



European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy measure fact sheet

France

Sustainable Building Passport

Thematic Objective 1&3

September 2016

Implementing body:	CertiVéa; Association HQE
Key features & objectives:	A simpler visualisation of building quality with more international outreach, the Sustainable Building Passport is a voluntary certification Norme Française (NF) HQE applied to tertiary buildings
Implementation date:	2011
Targeted beneficiaries:	Office building owners; Organisations interested in enhancing their sustainable profile
Targeted sub-sectors:	Tertiary sector / service sector
Budget (EUR):	Not applicable

In a nutshell

The building sector accounts for around 43% of France's energy consumption.¹ As a result, it has been targeted as a key sector to reach the government's objectives in reducing greenhouse emissions, as put forward by the Grenelle Laws and the Sustainable Building Plan.² The Grenelle Law 2 states that "all buildings must have their energy consumption reduced by more than 38% before 2020".³

The quality certification of buildings by independent third parties contributes to this objective of the Grenelle Law 2.⁴ In order to avoid self-declarations and ensure a verified certification, French authorities developed the HQE building certification process and reference framework.⁵ With a market share of 85%, HQE is today the primary building certification system in France.⁶ The HQE certification system focuses on assessing environmental impacts throughout the complete life cycle of a building on the basis of performance indicators.

A survey by CertiVéa conducted in 2010 revealed that the "NF Certification Standard of Tertiary Buildings HQE" was perceived to be too complicated. The Sustainable Building Passport developed by CertiVéa addresses this need by providing a leaner and more

understandable complement to the existing HQE Certificate for tertiary buildings.⁷ Like any HQE certification, the Sustainable Building Passport is a voluntary certification offered to building owners who want to engage in sustainable actions.

General description

HQE is managed by a group of stakeholders within a recognised public service organisation called HQE Association. The trademark, NF (owned by the French standards body, AFNOR Certification), is synonymous with quality in France. The French certification trademark is NF HQE™.

There are three bodies in charge of delivering certification in France:

- Certivea for local planning and non-residential buildings that are being built, renovated or used;
- Cerqual for Residential buildings, renovated or used;
- Cequami for detached houses.

The Sustainable Building Passport was introduced in September 2011 by CertiVéa and the *Association pour la Haute Qualité Environnementale (ASSOHQE)*. Next to being suggested by certified clients, the Grenelle Building Plan working group on "quality signs" – also composed of large businesses – had equally stressed the importance to adapt building labels to clients' needs.⁸

The aim of the Passport was to establish a more readable classification at international level indicating the quality of the building on the basis of the building design and use. The Passport is a complementary certification to the existing HQE certification scheme that is applied to new or renovated tertiary buildings, and has been operative since 2005.⁹ It is not an autonomous certificate. Next to being available on the French market, the certificate is also available in an English version for HQE operations internationally.

The new, simplified visualisation of the Passport displays the overall performance levels of certified buildings in the fields of

energy, environment, health and comfort by applying a ranking of 1-4 stars. The performance ranges from Good, Very Good, Excellent to Exceptional. To indicate the global assessment of a building's environmental performance, the stars of all 4 categories are added up to a total of 4 to a maximum of 16 stars.

Table 1: Sustainable Building Passport performance scale

1-4 stars	Good
5-8 stars	Very good
9- 12 stars	Excellent
13-16 stars	Outstanding

The process to obtain the certification remains identical to the NF HQE certification for tertiary buildings. This process includes four major steps:

1. Registration: Submission of certification application files incl. document review and transmission and acceptance of the registration;
2. Audit of the standard requirements by an independent expert;
3. Official announcement of certification including transmission of certificate;
4. Communication and enhancement of certification in collaboration with the Customer Center incl. logos and CertiVéa communication on social networks, website, etc.

The **HQE framework** comprises 14 targets incl. the buildings setting within its immediate environment, low carbon construction site, energy and water management systems, etc.

The Sustainable Building Passport was 'cost free' for tertiary buildings that had already obtained the NF HQE certification until the end of 2011. Thereafter, the costs amounted to 500-600 EUR per certification in addition to the costs linked to the certification of the NF HQE Tertiary Sector certificate. These costs vary according to the characteristics of the building ranging between 12,000-25,000 EUR. Financial advantages linked to obtaining the certificate include discounts on trainings offered by the Centre Scientifique et Technique du Bâtiment (CSTB) or discounts for additional certifications.

