

Moving up

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Elina Grigoriou describes the take-up of the Ska rating assessment method by the higher education sector

Strong growth and greater familiarity with sustainable practice in the interior fit-out arena has seen new sectors and countries look at adopting the Ska rating assessment method.

In higher education facilities, thousands of refurbishments are undertaken each year, large or small, often with highly specialised requirements and limited budgets. Construction windows create a constant challenge for optimal design, operational effectiveness and minimal environmental impact.

For these reasons, many university facilities teams identify Ska as a common method of communicating, encouraging and measuring sustainable practice in their fit-out projects.

[Ska rating for higher education](#) (Ska HE) was published earlier this year. The scheme is supported by the Association of University Directors of Estates, University College London (UCL), Rider Levett Bucknall, Grigoriou Interiors, Overbury and AECOM, in addition to both the Ska Technical Committee and a wider industry research team.

Developed to assist interior fit-outs and refurbishments meet clear sustainable good practice, Ska HE evolves from the existing Ska rating methodology to reflect the specific state requirements, which usually encompass a wide range of space uses and occupants.

Revising criteria

Criteria have been drawn from current Ska rating for office and retail schemes with adaptations for lecture theatres and other teaching and learning spaces, while additional measures have been developed to deal with laboratories and other specialist spaces.

Many higher education providers are already involved in the development of Ska HE, including UCL, the Universities of Liverpool and Manchester, City University and Goldsmiths, using existing versions of Ska rating. They praise its clarity and simplicity, seeing it as a cost-effective and flexible means of dealing with smaller-scale projects that do not warrant a full refurbishment assessment.

Both UCL and City University have sent internal staff on RICS training courses to become accredited assessors. Free use of the tool and method of self-assessment make it an attractive alternative to the significant human resources required for other schemes.

Sustainability goal

UCL has adopted RICS Ska to promote good practice in sustainability across its portfolio of projects. As a result, we have delivered significant savings as well as ensuring that the university is acting responsibly. We have also supported the upskilling of UCL project staff, enabling them to get a better understanding of our sustainability goals.

Richard Jackson, Director of Sustainability, [UCL](#)

Universities currently using the system report that Ska has not added capital cost and has encouraged operational savings. It is also credited as an effective means of educating framework suppliers on university requirements.

Reducing waste

A significant evolution of the scheme involves upgrades to the waste and resource management issues. Industry commitment to monitoring, managing and reducing construction waste has been a huge success, with the majority of contractors embedding stringent targets as standard practice.

SkaHE aims to include total project resource management, bringing re-use, repair and reduction strategies into the design process where it can have the biggest impact. It is felt that the industry is ready to bring sustainable resource management even closer to the dilapidations process; both landlords and tenants should search for economical solutions that minimise materials wastage in dilapidations and new fit-outs.

Retail rating

Following the addition of the HE scheme, an updated release of [Ska rating for retail](#) is scheduled for 2016. There is also a list of [Ska-compliant products online](#) and a [searchable directory](#).

The number of individuals registered on the online tool has increased by a quarter year on year, and certified assessments have more than doubled annually to 402 projects in October 2015, up from 336 in April last year.

Fit-outs achieving the highest Ska rating level of gold increased from 22 in 2013 to 106 by October, while the number of silver certificates has trebled and those achieving bronze has more than doubled.

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Further information

- The [online system and Good Practice Measures requirements documents](#) are free to use. The Ska rating team also welcomes feedback on the current schemes
- Related competencies include [Construction technology and environmental services](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Property journal* (March/April 2016)