Introduction

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is Ireland's National Standards Body. The NSAI is established under the National Standards Authority of Ireland Act, 1996[1] and is accountable to the Minister for Business, Employment and Retail at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

NSAI is the Irish member body of the European Standardisation Organisations, CEN, CENELEC and ETSI and the international standards bodies, ISO and IEC. Through its national committee structure, NSAI facilitates Irish-based experts and stakeholders to participate in standardisation at all levels. In addition, NSAI works closely with, and encourages, Irish organisations, businesses, Small and Medium-Size Enterprises (SMEs) and individuals to engage in standards development so that they can benefit from knowledge transfer and innovation through involvement at the cutting edge of research and standards development. Through its standards development work, NSAI aims to inspire consumer confidence and create the infrastructure for products and services to be recognised and relied on, all over the world.

Purpose of this Report

Article 6 of the EU Standardisation Regulation[2] requires all EU National Standardisation Bodies, such as the NSAI, to publish an annual report and send it to the European Standardisation Organisations[3] on their activities to encourage and facilitate Small and Medium-Size Enterprises (SMEs) in accessing and using standards and in engaging in standards development. This report is prepared in accordance with Article 6 and outlines the activities undertaken by the NSAI to create greater awareness by SMEs of the benefit of standards to their business and to encourage SME participation in national and international standards development.

NSAI Standards initiatives to facilitate SMEs access & engagement

SME Sector in Ireland

SMEs are a critical pillar of the Irish economy. SMEs are central to the success of the Irish enterprise policy and industry in driving broad-based growth and prosperity across the Irish economy.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) Ireland data from 2020[4] show that SMEs accounted for 99.8% of all enterprises and 66.9% of persons engaged. SMEs generated 41.9% of all turnover and 34.5% of Gross Value Added (GVA). In terms of the percentage breakdown of SME enterprises by size, Micro (<10 persons engaged) accounted for 92.6% of all active enterprises in the business economy; small (10-49 persons engaged) accounted for 6.1%; and medium (50-249 persons engaged) enterprises accounted for 1.1%. Data for the period from 2012 and 2018, show that the SME sector grew consistently in Ireland, with the number of persons engaged by SMEs increasing by 24.1%. All sectors showed increases in this time-period, with the Construction sector at 56.3% and the Services sector at 26.9% showing the largest increases.

In light of the contribution of SMEs to the Irish economy, in 2021 the Government of Ireland published a coherent *National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan*[5], founded upon a comprehensive OECD Review

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[1] National Standards Authority of Ireland Act, 1996 National Standards Authority of Ireland Act, 1996 (irishstatutebook.ie)
[2] EU Regulation 1025/2012 on European standardisation Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 (europa.eu)
[3] CEN, CENELEC and ETSI
[4] Central Statistics Office Ireland, Business in Ireland 2020 (published Nov 2022) Small and Medium Enterprises - CSO
[5] Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan (Jan 2021) sme-taskforce-national-sme-and-entrepreneurship-growth-plan.pdf (enterprise.gov.ie)

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of SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Ireland[6] which provided an informative, objective and robust evidence base for the development and implementation of the Growth Plan.

The OECD identified that the important role of standards in driving the growth and internationalisation of Irish SMEs and recommended the increased adoption of international standards by SMEs to support productivity growth. The OECD recommended integrating international Standards adhesion in SME development programmes, among other measures, so as to upgrade the international best practice business management approaches of Irish SMEs.

In seeking to address these recommendations, the National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan has recommended a number of standards-related initiatives which also seek to facilitate enhanced engagement of Irish SME with standards and standards development, particularly the use of standards as a means of increasing quality management and innovation.

Strategic priorities to support SMEs - the NSAI Strategy 2022 – 2026

As part of a coherent national approach to SME support, the new NSAI Strategy[7], published in May 2022, identifies, as a core pillar, initiatives to enhance current service lines to deliver greater value to SMEs and drive national growth. With regard to SMEs, the Strategy is focussed on delivering:

- sustainable SME business support programmes and packages including enhancing recognition of the value and use of standards to support SMEs;
- supports and knowledge transfers for SMEs through leveraging digital technology, to support the requirements as expressed by SMEs.

NSAI's new strategic initiatives have been structured to support the sustainable development and growth of Irish companies through the adoption of best practice in standardisation.

In particular, the NSAI Strategy is focussed on ensuring that standardisation is increasingly seen as a bridge between research, innovation, and the market, and as a means of capturing and disseminating knowledge, of demonstrating compliance. Through this, the NSAI is conscious that it can contribute positively to the economy by supporting SME growth and prosperity in order to remain competitive on the global stage.

NSAI Initiatives to promote SME awareness of standards and standardisation

NSAI is cognisant that increased SME adoption of international Standards can support productivity growth. It is recognised that adoption of standards by SMEs can assist in: improving internal processes; increasing quality; enabling enhanced collaboration with suppliers and clients; facilitating scaling up and expansion to international markets; and driving innovation. Consequently, a key focus of NSAI's work is to drive awareness among Irish SMEs of the benefits of standards and standardisation.

In order to promote the use of standards and provide greater access to the standardisation development process NSAI has developed an approach to awareness, focused on key stakeholders. It has also invested in ICT solutions, where possible, to facilitate businesses and experts already engaged and to grow the number of participants from small and medium size businesses, and the research and innovation communities.

NSAI continuously works to increase awareness across Government bodies and policy-makers about the important role that adopting and developing international standards can play in enhancing SME

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productivity. NSAI plays an active role in national Government SME policy and initiatives including in the national SME Growth Plan.

