

Almost three years after Structural Engineers Registration (SER) was first introduced into Jersey, Approved Certifier John White of T & G Limited explains the benefits of the SER scheme.

Anyone wishing to undertake a building project in Jersey is now required by law to employ an Approved Certifier of Design to ensure the proposed work meets the requirements of Part 1 of the second schedule of *Building Bye-laws (Jersey) 2007*.

The certifying engineer is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the design of the structure for such a project satisfy these requirements, but the new procedure also makes engineers who are responsible for building structures specifically aware of their responsibilities and duties in the design, thus improving assurance of structural safety.

Historically, under the Jersey system of building control, designers of buildings have had to submit plans and details of their proposals to the Planning and Environment Department (PED) for approval before a building permit is issued, in order to limit the risk to public safety as a consequence of inadequate building performance. A key element of this verification process was to ensure that the structural design complied with all relevant parts of the aforementioned *Building Bye-laws (Jersey) 2007*.

Until the introduction of this new legislation, the verification of structural plans submitted in support of an application for Building Bye-laws approval had been the responsibility of PED although, in most cases, the task of checking was delegated to a third party.

However, it was recognised within the industry that this process could delay the commencement of building projects. So, following consultation with local engineering practices, PED began to investigate different ways of verifying the structural designs forming part of a bye-laws application.

Certification of structural designs by an approved person for building control purposes had first been introduced in Scotland in 1992 but, following concerns over the lack of an independent assessment of those signing the design certificate, it was not felt this system adequately protected the public interest. As a consequence, a new system of certification was introduced under the *Building (Scotland) Act 2003* which first created the role of Approved Certifier of Design.

A joint working group of the Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE) and Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) was set up to administer the certification scheme, which led to the formation of

Structural Engineers Registration Limited (SER) – the body which now issues the necessary design certificates.

In 2007, the Minister for Planning and Environment approved a similar scheme for the certification of the design of building structures in Jersey and SER was appointed to manage it, with certificates being issued from 1 January 2008.

Under the scheme, SER is responsible for assessing both individual candidates and local firms for registration either as Approved Certifiers of Design (Building Structures) or as Approved Bodies for Certification of Design (Building Structures).

Individual membership of the scheme is open to Chartered Engineers who are members of the IStructE or ICE and have at least five years' relevant experience since gaining chartered status. There are also requirements in respect of declarations of experience and continued professional development. Firms wishing to be members of the scheme have to agree to adopt appropriate quality control procedures, hold adequate professional indemnity insurance and make provision for the Approved Certifiers they employ to receive appropriate training and access to all relevant documentation.

A fundamental principle of the scheme is that Approved Certifiers are required to adopt a “holistic approach” to the certification process.

This means certifiers must satisfy themselves that not only the structure itself but also any and all specialist contractor-designed structural elements specified by the project engineer or architect comply with the relevant requirements of the Building Bye-laws. Such items could range from foundation piles to supplier designed roof trusses and include bespoke balcony fixing systems and curtain walling.

As one of the first Approved Bodies, T & G Limited has considerable experience in this area, but is still aware of delays in the certification process caused by a lack of information with respect to contractor designed elements. To address this issue, we have produced a guidance document with a view to raising awareness of the importance of making such information available to the certifier as soon as practically possible.

It is important to understand that SER certificates relate solely to the design of the building and do not certify any aspects of construction. It remains the responsibility of the Building Control Officer to ensure that the construction project is carried out on site in accordance with the certified plans.

There is no doubt that the introduction of SER has increased the workload for consulting engineers both in terms of administration and in implementing the necessarily rigorous and detailed checking procedures required by the Scheme, but what are the benefits of SER?

These may be summarised as follows:

No delays to a start on site as there is no further checking of structural plans that have been certified.

Client confidence that the entire structure complies with the relevant sections of Part 1 of the second schedule to the *Building Bye-laws (Jersey) 2007*.

Approved Certifiers must have met the high levels of qualifications and experience necessary to be accepted into the scheme.

A firm employing at least one Approved Certifier must meet the criteria of an Approved Body.

Members of a certification scheme have their work audited by the scheme's administrator.

Approved Bodies are required to hold insurance cover to any project to be certified.

For further information:

SER Website www.ser-ltd.com

To download a copy of the guidance notes, visit T & G's website www.tandglimited.com

To view the register of Approved Certifiers and Approved Bodies, go to the Planning and Environment section of www.gov.je.

John White, September 2010