



Trade with the EU and beyond: the role of standards



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David Bell is Director of Standards Policy at the British Standards Institution (BSI) the UK's national standards body.

He heads a team of 24 which is responsible for BSI's input to the international and European standards bodies, ISO IEC, CEN and CENELEC on technical and policy issues. In addition, David manages relations with UK government and key stakeholders, including consumer and public interest groups.

David has been at BSI for over 20 years, overseeing a number of European and International standards issues and took over BSI's policy team in 2009.

An economist by training, David is currently the UK member of the Council of ISO, is a member of the Administrative Board of CENELEC, the policy and finance committees of CEN and CENELEC, chairs CEN/CENELEC working groups on regional and international engagement and is a former chairman of the CEN Certification Board



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What is the immediate impact of Brexit on the laws surrounding product safety and performance in the UK?

The technical requirements of product regulation in Great Britain are currently the same as prior to the end of the transition period. UK government ensured that all EU regulation would be transferred identically into UK law with only minor changes made to address inoperabilities. Approximately 3,500 European standards, adopted as British Standards, continue to confer a 'presumption of conformity' to product regulation in the UK under the UKCA marking regime. These standards are designated for this purpose by UK government. Under the terms of the 2019 Withdrawal Agreement, Northern Ireland continues to adhere to much of the EU single market product regulation including harmonised European standards. Product regulation will evolve over time in both Great Britain and the EU and may diverge.

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What does the change from CE marking to UKCA marking mean for standards?

The UKCA marking was introduced at the start of the year in Great Britain. CE marking continues to be recognized on a temporary basis by the UK government for the purposes of demonstrating conformity. This recognition is due to expire at the end of the year for the majority of products, although it will continue for longer for medical devices. At the start of the year, UK government designated the same standards for UKCA marking as those harmonized standards cited for regulatory compliance in the EU. Over time there will be changes to regulation in Great Britain or in the EU and this may possibly lead to some divergence in specific aspects of the standards designated for regulatory compliance for UKCA marking. BSI is working closely with government and stakeholders to understand where regulatory divergence may occur and its potential impact on standards.

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How can standards help businesses deal with new border checks, paperwork and potential delays?

The UK's exit from the EU's single market and customs union has caused some increased trade friction with the EU such as additional formalities at the border. The Trade and Cooperation Agreement signed at the end of 2020 between the UK and EU has some provisions to tackle technical barriers to trade though there is no overarching agreement with the EU on the recognition of conformity assessment results. Standards are one area of continuity for UK business. As things stand today, the same standards are used for regulatory compliance in the UK and in the EU avoiding the need for separate production lines or expensive product modifications. This is an extremely important factor in keeping exporting costs low for businesses.

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In which ways will standards be important to the UK's future relationship with the EU and what role will BSI play?

Given the close economic relationship between the UK and EU, market access to the EU will continue to be an important consideration for our stakeholders, especially those who export goods and services. Northern Ireland also continues to abide by the majority of single market product regulation including the CE marking. The EU's recognition of specific European standards as a means to show a product's conformity to regulations will continue to apply to Northern Ireland even if other standards may be designated for regulatory compliance in Great Britain. BSI expects to continue to provide the standards our stakeholders need for market access in the EU and other European markets through full participation in the technical work of CEN and CENELEC, the European regional standards bodies. CEN and CENELEC are not EU agencies but private member associations which develop European standards, aligned with international standards, for the needs of market access across Europe.

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How does BSI's work reflect the interests of the UK post-Brexit?

BSI, as part of its role as the UK's national standards body, has always put the needs of our stakeholders first and continues to do so post-Brexit. Our stakeholders have consistently made clear their preference for BSI to prioritize work at international level to ensure that UK stakeholders – manufacturers, regulators, consumers etc – are shaping the terms of global trade. It is for this reason that over 85% of British Standards in the national collection are national adoptions of either international or European regional standards. BSI also works closely with government to provide specifications to meet the needs of public policy. With the repatriation of policymaking responsibilities from the EU to the UK government and the devolved administrations, BSI is engaging with all layers of government to highlight the role of standards in underpinning an open, trade enabling and innovation friendly regulatory model.

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What is the role of standards in international trade agreements and to what extent is BSI involved in trade negotiations for the UK?

Most trade agreements seek to build on the World Trade Organization's Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement which sets down principles for the global trade in goods including non-discrimination and predictability of market access. International standards are a cornerstone of the TBT Agreement and are an important means to remove barriers to trade between WTO members. For this reason, the TBT Agreement mandates, in most cases, the use of international standards as a basis for national technical regulation. The term 'international standard' is not defined in the TBT Agreement but in practice international standards are primarily considered to be those developed through international standardizing bodies such as ISO and IEC which base their standards development on participation through national delegations. BSI is not itself involved in the negotiation of trade agreements but closely supports the UK government through membership of the Strategic Trade Advisory Group and through participation in the DIT's TBT thematic working group. In addition, BSI has bilateral discussions with a wide range of counterpart NSBs, including in countries where the UK government is negotiating trade agreements.

