



## How Innovate UK EDGE is helping businesses to innovate by using standards better

A practical toolkit enables the organization's innovation and growth specialists to give clients the best advice on standards



### The story at a glance

- Innovate UK EDGE wanted more small and medium-sized businesses engaging with standards, because they can help them innovate and grow at scale
- Its innovation and growth specialists needed to improve their own understanding of standards in order to be able to advise their clients better
- BSI worked with Innovate UK EDGE to create an educational toolkit and training programme that would increase these specialists' knowledge of standards and their benefits
- This programme has made the innovation and growth specialists better equipped to help businesses innovate and emerge stronger from the Covid-19 pandemic

### The starting-point

Standards are proven to have a key role in creating stronger, more resilient businesses and accelerating growth. They also support business continuity in uncertain times. As the UK faces the unique challenges of emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital to build standards expertise in all organizations – but particularly in SMEs that need to innovate, grow at scale and help the UK build back better.

Innovate UK EDGE is the UK innovation agency's business growth and scaling service. It provides intensive, tailored support to innovation-driven SMEs through innovation and growth specialists across the country. Its number of employees expanded to 270 in response to the pandemic.

Innovate UK EDGE was determined to support businesses in identifying the best strategy to navigate the individual challenges of the pandemic and grow. This included offering businesses new ways to access the information they needed.

“It fully supports our ultimate goal: to get more businesses innovating better and growing at scale, which leads to economic growth and societal benefit.”

Martin McGurk,  
Head of Operations and Impact,  
Business Growth, Innovate UK EDGE



## The challenge

Many businesses have only a limited understanding of standards, seeing them only as a requirement or a cost and being unaware of their many business benefits.

“We know that as small businesses grow, they need formal systems and processes in order to expand their teams, products and markets,” explains Martin McGurk, IUK EDGE’s Head of Operations and Impact, Business Growth. “But many business owners don’t realise that a lot of this work has already been done for them, in the form of standards. They can learn a lot from standards about how to grow: they don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Yet often they don’t have the time or mental space to get into it all and understand

how standards could help them. They don’t see how standards are relevant to their business. So we wanted to open their eyes to the possibilities of all these collaborative, peer-reviewed collections of best practice as a very useful resource they can use to grow and scale.”

However, knowledge of standards and their benefits was also limited among IUK EDGE’s newly-recruited innovation and growth specialists. “They are experts in growing and scaling businesses, but we needed them to become experts in standards too,” says Martin. “They have to be able to explain to their client businesses exactly how the standards landscape works; tell them the specific benefits of specific standards; and give them the best advice possible”

## The solution

IUK has a long-standing relationship with BSI: it has worked with them on many projects and contributed to developing standards. So it saw BSI as a natural partner for this challenge.

“Innovate UK EDGE came to us to help with this challenge because they believe, and rightly so, that standards can enable innovation and also with Covid recovery,” says Gill Jackson, BSI's Research & Insight Manager. “You name it, there's a standard for it.”

BSI set to work with IUK EDGE to develop a programme to educate their innovation and growth specialists, so they could in turn help businesses use standards effectively to grow. The 13-month project began with a research survey, designed to discover how much the specialists knew about standards and their benefits; what priority areas they would like to understand better; and how standards relate to those.

From this, BSI and IUK EDGE were able to define three learning objectives for the specialists:

1. Identify and demonstrate knowledge of relevant standards for their clients
2. Explain key benefits of standards to their clients
3. Recognize where client opportunities/challenges could be supported using standards and develop a plan to source information

To meet these objectives, BSI then developed a multi-channel programme with three main components:

### 1. A dedicated microsite

A co-branded section on the BSI website hosts the “Innovate UK EDGE Toolkit”. It's updated regularly with new tailored content (from articles to case studies) that supports IUK's objective of helping UK businesses survive and grow, especially post-Covid. In addition, there are quick links for accessing the British Standards Online Library ([BSOL](#)), training materials and enquiry support.

