

**RIAI QUESTIONS NEED FOR ADDITIONAL 'GRANDFATHER CLAUSE'
IN BUILDING CONTROL ACT CURRENT LEGISLATION ALREADY ACCOMMODATES
REGISTRATION OF ALL COMPETENT ARCHITECTS
AMENDMENT BILL UNDERMINES CONSUMER PROTECTION,
DAMAGING TO INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION, AND IS UNNECESSARY**

Tuesday, 27th July, 2010: The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) today expressed grave concerns about the Building Control (Amendment) Bill 2010, a Private Members' Bill recently tabled by John O'Donoghue T.D., describing it as unnecessary and saying it would undermine consumer confidence and protection, invalidate the existing Register for Architects and would damage the reputation of Irish architects and architecture.

The Bill proposes an additional 'grandfather clause' exemption for unqualified persons aged 35 or older who have provided architectural services for seven years or more, but who are unwilling to verify their standard and quality of work through independent assessment as already provided for in the legislation. Registrar, John Graby, said the existing legislation, introduced by Government in 2007 already provides for the registration of those who do not have formal architecture qualifications. This process, operated by the independent Technical Assessment Board is fair, accessible, structured, independent, and based on expert assessment of professional competence and experience unlike the process in the proposed amendment which specifically excludes any qualitative assessment and independent verification.

The Register for Architects was established in November 2009 and already has over 2,800 architects registered. The independent Technical Assessment Board is processing applications at present.

Mr Graby said that admitting persons to the Register for Architects without assessing their professional competence would not meet the EU minimum standard and would greatly undermine consumer protection and confidence.

"Unfortunately we have seen all too often in Ireland what a lax approach to regulation, combined with persons doing work they are not qualified for, can result in. It is vitally important for the reputation of the country, as well as for consumer confidence in the safety and quality of the building work they are commissioning that we are seen to be beyond question in our handling of this legal and regulatory requirement", said Mr Graby.

"The Register does not seek to exclude or disadvantage any competent person, whether they have formal qualifications or not. It is in no way elitist. We already have architects coming successfully through the independent Technical Assessment process. What we cannot have is consumers receiving a false guarantee of safety and quality from a statutory process that does not meet minimum European standards.

All this amendment tries to do is serve, at the expense of the consumer, those who are unwilling to have their knowledge, skill and competence assessed by an independent Government appointed statutory board", he added.

The RIAI is the Government appointed registration body and competent authority for architects in Ireland. The RIAI does not have a role in the decision of the Independent Statutory Admission Board or Technical Assessment Board. The assessment by the independent Technical Assessment Board ensures that people have an EU and internationally agreed and recognised minimum professional standard and is based on a practical assessment of their work and experience.

While having grave concerns about the proposed amendment, the RIAI as a registration body, can understand the action taken by John O'Donoghue given the amount of mis-understanding, mis-information and mis-representation about the Building Control Act 2007.

Mr Graby added that economic circumstances meant that many architecture firms and individual architects would be required, for the medium term, to seek work and employment abroad in order to practise their profession. The Register provides an internationally validated proof of professional competence. "It is essential that our standards, reputation and processes stand up to international scrutiny or we will do further damage to our good name. This proposal will undermine the validity and acceptability of all architectural qualifications in the State," he said.

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