



# European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy fact sheet

Ireland

BeSMART.ie for Construction

Thematic objectives 2 & 4

September 2020



# In a nutshell

Implementing body	Health & Safety Authority (HSA)
Key features & objectives	BeSMART.ie is an online tool that helps business owners and managers to prepare risk assessments and a safety statement for their workplace.
Implementation date	2011 (Construction section added in 2015)
Targeted beneficiaries	Employers and employees
Targeted sub-sectors	Occupational safety & health (OSH) across multiple sectors, including construction (all sub-sectors)
Budget (EUR)	30,000 (development cost) 10,000 approx. per year (cost of running, maintaining and updating BeSMART.ie) <sup>1</sup>
Good practice	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Transferability	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Irish Health and Safety Authority (HSA) published a three-year strategy in 2010. It estimated the rate of workplace injuries in Ireland to be between 1,000 and 1,500 per 100,000 employees. Work-related injuries and illnesses were estimated to affect 150 employees per day, at an annual cost to the economy of EUR 3.3 billion<sup>2</sup>.

In Ireland and the EU, occupational safety and health (OSH) risk assessments are a legal requirement. Ireland’s Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005<sup>3</sup> requires all employers to risk assess their work activities and identify, ‘so far as is reasonably foreseeable’, all hazards that can cause accidents or ill health. These hazards, together with an evaluation of the resultant risks are required to

be written down, reviewed and controlled ‘as far as is reasonably practicable’.

Following a request from a wide range of stakeholders in Ireland to help small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) meet their legal risk assessment obligations and deal with the administrative burden, the HSA developed the BeSMART.ie risk assessment tool<sup>4</sup>.

**BeSMART.ie is a free online tool that enables employers to generate their own workplace risk assessments and safety statement. Using simple language and easy-to-follow instructions, the tool guides users through the entire risk assessment process. On completion, employers can print, download and implement their own workplace-specific safety statement<sup>5</sup>.**

**Construction sector companies regularly move from one site to another and they are required to conduct a risk assessment for each work activity. They therefore need to update their safety statement on a regular basis<sup>6</sup>.**

**Using the BeSMART.ie tool, construction companies are able to:**

- Create and update safety statements online and at no cost;
- Improve health and safety;
- Protect their employees and their business;
- Reduce paperwork;
- Save time and money;
- Comply with health and safety law.

BeSMART.ie has been a very successful initiative to date and it is continuing to expand its reach. By 2019, it had attracted 72,000 registered users, an average of 8,000 new users each year since 2011. According to HSA estimates, the cost of hiring OSH consultants to produce OSH risk assessments and safety statements ranges from EUR 1,000 to EUR 1,500 per company. Thus, the free of charge BeSMART.ie tool helped Irish SMEs save an estimated EUR 72-108 million in business expenditure. In addition, BeSMART.ie has earned an almost universal praise from users and the Irish business sector.

## 1.

## General description

BeSMART.ie is an online tool developed by the Health and Safety Authority (HSA). Launched in 2011, it helps business owners and managers prepare risk assessments and a safety statement for their workplace. The tool is free to use and compliant with the Irish health and safety law.

BeSMART.ie (Business electronic Safety Management And Risk assessment Tool) covers hundreds of different business types across a range of sectors including retail, hospitality, manufacturing, services, construction and agribusiness.

BeSMART.ie currently covers 39 construction sector business types<sup>7</sup> and is designed to help contractors develop:

- A **site-specific safety statement including a risk assessment for their business;**
- Or if a contractor is appointed a Project Supervisor Construction Stage (PSCS), they can choose this business type to develop their own risk assessments, checklists and download a construction stage safety and health plan template<sup>8</sup>.

BeSMART.ie guides contractors through a simple four step process to develop their safety statement<sup>9</sup>:

1. Contractors register on BeSMART.ie and select their business type;
2. Contractors respond to a series of questions about the hazards in your workplace;
3. Contractors consult with their employees to ensure that no hazards have been missed;
4. Contractors manage and print their safety statement and risk assessment.

To help employers and employees learn about and expand their knowledge of occupational safety and

health (OSH), BeSMART.ie provides tailored OSH information and materials for agribusiness, construction, safety representatives and other businesses.