Annually, NSAI hosts and participates in a number of business and Government-sponsored events. Through these outreach fora, NSAI has the opportunity to create awareness about standards and standardisation, especially across the SME sector, by hosting and speaking at events, providing an information desk and addressing queries relating to standards and standardisation activities.

NSAI has an ongoing media campaign on national radio and online social media highlighting the benefits of industry participation in standardization and advocated the use of certification to standards. NSAI uses a number of IT tools and social media to create awareness about standards and standardisation. These include RSS feeds on NSAI website which allow users to sign up to follow NSAI news and events; circulation of a quarterly e-zine; and using the NSAI social media to disseminate information on NSAI activities. NSAI's website gets ca 25,000 page views per month, and has over 3,000 users of the quarterly e-zine

Through their work, NSAI Standards Officers play a key role in creating national awareness about standards and standards development. Standards Officers develop national stakeholder networks across a wide range of sectors and provide information and supports to SMEs.

Furthermore, with regard to awareness, NSAI maintains a dedicated web page for SMEs, the NSAI SME Portal. It provides information about aspects of NSAI's standardisation work including the annual work programme and information on how to get involved in standardisation activities through participating in NSAI's Standards Committees.

Initiatives to promote access to, and use of, standards by SMEs

In addition to creating awareness for SMEs, the NSAI SME Portal is focussed on providing information to SMEs regarding the benefit and use of standards. The portal provides information for SMEs on the ISO Management System standards highlighting the Practical Guides for Small Enterprises which give advice to SMEs on how adopt and put into practice the international best practice business management approaches without the requirement to get certified. The Practical Guides for SMEs are made available with additional information.

Almost 60% of Irish SMEs engage in innovation activities[8]. In order to support and enhance these enterprises, the NSAI is actively involved in the development and promotion of international Innovation Management Standards. These Standards are of particular benefit to organisations, including SMEs, in supporting systematic innovation.   Additionally, NSAI is collaborating with skills providers to build innovation excellence programmes, with a focus on SMEs, using the newly published International Standard I.S. EN ISO 56002:2021 for Innovation Management System as the framework for the programme.

NSAI also offers a Standards Health-Check to Irish companies, including SMEs. As part of this service, NSAI will review the list of technical standards used by a company and provide updates on any changes to the standards free of charge. The ISO 56002 Practical Guide expands on the guidance within the Standard and is designed to help small organisations start or improve their innovation management journey.

With regard to access to standards by SMEs, NSAI provides free access to draft standards through its online Enquiry Portal Your Standards Your Say. This portal makes vital information on Standards in development

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[8] Central Statistics Office Ireland, Innovation in Irish Enterprises 2020 (published June 2022) Innovation in Irish Enterprises 2020 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

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easily accessible, and gives business and the public a chance to have their say on standards prior to finalisation. This portal has been designed to make it easy for SMEs to access draft standards.

All Irish Standards can be viewed without charge by visiting the NSAI Head Office during working hours. In addition, the NSAI catalogue has also been made available through most of the University and Institute of Technology libraries in Ireland.

With regard to the sale of standards, standards can be accessed and purchased through a web-based platform, making it easy for businesses to search and purchase standards online. Abstracts of standards are available to view without charge for the Irish [Standards catalogue](). NSAI provides competitive and tailored pricing structure for standards for SMEs in certain circumstances. In addition, a tailoring update service is available where, by means of an annual charge, businesses can receive updates on standard revisions for view or automatic purchase.

Initiatives to encourage SME engagement in Standardisation

Standardisation is the activity of drafting, developing and agreeing the content of a Standard. NSAI maintains over 400 indigenous Irish Standards. NSAI adopts all European Standards (EN) and publishes approximately 1,100 Irish Standard adoptions annually. As Ireland's National Standards Body, NSAI provides access to its Irish (domiciled in Ireland) members directly and indirectly into the standardisation processes of national standardisation within [NSAI](), [CEN](), [Cenelec](), [ISO]() and [IEC](). With regard to the development of indigenous Irish Standards, these are developed and maintained with a focus on supporting Irish SMEs.

NSAI also works to ensure that SMEs have easy access to standardisation activities and are aware of the benefits of participation. NSAI continually seeks to encourage SMEs to participate by emphasising the advantages that can accrued to businesses, such as enhancing competitiveness and creating the condition to be first in line to take advantage when market opportunities present.

As a statutory body, NSAI operates an open governance model where there are no restrictions (including membership or cost restrictions) on SMEs participating in standards development processes. Data from 2021 show that 90% of all NSAI national committees have at least one SME member.

NSAI has established a large number of technical committees across a wide range of sectors of interest to Irish businesses, including:

- Accessibility,
- Building & Construction,
- Biotechnology
- Chemicals, Chemical Engineering & Food Products,
- Circular Economy,
- Electrical Engineering,
- Electronic Engineering,
- Energy supply and distribution,
- Fundamental Measurement,
- Information and Communications Technology.
- Health, Cosmetics and Medical Equipment,
- Management Systems,
- Mechanical Engineering,
- Metallic and Non-Metallic Materials,

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- Products for Household & Leisure Use,
- Transport, Mechanical, Handling & Packaging, and
- Services.

NSAI exchanging best practice with other National Standards Bodies

NSAI is committed to learning from and exchanging best practices with other national standards bodies. In particular, NSAI participates in the CEN/CENELEC SME Working Group which focuses on the standardisation needs of SMEs Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) - CEN-CENELEC.

The CEN/CENELEC SME Working Group has developed a toolbox of solutions for SMEs which are designed to enable SMEs to find the right standards and get involved in standardisation Tools for SMEs - CEN-CENELEC.

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