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Big stumbling block for architects

WHILE it is good and proper to have governing bodies over the architectural profession in Malaysia – the Board of Architects (Lam) and the Malaysian Institute of Architects (Pam) – it is also pertinent that actions, decisions and activities of these bodies be constantly reviewed by the Government, especially by the relevant ministry.

The Part 3 professional architectural examination is a classic example. To be a professional architect in Malaysia, one must pass the Part 3 examination. To register for it, one must first graduate from recognised schools of architecture, undergo years of certified training, prepare reports, fill in the log books, pass the oral exam and then take the written exam.

The Part 3 written exam seems to be the culmination whereby upon passing it, you can then register yourself with the LAM as a professional architect and with the Pam as a corporate member.

The passing rate is known to be stringent, and over the years, there seems to be an accumulation of unsuccessful candidates who have to repeatedly take the exam over and over again. The exam venues get bigger and bigger each year.

In 2009, the Part 3 exam was held in July with more than 300 candidates. They range from young architects from private firms and the Government, executives, directors, professors, whose ages vary from the late 20s to even 50s. The results were announced in mid-November and only a mere 9% passed.

It flabbergasted almost everybody! The exam has become so ridiculously stringent.

Only 31 candidates passed while the others must have been considered by the exam panel as so stupid that they can't even differentiate a building from a tree!

I am talking about determined Malaysians who want to be competent Malaysian professionals to serve the country. I am not yet talking about those who have given up hope. But even this group of people, although small in number, should not be forgotten as well. They have simply given up taking these exams because they feel there is no hope of passing. What a waste of valuable resources.

If you call the Board and ask them why you failed, the common answers are: "Sorry, the person in charge is not in," or "Only the panel knows," or "We can't disclose that."

We just want to check whether the marks have been calculated right. They will tell you to appeal and the fee is RM900.

In times when Malaysia can do with more professional architects, why is it so difficult to join the profession?

We want an explanation from the Lam and the Pam.

**ONE MALAYSIAN ARCHITECT,
Penang.**

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LEMBAGA ARKITEK MALAYSIA

Response to “Big stumbling block for architects”

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The entry to any profession requires a rigorous examination of a person’s ability to perform with an accepted level of competency.

Architecture is no different. As correctly pointed out by “One Malaysian Architect”, in this country, to become a professionally qualified architect, one has to undergo a prescribed course including a minimum of 2 years practical experience, for which a log-book and a Practical Experience Evaluation Report of such experience has to be kept and submitted, passing an oral examination and finally proceeding to a written examination.

The recent building collapses underline the need for candidates undertaking the Part III Examination to realise that architects in practice are not just designers of buildings but have to take on a host of other responsible actions including supervision of construction works and contract administration to bring a project to a successful conclusion.

Of paramount importance is the safety of all who will use the structures that we as architects design and that is why under the Street, Drainage and Building Act, Architects have been designated as a “Submitting Person” with all the legal responsibilities that come with it. Hence the core competencies of the architect encompass not only professional knowledge and experience that he or she has acquired during the training period in the work place but also the moral responsibility that comes with any job.

At the same time, an architect must be able to carry out his advisory, contractual and fiduciary duties in an accurate, efficient and professional manner so that his clients, who are the catalyst for development, will experience higher profits and enhancement of their reputation.

These core competencies are what the Part III Professional Examination seeks to ascertain.

The Part III Professional Examination has been in existence for almost 40 years and in its present form consists of two papers with questions derived from a published syllabus of subject matter that a candidate is deemed to have sufficient knowledge of in order to be able to perform competently as a professionally registered architect. The examination questions are set in both Bahasa Melayu and English and candidates have the option to choose their language of preference to answer.

In the past, candidates had to pass both papers in order to fulfil the exam requirements but recently this was changed so that candidates who passed one paper was only required to retake just the paper they did not pass. This has contributed to the increase in the number of candidates comprising those sitting for the first time, those repeating both papers and those sitting or repeating one of the papers.

In order to assist the candidates, both PAM (Malaysian Institute of Architects) and LAM (Board of Architects, Malaysia) have held tutorials, seminars and workshops prior to the examination. Regretfully, at this year’s final workshop, it was noted that the workshop was not fully exploited as a platform by candidates to clarify or to address queries relevant to the exam. There was no active participation by candidates; rather they appeared to expect the panel to lecture to them instead.

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The method of assessing the papers is done in such a way that there is no room for bias. In the past, three examiners marked all the questions in each paper which meant that each candidate's paper was screened three times. Currently, two examiners mark one question in one paper only. This means that no examiner will know how the candidate fares in the rest of that particular paper and that each candidate will have had both his or her papers marked by a total of 16 examiners.

While it is unfortunate that such a large number of candidates were unable to obtain at least 50% to pass, the "determined Malaysians" would have to seriously dedicate themselves to preparing for such an important examination. Perennial common comments from our panel of examiners in regard to answers by the candidates all point to a lack of preparation by candidates (or wrong preparation) in their approach to this exam.

Every year, it is the duty of the Part III Examination Panel to prepare questions for the two papers based on standards commensurate with the level of competency expected of candidates who, upon passing, can immediately be registered with LAM and therefore be able to commence practice as professional architects.

In the absence of a better system to gauge the candidates' readiness for professional practice, the Part III examination procedure at present seems to be the most appropriate form of assessment. LAM affirms that those who have passed the exams have successfully demonstrated their ability to do so by thoroughly understanding all the elements required to become a professional.

President
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