

3 April 2009

NZRAB Newsletter 1/2009

Greetings from the New Zealand Registered Architects Board, this being our first newsletter for 2009.

The downturn

The economic downturn is “front of mind”, given its implications for the sector and the profession. Our first initial registration assessments for the year are in May, so we will see then if graduates are backing away from registration. Some states in Australia have gone through a registration cycle in recent months. In Western Australia apparently applications for initial registration are down 50 per cent, but in Queensland there’s been no drop off at all. What will happen here, we don’t know. If applications drop enough, we will cancel one of our registration rounds for the 2009/10 year.

The bigger question for the NZRAB is will the crunch see large numbers of architects not renewing their annual registration. We will know in June/July.

This raises the question of what architects who are out of work should do regarding their annual registration. If you aren’t working when the invoices go out and can’t afford to pay, we ask that you go into voluntary suspension, rather than just not responding. That way we won’t make things worse by chasing after you for the payment.

Formally voluntary suspension can be for between one and five years. However, if you go into voluntary suspension and then a week later find a job, it doesn’t matter. Just contact us with the good news, pay (or have your new employer pay) for your annual certificate of registration (which you/your new employer can do online), and your registration will be reactivated within a few days.

Voluntary suspension fee abolished

Also, as of now we will not be charging a fee for architects going into voluntary suspension. Last year the Board decided that the current fee does not make sense and we’ve decided to implement this change now, given that many architects are facing hard times.

We will send out the annual certificate invoices a little earlier than in past years to give architects more time to sort out what they want to do.

Voluntary suspension and CPD

Another change worth reporting – architects in voluntary suspension can now do and record CPD. So, if you are in voluntary suspension, you can stay in touch with the profession by taking part in CPD and you can record it in the normal way on your personalized CPD website, just as if you were currently registered.

We’ve made this change because in the CPD survey last year there was a widely held view among architects that this should be so. Women raising children were especially strong on this.

If you’re in voluntary suspension, try logging on via “Architect’s Login” at <http://www.nzrab.org.nz/> as you did when you were working. If you’ve lost your password you can generate another. People in voluntary suspension should **not** feel obliged to do CPD, but the option is now there if you want it.

That begs the question of what happens when people in voluntary suspension want to practice again. You can revive your full registration at any time just by contacting the NZRAB. We then send you an invoice for your latest annual practicing certificate and once that is paid you are “in harness”. The only exception is that if you were first registered, or last had a competence review, more than five years ago, then you must have a competence review again before your registration can be reactivated. That’s another reason why doing CPD when in voluntary suspension is a good idea, depending on your circumstances.

Don’t sacrifice quality

We’ve heard anecdotal reports that some architects are cutting their fees to the bones to keep working. The NZRAB makes the plea “Don’t cut your fees so much that to make any kind of return you have to cut the quality of the service you provide.” The risk is that taking short cuts will lead to a quality or process failure and then a discipline case. For any architect a discipline case is potentially a disaster, and “I had to cut corners to cut costs” is no excuse. So don’t sacrifice quality to win a commission on price. The risks to your reputation are too great.

For some more thoughts on this, if you are a member have a look at the NZIA’s Practice Note PN3.209 which conveys a similar message. The NZIA Practice Series 2009 is about “Improving business performance in the current economic climate”, which is good too.

Impact on NZRAB

We’ve been looking hard on the down-turn for the NZRAB’s finances. Contingency plans have been prepared in case we have to sharply contract our spending.

Better governance

The NZRAB has been running for nearly three years now and our systems are settling down. With that we have become a bit more formal and the Board has now adopted for itself a Financial Policy, a Sensitive Expenditure Policy and an Honoraria Policy. We’ve also established terms of reference for our Strategy and Finance Committee and a Preferred Suppliers Schedule. You can view all this and our other governance documents at <http://www.nzrab.org.nz/default.aspx?Page=172>.

Discipline

The NZRAB has had its first case of an architect being found wanting via a discipline procedure. Shortly we will provide you with information about the case. It is good to learn from the mistakes of others, given that “there but for the grace of God go I”.

Access to Japan

Does working as an architect in the world’s second largest economy appeal? The NZRAB has been in discussion with the architects’ registration agency in Japan and we’ve made great progress on getting an access agreement. Once finalised, this will provide senior architects from each economy with a fast track way to register in the other economy. We hope to have it signed off by the end of April. This will be an agreement made within the APEC Architect Framework. Talks have been scheduled with Singapore too.

Also, the number of New Zealand APEC Architects has increased by a third – that is to say, we have one more – Mr Stuart Huggett. For more information about the APEC Architect Project, go to <http://www.nzrab.org.nz/default.aspx?page=105>.

That’s our news so far. As always, if you have any concerns or feedback, please contact me directly

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