



# GREEN BUILDING CERTIFICATION FOR OPERATIONAL BUILDINGS

EVORA Global | [info@evoraglobal.com](mailto:info@evoraglobal.com) | +44 (0)203 326 7333

Sustainable real asset investment & finance consultancy and ESG software

Since the first green building certification standard, BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method), was launched in the UK in 1990, the number of sustainability related certification initiatives for the built environment has grown year on year. There are now hundreds operating around the world. While the early certification standards focused on the design and construction of new buildings, there are now a plethora of standards that assess the operational performance of existing buildings. Indeed, the 2021 GRESB Real Estate Reference Guide<sup>1</sup> lists over 70 "operational green building certification schemes".

From an asset owner's perspective, there are various drivers for targeting green building certification. One of the most significant aspects is the increasing body of evidence that demonstrates the business case for and value of green buildings, including reduced operational costs, improved occupant productivity and increased asset value.<sup>2</sup> Results from a recent RICS Global Commercial Property Monitor survey showed that around 75% of global respondents believe that green certified buildings achieve a rent or price premium over comparable non-certified buildings, either through a green premium or a brown discount.<sup>3</sup>

As the demand for green building certification continues to grow, asset owners and investors are now faced with an overwhelming choice of certification standards. The scope and applicability of certification can vary significantly between the different standards. Some can be applied internationally, while others are country or location specific; some provide a holistic consideration of sustainability issues, while others focus on a particular topic (e.g. energy or health and wellbeing); and some can assess a range of asset types, while others cover a single sector (e.g. housing).

The past decade has seen the following green building certification standards for operational buildings award significant numbers of certificates across Europe, which are all recognised by GRESB:<sup>4</sup>

- BREEAM In-Use
- DGNB System for Buildings In Use
- HQE Buildings in Operation
- LEED for Operations and Maintenance

For each of the above standards, the following tables provide a summary of the scope, coverage and main features of the respective certification processes and requirements.

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[https://documents.gresb.com/generated\\_files/real\\_estate/2021/real\\_estate/reference\\_guide/complete.html#building\\_certification\\_list](https://documents.gresb.com/generated_files/real_estate/2021/real_estate/reference_guide/complete.html#building_certification_list)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldgbc.org/news-media/business-case-green-building-review-costs-and-benefits-developers-investors-and-occupants>; <https://www.worldgbc.org/news-media/doing-right-planet-and-people-business-case-health-and-wellbeing-green-building>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rics.org/globalassets/rics-website/media/knowledge/research/market-surveys/gcpm-q3-2020-final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://files.bregroup.com/breeam/briefingpapers/Gr-n-kommt--2015.pdf>

BREEAM In-Use													
Operator*	BRE Group, UK												
Current Certification Standard(s)	BREEAM International In-Use: Commercial Version 6 BREEAM International In-Use: Residential Version 6 BREEAM USA In-Use: Commercial Version 6 BREEAM USA In-Use: Residential Version 6 (All published in 2020)												
Geographical Scope	International												
Sustainability Themes Covered	Management, Health and Wellbeing, Energy, Transport, Water, Resources, Resilience, Land Use and Ecology, Pollution												
Scope of Certification	<p>Covers all existing non-domestic and residential assets. Comprises two parts that can be certified against separately or together:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part 1 'Asset Performance' covers how well the physical attributes of the building perform.</li> <li>Part 2 'Management Performance' covers how well the building is being managed.</li> </ul> <p>Certification can cover the whole building or selected parts of a building, e.g. common areas or tenanted areas. Certification is valid for three years before full recertification is required, although recertification can be performed before this time if required.</p>												
Certification Process	The assessment process operates through the <a href="#">BREEAM In-Use online platform</a> . Users register assets and then enter data and answer questions about the building, which generates a dynamic performance score. An independent licensed BREEAM In-Use Assessor reviews and verifies the assessment performance, including a site audit, and submits the assessment to BRE Group for quality assurance and the final certification decision.												
Certification Ratings	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Outstanding (≥ 85%)</td> <td>★★★★★★</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Excellent (≥ 70%)</td> <td>★★★★★</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Very Good (≥ 55%)</td> <td>★★★★</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good (≥ 40%)</td> <td>★★★</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass (≥ 25%)</td> <td>★★</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Acceptable (≥ 10%)</td> <td>★</td> </tr> </table>	Outstanding (≥ 85%)	★★★★★★	Excellent (≥ 70%)	★★★★★	Very Good (≥ 55%)	★★★★	Good (≥ 40%)	★★★	Pass (≥ 25%)	★★	Acceptable (≥ 10%)	★
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Very Good (≥ 55%)	★★★★												
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Pass (≥ 25%)	★★												
Acceptable (≥ 10%)	★												
Scoring System	For each Part, all the above sustainability themes ('Categories') are subdivided into a range of associated 'Assessment Issues', each with their own aim, specific question(s) and pre-determined answer options covering the relevant performance targets or benchmarks for the issue. Where the asset's performance meets one of the answer options, as determined by the BREEAM In-Use Assessor, the associated number of points (called credits) are scored. The category score is then calculated according to the number of credits achieved and the category's weighting. The final performance rating is determined by the sum of the weighted category scores. Achieving credits under certain assessment issues is a prerequisite (minimum standard) to achieving some ratings (e.g. Very Good or above).												
Certification Fees	£500 registration fee per asset; £800 certification fee per Part												
Number of Certifications	There are over 7,100 currently certified BREEAM In-Use projects covering around 40 countries, predominantly in Europe, with significant numbers of certificates in France (19% of the total), Sweden (13%), Netherlands (11%), Spain (7%) and Poland (7%). Certified BREEAM In-Use assessments can be found on BRE Group's <a href="#">Green Book Live</a> online database.												

