

**Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local
Government and Heritage**

2 May 2023

**Opening Statement – Geraldine Larkin, Chief Executive Officer,
National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)**

I would like to thank the Committee for the invitation to assist in its consideration of the issues relating to Modern Methods of Construction. My name is Geraldine Larkin, and I am the CEO of the National Standards Authority of Ireland – NSAI.

General

I am accompanied by my colleagues, Mr Seán Balfe, Head of Sustainability and Built Environment, Mr Enda McDonnell, Director of Standards and Metrology and Ms Yvonne Wylde, Head of Standards Technical, and we are here today to assist the Committee in your work and address any questions you may have.

I am aware that the committee will be addressed by officials from the Office of Public Works, the Industrial Development Agency, Coillte and Solas. I will confine my comments to NSAI's role in supporting government policy, and the needs and benefits of providing technical support for modern methods of construction - MMC.

It is worth noting at this point that the term MMC can have a very broad definition, encompassing all aspects of construction, from the use of innovative building systems, 3-D printing, and off-site manufacture, through to the application of building information modelling tools (BIM) and use of drones to monitor construction.

NSAI, as the Irish National Standards Body, was established by the NSAI Act 1996.

Our role in the areas of standardization and certification contribute to the technical infrastructure of the state, and as we move towards a more sustainable future it is essential that we embrace innovative construction techniques that are not only efficient but also deliver advantages of sustainability, consistent quality, flexibility and freedom of design.

Technical support is essential to realize the full potential of MMC from the stages of innovation and research, training, through to standardization and compliance. A collaborative partnership approach between government, industry and academia to promote innovation and improve adoption of modern construction methods is key to optimizing the benefits of MMC. NSAI, through its participation in Housing for All (HFA), Ireland 2040 and other government initiatives, is well positioned to contribute to MMC initiatives through standardization and certification supports.

This is what NSAI is good at, it is what we have been doing for the construction sector for many years and it is what we plan to do for MMC.

Enhancing the MMC offering

The HFA has identified the adoption of MMC as central to delivery of its targets. Action 13.11 of the action plan focuses on the continued enhancement of the NSAI's Agrément system for MMC in residential construction and it is expected that more actions will evolve as other initiatives are agreed.

Agrément certification is a process for certifying innovative construction products and systems where no standard exists. As such, it is a voluntary certification scheme operated by NSAI that provides manufacturers with a

method of showing that the product is a 'proper material' thereby complying with Irish building regulations.

To meet an increasing demand for Agrément certification, NSAI is expanding its offering to cover certification at the construction stage and sign-off of MMC products and systems, in addition to product certification. The necessary skills and knowledge already within NSAI and the plan for new services provide a sound base to enable industry to adopt and integrate new technologies in a safe and compliant way that will deliver on the HFA initiative.

Working with industry and regulators, SME supports will be developed for a suite of complementary/assessment services.

To date NSAI Agrément has certified seventeen companies producing MMC systems supplying the residential construction sector in Ireland, with seven more under assessment.

Standards development

NSAI has ongoing construction related standardisation work which directly and indirectly supports, or has the potential to support MMC.

At international level, work commenced in 2021, on standards for prefabricated buildings (ISO/TC 59/ SC 19 Prefabricated Building.) NSAI has established a 'mirror' committee (NSAI TC 150) to monitor and contribute to the work and monitor related European work.

Other areas where the Irish construction sector is already working with NSAI developing standards supporting the adoption of MMC include:

- updating structural design (Eurocodes) and product codes to allow for evolving technologies including cross-laminated timber (CLT),

- amending the standard for retrofitting of existing buildings (S.R. 54) and the code for design of timber dwellings (I.S. 440)
- developing standards related to Building Information Modelling (BIM) and the Circular Economy, and a new Irish Standard I.S.375 202X for 'Universal Design for Dwellings'.

Summary

NSAI's technical support activities across standardization and certification for the construction sector is essential for the value it brings to citizens and businesses in everyday life. As an organization we are used to change and as MMC takes us in a new direction I would like to assure the committee of our continued commitment, through our work, to support the construction sector.