In May 2013 we held a week-long online discussion between UK-GBC members and RICS about the Ska scheme.

Want to add to the conversation? The comments that came out of the discussion have been added to Pinpoint and you can add your comment here: [http://pinpoint.ukgbc.org/resource/7144](http://pinpoint.ukgbc.org/resource/7144).

This document is a summary of the wide ranging debate on the rating tool.

**Take up of Ska Rating**

Ska is gradually becoming a useful and easy to use tool for assessing the refurbishment and fit-out of office and retail projects. It can be used by any organisation, is designed flexibly to consider environmental performance even on minor works and simple enough for non technical project teams to apply. It has a user-friendly terminology that focuses on the ease and practicality of applying the tool, which permits a wider reach than only trained assessors. It can be implemented with certification or by undergoing informal review without certification. Currently, there are nearly 3,300 users signed up to the online tool, 200 accredited assessors, 550 projects registered for certification and 76 certified projects (23 Gold, 36 Silver, 17 Bronze). It is supported by RICS which adds credibility to the tool.

Awareness levels of Ska are low but rising. Client briefs, tender documentation, specification clauses and landlord/tenant guides are now making reference to Ska Rating, indicating the increasing awareness of the impact fit-outs have.

Ska does not currently have a full “in-use” assessment as project delivery teams are often different from their operational teams and in use assessment is based on a different set of decisions, taken by a different set of people to the design stage. However there is an ‘occupancy stage’ assessment which measures energy and water consumption in the 12 months following the completion of the project. Take up of the occupancy stage assessment, which is non mandatory, has been limited.

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1 See contributors end the end of this document.
BREEAM vs Ska

There are a number of differences between BREEAM and Ska. One fundamental difference is the level of rigour applied to each scheme. BREEAM is a UKAS accredited third party certification scheme and requires a robust auditing process. It focuses on influencing the refurbishment/fit-out process and driving the long term performance of the overall building. Ska, on the other hand, was designed as a self-assessment rating tool and is focused on rating the scope of works that are added to the base building.

Ska Assessors

In the same vein as BREEAM, projects benefit from having Ska Accredited Assessors within the project team at the development stage in order to integrate sustainable fit out decisions and achieve the highest rating possible. Contract tenders with only a single clause mandating a Ska Rating will have difficulty achieving this, therefore it is advisable for contracts to also specify that a Ska Accredited Assessor be appointed as part of the project.

Assessors can adapt their service to a project team’s experience and requirements. A minimum service level of site visits and review of documents should not be less than 5-7 working days over a six month project.

The strength and weakness of Ska is that it relies on the assessor’s knowledge to make a real impact and the evidence required is not as robust as BREEAM. The onus is on the assessor to determine whether credits can be awarded. There is also a reliance on the Energy Technology List (ETL) for determining whether certain credits can be awarded for various types of technology. This can be detailed work and can take an assessor beyond their level of expertise and increase the time it takes to produce an assessment, adding to the cost. Conversely, it makes the process less of a “tick box exercise”, making it more attractive to project teams and allows for integrating more appropriate solutions.

RICS has considered this issue extensively, reviewing the option of a minimum entry requirement to become an assessor, based on industry experience or/sustainability understanding or a multi-question test on a minimum level of knowledge on interior fit-out and sustainability. However, this does not ensure the implementation of that knowledge in the long run, so RICS’ first step has been to instate a support structure through the Assessor Registration scheme which includes a continuous knowledge enhancing requirement (CPDs), enhanced auditing and re-examinations every 3 years. RICS are also improving the training material and monitoring the type of queries that are received through the Online Assessor Forum to understand where the assessors may have knowledge gaps. The advantages of making decisions assessor-based are that real sustainable results are awarded and there is a less bureaucratic process.

Robustness of evidence

RICS have purposely kept the verification process simple to prevent increased costs associated with assessor fees and auditing time/cost which would not be viable to the majority of interior fit-out budgets, team compositions or timescales.

There are also challenges around the application of the ETL and Water Technology List (WTL). These lists set criteria which product suppliers must meet. Ideally all suppliers and manufacturers would upload their products to the scheme. However, there are varied reasons as to why not all manufacturers participate, including: (perception) of cost, lack of general awareness, failure to spot the marketing potential and concerns of the label being superseded resulting in resubmission costs. A compliant product directory would require an assessment/accreditation structure for manufacturers which adds to
costs. The current approach rewards high performance products and places the onus on manufacturers to meet the rating targets. The ETL and WTL, in addition to the new EU energy label (in Ska v1.2) are the only product listings currently used that ensure an independent, reliable benchmark of performance per item without introducing another calculation or process.

**Costs**

There is no or limited uplift in associated project costs in achieving a Ska rating but this is dependent on the project team and if Ska expertise is involved from the design phase. If requirements are incorporated pre-tender, the project team is committed to integrating Ska and can apply the necessary pressure on the contractor to do the same, then experiences show that no extra costs are incurred. A case study demonstrating this, from the retailer Lush, is available here: [http://pinpoint.ukgbc.org/resource/7841](http://pinpoint.ukgbc.org/resource/7841).

Assessor fees are discretionary. Clients, design consultants & contractors can opt to have in house accredited Ska assessors. Formal submission of projects require a one off certification fee of £295 +VAT (as of August 2013) once the project achieves the desired rating.

As the onus is on assessors to implement the scheme, with RICS and UKAS only required for compliance checks, the submission fees reflect this structure and are used for the administration and running of the scheme.

There are future changes planned as the scheme has reached a point where enhanced auditing is possible, requiring an increase in certification costs. This forms part of the new Ska Rating Assessor Registration scheme. Further information on this can be found here: [http://www.rics.org/uk/knowledge/more-services/professional-services/ska-rating-/register-of-accredited-assessors/](http://www.rics.org/uk/knowledge/more-services/professional-services/ska-rating-/register-of-accredited-assessors/).

**Future development**

Each individual measure is developed from current practice to best practice e.g. timber must be 100% PEFC/FSC sourced and the greater impact of hardwoods is acknowledged. BES6001 compliance is not available for all materials e.g. wallpaper. The Technical Committee is participating in the BES6001 consultation to try and make the standard easier and encourage uptake by materials manufacturers and promote a chain of custody approach for many more materials.

Residential refurbishment is not currently covered by Ska but there may be interest, especially for large landlords, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) or hotel chains where an assessment could be applied to a portfolio or a large stock of properties. RICS is piloting the Ska Volume Certification scheme to enable assessment of a single design applied to multiple sites using a sampling approach. Initial pilots show that between 70-150 retail stores can be certified under around two assessments making highly attractive economies of scale for retailers, hotels and large volume clients.

**Thank you to the following people who contributed to this discussion:**

- Alan Fogarty, Partner, Cundall
- Elina Grigoriou, Grigoriou Interiors & Chair of Ska Technical Committee
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