Other information	Separate BREEAM certification standards cover the design and construction of new buildings (BREEAM New Construction) and the design and works for refurbishment or fit-out projects (BREEAM Refurbishment and Fit-out)
Website	<a href="https://www.breeam.com/">https://www.breeam.com/</a>
Notes	<p>* Locally adapted and translated versions of BREEAM In-Use are operated in some locations by BRE Group's partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dutch Green Building Council (DGBC) in the Netherlands (<a href="#">BREEAM-NL</a>)</li> <li>• Instituto Tecnológico de Galicia (ITG) in Spain (<a href="#">BREEAM-ES</a>)</li> <li>• TÜV SÜD Industrie Service GmbH in Germany (<a href="#">BREEAM-DE</a>), Austria (<a href="#">BREEAM-AT</a>) and Switzerland (<a href="#">BREEAM-CH</a>)</li> </ul> <p>Certification fees are set by these National Scheme Operators (NSOs) and vary slightly from the BRE Group fees. BREEAM In-Use Assessors must be licensed by the respective NSO to undertake assessments in these locations.</p>

DGNB System for Buildings In Use	
Operator*	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Nachhaltiges Bauen (DGNB), Germany (German Sustainable Building Council)
Current Certification Standard(s)	DGNB System for Buildings In Use (Version 2020)
Geographical Scope	International
Sustainability Themes Covered	Environmental quality, Economic quality, Sociocultural and functional quality
Scope of Certification	Covers all existing building types. Buildings must have been in use for at least one year. Certification is valid for three years before full recertification is required, with the option to recertify annually by submitting the annual consumption data.
Certification Process	Certification requires the client to appoint an independent DGNB Auditor who registers the project with DGNB. The auditor supports the whole certification process including provision and submission of documentation to DGNB for conformity checking and the final certification decision. A DGNB Consultant can also advise building owners and investors on how to achieve certification for their projects.
Certification Ratings	Platinum (≥ 80%) Gold (≥ 65%) Silver (≥ 50%) Bronze (≥ 35%) Buildings that demonstrate they are operating carbon-neutrally receive an additional 'Climate Positive' award.
Scoring System	Each of the above sustainability themes ('Topics') are split into three 'Criteria', i.e. a total of nine Criteria. Five of the nine Criteria are divided into Part 1: Management and Part 2: Performance to reflect continuous improvement process principles. Each criterion is assigned a weighting ranging from 5% to 30%. Assessment for each criterion comprises evaluating performance against a series of indicators. Each indicator is assigned points, with a maximum of 100 evaluation points available for most of the criteria. For some criteria, additional bonus points can also be achieved for performance going beyond the standard requirements. The weighted scores for the nine Criteria are then combined to calculate the total performance index and certification rating. There are no minimum requirements that need to be met to achieve a certification rating.
Certification Fees	€2,500 registration fee per building (€1,000 for DGNB members); certification fees vary by gross floor area (GFA) from €1,500 to €9,000 (€1,500 to €7,500 for DGNB members)
Number of Certifications	There are currently over 100 certificates covering around 8 European countries predominantly in Germany (around 90% of the total). Certified DGNB Buildings In Use projects can be found on the DGNB <a href="#">Certified projects</a> webpage.
Other information	Separate DGNB certification standards cover the construction of new buildings (DGNB System for New Construction), renovation projects (DGNB System for Existing Buildings and Renovation) and deconstruction of buildings (DGNB System for the Deconstruction of Buildings)
Website	<a href="https://www.dgnb-system.de/en/">https://www.dgnb-system.de/en/</a>
Notes	* DGNB has established several system partners that actively manage certification locally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Building Council Denmark (DK-GBC)</li> <li>• Austrian Sustainable Building Council (ÖGNI)</li> <li>• Swiss Sustainable Building Council (SGNI)</li> </ul>