Achieved or expected results

The Sustainable Building Passport is applied to new buildings and renovation works with the purpose to contribute to the target to reduce energy consumption of all existing buildings by 38% by 2020.¹⁰ HQE is by far the dominating building certification in France, with a national share of 85% of all certified tertiary buildings up until 2014. Meanwhile, the average cost per HQE non-residential certification in 2014 amounted to approximately €18,000 per certified building.¹¹

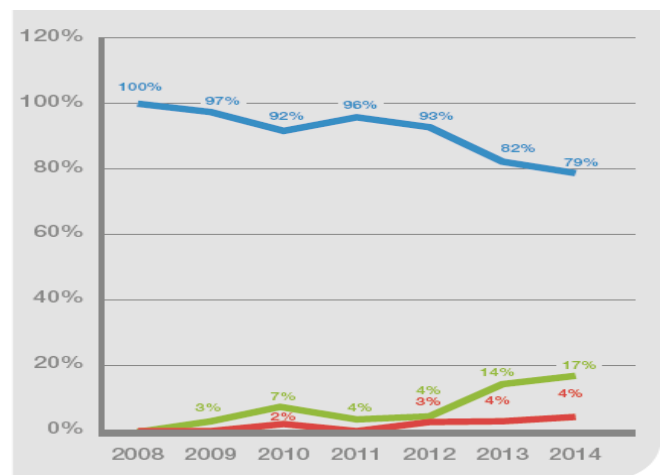
Table 2: Share of HQE Certifications in France in 2014

Total number of certifications	1370
HQE Certifications	1170 (85%)
BREEAM	177 (13%)
LEED	23 (2%)

Source: Green Building Council France, Green Soluce (2015). The Environmental Certification Barometer – 2015 Edition

In fact, HQE certificates only received competition from other certificates since 2009, namely from the British BREEAM and the U.S. LEED system. While the share of new HQE certified buildings has been decreasing as compared to BREEAM certifications since 2011, HQE remains the main building certification in France.

Figure 1: Building certification market evolution in France



Source: Green Building Council France, Green Soluce (2015). The Environmental Certification Barometer – 2015 Edition.

A look at the performance levels of HQE certifications since 2005 shows that 89% of certificates distributed were either "Very Good" or "Excellent", while only 9% received the best mark "Outstanding".

Figure 2: Breakdown of performance levels for the NF HQE® certification



Source: Green Building Council France, Green Soluce (2015). The Environmental Certification Barometer – 2015 Edition.

The first Sustainable Building Passports were delivered to the following tertiary buildings:

- Office building renovation, Allianz, 20 Rue Victoire, Paris;
- New office building “Claude Bernard”, BNP Paribas Real Estate, Boulevard Mac Donald, Paris;
- New office building, Bouygues Immobilier, Saint-Quentin en Yveline;
- New office building “Newside”, Gecina, Île de France;
- New office building, Icade, Lille;
- 'New 'Majunga Tower' Office building, Unibail-Rodamco, La Défense, Paris.

Perspectives and lessons learned

The Sustainable Building Passport was the result of learning from clients' needs concerning the HQE certificate for tertiary buildings. In response to findings from an awareness and satisfaction survey from 2010 and upon recommendation from the working group on quality signs, the Sustainable Building Certificate was developed.

As a voluntary certificate, the Sustainable Building Passport has profited from a global sustainability trend supported by a policy framework established by the French authorities.¹² Given private companies' interest in obtaining recognition for their sustainable engagement, building certification has become a regular practice.

¹³

Although the Sustainable Building Passport and HQE certification aim to provide a more international certification, critiques have pointed out its lacking international recognition, as compared to other certificates, e.g. LEED.¹⁴ Another point of criticism targets the fact that the 14 targets of the HQE framework are not quantifiable.¹⁵

From the **perspective of the implementing authority (CertiVéa)**, the feedback with regard to the passport was very positive from various actors in the building sector, e.g. real estate professionals, building owners and users.

