

# letters



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## Protecting the title of 'architect'

*From: John Graby, director of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland and Registrar for Architects, 8 Merrion Square, Dublin 2*

Up until recently, the title 'architect' was without legal protection and, indeed, anyone could claim to be an architect. However, since the commencement of the *Building Control Act 2007* and the launch of the register for architects in November 2009, jointly launched by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and Minister for the Environment John Gormley, those misusing the title 'architect' can be liable to a fine not exceeding €5,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both, under section 18(1) of the *Building Control Act 2007*.

Established under the *Building Control Act 2007*, the register for architects lists architects whose qualifications meet the standards set out in the act. Now only architects who are on the register may use the title 'architect'. This development is of critical importance for Irish architecture, the construction industry and the general public, as the register for



architects establishes an internationally, EU-agreed and recognised professional standard against which all persons applying for registration will be measured.

The register, therefore, improves and protects the quality of service to consumers who can now see if an architect is registered by checking the online register at [www.riai.ie](http://www.riai.ie). The system also provides consumers with an advice service and with dispute resolution mechanisms in the case of poor service or suspected malpractice.

As of the end of November 2009, there are over 2,700 architects on the register. For people who are not fully qualified, but who have substantial experience, there is now an established framework, set up under the terms of the *Building Control Act*, to support

them in becoming registered architects.

Certainly, during the initial stages of registration, there will be people not on the register who have qualifications listed in the *Building Control Act 2007* or who are in the process of completing submissions for evaluation. There will also be those who don't have listed qualifications but who are preparing for assessment under the technical assessment process, which evaluates relevant experience in architecture and can lead to registration. In addition, there are those who are taking the register admission examination.

However, for persons not registered, nor in the process of registration, and who use the title 'architect' – either alone or in combination with any other words or letters, or name, or title, or description implying

the person is so registered, or who practises or carries on business under any name, title, not in accordance with relevant RIAI rules – legal action can be pursued, though our focus initially will be on supporting people to become registered.

The RIAI is the designated registration body and competent authority for architects in Ireland. Independence and government oversight is provided by the Admissions Board, the Technical Assessment Board, the Appeals Board and the Professional Conduct Committee, having a majority of non-architects nominated by the state and chairpersons with a legal background. The registration of architects is a serious process and the statutory independent committee has the same legal powers, rights and privileges as a High Court judge, including the discovery of documents and enforcing witnesses.

Since 1893, the RIAI has been committed to upholding the highest standards in architecture. The register for architects is a major milestone for the profession and will lead to securing higher quality in our built environment for future generations. **G**



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