

Shaun McCarthy

Represented UK in the ISO 20400 committee

Why I joined the ISO 20400 committee.

As a long-standing procurement professional, I have always been interested in how procurement power can be used to deliver wider benefits to businesses than just price. In the 1980s it was all about quality and BS 8780 which became ISO 9001, in the 90s I was into e-commerce and purchase to pay processes. Since the late 1990's I have worked on ways to use procurement to deliver wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

I played a role in the UK Sustainable Procurement Task Force in 2005/06. I founded Action Sustainability (ASCIC) as a social enterprise specialising in sustainable procurement. We were involved as technical authors of the British Standard for sustainable procurement, BS 8903 and so it was an obvious step for me to be involved in the ISO committee in 2013. I wanted to use my experience and expertise to help to create a global sustainable procurement standard that could make a difference.

What I have done to promote the standard since its launch in 2017.

At the end of a four-year process we had a robust document and we had built a good relationship with many international colleagues. We all decided we couldn't just stop there so I agreed to use the resources of my social enterprise to set up ISO20400.org. It is a free site enabling people to share their knowledge globally in a variety of languages. The site has been viewed 18,000 times in 155 countries in the last 12 months alone. We have 9,600 followers on LinkedIn and a growing following on Facebook and Twitter. We had a launch event in London in May 2017. We have attended events, and given presentations. We have made connections with Universities and colleges who have accessed and used our resources in their courses. We continue to promote the standard and work with our international steering group to ensure that as ISO20400.org we do not promote buying, selling or links to advertising paid for work. This is more than a website; it is an international community of practice.

We have recently launched a free self-assessment tool to enable organisations around the world to have a snapshot of how aligned they are with the standard and what they need to do. This has been a great success with 100 self-assessments being taken by 28 different countries so far.

One of the questions I am frequently asked is "When will it be a proper standard?" Meaning when will it be certifiable. I am far from convinced this would be a good thing. In my view, audits are a contest between how good the auditee is at hiding the bad stuff and how good the auditor is at finding it. By having a more open approach to an evaluation we can provide an honest appraisal and recommend actions to the client, it is a more competitive and honest process.

2020 is our decade to deal with climate change. I look forward to sustainable procurement playing a big part in meeting this challenge.

Shaun McCarthy OBE Director,

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