

An Irish robotics leader influences international standards

“Our work with the NSAI puts us in a position to act as trusted advisors to our system partners and to our machine builders, so we can advise them on what the standards are and what’s coming down the line.”

BRIAN COONEY, CEO, KUKA IRELAND



NSAI

Shaping standards for technology that shapes our lives

An interview with Brian Cooney, CEO at KUKA Ireland



Almost everything we have or do is in some way touched by a robot. That’s according to Brian Cooney, KUKA Ireland’s CEO. *“Most people don’t realise it but that’s the reality of it. From your mobile phone to your car, down to your shoes. There are robots in every process of manufacturing.”*

Robots’ ubiquity, and the global nature of supply chains, means international standards like the ISO 10218 series — which sets safety requirements for industrial robots — are critical for ensuring product and application safety, building trust and eliminating barriers to trade and to automation itself.

Brian actively contributes to the continuous development of standards by participating in NSAI’s technical committee for Robots, Cobots, and Robotics. Additionally, he plays a crucial role within the ISO working group responsible for reviewing the ISO 10218 series of standards. These are mandatory for both product safety and safety in application and machine builds, enabling efficient use of industrial robots across diverse Irish and international industries.

NSAI’s Standards Division is responsible for the development of Irish standards. It also represents Irish interests in the work of the European and International standards bodies, such as CEN,

CENELEC, ETSI, IEC and ISO. Through its national committee structure, involving over 2,400 committee members, NSAI facilitates Irish-based expert and stakeholder participation in standardisation at all levels.

That’s where Brian’s participation comes in. He’s a great example of an Irish business leader whose contribution to the development of standards benefits the entire industry and supply chain.

Automating Ireland

On behalf of German automation giant KUKA AG, Brian set up shop in Dundalk in 2014, establishing KUKA as the only global robot manufacturer with a local sales, service, training and applications engineering presence in Ireland at that time. Since then, KUKA Ireland has provided cutting-edge automation solutions across the entire Irish manufacturing sector in diverse areas including medical devices, aerospace, and food and beverages.

“Whilst we’re part of the wider KUKA AG organisation, which has 15,000 employees, we’re a small enough organisation here, with a team of 12,” he says.

We don’t manufacture in Ireland — our four key areas are sales, service, training and application engineering. And our route to market is through system partners, integrators and machine builders. They make the machines that perform the various applications, and we supply the robotics and automation for those machines.”

As the benefits of automation have become clearer to Irish manufacturers, KUKA Ireland's business has grown rapidly. The company marked its 10th anniversary with the official opening of its newly expanded facilities in Dundalk's Brewery Business Park in 2024.

Contributing to the future of Irish industry

KUKA's products and expertise are at the heart of Ireland's transition to Industry 4.0, or 'smart manufacturing'. Ireland's Advanced Manufacturing Training Centre of Excellence, which supports people in reskilling or upskilling for careers in emerging technologies, uses KUKA robots for its onsite learning.



Brian's contributions to standards are yet another way KUKA supports Irish industry. As KUKA Ireland's CEO, Brian sits on the NSAI and ISO committees in a voluntary capacity, to help advise from an Irish perspective.

"My role within NSAI, in addition to sitting on the ISO committee, is to represent Ireland, not KUKA. When the standard is ready for a final draft review, it goes to ballot globally. When we are balloted on the different standards, we vote as a country, not as a company.

Every country, regardless of size, has one vote, and this is a critical part of it — our vote in Ireland carries the same power as the US or German votes. So it's important from a country perspective that we agree with the standard and how it applies to Irish

manufacturing and determines whether we approve, disagree or abstain from the voting process."

The benefits of committee participation

Working on these committees gives Brian powerful insights into current standards as well as what's on the horizon.

The rigorous nature of standards can make for dense, sometimes challenging reading. But Brian has a strong understanding he can share with KUKA's partners, as well as industry and academic stakeholders.

"We're close to the standards, so we can navigate them with the help of all the other experts involved. And we know the really critical parts that apply to our system partners and our integrators.

That's where we can come in and advise on what they need to think about with their next machine — how it needs to be built, and what they need to be cognisant of, from a safety perspective or otherwise."

Brian cites a recent training session as a perfect example of how his work on the ISO 10218 series on robotics safety requirements has helped him to help others, and support the industry.

"We're involved in an EU-funded project called the iCircular 3 Doctoral Network, which is primarily coordinated by UCD. It brings together nine international researchers, industry partners and European and UK universities.

KUKA recently hosted a full training week in UCD, and one of the talks we gave was around the use of standards. We explained the need to comply with standards when taking a product from concept, or cradle to grave — and how standards allow us to become a more circular economy and build sustainability into our products.

So again, it's an example of where our participation with the NSAI and on the committee helps us to visualise what's coming. And we can use that to help formulate how researchers approach their individual research topics."

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+ Have your say: Would you like to benefit from knowledge transfer and innovation by contributing to the development of standards? NSAI encourages Irish organisations, businesses and experts to get involved. Join a technical committee, as Brian did, or read and comment on draft standards through NSAI's Your Standards, Your Say platform.



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