

# Implementing the **circular economy** British Standard

Dr Stuart McLanaghan tracks the development of the BS 8001 standard and explains what it sets out to achieve, and considers how the principles of the circular economy can actually be implemented in the United Kingdom and abroad

In its 2015 report, McKinsey & Company identified that adopting circular economy principles could not only benefit Europe environmentally and socially, but also generate a net economic benefit of €1.8 trillion by 2030 versus today. Assuming the underlying evidence base is sound, how can an opportunity roughly equal to two-thirds the size of the UK's 2016 GDP be unlocked by the European business community?

Circular economy thinking challenges organisations to re-think how their resources are managed to identify and create economic, environmental and social benefits. This thinking is at the heart of published British Standard 8001: 2017 *Framework for implementing the principles of the circular economy in organisations – guide*, which was developed to meet these mutually beneficial goals, by providing guiding principles for organisations to deliver more sustainable resource management.

## BS 8001 journey

Back in December 2014, BSI established a committee to standardise the field of sustainable resource management. BS 8001 represents the culmination of almost 2.5 years' work, involving over 60 members drawn from a variety of fields and sectors

Funding from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy contributed to the standard's development, enabling core elements to be piloted with a variety of business organisations from different sectors and sizes – including businesses across their supply chain - to ensure the standard met the test for practical guidance.

A subsequent public consultation exercise elicited over 750 comments, influencing the shape of the published version.

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prescriptive or certifiable; instead it is intended to be used flexibly. It is also by design non-jurisdictional (i.e. not confined to the UK) which widens its potential application.

This has already resulted in interest to potentially adopt the standard from EU Member States and national standards bodies.

## Generic applicability

Part of its key strength - and potential appeal - lies in its generic applicability for all organisations, irrespective of size, sector, type or location. BS 8001 is also designed to apply equally to product, service, process and business model innovation. But, given its generic scope, it is envisaged that different business sectors will translate its key guiding principles and framework into more tailored guidance.

Practical implementation of six principles of the circular economy – innovation, stewardship, collaboration, value optimisation, transparency and systems thinking – provide the foundation

to the standard. The standard is not designed to be read from cover to cover; instead, step-by-step guidance on how an organisation can navigate through the different stages of implementation is provided.

BS 8001 is intended to help guide organisations irrespective of their level of knowledge and understanding of the circular economy. Thus, it is suitable for organisations as an early transitional approach to implementing the principles of the circular economy. At the same time, it also suitable for those who are more advanced, but nevertheless want to review or sense-check their approach. For example, a manufacturing company operating from a baseline of basic regulatory compliance might subsequently work to achieve zero waste to landfill, ultimately aspiring to establish more closed-loop recycling operations, reclaiming materials from its products at end-of-life. The standard's maturity

model is designed to help organisations by providing a relatively simple yet powerful and systematic approach to identifying their reference development level, as well as clarifying next steps and actions to further improve their maturity. Such maturity matrices/models are increasingly being included in (environmental) sustainability standards (e.g. BS 8900-1:2013).

Organisations intending to move towards sustainable resource management should ensure whatever business model employed is underpinned by circular economy principles, implemented through a flexible framework.

## Industrial strategy

The UK government's 2017 industrial strategy green paper currently excludes specific reference to the circular economy, but recognises the need to “explore opportunities to reduce raw material demand and waste in our energy and resource systems, and to promote well-functioning markets for secondary materials, and new disruptive business models that challenge inefficient practice.” The circular economy and sustainable resource management should therefore be key pillars; in this context BS 8001's publication could not be timelier. **RWW**

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