

## Why are benchmarks so important?

*benchmark*

*['ben(t)ʃma:k]*

**NOUN**

*benchmarks (plural noun)*

*1.a standard or point of reference against which things may be compared.*

*"the pay settlement will set a benchmark for other employers and workers"*

*synonyms:*

*standard · point of reference · basis · gauge · criterion · specification ·*

*[More]*

*2.a surveyor's mark cut in a wall, pillar, or building and used as a reference point in measuring altitudes.*

**VERB**

*benchmarks (third person present)*

*1.evaluate (something) by comparison with a standard.*

*"we are benchmarking our performance against external criteria"*

As the definition above says, Benchmarks are used to provide a reference that can be used to compare work to, for example benchmarking something for a quality of finish or technically used to show what good looks like and set a standard for what's expected throughout a project.

A building contract should make provisions for the sub-contractor to provide an appropriate number of benchmarks on a project. A full list of what is required should be scheduled and agreed between the parties and constructed at the earliest opportunity taking care that these benchmarks can be accessed and referenced throughout the project, and sufficient records taken to log what was constructed .

### Benchmarks can take a number of forms.

#### Quality

Finish

Tolerances

#### Technical

Detailing

System

**A Quality benchmark** can help to agree the standards for both the installation tolerances and the quality of finish and allow the methodology for checking the works to be explained, to avoid overzealous methods being employed. It is important to carry out the works as you would intend to do throughout the project and not to overwork this area.

After all, this will be the standard you would be expected to install throughout the duration of the contract.

**A Technical Benchmark** allows the parties to demonstrate how the system is compliantly assembled and also gives the opportunity to 'mock up' specific areas of work where there is complex detailing e.g. a partition interface with cladding. The benchmarks can form part of the finished works or be a standalone area and this will depend on the size of the project. It is imperative that quality benchmarks are available to view throughout the project, as these will need to be used as a comparison if there is a dispute, whereas a technical benchmark may simply be recorded photographically, however both types must be signed off by the relevant persons.

The FIS Advisory service are often asked to evaluate the quality of a finish where there is a dispute, yet in the majority of cases this could have been prevented by providing a finished area as a benchmark before the work started.

The quality of finish, be it tape & jointing or plaster skimming are probably the most disputed items on a project, and this is because the approach is often more subjective rather than objective from each party involved. A benchmark is a 'friend' and will assist in the smooth-running and completion of a project, hopefully with no disputes. If benchmarks are not mentioned in a specification or the

contract, it is advisable that you proactively offer this as part of your works, and once constructed, accurately record what was agreed and with whom.

You should also understand who should 'sign off' these benchmarks. This may require not only the Main Contractor to accept, but also the designer, client etc. Always insist that all parties involved in the sign off process agree and accept the quality of finish at the earliest opportunity.

Quality can be objective and also subjective where expectation can cloud decisions to accept a finished piece of work, so it's important to understand the standards you are being contracted to construct to, and this should be noted in the specifications. This could be British/European Standards, NHBC Standards, manufacturers recommendations and legislative requirements. If you don't have a copy of these standards and guidance, ensure you obtain them, read and fully understand what is expected of you in the documents. If there are no references to the standards in the contract documentation, then you should advise your client in writing which standards you will be using as the basis of the installed works (in conjunction with the manufacturer's recommendations). For example, Drylining tolerances are stated in BS8000-8 and BS 8212, plastering tolerances in BS EN 13914-2 etc

The Quality of Tape and jointing and drylining installation will be objective as these can be physically measured against prescribed dimensions. The finish of plaster skimming on the other hand is more subjective, however there is invaluable guidance on the flatness, smoothness and inspection regimes to be employed when inspecting this type of work. E.g. When inspecting plasterwork for acceptance, surfaces shall be viewed from the positions normally used in the adjacent area and this would be from the entrance doorway and from the centre of the room in a normal domestic house and from about 2 metres away from the surface in larger areas. This is stated in the British Standards and should be used by both the installers and by those inspecting the works to ensure a similar approach is taken. Check the final lighting conditions, natural and artificial, and always install the works using supplementary lighting which is adequate to facilitate the production of a good standard of finish

If there are any omissions in the standards or the specifications for any items requiring inspecting, this can also be benchmarked and agreed.

Providing **Technical benchmarks** for example in the Firestopping of Service Penetrations provide a number of useful purposes. They can demonstrate the technical competence of the sub-contractor and show they have a knowledge and understanding of how systems are constructed. They can also be useful to understand how a detail may work on site with all of the building tolerances

factored in. They provide a useful point of reference throughout the project so the site team know 'what good looks like'. It is always recommended that both the manufacturer and competent persons check the technical benchmarks, and this is particularly important when fire performance is required.

With firestopping benchmarks, we would always recommend a sample wall (or floor) is constructed with all penetration seals installed in this area (where practicable to do so), and this can be used as a control sample for all to see and understand. Sample areas may only be possible on larger projects, however a benchmark of each type of penetration seal should always be provided and signed off by the relevant competent persons.

Samples and Benchmarks can also allow for any early warnings if there are any problems or spatial reasons why the design may not be possible.

Lifted from an article in SpecFinish July 2022 by Alex Double of ADDC design

Further reading [Firestopping of Service Penetrations - FIS \(thefis.org\)](https://www.thefis.org/)