The BeSMART.ie 'Learn More'<sup>10</sup> section for the construction sector provides access to a comprehensive library of sector-specific information, guidance and support materials:

- **Management and Duty Holder** role descriptions which provide information on the duties of construction clients, the project supervision construction stage (PSCS) and construction contractors;
- **Safety Alerts** published by the HSA each year. The purpose is to make the industry aware of the key safety issues and ensure they are taken into account in risk assessments and safety statements;
- **Videos** on the roles and duties of construction clients, contractors and project supervisors for the design process (PSDP) and the construction stage (PSCS). There is also a video on the Construction Stage Safety and Health Plan;
- **Publications** (information and data sheets, guides, check lists and plans) listed by topic;
- **Statutory forms** that are legally required for completion;
- **Templates, registers and forms** such as: method statement, risk assessment and site rules templates; induction and training registers and inspection checklists; and an accident investigation form;
- Guidelines on how to create a **Construction Stage Safety and Health Plan;**
- **Accident and dangerous incident reporting** – forms and guidance;
- **Training** – construction tool box talk materials for varied types of work;
- **Codes of practice** for safe working in various activities;

- **Safe System of Work Plan** – forms to complement the safety statement;
- **Work-related vehicles** – guidance for construction site traffic management, load security, use of site vehicles (site dumpers) and safe driving to work;
- **Work positive** – providing guidance on how to improve employee well-being.

**BeSMART.ie also signposts viewers and users to OSH eLearning courses<sup>11</sup> provided by the HSA.**

There are four courses designed for construction sector personnel:

### 1. Introduction to construction safety

A 30-minute course designed for construction contractors, in particular small contractors and the self-employed, as well as employers and employees working in the sector and those employing small contractors to carry out work. It aims to help trainees to:

- Identify key duties under health and safety legislation;
- Recognise key hazards and risks in construction;
- Understand the consequences of unsafe work practices;
- Source relevant information on construction health and safety, including the Safety Statement;

### 2. Asbestos safety for tradespeople

A 30-minute course designed for tradespeople that could potentially be exposed to asbestos containing materials (ACMs). The aim is to help trainees to:

- Understand what asbestos is;
- Outline the health effects of exposure to asbestos;
- Recognise potential ACMs in the workplace;

- Outline the steps to take to protect themselves from exposure to asbestos;

### 3. Construction safety videos

A series of two-minute video animations that explain the role of key duty holders under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations and provide information on the safety and health plan;

### 4. Safer steps and stairs

A 30-minute course designed for employers, employees, the self-employed, designers and students that are learning about buildings and design. The aim is to help trainees to:

- Identify the key hazards associated with steps and stairs;
- Describe the four holistic elements of steps and stairs;
- Identify the four main types of hazardous steps;
- Understand organizational and personal responsibility for safety on steps and stairs.

The **main benefits<sup>12</sup>** that BeSMART.ie aims to deliver to businesses, and particularly smaller businesses, are:

- Reduced accidents at work;
- Less administrative burden;
- Simplified management of health and safety;
- Improved staff morale and motivation;
- Higher safety standards to limit absenteeism, downtime and the cost of repairs;
- Greater time and cost savings;
- Enhanced worker protection and business viability;
- More positive attitudes to OSH practices and their value;
- Increased compliance with OSH practices and regulations.



## 2.

## Achieved or expected results

BeSMART.ie is a very successful initiative that is continuing to grow. By the end of 2019, the HSA's online risk assessment tool had attracted over 72,000<sup>13</sup> registered SME users from multiple sectors. That figure is equivalent to just over a quarter (27%) of the total number of SMEs active in Ireland in 2018 (263,338<sup>14</sup>).

Over the seven years since its launch, BeSMART.ie user registrations have grown consistently year on year, and at an increasing pace. The number of BeSMART.ie users since 2015 is shown in Table 1. Although the tool was first launched in 2011, 2015 is used as a starting point in this analysis, as that was the year that the tool launched a dedicated construction section and modules.