Currently, CertiVéa experiences a strong demand for non-residential certification as a trend towards more sustainable development, i.e. the integration of environmental criteria into a sustainable development approach. The upcoming certification framework will emphasise this evolution towards sustainable performance combining environmental, social and economic indicators. In practice, the hitherto fields of “Energy, Environment, Health and Comfort” will be replaced by Environment, Economic Performance and Responsible Management. Instead of appreciating quality the main angle of the new framework will proceed to evaluating performance.

From the **perspective of the French construction federation**, the key value added of the Sustainable Building Passport is in the visibility of the client or investor. In the light of a new certification framework¹⁶ published in July 2016, the applicability of the

Sustainable Building Passport is today no longer given.¹⁷ The FBB further highlights that the Sustainable Building Passport only applies to non-residential buildings, a minority sector with only 182 certified buildings in the whole of France in 2015.

The certification of sustainable building stays, however, a dynamic topic in France. The French Environmental Ministry is currently piloting a “Digital Booklet for Maintenance Follow-up” to be tested until 2018, as part of the Digital Transition for Buildings Plan.¹⁸ This framework is planned to be applicable to all new buildings (residential and tertiary). For the French construction federation, it will be a priority to ensure that the new framework will be financially sustainably including for vulnerable households.¹⁹

From the **perspective of BNP Paribas Real Estate**, the HQE certification for tertiary buildings is a very complete environmental building certificate covering even health and comfort dimensions. With more than 1 million m² HQE certified office surface in France, BNP Paribas sees the main benefit of the Sustainable Building Passport in simplifying and visualising a rather complex certification system. As a result, the only HQE certificate used systematically in client communication is the Passport, highlighting its suitability as a clear communication instrument.

Endnotes

- ¹ UNEP (2012). State of play of sustainable building in France 2012. Available at: <http://www.unep.org/sbci/pdfs/SoPFrance-Final.pdf>
- ² <http://www.planbatimentdurable.fr/>
- ³ A decree drawing up specific obligations to be met is currently developed, source: UNEP (2012). State of play of sustainable building in France 2012. Available at: <http://www.unep.org/sbci/pdfs/SoPFrance-Final.pdf>
- ⁴ <http://www.actu-environnement.com/ae/news/certivea-passeport-batiment-durable-performance-globale-13569.php4>
- ⁵ UNEP (2012). State of play of sustainable building in France 2012. Available at: <http://www.unep.org/sbci/pdfs/SoPFrance-Final.pdf>
- ⁶ Green Building Council France, Green Soluce (2015). The Environmental Certification Barometer – 2015 Edition.
- ⁷ <http://www.alliance-habitat.com/blog/economies-energies/2042-passeport-batiment-durable-un-certificat-plus-simple-et-plus-comprehensible/>
- ⁸ http://www.planbatimentdurable.fr/le-chantier-signes-de-qualite-a670.html?id_rubrique=160
- ⁹ In French the certification is called “NF Bâtiments Tertiaires-démarche HQE”.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.cleantechrepublic.com/2011/09/21/passeport-batiment-durable-affichage-environnemental-hqe/>
- ¹¹ Information provided during phone enquiries with CertiVéa.
- ¹² For example, by the Grenelle Laws I and II.
- ¹³ European Commission (2014). Market study for a voluntary common European Union certification scheme for the energy performance of non-residential buildings. Final report. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/Final%20Oreport%20-%20Building%20Certification%20Schemes%20-%20FINAL%2026112014.pdf>
- ¹⁴ <http://imis.angers.free.fr/site/spip.php?article112>
- ¹⁵ Ibid
- ¹⁶ http://www.hqegbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015-05-Brochure_cadre_de_ref.pdf
- ¹⁷ Based on phone and e-mail exchange with FBB.
- ¹⁸ The Digital Transition for Buildings Plan (FR: “Plan Transition Numérique dans le Bâtiment”) is part of the Energy Transition for Green Growth Law adopted in 2015. Source: <http://www.batiment-numerique.fr/news/40/27/Carnet-numerique-de-suivi-et-d-entretien-du-logement.htm>
- ¹⁹ Ibid