- Green Building Council España (GBCe)

HQE™ for Buildings in Operation	
Operator*	For projects in France: HQE Association, France For projects outside of France: Cerway, France
Current Certification Standard(s)	France: NF HQE™ Bâtiments Tertiaires en Exploitation Version 2 (2013) International: HQE™ Certification Scheme for Buildings in Operation (2015)
Geographical Scope	International
Sustainability Themes Covered	Environment, Energy Use, Health, Comfort (plus Management)
Scope of Certification	<p>Covers all existing non-residential building types. Certification is split into three areas covering the performance of different stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable Building – Building owners and landlords</li> <li>• Sustainable Management – Building operators and managers</li> <li>• Sustainable Use – Building users</li> </ul> <p>Certification can cover each area separately or any combination of the above. Consequently, certification can cover the whole building or selected parts of a building, e.g. common areas or tenanted areas. Certification is valid for five years before renewal is required (the international scheme also has the option of a three-year certification cycle).</p>
Certification Process	<p>Project teams make a certification application to the relevant certification body. Following verification of the application, a contract is agreed between the applicant and certification body and an independent qualified HQE™ Auditor is appointed to the project. The auditor undertakes a site audit to verify compliance with the certification requirements. The auditor prepares a report that highlights strong and weak points and any non-compliances. The project team can then address any non-compliances prior to the issue of the auditor's final report and the certification decision. Within the three- or five-year certification period, the building is subject to one or two site audits (depending on the length of the certification period) to verify that the certification requirements are being maintained. Project teams may seek advice from approved professionals (HQE™ Certification Référents) about the certification process.</p>
Certification Ratings	<p>Exceptional (12 or more stars, with at least 3 stars for the Energy theme, and achievement of all the Pre-requisites) Excellent (Between 9 and 11 stars and achievement of all the Pre-requisites) Very Good (Between 5 and 8 stars and achievement of all the Pre-requisites) Good (Between 1 and 4 stars and achievement of all the Pre-requisites) HQE Pass (No stars and achievement of all the Pre-requisites)</p>
Scoring System	<p>The 4 themes are divided into 14 targets (sets of requirements). Each theme is assessed on a scale of 0 to 4 stars. Each target has three performance levels: Pre-requisite, Performing and High Performing. To achieve the Performing and High Performing levels, all Pre-requisites must be met and a percentage of the available points for the target obtained. The number of stars awarded for each theme is based on the performance across all targets in the theme and the level achieved for each target. There are also separate requirements covering the implementation of management systems for the building.</p>
Certification Fees	<p>HQE certification fees are not publicly available and are available on request from the relevant certification body. However, certification fees are based on the scale and characteristics of each project.</p>

Number of Certifications	There are currently around 630 HQE Buildings in Operation certificates in France, with only a small number of certificates (approximately 15) currently outside of France (in Luxembourg and Brazil). HQE projects certified by Certivea can be found using the online <a href="#">CertiMap</a> tool.
Other information	Separate HQE certification standards cover the design and construction stages for new and renovated residential buildings (HQE™ Assessment Scheme for the Environmental Performance of Residential Buildings under Construction) and non-residential buildings (HQE™ Assessment Scheme for the Environmental Performance of Non-residential Buildings under Construction)
Website	<a href="https://www.behqe.com/">https://www.behqe.com/</a>
Notes	<p>HQE is an acronym for Haute Qualité Environnementale (High Environmental Quality).</p> <p>* There are three bodies responsible for delivery of certification in France:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certivea for new build, renovation or in use non-residential building projects</li> <li>• Cerqual for renovation or in use residential building projects</li> <li>• Cequami for detached house projects</li> </ul> <p>HQE also has the following recognised certification partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundação Vanzolini (FCAV) in Brazil</li> <li>• Industrial Research Institute (IRI) in Lebanon</li> <li>• Écobâtiment in Canada (Québec)</li> <li>• Tecnalía in Spain</li> </ul>

