

Standards and Surveyors: FIG's Past and Future Response

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Key words: standards, surveyors, FIG.

ABSTRACT

It is now four years since FIG's Task Force on Standardisation began its work in earnest at the FIG Congress in Brighton in 1998. The ending of a quadrennial is an appropriate time at which to reflect on work achieved and remaining challenges. 2002 is also likely to see a recasting of the Task Force into some more permanent organisational form within FIG. This paper can therefore be seen as a report on the work of the Task Force (successes and failures) and a summary of the outstanding work for its successor.

Some elements of this paper have appeared before in a variety of guises – in conference papers, in journal articles, on the FIG website, in FIG input to standardisation bodies, and so on. No apology is made for repeating relevant work already published: one of the key lessons from the four years of the Task Force's existence is that repetition of key facts and issues is essential if the dry and apparently peripheral topic of standards and standardisation is to be properly recognised as one of the most crucial issues for surveyors in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The discussions in this paper must, of course, be set within a social, technological, economic, political and environmental context. Many summaries of recent developments on these fronts can be found in the pages of journals and other media. An overview of issues pertinent to surveyors is given by Greenway (2000). In summary, the rapid advance of technology and increased customer expectations point to the need to specify required results and methodologies clearly. In addition, as professionals, we have staked a claim to provide an expert service of value to *society* (rather than simply to our 'customer'). We therefore have responsibilities to clients, employers, colleagues and the general public. The often-conflicting expectations of these elements reinforce, for professionals, the need for clear statements of how and what. A common language is needed for this dialogue. Standards attempt to provide this language, so providing reassurance to all stakeholders.

A further profound change in the business environment is the globalising of the world's economy. Our duty as a profession (if not individually), therefore, is to the international community. This reinforces the need for us to view issues internationally, rather than regionally or nationally. This in turn raises the profile of international standards rather than their regional or national equivalents (a trend clearly seen in standardisation work in the last decade); and the role of international professional bodies such as FIG.

JS3 Standards – The Response by Professional Organisations
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FIG XXII International Congress
Washington, D.C. USA, April 19-26 2002

This paper sets out the importance of standards and standardisation, summarises the information gathered and conclusions drawn by FIG to date, and moves on to plans for the future. In doing so, it paper provides further explanation of how, and where, surveyors must overcome shortcomings in the standardisation process so as to benefit all of the stakeholders of the profession of surveying.

In summary, standards provide a tool which can help us meet the various demands on us a profession. As posited by the chairman of the ISO Committee for Consumer Protection (Ringstedt, 2001), '[complaints] can be substantially reduced by the provision of comprehensive, comparable and transparent information... Global standards can have a direct impact on the market, on society and on prosperity. Widespread adoption of International Standards in the field of services would mean that suppliers could base the development of their activity on specifications that have worldwide acceptance. This would be to the advantage of both consumers and businesses.' Standards are therefore of great relevance (however dry they may seem) to us as individual practitioners; and we rightly have an expectation that our professional bodies (particularly international bodies such as FIG) will provide us with a clear lead and guidance in this area.

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