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Current News.

Unprecedented times! The current COVID-19 crisis has certainly taken over our lives for the moment. The one & only priority for Assessors has to be the protection of themselves, their families & their communities from this once-in-a-lifetime virus. However, we must also look to the future; this crisis will not last forever - our family & work lives will start to normalize again in a few short months.

There may be some ambiguity about whether BER Assessors can continue to operate under current Government restrictions in light of the fact that they have listed “engineering, technical testing activities and analysis” as among essential services. However, their guidance of Monday last (March 30th) clearly states:

“The government has decided that everybody should stay at home until 12 April 2020, except for the following situations:

- **to travel to and from work, or for purposes of work, only where the work is an essential health, social care or other essential service and cannot be done from home”**

In the opinion of this writer, the above restriction precludes carrying out BER Assessments (obviously other than office-based New Build – Provisional BER’s). If a particularly urgent situation arises, I submit that, at a minimum, you will need to carry ID as well as an instruction from a Solicitor demonstrating the essential nature of the particular BER. This may or may not satisfy a Garda checkpoint. However, I must emphasize that surveying properties, even if they are vacant, is far from risk-free in the context of COVID-19. The default position has to be to STAY AT HOME in all situations.

I should confirm that SEAI have not issued any definitive guidance on this matter to date. We wrote to them on two occasions over the last 10 days, particularly in relation to grant-related post-works BER’s, but are still awaiting a reply. For your information, I did receive a reply from the BEH team on March 25th last confirming that grant deadline extensions will be given to Home-Owners who are affected by current circumstances, if works have commenced. If works have not commenced, then applications may have to be re-made if grant drawdown deadlines are imminent.

Notwithstanding the above, the Government imposed restrictions of Friday last March 27th trumps all else.

The current situation will undoubtedly have an enormous negative financial impact on Assessor incomes – in fact, many Assessors will have no fee income for the short to medium-term. I would urge Members to check out

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their entitlements at <https://revenue.ie/en/news/articles/guidance-on-the-temporary-covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme.aspx>

For your information, BERAA has written to SEAI on this date requesting suspension of collection of BER publication fees for the duration of this crisis – we will update you as soon as we receive a response. My understanding is that they are not currently applying a credit block for failed collection of a direct debit payment.

On a positive note, this “break in play” provides all of us with an opportunity to refresh our skills and seek guidance on any niggling doubts in relation to our interpretation of domestic & non-domestic BER procedures. BERAA would urge you to compile all your queries into a single document and forward to the Helpdesk for adjudication.

Perhaps you could consider forming small local “think-tanks” among Assessors to discuss ways of improving BER delivery, in the context of Assessors and/or SEAI? We believe that we all have an opportunity now over the coming weeks to take stock of how the BER Program works for us (the Customer). Can SEAI improve its work practices & procedures? Can we improve our work practices?

We need Assessors to advise BERAA of issues that they want addressed. BERAA needs your active participation as we strive for a better future for BER Assessors.

Towards this end, BERAA will shortly be setting up a private BERAA Facebook Group (for Members only) where Assessors can share experiences and express opinions. Further details to follow.

BERAA is very grateful to Mike Teahan of RBSI who has agreed to put on a webinar tomorrow (Thurs April 2nd) at 10am for **BERAA Members** in respect of heat emitter design. However, in light of the short notice, we will forward a link to the ZOOM meeting later today to all Assessors on this occasion.

BERAA is in the process of organizing further informative webinars for its members over the coming weeks.

