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Sore lack of architects

IT IS undeniably good to have a professional body like Lembaga Arkitek Malaysia (LAM) governing the architectural profession and registration of architects in Malaysia.

However, at the rate LAM is allowing new registration of architects in Malaysia, I don't think we would have enough architects by the year 2020. This year, only 50 architects passed their professional exam out of about 280 candidates.

By 2020, Malaysia would have just another 500 more architects added to the existing 1,700. This would make the architect to population ratio about 1:13,000. This is without factoring in the retirement of existing professionals and population increase.

This is obviously very low in comparison with other developed nations: Britain 1:1,860, the United States 1:3,176, Australia 1:2,330.

One might argue that the strict admission is to protect public interest and only those who are really qualified with a high level of knowledge and intelligence can get registered.

One could also argue that architects must master the theoretical part of practice in order to ensure that high professional ethics are upheld, but LAM must be transparent about this. A more inclusive approach should be created.

As of now, the candidates are not even allowed to view their answer scripts to find out what mistakes they made in answering the questions so that they could correct them in their next attempt.

LAM or perhaps Persatuan Arkitek Malaysia (PAM) needs to start looking into ways of creating a more reasonable number of architects to match the country's progress. Perhaps a more systematic way of "re-training" aspirant professional architects needs to be devised so that architects with high professional moral responsibility who could effectively carry out the wide spectrum of architectural scope of services can be created fast.

Malaysia needs around 15,000 architects by the year 2020 to match Britain's architect to population ratio of 1:1,860. In order to do that, about 1,325 architects need to get registered every year until the year 2020.

We really need the numbers to serve the nation because the reality is that currently most of the buildings in Malaysia are designed and supervised by non-registered architects.

Even these numbers are not enough, resulting in one architect serving four projects at one time and exposing them to mistakes due to lack of focus.

The risk of building collapse is higher because we don't have enough architects to supervise building construction, and even if we do, the supervision is carried out by those without or who have only limited liability.

I would like to suggest that LAM and PAM pool their professional expertise and start a comprehensive training programme. The trainers could be from the panel of LAM examiners themselves so that the candidates can be trained exactly as per the required mould of professionals aspired by LAM.

The training with comprehensive syllabus could be held every weekend from now until the July examination date or it could be a one-month intensive course prior to the examination date.

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Tuesday December 7, 2010

A monumental problem

I REFER to “Sore lack of architects,” (*The Star*, Nov 25). The Architect’s Act exists to protect the interests of the public by ensuring that only persons who are appropriately qualified, sufficiently competent and possessing the required integrity are allowed to be registered to practise as architects as there is much at stake when things go wrong.

The Board of Architects Malaysia (LAM) is entrusted with the task of regulating the profession by ensuring that those who are qualified to be registered under the Act meet the required standards in terms of knowledge and understanding of the legislative, technical and ethical aspects of the profession and also to ensure that these standards are met by architects.

The fact that there are relatively few building failures where architects are involved points to the efficacy of this regulatory function.

LAM holds annual professional examinations, both oral and written, to gauge the readiness of the candidates to join the ranks of professional architects.

In addition to this, it also regulates and monitors continued professional development (CPD) programmes for those registered to practise as part of their annual re-registration requirements.

However, it is not the responsibility of LAM to train aspiring candidates for their professional exams.

LAM is equally dismayed by the poor passing rate as it is a sad reflection on the state of the industry and the profession.

It has to be understood that it is not a matter of LAM “allowing” new registrations but a matter of candidates actually not passing the Part 3 professional exams.

It must be reiterated that the exam papers are set at a level of knowledge based on professional practice that one would expect of a candidate with two years’ experience in an architect’s office.

There is no quota system nor are the expectations unreasonable since the passing mark is set at 50%.

It has to be emphasised that the two years’ experience is the minimum period of training required.

The majority of the candidates generally require more time to acquire the necessary skills and experience either by reason of there being insufficient exposure or lack of guidance while at work.

In this respect, the profession has a major role to play in the training of future professionals.

Too often, graduate architects are employed to work exclusively on specific tasks such as design or

presentation with little exposure or experience on the other aspects of professional training, resulting in a failure to acquire the set of skills necessary to cut it as a professional architect.

On the other hand, the graduate architects who aspire to be registered as professional architects should be asking their employers at the onset whether they would be provided with opportunities to learn all aspects of professional practice during their tenure with the company and at the same time seek avenues to improve their skills and knowledge outside the office.

In the interest of their own career, they must be prepared to change employment if the situation warrants such a move.

LAM is very much aware of the need to increase the number of professional architects in order to serve the public interest, and over the years has enlisted the assistance of the Malaysian Institute of Architects and its members to carry out both Part 3 and CPD programmes and seminars designed to both disseminate and reinforce knowledge of candidates wishing to present themselves for the Part 3 examinations.

LAM is not sure how transparent the writer, Aspirant Architect, wants the board to be.

No professional body divulges examination marks or returns answer scripts to its candidates.

The examiners do not mark the scripts with comments so nothing could be gained from such an exercise.

We welcome suggestions from candidates and architects as to how we can raise the number of professional architects in the country while maintaining the necessary standards of competence to safeguard public interest.

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President,

Board of Architects Malaysia.