Standardisation – a way to get IMPACT from research

How to make Knowledge Transfer Offices (KTOs) fit for standardisation?

In March 2023, the European Commission (EC) published a Code of Practice on Standardisation in the European Research Area [1]. This included a recommendation (Clause 2.4) "*To make Technology Transfer Offices fit for standardisation*." This info sheet highlights some key initial actions needed to achieve this.

Good to know - what is a Standard?

Standards are an important part of the innovation ecosystem. A Standard is a document, established by consensus, that provides rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results. They are used to ensure uniformity, consistency, safety and quality in products, services, processes, and practices.

Standards do not impose any regulations or legal obligations to comply; however, laws and regulations may be established by national or international authorities requiring compliance. For example, Health and Safety standards in the workplace, IT standards to keep data safe, standards to ensure interoperability between systems or component parts, or food safety standards.

Even though a particular technical standard might not be covered by a legal requirement, conforming to it demonstrates that the research results meet established levels of quality, safety, interoperability, or reliability. Non-technical standards, such as management systems standards, including quality management, project management, innovation and IP management, demonstrates best practice in these areas. Awareness and use of standards can support the take-up and valorisation of research results; particularly for interoperability or safety standards. In addition, they can demonstrate to investors or research funders that a professional management approach is in place; for example, with respect to innovation and IP management, quality management, risk management, etc.

Boost the impact of research - why engage with standards?

Engaging with standards can be very beneficial for researchers, whether by using standards to guide research, or by contributing to the development of standards. Standards can also strengthen a research proposal and support the exploitation of the research results, so boosting the impact.

For example, **if existing or developing standards (e.g., technical specifications) are not considered, the research results could be "out of sync" with the market, and hence less likely to be taken up, hence reducing impact.**

Participating in the development of standards, either directly as a member the technical committee, or as an observer, or through a liaison with the committee can also bring further benefits. These

include being “ahead of the curve” to inform the direction of your research, and being able to network with other committee members, many of whom are from industry, or represent end-users. So, researchers are in a better position to understand the real needs of potential end users or engage with potential industry partners.

What should KTOs do to increase their “standardisation fitness”?

It is important that the use of standards is considered as soon as possible, from the research planning stage through to its valorisation. Therefore, **there needs to be awareness among both researchers and KTOs to avoid unintentional value leakage and improve the likelihood of successful valorisation**. The use of standards is a strategic decision and so the KTO should have a role in this. The EC Code of Practice also recommends that institutions “*develop a standardisation policy, self-standing or as part of an intellectual property or research results valorisation policy.”.*

Key actions for KTO’s include:

- **Working with their Research Support Office and researchers** to raise awareness of how standards should be used during research proposal preparation and projects.

- **Engaging with their local NSBs** (National Standardisation Bodies) to obtain a list of people participating on behalf of your organisation; to provide training for the research community on the standardisation process, how researchers can become involved in standards development, and how they can propose new standards.

- **Clarifying if there is a standardisation policy at their organisation**. If it is, ensure it adequately addresses the KTO aspects, and if not ensure the KTO is involved in its development.

Key actions and questions for researchers and their KTOs:

1. **Questions for the organisation:**
   - Does it have a standardisation policy?
   - Would work on standardisation be recognised and supported by the organisation?
   - Does the organisation provide access to standards, e.g. via the library or other channels?
   - Does the organisation provide advice on how standards should be used during research proposal preparation, or to support exploitation of the project results?

2. **Actions for researchers during proposal preparation and during projects:**
   - Check for relevant standards in the research field. **Understanding this could influence the direction of the research**.
   - Consider how standards could **improve the impact of the research**; particularly during dissemination and exploitation.

- Are there colleagues or potential project partners who have experience with standards?
- Could the participation of National Standardisation Bodies as partners add value to the proposal and project?
- Costs regarding standards could be eligible costs in projects; for example, time and travel to participate in standards committee meetings, or to hold standards workshops.
- Standardisation and IP protection have to be aligned well. For technical research results, premature disclosure via standardisation can hinder a patent application, and hence the potential impact of the research. The development of a viable strategy to protect the research results is necessary; for example, through intellectual property rights (IPR), such as patents or design rights.

3. **Engage with the standardisation process:**
   - Any Horizon Europe project can request a liaison with a relevant standardisation committee to keep the project informed of developments.
   - A standardisation committee could be joined in the relevant research field (estimated workload for one committee member starting at half a month per year) and contribute directly to the development of the standard.
   - A new standard could be proposed, a developing standard can be commented on, or an improvement to an existing standard can be suggested.

Delve further:

- Short video for a quick overview: Standards + Innovation - YouTube
- Good interactive explanation: Standards + Innovation | Boost your innovation with European standards
- Check out your National Standardisation Body's homepage
- Booklet by The European Intellectual Property Teachers' Network and 4iP Council, aims at clarifying concepts and current practice on Standards and IP.
- Report on the standardisation history with focus on Sweden and digitalization: Swedish_Tech_The_Golden_Standard_ENG.pdf
- [1] *Recommendations of a Code of Practice on standardisation in the European Research Area*

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