Local Government and Communities Committee

Building Regulations in Scotland

Submission from Bern Balfe Architect

I am an architect and sole practitioner. The majority of my work is domestic alterations involving building warrants for relatively minor works and my comments below are made in the light of this.

- **Should verification of building standards be extended to organisations other than local authorities?**

  Verification should be left to architects at least for minor works, with an opportunity for consultation with an expert from either the local authority or SBSA for clarification on issues which are unclear. The building regulations attempt to cover a plethora of different building types under one set of rules and there are a number of grey areas; therefore a limited amount of consultation should be offered without charge.

- **Should procedural regulations specify a minimum requirement for the inspection of ongoing building works, to ensure compliance with building standards?**

  No. It would be better to require inspection by a fully trained architect or surveyor who has had some input into the writing of the specification.

- **Should there be a statutory system to provide redress for new home buyers whose properties are subsequently found not to meet building standards requirements?**

  I would support this particularly for large scale new build developments.

- **Are the current building warrant and associated fees set at the correct level?**

  No. The cost is too high for domestic alteration work. There is also a significant amount of time involved in dealing with warrant submissions, the cost of which has to be passed on to the client and is largely a duplication of work which needs to be done anyway for preparation of appropriate construction information.

- **Any other issues relating to the regulations which you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee?**

  I think the Scottish Building Control system is too labour-intensive and bureaucratic. The English system (which I admit I don’t have recent experience of) seemed to me
when I last used it to be based more on respect for the integrity and skill of the professional. A lighter regulatory touch in Scotland might save a lot of money which could be better used elsewhere.

On the basis of my own limited experience of recently graduated architects, it seems to me that more training is required for young architects in the reasoning behind, and correct interpretation of the building regulations. Perhaps a stronger requirement to demonstrate understanding and proficiency before qualification would be worth considering. If integrated in design ideas from the start, building regulations can be used to support and inform safer design practice, so that they do not become merely a hindrance to the achievement of design goals.