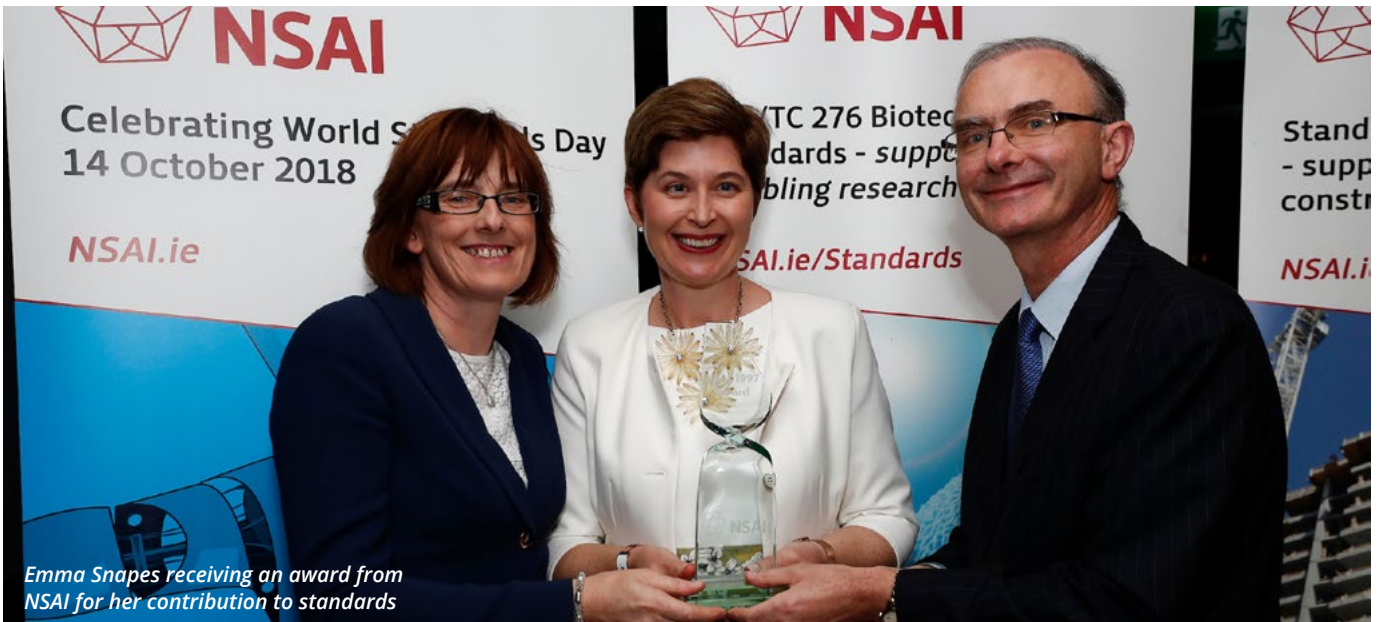
Dependent on the altruism of a vulnerable population – expectant mums and babies – Emma was motivated by the issue of trust. “*I wanted a way to say, ‘you can trust us with your precious samples and data.’”*

And that trust had to extend beyond participants, into every stakeholder relationship. “*We are wholly dependent on trust. If the participant does not trust us, they will not provide samples and data. If the funding bodies do not trust us, they will not provide funding. If the researchers do not trust us, they will not use the samples and data.*”

### **An international issue**

Emma saw that for biobanking to be trustworthy and consistent across borders, it needed shared international standards.

“*At the time, there were multiple types of best practices, codes of conduct, and laws in some jurisdictions, that didn’t apply across every area. The important thing to determine was, ‘What’s the most basic goal that we must all work to?’”*



### A chance for change

In 2014, Emma found she wasn't alone in asking that question. An associate approached her about a new ISO Technical Committee developing standards for biotechnology, which included a working group for biobanking and bioresources.

NSAI set up a mirror committee to facilitate Irish involvement: NSAI TC 62 – NSAI Biotechnology Standards Consultative Committee is the national forum for contribution to ISO TC 276 (Biotechnology).

Emma embraced the opportunity to help make standards as relevant as possible for the research community. With support from her manager, and funding from the Health Research Board, Emma travelled to ISO plenary meetings abroad. *“Going to the international meetings was hugely transforming for me,”* says Emma.

In 2018, the ISO Technical Committee published ISO 20387, setting out general requirements for biobanking, including quality control. An implementation guide, ISO/TR 22758, followed in 2020. The committee's work continues, with ISO 20387 under revision.

### Leadership and advocacy

Encountering large delegations from China, Japan and the US at ISO meetings, Emma remembers being relieved to learn each country had a single vote. The Irish delegation had as much influence as any other and the meetings took place in English.

### Words of wisdom

Emma encourages anyone interested in standards to reach out to NSAI and learn more. *“Involvement in standards can be formative in your career, giving you close-up access to the international heavy hitters in your industry. It's quite amazing.”*

**EmmaSnapesBioConsulting.com**

**+ Have your say: Would you like to contribute to the development of standards? NSAI encourages Irish organisations, businesses and experts to get involved. Join a technical committee, as Emma did, or read and comment on draft standards through NSAI's Your Standards, Your Say platform.**



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