Shadow gaps, flush skirtings and minimal *trim*

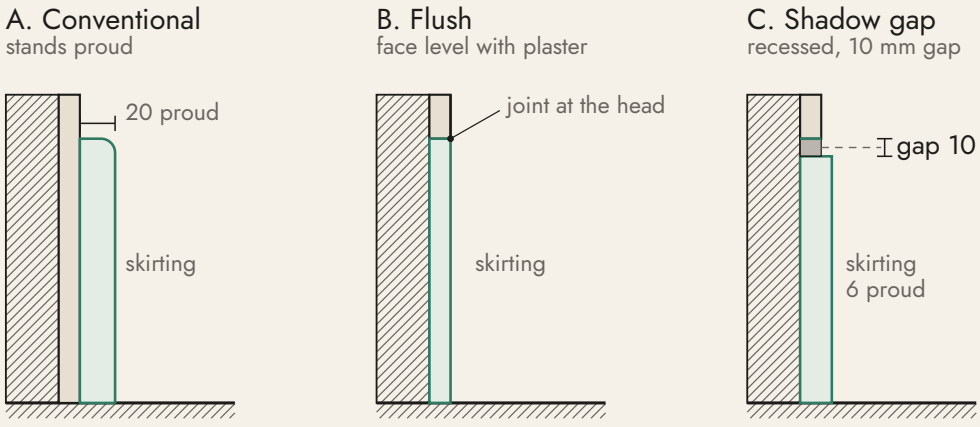
A shadow gap puts the wall's errors in plain sight. This sheet draws the details, works out what a wall out by 3 mm does to a 10 mm gap, and gives wording to write flatness, plumb and the gap into the specification.

AT A GLANCE

Element	Limit in LABC Warranty Technical Manual v11 (2022)	What it does to a shadow gap (our note)
Wall, flatness	±3 mm on a 2 m straight edge; ±3 mm on 450 mm for board joints, not readily visible from 2 m	A straight line 10 mm from the wall can measure 7 to 13 mm, and a ripple shows over a short distance.
Wall, plumb	8 mm up to 3 m high; 8 mm per storey and 12 mm in all above 3 m	A vertical gap beside a lining can change by about 5.6 mm over a 2.1 m door (8 x 2.1 ÷ 3).
Internal corners	±10 mm in 500 mm	A corner out of square opens the mitre of a continuous channel.
Floor and ceiling	Flat ±5 mm on 2 m; level 3 mm per metre up to 6 m, 20 mm beyond	A level skirting over a floor falling 3 mm in each metre gains 9 mm of gap in 3 m.
Cracking at junctions	Some cracking up to 2 mm wide may occur at wall, floor and ceiling junctions	A flush junction shows it; a gap or bead can be designed to take it (our reading).
Skirting to floor	Gap not over 5 mm at completion; it can grow as the floor dries	That gap is added to any shadow gap at the foot.

These are the limits a new-home warranty scheme treats as acceptable, not design tolerances and not a standard. Our notes and arithmetic are in the third column. A designer can require tighter figures, and later editions of the manual may differ.

THREE SKIRTING SECTIONS



Hatched: wall core. Pale band: plaster, 12 mm. Sections at the foot of a wall; sizes are illustrative.

Sizes are illustrative.

WHAT GOES WRONG, AND WHAT TO WRITE

What goes wrong	What to write
The gap wanders along the run	Flatness in the plastering scope; form the gap in the wall or scribe the trim; mock up.
The gap at the foot varies	Scribe the skirting to the floor, or level the floor first.
Mitres open at corners	Mitre to the surveyed angle; survey every corner.
The gap is painted or filled shut	Say who finishes it, that it stays open, and that it is masked.
The gap crosses a fire or acoustic line	The consultant details the junction first. No figures given here.
Two trades, two tolerances	One written substrate tolerance in both scopes.

FIRE CLASSIFICATION AND GAPS IN ENGLAND

In England, Approved Document B leaves skirtings, architraves, cover moulds, picture rails and similar narrow members out of what counts as a wall lining (Volume 1 paragraph 4.3, Volume 2 paragraph 6.3; ceilings 4.6 and 6.6; 2019 edition with amendments to 2026). The wall behind is still a lining. A gap through a fire or acoustic partition is a specialist detail.

SPECIFICATION WORDING

SHADOW-GAP SKIRTING

Ref [S-02]: skirting [18] mm thick x [100] mm high, [recessed] with a shadow gap [10] mm wide x [10] mm deep at its head, formed by [a plaster stop bead / a rebated profile], as detail [D-14] at 1:1. Material [ ]. Finish [ ]. Scribed to the finished floor, with the gap at the foot measured from the floor and not from a datum; floor finish [laid before / after] the skirting. Gap width consistent within [ ] mm along each wall, as agreed on the mock-up.

SUBSTRATE FLATNESS (PLASTERING OR DRY-LINING SCOPE)

Walls and ceilings receiving shadow-gap or flush trim to be flat within [3] mm on a 2 m straight edge and within [3] mm on a 450 mm straight edge, and plumb within [3] mm up to 2.4 m high. Corners square within [ ] mm in 500 mm. Checked by [party] before joinery is fixed; work outside the limits corrected by [the main contractor] first.

MOCK-UP AND FINISH

A mock-up of [the skirting / the ceiling junction / a door lining] is to be built in [location] by [party] and approved by [designer] before production; it sets the standard for the gap. The gap is to be left open and painted [colour], not filled with paint, filler or sealant.

TERMS USED

Shadow gap
A deliberate recessed gap at a junction, such as skirting to wall or wall to ceiling, which reads as a clean dark line. It makes any difference between the wall and the trim visible in the line.

Stop bead (plaster stop)
A thin profile fixed to a wall that gives the plaster or board a straight edge to finish to, and can form a reveal.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- LABC Warranty Technical Manual Version 11, Section 20 Tolerances (2022/2023): 20.1.3 to 20.1.7. Read 5 Nov 2026.
- Architectural Woodwork Standards, 1st edition (2009), Section 10, 1.5.6.1.2 (US practice): BS 8212, 8000-5, 8000-8 and 1186-3 named only, not read.
- Approved Document B Vols 1 and 2 (England), 2019 edition with amendments to 2026: paras 4.3, 4.6, 6.3, 6.6. Read 5 Nov 2026.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/shadow-gaps-and-flush-trim. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.