The growth in user registrations (new users) since the introduction of the construction and agribusiness sections in 2015 is noticeable, particularly in the first year of those new modules. There was also a **significant increase in new users in 2019, up by about 67% on the previous year**. This increase is inferred by the cumulative total reported by the HSA in their Programme of Work 2020. Overall, **BeSMART.ie has registered an average of 8,000 new users per year since 2011**. That average figure fits comfortably with the annual user data in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of new and cumulative BeSMART.ie users, 2015-2019

Year	Number of Users	
	New	Cumulative
2015	6,896	30,278
2016	>8,000	38,476
2017	8,496	46,972
2018	9,357	56,329
2019	15,671	72,000

Source: HSA<sup>15</sup>

BeSMART.ie is helping SME users to achieve significant cost savings. The online tool removes the need for SMEs to hire OSH consultants to produce risk assessments and safety statements.

In 2016, the HSA estimated the cost of hiring an OSH consultant to conduct that task to be between EUR 1,000 to EUR 1,500 per company. In 2016, for example, the HSA estimated the cost savings to SME users to be about EUR 11 million.

The cost saving to SME users between 2011 and 2016 was estimated to be between EUR 31-45 million<sup>16</sup>. By 2019, using the same calculation, the cost saving to SMEs can therefore be expected to have reached EUR 72-108 million.

The success of BeSMART.ie can also be measured in terms of **qualitative achievements**. The HSA surveys 500 users each year to elicit their feedback on the BeSMART.ie tool. According to the results of the latest survey that has been reported on (2016), **95% of respondents expressed a high degree of satisfaction** with tool<sup>17</sup>. This satisfaction level is further evidenced by the continued yearly increase in the numbers of new users. Given that the highest increase in new users occurred in 2019 (67%), one can deduce that user satisfaction must remain very high.

BeSMART.ie has also received **national and European awards and commendations** for its achievements<sup>18</sup>. The Irish Times newspaper awarded BeSMART.ie a business innovation award in 2014. In 2015, the European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation commended the BeSMART.ie initiative. In addition, the Irish Government, Irish business leaders, social partners and users have all voiced their approval of the online tool.

Each year, the HSA has improved the BeSMART.ie tool, introducing **new and updated content**. As an example, their latest annual report (2018) confirmed that 15 new business types and 19 new risk assessments involving 194 new controls had been added to the tool that year. Existing risk assessments were also reviewed and 22 updates were introduced.

The success of BeSMART.ie has led to the HSA taking the decision to migrate the tool onto a new platform to ensure that BeSMART.ie can meet the needs of an increasing number of SME users.

## 3.

## Perspectives and lessons learned

### **BeSMART.ie demonstrates the economic case for the use of web-based tools for OSH risk assessments.**

According to a peer review on the 'Use of web-based tools for OSH risk assessment'<sup>19</sup>, published by the European Commission in collaboration with Dublin Institute of Technology, no other method of regulation demonstrates such economic efficiency in producing SME-based OSH risk assessments. BeSMART.ie helped Irish SMEs save an estimated EUR 31-45 million in OSH consultant fees by 2016 and an estimated EUR 72-108 million by 2019. On this basis, BeSMART.ie represents exceptional value for Member State Labour Inspectorates. It also reduces the burdens placed on SMEs.

### **BeSMART.ie creates opportunities for European OSH regulation by demonstrating an agreed balance between adequate social protection and free market operations.**

Finding an appropriate balance between the need for regulations to protect employees and the need to enable businesses to succeed in the free market is a huge challenge for advanced market economies. Too little regulation leads to accidents, ill health and financial loss to employees and employers<sup>20</sup>. In contrast, too much regulation can stifle business success, growth and job creation<sup>21</sup>. Having gained almost universal praise from users and the Irish business sector, BeSMART.ie demonstrates that a balance can be found<sup>22</sup>.

### **BeSMART.ie has improved interactions between businesses and labour inspectorates, and has increased business compliance with OSH risk assessment and safety statement requirements.**

BeSMART.ie has made interactions between labour inspectorates and BeSMART.ie users more constructive. They can now perform an advisory and educational role, rather than a formal inspection and enforcement role, which is often confrontational and legalistic. This change has

produced tangible benefits. Over a quarter (27%) of all Irish SMEs have used BeSMART.ie to produce OSH risk assessments and safety statements between 2011 and 2019. This is a significant increase in requirements compliance in comparison to the previous decade when it was down to single figures in some sectors<sup>23</sup>.

