

Trademarking the word ‘architect’ reduces choice

From: Brian Montaut, spokesperson for Architects’ Alliance, Bray, Co Wicklow.

I refer to the new compulsory registration of architects in Ireland, which is being managed on behalf of the state by the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland Limited (RIAI). I write for the Architects’ Alliance, which represents long-established, non-RIAI architects, who, because they were not members of the RIAI, were denied automatic registration. That exclusion has placed their hard-won livelihoods in jeopardy to the advantage of their competitors.

An EU directive is being incorrectly cited by our detractors in support of the new regime. In fact, the EU is specifically neutral on both the state registration of architects and the ‘protection of title’.

Nor does state registration confer any rights of access into the European market – it is purely an internal and entirely discretionary policy.

In the general discussion that has ensued, a mistaken comparison with doctors has been drawn in order to explain the ‘protection’ of the common-usage word ‘architect’. My reply is that many important professions are conducted without a need to commandeer the language. Doctor is not a ‘protected title’, nor for example are the descriptions ‘teacher’, ‘nurse’, ‘engineer’, ‘lawyer’ or ‘journalist’. The inevitable consequence of trademarking the plain word ‘architect’ is to create a closed shop and to reduce consumer choice.

This trouble can be reduced by ceasing to exclude the 1,000 or so non-RIAI architects,



whose established presence in the Irish market has been acknowledged by the Architects’ Council of Europe. It is simply achieved through the adoption, within the current legislation, of a standard, self-extinguishing ‘grandfather clause’ for long-established, market-proven architects. New entrants to the profession would continue to be bound by the new regime, for they can make no claim of prior establishment and market accreditation. A clause similar or identical to that

already provided in the *Building Control Act 2007* for the equally important professions of quantity surveyor and building surveyor, will suffice.

In addition to being made state registrar, the RIAI was also made a competent authority for architects. It is therefore particularly disturbing to learn of its newly launched political lobbying campaign, which is targeted against a parliamentary bill for just such a ‘grandfather clause’. Of course, it was hardly anticipated that the Royal Institute would use its state appointments in this way. But to also learn that RIAI credits for continuing professional development are awarded to members attending this week’s lobbying briefings takes the breath away. Only vested interests are served by continuing to deny us equity. **G**