LEED for Operations and Maintenance	
Operator	U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), USA
Current Certification Standard(s)*	LEED v4.1 Operations and Maintenance (2017)
Geographical Scope	International
Sustainability Themes Covered	Location & Transportation, Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy & Atmosphere, Material & Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality, Innovation
Scope of Certification	Covers existing whole buildings (LEED O+M: Existing Buildings) and existing interior spaces that are contained within a portion of an existing building (LEED O+M: Interiors). Buildings must be fully operational and occupied for at least one year. All types of building can be assessed, but requirements vary for retail, schools, hospitality, data centres, warehouse and distribution centres, and multi-family projects. Certification is valid for three years, but projects need to provide performance data annually and must recertify every three years.
Certification Process	Project team register the project via <a href="#">LEED Online</a> . The project team collect the relevant information and documentation and then submit this via LEED Online for technical review and the final certification decision. Project teams may seek advice from LEED Accredited Professionals (LEED APs).
Certification Ratings	Platinum (80+ points) Gold (60–79 points) Silver (50–59 points) Certified (40–49 points)
Scoring System	Each of the above sustainability themes is divided into a series of prerequisites and credits. Prerequisites set the minimum requirements that all projects need to meet to achieve certification. Credits are optional and allow projects to achieve additional points. 100 points are available across all the themes with the number of points a project earns determining the level of LEED certification it receives. More weight is given to credit requirements that are directly measurable by the project. 90 of the total points are allocated to the prerequisites that have a calculated performance score, based on actual building data. The remaining 10 points are distributed across the remaining credits with equal weight.
Certification Fees	\$1,500 Registration fee per building (\$1,200 for USGBC Members); Certification Review fees vary by project gross floor area between \$0.0216 and \$0.0274 per sq. ft (\$0.0180 and \$0.0228 per sq. ft for USGBC members) with a minimum fee set for each gross floor area band, e.g. \$1,350 for projects < 250,000 sq. ft (\$1,140 for USGBC Members)
Number of Certifications*	Around 7,350 existing building projects in over 60 countries have been certified against the various full and pilot versions of LEED O+M since it was first launched in the early 2000's, with 75% of these projects located in the USA. There are currently just over 400 existing building projects certified to LEED v4.1, with approximately 25% of these in the USA, 17% in India and 17% in China, and coverage in 9 European countries with the most certificates in Sweden (7% of the global total). LEED O+M certified projects can be found using the online <a href="#">LEED Project Library</a> .
Other information	Separate LEED certifications cover Building Design and Construction (LEED BD+C), Interior Design and Construction (LEED ID+C) and Residential Design and Construction
Website	<a href="https://www.usgbc.org/leed">https://www.usgbc.org/leed</a>

Notes

\* It is still possible for projects to register under LEED v4 O+M.

# Prior to the launch of LEED v4.1, there was no requirement for existing building projects to undertake recertification.

In terms of the European market for operational building certification, the vast majority of DGNB and HQE certifications to date have been concentrated in their home territory (Germany and France respectively). The current and previous versions of LEED O+M have seen certificates awarded across various European countries, but at a lower level than in North America and Asia. BREEAM In-Use has emerged as the predominant certification for operational buildings in Europe with certificate coverage across most of Europe, including significant numbers of certificates in several European countries.

While there are various similarities between the four certification standards for operational buildings, as demonstrated by the above tables, there are also considerable differences between the four approaches both in terms of the certification processes and the technical requirements. As such, it is very difficult to compare the merits and value of a specific certification rating for one standard against a rating from one of the other standards. Consequently, the selection of the most suitable certification standard will be project specific and should be informed by the project team's sustainability aims and objectives for each asset. Location and local market factors may also steer the choice of certification.

Regardless of the differences between the standards, all four set requirements that aim to reward performance above standard practice for existing buildings. Therefore, any rating achieved against any of the standards would demonstrate a level of sustainability performance beyond that of an average building of a similar type. Achieving any of the higher ratings would demonstrate projects as being high performing buildings with excellent sustainability credentials.

In a post-pandemic world and with the urgent need for the built environment to decarbonise to meet net zero carbon trajectories, there will be an increasing demand for asset owners and investors to demonstrate the value of their assets, with an asset's sustainability performance a key factor in this. As such, third party assessed green building certification will continue to be regarded as good evidence that an asset's sustainability impacts are being appropriately considered as part of its operations and management.

EVORA can advise clients on the most appropriate green building certification for their individual assets or wider portfolios and has in-house experts that are able to deliver BREEAM, DGNB and LEED certification for operational buildings across Europe.

## **HEAD OFFICE**

London +44 (0)20 3326 7333

## **MANCHESTER**

Bolton +44 (0)1204 328 464

## **GERMANY**

Frankfurt +49 (69) 153 294 435

## **ITALY**

Milan +39 (335) 7610305

## **WEB**

[www.evoraglobal.com](http://www.evoraglobal.com)

## **EMAIL**

[info@evoraglobal.com](mailto:info@evoraglobal.com)

## **SOCIALISE**

 @evoraglobal

 [linkedin.com/company/evora-global](https://www.linkedin.com/company/evora-global)

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