PLEASE JOIN BERAA TODAY

Recent Correspondence from SEAI Program Manager

As you will be aware from the March Newsletter, we wrote to the BER Program Manager in early February with multiple queries – a reply to same was received on March 23rd last. The most pertinent points in the reply are as follows:

1. The Advisory Report will be updated in 2020
2. There will be a DEAP4 update in April 2020:
 - a. Age Bank K will be included
 - b. Revisions in respect of Library “searchability” functions
 - c. Revisions in respect of capability to edit Windows & Heat Pump characteristics
 - d. Inclusion of a Description field on the DEAP4 webpage title-bar to enable easier scenario management (for example, when working with multiple retrofit options)
3. SEAI intends to issue a revised Survey Guide along with GDPR considerations shortly.
4. SEAI are currently investigating options for file sharing functionality.
5. SEAI intend to develop a consolidated DEAP technical resource; they would welcome Assessor input to this project via Helpdesk (*alternatively, feel free to forward a submission to BERAA*).
6. SEAI is currently reviewing options to simplify evidence uploading viz multi-unit developments.
7. SEAI intends to engage a consultant to carry out an external review of the “suitability and appropriateness” of the BER QA system.
8. In the meantime, SEAI intends to implement short-term changes:
 - a. Assessors with 6 penalty points or more will, if selected for audit, be offered a mentoring audit that will not attract any penalty points (effective from mid-March)
 - b. Implementation (on a pilot basis) of advisory data review audits to assess particular knowledge gaps (eg. heat-pumps, mechanical ventilation, renewables and building fabric)
9. SEAI are currently exploring options to recognise compliance by a reduction in accrued penalty points – further information to be communicated in due course.

Contact Us

www.berassessors.com

BERAA is currently preparing a response to this 11-page letter. There are quite a number of points on which we believe the reply received has not fully, or sometimes even partially, addressed the concerns detailed on our submission of February 6th. We will certainly be making a submission in respect of the scope of the proposed consultants review of the QA system. However, it must be acknowledged that the commitment made in relation to Assessors that are on 6 penalty points or more should remove some stress that the next audit may lead to suspension. This is welcome, but falls a long way short of the radical overhaul that is required. Furthermore, the commitment to consider penalty point reductions in certain cases is also welcome – any small departure from the historical “stick only” disciplinary approach is a small step out of the 19th century!

The BERAA committee has worked really hard over recent months to get SEAI to engage on the grossly unfair QADP procedures. Hopefully, we will get some tangible positive results in the coming months.

Recent Correspondence from SEAI CEO

BRAA also wrote to the William Walsh, Interim CEO of SEAI on BER program Manager on February 23rd with multiple queries – a reply to same was received on March 24th last. The most pertinent points in the reply are as follows:

1. SEAI will undertake a review of the suitability and appropriateness of the BER QA system:
 - a. BER assessor competence and registration (including qualification requirements, training, national examination etc.),
 - b. BER assessor Code of Practice and governance, particularly as it relates to assessor independence and objectivity of BER assessments,
 - c. Quality assurance and auditing of BERs and BER assessors.
2. SEAI will implement short term/interim changes (as detailed in summary above of letter from Program Manager)
3. An updated Survey Guide will be published in March 2020
4. The time frame for providing additional supporting evidence for desk audits has reverted to the normal 21 calendar days until further notice.
5. An update of the HARP database is currently in progress.
6. SEAI is currently recruiting a program executive to augment the BER Team.
7. SEAI is open and committed to engagement with all our stakeholders including the BER Assessors Association.

It has to be said that the letter from the CEO is mainly a re-hash of the letter received from the Program Manager. However, there was a conciliatory tone to the letter which was welcome.

BER Examinations & Audits

BERAA wrote an urgent letter to William Walsh, Interim CEO of SEAI on March 12th last in respect of relaxation of rules in respect of BER Exams & BER Audits during the current COVID-19 crisis.

We are happy that SEAI has agreed to extend, where necessary, Assessors registrations until August 31st for Assessors that have an exam renewal date before June 30th.

Furthermore, it is currently possible to request extensions to audit deadlines where required due to the COVID-19 related exigencies.

Let's hope that common sense prevails and that all audit requests will be suspended during this crisis.

New Members.

Please support the work of BERAA in our endeavors to improve the working environment, conditions & SEAI relationship for all Assessors.

PLEASE JOIN BERAA TODAY

Kevin Curtin, Chair

1/4/2020



**BER Assessors
Association of Ireland**