

Premises accreditation – a useful tool or a passing fad?

As a healthy workplace environment is an increasing focus for both employers and employees, there is also a trend towards accrediting a building's wellness score.



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Will Scott looks at the trend for building accreditation and asks whether it is worth the effort involved

Recently the pace of change in the commercial property market has picked up. For a large number of organisations the cellular office is now a thing of the past, having been replaced by large open floor plates with as much light and shared space as possible. At first it was a desk for everyone, then hot-desking, now the ever-increasing trend is towards agile working and beyond, as discussed by Ayden Peach on page 9.

Riding on the back of the change in the use of space is an increased awareness of the impact our surroundings have on our health and wellbeing. People are starting to question the effect of these large open offices on the health and wellbeing of those who work in them. The issues of wellness and productivity – of how, when and where we do our work and the effect of our environment on that process – is becoming more important for not only employers but building owners. No one now disputes the concept that a happy worker is a more productive worker, who

takes less time off work and is, therefore, more cost effective. Studies have shown that by focusing on wellness in the workplace, you can improve individual productivity by around 10%.

Recent surveys have also shown that employees increasingly feel that it is the employer's responsibility and duty to now focus on the health and wellbeing of employees and to have policies and procedures in place to promote them.

It's all well and good having a wellness programme, but how can you practically measure such an ethereal concept like wellness and why would you actually want to measure how effective your premises is in supporting and promoting wellness?

As for the reasons why, this is relatively straightforward. If you are a building owner wanting to maximise the return on your investment, a building that has been certified as healthy and clean is going to be a more attractive prospect to any incoming tenant. If you are an employer – and the stats are to be believed – your organisation will be a more productive and happy place to work, and who would not want that?

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There are now a number of organisations that will accredit your premises, such as the Well Building Standard, Fitwell and BREEAM to name just a few of the market leaders. The nature and extent of the process you have to go through to accredit your building will depend on which organisation you choose. Some are more detailed and time-consuming than others, but they work on similar principles: namely, that your building is assessed against core criteria, such as:

1. the amount of natural and electric light there is in the premises and where;
2. the air quality within the premises and the common parts;
3. the water quality;
4. what facilities are available in the building, such as break out spaces, cafes, roof terraces, lifts, stairs etc.;
5. the location of and access to the premises.

Once you have provided all the relevant information you will be awarded a score or a gold, silver or bronze rating, depending on which organisation has accredited your premises.

Once a building is accredited, this can be used in marketing material or as evidence of an organisation’s commitment to actually improving the quality of working life. In addition, the accreditations come with recommendations on how to improve the premises in order to achieve a higher score.

Some recommendations might require a conversation with the landlord of the building. For example, work to improve the air quality in the building as a whole will generally require the building owner to carry out work to the air conditioning equipment, which would

be outside of the demise for most premises in a multi-let office block.

The works required might also impact on the amount of service charge payable, as any works required to the common parts of a multi-let building will incur costs. The landlord will want to at least try to recover these costs through the service charge, albeit tenants should not in general be paying for improvements to the building.

Accreditation schemes for commercial buildings are not limited to wellness. Companies such as Wired Score provide accreditation for a building’s connectivity. With the ever-increasing rise of agile working, telecommunications and connectivity are becoming increasingly important to both building owners and tenants – even more so as the risers in older office blocks are becoming full to capacity. Building owners who have the connectivity in the building assessed are now starting to use the gold, silver or bronze status in their marketing material.

So, if you are an office worker and want to improve the quality of life in the office, perhaps it is time to assess the wellness of your space. If you are a building owner and looking to increase your return and attract a better tenant, might it not be time to have your whole building assessed?