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What is BSI's priority in ensuring the right outcome from trade agreements?

The most important priority for BSI is to ensure that trade agreements maintain the ability of the UK government to designate standards for regulatory compliance that have been shaped by UK stakeholders through the national standards body. The risk with some trading partners is that their government or private sector actors will seek to impose the recognition of their own national or private interest standards on the UK for the purposes of regulatory compliance. Making concessions in this area in a trade agreement, or in future regulatory cooperation, would mean that the UK government could be forced to recognize other nations' standards as equivalent to British Standards even if UK stakeholders have had no systematic influence over the content of those standards. BSI is working very closely with the departments for business and international trade on this important issue.

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Which other organizations within the UK is BSI working with to facilitate future trade?

BSI has used its convening power to bring together a broad range of stakeholders within a trade and regulation forum, an informal grouping of over 25 representative organizations from all sectors. Participants include manufacturing, business organizations and consumers. These stakeholders all help to shape BSI's position on some of the key questions of UK post Brexit trade and regulatory policy including the role of standards in trade deals and the UK government's approach to designating standards for regulatory compliance. BSI is very pleased that with the backing of these stakeholders, we were successful in October last year in making the case to the international trade department to create a specific working group on technical barriers to trade.

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What is BSI's role in developing international and European standards post-Brexit?

As founding members of ISO and IEC, the main international standardising bodies, and CEN and CENELEC, the regional European bodies, BSI has always played a leading role in developing both international and European standards. Some of the world's most popular international standards such as ISO 9001 originated as British Standards and BSI continues to work to ensure that specifications developed in the UK are promoted to international level to maximize the UK's global influence. Standards for Building Information Modelling and occupational health and safety are other examples. Today, across the board, the UK has the most participating experts in ISO committees of any other country, also chairing committees working on vital areas of global importance including nanotechnologies and sustainable finance. BSI is present at every level of governance of these organizations and our Director-General, Scott Steedman, is currently Vice President Policy of ISO. As far as European standards are concerned, BSI is working with the other members to revise the statutes of CEN and CENELEC to secure BSI's ongoing membership of these organizations, reflecting the UK's new economic relationship with the EU. We expect that BSI will continue to play an active role in shaping the standards that apply to products and services traded across Europe.

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What is the role of standards in the UK's ambitions as a global trading nation?

This is a very timely question given the publication of the government's 'Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', two months ago. Standards can play a role in achieving the UK's global ambitions in two important ways: increasing market access for UK businesses through the global adoption of international standards and as a tool of regulatory diplomacy to help increase the UK's global influence and soft power. We already have the global influence in the development of international standards, through BSI's leadership in ISO and IEC, although some trading partners could engage more in these bodies and adopt more international standards. BSI is well qualified to support UK regulatory diplomacy through a long track record of providing technical assistance in developing countries. We have just completed a three-year programme of work funded by FCDO to create a network of Commonwealth countries that promotes the use of international standards. Such connections forged with some of the most dynamic economies in the world will be a great advantage to both BSI and broader UK global interests.

Key international standards checklist:

This standard specifies requirements to implement a quality management system (QMS) that is tailored to individual business needs and meets regulatory requirements worldwide.

It provides a globally recognized language of quality and shows a commitment to excellence. Underpinned by a QMS, businesses can improve the quality of their management systems and goods and improve their prospects of gaining new customers worldwide.

ISO 14001 helps organizations to embed a culture of sustainability that meets the high standards that consumers increasingly expect from businesses they buy goods and services from. It also ensures legal and regulatory compliance.

ISO 26000 provides guidance in implementing a social responsibility strategy, enabling an organization to fulfil policy commitments and reassure stakeholders it operates in a socially responsible way.

ISO 45001 is the standard for implementing the right occupational health and safety (OH&S) policy and practices. ISO 45003 focuses on psychological health in the workplace. Certification demonstrates that your organizations cares about the working conditions of employees and partners, bolstering brand reputation.

ISO 22301 is the international standard for business continuity management. It provides a system for responding to unexpected situations, helping to mitigate potential loss of revenue and reputational damage.

ISO 27001 offers a robust methodology for identifying cybersecurity threats and vulnerabilities so risks can be managed and incidents kept under control. It also ensures sensitive data and critical assets are protected, increasing trust in your business.

ISO 44001 provides a framework for to help establish collaborative partnerships. Such partnerships can deliver increased innovation, improved cost management, and better risk mitigation. It also shows a commitment to transparency and good governance.

How can I access standards?

bsi.bsol

British Standards Online (BSOL) – Our standards management system

BSOL is a simple online tool that acts as your standards management system. You can view and download standards with multiple user access, across all your sites, facilitating the easy distribution of knowledge throughout your business.

BSOL contains British Standards and international and European standards that have been adopted as British Standards. It also includes ISO, IEC and ASTM standards that haven't been adopted as British Standards as well as PAS.

You can subscribe to our pre-built modules or build a personalized standards collection, tailored to your organizational needs. Reduce risk within your organization and instil trust with your clients – to learn more about BSOL.

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