

Industry News



How about joining the International Sightseeing Organisation?

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Last month, I attended an online meeting with some of the leading technical experts from major companies in the laboratory sector. They were representing organisations from across the globe and came together to work on key standards for the laboratory furniture sector which covers a huge range of things from fume cabinets to pipettes. Most of them were familiar faces - I had met them last year in Portugal, in a charming bar in Lisbon, after a hugely interesting meeting of the International Standards Organisation. That encounter proved extremely valuable, as I was able to obtain contact details for key financial decision-makers within their organisations. These individuals are often difficult to reach, particularly when they are based outside the UK, even for UK entities. Others had their own reasons for being there. Some were there to learn, some to influence on behalf of their companies, others to make their commercial life a bit smoother, but by being there, all of them make life a bit easier for everyone.

One of the more disheartening topics discussed during last month's meeting was the potential revocation of a key standard concerning the design and test methods for density hydrometers. Despite its widespread use across the laboratory industry, ISO 649 Parts 1 and 2 are currently under review. Unfortunately, there are insufficient experts from the requisite number of countries willing to participate in the revision process. If no-one can review it, the standard will be withdrawn. This poses a serious challenge for manufacturers of density hydrometers. What will they do without a standard to work to? Will this be another race to the bottom?

This issue is mirrored in UK standards development as well. The British Standards Institution (BSI) has recently approached GAMBICA for assistance in identifying experts in a number of specialisms, including the safety of laboratory centrifuges, furnaces, and refrigerators. If we are unable to recruit individuals to serve on the committees responsible for drafting and updating standards, it is inevitable that more standards will be withdrawn.

There is a common perception that standards work is time-consuming and yields no tangible return on investment. However, timely engagement in standards development can deliver substantial benefits to companies. One example is provided by UK autoclave manufacturers who collaborated to create a standard specifically for laboratory autoclaves, distinct from those used in hospitals. This initiative enabled them to avoid the need to meet unnecessarily stringent hospital standards, which have to be designed for higher-risk environments. As a result, manufacturers can now

produce autoclaves that are more cost-effective to manufacture and to purchase—a win for both producers and customers. Unexpectedly, the absence of a comparable European standard led many European buyers to adopt the new UK standard, resulting in a marked increase in UK autoclave exports to Europe.

In another case, a French manufacturer of fume cabinets attempted to introduce a series of costly type tests that would have severely disadvantaged competitors. Fortunately, timely intervention by the UK expert on the relevant committee successfully blocked these proposals.

By nominating a representative from your organisation, you gain a unique opportunity to shape the standards that govern your industry. You can influence the regulations that impact your business, network with fellow experts, and gain insight into emerging technical innovations. In terms of staying at the forefront of your field, involving staff in standards development is unparalleled.



The International Sightseeing Organisation

The International Standards Organisation was once affectionately dubbed the 'International Sightseeing Organisation' by committee members, owing to its tendency to hold meetings in highly desirable locations. This certainly added an element of



enjoyment to participation. Today, in an effort to reduce the environmental impact of standards development, in-person meetings are less frequent. Nevertheless, serving on standards committees continues to offer significant personal development benefits. It enhances your credibility with customers and stakeholders, expands your professional network, and helps you acquire new skills.

Regrettably, due to budgetary constraints, many UK and European companies feel unable to take advantage of these opportunities. In contrast, Chinese organisations are actively seizing them. For example, they have recently established new committees focused on laboratory design, gradually encroaching on areas covered by existing standards. Whenever a committee chair or secretariat position becomes available, they are quick to volunteer.

This presents a clear risk: those who set the standards ultimately shape the market. Would you prefer that to be your organisation - or the Chinese?

If you would like to volunteer to help develop standards relevant to your products, please do get in touch: jacqueline.balian@gambica.org.uk

Are you finding EU companies reluctant to buy from the UK?

A GAMBICA member has reported increasing reluctance among EU-based customers to purchase from UK companies following Brexit. This stems from a persistent and damaging misconception: that buying directly from the UK is no longer feasible or is overly complicated.



Is this concern being raised with you?

Do researchers or procurement teams across Europe assume that purchasing from the UK involves excessive delays, unpredictable import charges, or complex customs procedures - concerns that may outweigh the benefits of working with a UK supplier?

Are these perceptions affecting your export figures?

If so, it may be time to address the issue directly. Please let me know if you would support a campaign urging the Government to communicate more clearly and proactively with EU markets, reassuring potential customers that:

- Purchasing from UK suppliers remains straightforward and entirely feasible
- Any additional steps introduced post-Brexit can be managed efficiently with the right processes
- UK companies remain fully committed to delivering the same high standards of service to EU customers as before.

Please let me know your thoughts: jacqueline.balian@gambica.org.uk

And if you are experiencing export challenges - help is available

It can't be denied that since the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, the global trade landscape for UK exporters has become more complex. Customs declarations, import VAT charges, and rules of origin checks have all increased the administrative burden on businesses.

For exports to markets further afield, navigating intricate customs procedures also requires meticulous attention to detail. Correct classification of goods using Harmonised System (HS) codes and adherence to both UK and EU regulatory standards are essential. Even minor errors can result in delays, financial penalties, or rejected shipments. Compliance does not end at customs - VAT registration and fiscal representation are now frequently required in the destination country, adding further complexity for firms that previously operated within a single market.

In the Middle East, exporters face additional requirements such as consular legalisation of documents, product conformity inspections, and strict labelling and language standards - particularly for regulated goods including food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. Without thorough preparation, businesses risk having consignments rejected at the border.



Meanwhile, in the United States, exporters are encountering a range of challenges, from complex customs procedures and import regulations to state-level requirements that may differ from federal mandates. Compliance with standards such as those set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is essential for specific product categories, yet these are often overlooked.

For those handling sensitive or high-value shipments, robust documentation support is critical. You may need Certificates of Origin, EUR1 Movement Certificates, and ATA Carnets for example.

GAMBICA partner organisation, Chamber International, offers product conformity support, translation services, customs check-ups and hands-on workshops on HMRC audit preparation, customs record keeping, and consular legalisation services in order to simplify requirements and reduce potential bottlenecks. Their product conformity support and translation services also help exporters meet both technical and cultural expectations with professionalism and precision.

GAMBICA members benefit from preferential access to Chamber International's services, giving them a head start in managing these challenges. However, even if you are not currently a GAMBICA member, you can still contact Chamber International to access their full range of support, including customs check-ups and practical workshops on HMRC audit preparation and customs record keeping. You can reach them at www.chamber-international.com

It may be better to be late than never - but better still to get the right help and be on time.