### **BeSMART.ie is helping to standardise OSH risk assessment documentation.**

BeSMART.ie has enabled the HSA to standardise required documentation and conduct by offering a labour inspector validated method of producing risk assessments and OSH statements. The added value is that users have now simplified access to labour inspector validated information and advice.

### **BeSMART.ie eLearning courses are a useful resource for smaller construction businesses.**

Smaller contractors are over three times more likely to suffer from fatal accidents than larger contractors, according to the Head of Construction Policy with the Health and Safety Authority<sup>24</sup>. BeSMART.ie/HSA courses provide insight on important topics such as construction regulations and practical OSH requirements on construction sites. They are a useful resource for smaller firms and sole traders.

According to the HSA Education Manager<sup>25</sup>, these courses provide a number of advantages. Learners can take courses in their own time, at their own pace and can get a certificate upon the successful completion of a short assessment. Although not a formal qualification, certification can form part of an individual's training or continuous professional development record. In addition, courses are delivered to a group of learners using the group manager facility. This means that employers, managers or tutors can register groups of learners to take the course in their own time and remotely monitor their progress.

## 4.

## Conclusion and recommendations

**BeSMART.ie has achieved significant success in reaching and assisting over one quarter of all Irish SMEs. New user registrations have grown by an average of 8,000 each year since 2011, reaching a total of 72,000 by 2019.**

**SME users no longer need to hire OSH consultants to complete OSH risk assessments and safety statements. That amounts to an estimated cost saving of EUR 72 million to EUR 108 million for Irish SMEs, according to the HSA.**

Other achievements include the standardisation of OSH risk assessment documentation and conduct. SME users now have easier access to labour inspector validated OSH information and advice. Interactions between labour inspectorates and BeSMART.ie users are now more constructive, which has helped to drive up SME compliance with OSH regulations.

In addition, BeSMART.ie provides access to comprehensive OSH information and guidance and to online OSH courses. These resources provide flexible learning opportunities allowing users to learn in their own time and at their own pace. They are particularly useful resources for SMEs.

Looking forward, two recommendations are suggested to help improve the impact of BeSMART.ie:

- Consider scaling up the initiative. In spite of its considerable success in reaching one quarter of all Irish SMEs, there are three quarters that still need to be reached. Scaled up communication and stakeholder engagement should be considered to increase the reach of the initiative;
- Consider developing an assessment initiative, perhaps in collaboration with the labour inspectorate, to gain greater insight into the impact that BeSMART.ie is having on accidents and illness at work. Is the growing use of BeSMART.ie translating into improved OSH

practices on the ground and fewer accidents and illnesses?

**Overall, BeSMART.ie is rated as a ‘5-star good practice measure’ on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).**

This score is based on the significant and ongoing success of the BeSMART.ie tool. It continues to attract a growing number of users each year. It is a free and highly useful tool that helps SMEs comply with OSH risk assessment and safety statement requirements. It saves SMEs time and money, and helps protect both employees and businesses. It has received almost universal praise from all stakeholders. It has also won national and international awards and commendations.

**The BeSMART.ie is rated as a ‘5-star transferable measure’ on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).**

This score is based on similar reasons to those in relation to good practice. The success and wide acceptance of BeSMART.ie in Ireland suggests that the concept and model of the tool are transferable to other countries. The appropriateness of this tool would depend however on whether other similar tools are already in place.

For those that might want to implement the BeSMART.ie model or something similar, a case study published by EU-OSHA<sup>26</sup> highlights some of the key considerations to take into account. A lot of promotional work by inspectors is required to gain business acceptance and buy-in. Trust and confidentiality are also key to users’ uptake and should be continually reinforced. Usability is also important, which requires a tool and content that is simple and easy to use.

BeSMART.ie is also potentially transferable to the education sector, as part of risk-related educational programmes.



# Endnotes

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