### 2. A Standards Tools course

This four-month course of 14 training sessions provided a complete introduction to BSI, standards, and BSOL — A standard management system built with leading industry knowledge, trusted and used by businesses globally, and the Standards Development Portal. Through presentations, live demos and Q&A sessions, 215 innovation and growth specialists learned how to navigate the systems and standards – from registering users to search functions, email alerts and how to access standards.

### 3. A Standards Foundation course

This three-month course of 12 sessions was developed to help innovation and growth specialists understand how standards can be useful to their role. Attended by 142 specialists, it covered how standards benefit businesses and why standards can be an important tool to support UK business growth and recovery and to build confidence and trust.

The goal is for the specialists to be able to look at any client's business problem and know precisely which standard they need to help that business thrive. “Our aim is to help them see how standards can help with everything – from innovation to risk management and cyber security,” says Gill Jackson.

“Right now it's more important than ever that people are aware of standards and regulation, so that UK businesses have the best opportunity to interact with markets or create new markets.”

Martin McGurk, Head of Operations and Impact, Business Growth, Innovate UK EDGE



## The result

The Innovate UK EDGE Toolkit project is delivering clear benefits for Innovate UK and its SME clients, helping businesses operate more effectively through a better understanding of the standards that are out there. “It fully supports our ultimate goal: to get more businesses innovating better and growing at scale, which leads to economic growth and societal benefit,” says Martin McGurk.

### Some of the benefits:

- Allows the innovation and growth specialists to understand what best practice exists in new industries and highlight it to their clients, who can then implement or build on it
- Makes the innovation and growth specialists more confident in engaging with their clients on standards
- Helps the innovation and growth specialists (and ultimately businesses) to navigate the standards landscape, knowing which standards can support future growth and the ability to scale both at home and abroad
- Accelerates the adoption of new technologies within growing businesses
- Gives UK businesses an opportunity to help shape future standards that will underpin new technologies and areas of innovation

Martin McGurk says this last benefit is important. As a long-standing BSI committee member, he knows it is vital that the right voices are heard

when developing standards. “For me, it was a no-brainer that more smaller businesses should be involved in the standards-making process,” he says.

The response to the programme from IUK’s Innovation Leads was extremely positive, to the extent that they all requested access for their sector-specific work. “BSI has generously opened up access to BSOL on the same terms,” says Martin. “Now we’re making the offer to the rest of Innovate UK, and that will help bring more smaller businesses into the standards development process.”

“This project has fed into conversations we’ve been having at the highest levels,” he continues. “BEIS recently launched the UK Innovation Strategy, and we’ve been working with BSI (among others) to look at the innovation ecosystem and put a supporting strategy in place to deliver on the BEIS strategy.”

The Innovate UK EDGE toolkit comes at a crucial time for UK PLC, as the government tries to negotiate multiple new free trade agreements. “Right now it’s more important than ever that people are aware of standards and regulation and how the interplay between all the different bodies works, so that UK businesses have the best opportunity to interact with markets or create new markets,” says Martin. “Businesses need to be confident that if they develop a product, they’ll actually be able to sell it in specific markets. The greater the clarity they have on that, the clearer they can be on how to get there and the potential pitfalls along the way. It’s about building confidence and trust.”



# About the client

Innovate UK EDGE is a government-backed service provided by the UK's innovation agency. It is aimed at accelerating business growth among the small to medium sized innovative businesses that transform industries, drive economic growth and deliver the associated benefits for society.

## About Knowledge Services

Our service gives you the right minds for the right solutions because we draw on relevant expertise from across BSI and from our vast network of experts. This gives you a multidisciplinary team that can address your specific needs – whether you need better standards management, new content development, insight and analysis, strategic advice, or transformation activities.

Our team is both independent and neutral. We bring together consultants, information specialists and researchers with quantitative and qualitative skills, and standards development experts.

To find out more download our brochure [here](#).

To learn more about how BSI's Knowledge Services team can help you create excellence for your organization and industry

<https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/our-services/knowledge-services/>

or get in touch with us to discuss your requirements.



### **British Standards Institution**

389, Chiswick High Road  
London W4 4AL  
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 845 086 9001

[Contact form](#)

[bsigroup.com](https://www.bsigroup.com)