

Building Control and the Building Regulations

Guidance notes: 1

What is your role?

Our main aim is to protect the health and safety of people in or around buildings, and to make sure that buildings include energy-saving measures and facilities for people with disabilities.

We deliver these aims through the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 which are written by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFPNI) and enforced by the building control service in each of the 26 local councils.

The Building Regulations cover building work to homes, business properties and public buildings. We, Building Control, make sure that any building work carried out is in line with the Building Regulations.

There is often confusion between our role and the role of the Planning Service. Planning comes under the control of the Department of the Environment (DOE) and you may need 'planning permission' before you can build a new property or carry out alterations to an existing property. Planning also deal with things such as the proposed use, the height, size or appearance of a building, access to buildings and the location of new buildings.

What are the Building Regulations?

The Building Regulations were introduced in 1973 and were designed to encourage consistency by setting performance standards in the design and construction of buildings. The regulations protect the health and safety of people in and around those buildings and also include measures to save fuel and power, and provide facilities for disabled people.

The regulations changed in 1977, 1990, 1994, and 2000. At first, they were very rigid and set out how something had to be built, but now they contain functional statements like "a building shall be adequately insulated to resist the passage of sound" and performance-based codes like "separating walls shall be to 56dBA standard".

The regulations are arranged in 16 parts as follows.

- Part A: Interpretation and general
- Part B: Materials and workmanship
- Part C: Preparation of site and resistance to moisture
- Part D: Structure

- Part E: Fire safety
- Part F: Conservation of fuel and power
- Part G: Sound
- Part G1: Sound (conversions)
- Part H: Stairs, ramps, guarding and protection from impact
- Part J: Solid waste in buildings
- Part K: Ventilation
- Part L: Heat-producing appliances and liquefied petroleum gas installation
- Part N: Drainage
- Part P: Sanitary appliances and unvented hot water systems
- Part R: Access and facilities for disabled people
- Part V: Glazing

Parts C to V refer to technical booklets. If you follow these booklets, your building will meet the Building Regulations.

When do I need to apply for Building Regulations approval?

You must apply for Building Regulations approval if you want to do the following.

- Construct a building such as a new home, office, shop and so on.
- Make structural alterations to a building, for example, remove a load-bearing wall or a chimney breast.
- Build an extension on an existing building for example, build a kitchen extension.
- Convert a roofspace to be used as storage or an extra room.
- Install fittings or services in a building, for example, install or convert a central-heating system, install a heating appliance, flue, or unvented hot-water system.
- Install a solar panel or other renewable-energy technology.
- Alter or install drainage or provide new sanitary accommodation such as a toilet or bathroom.
- Make material change of use to a building, for example, convert offices into flats.
- Provide access ramps and other facilities for people with disabilities.
- Install cavity-wall insulation.

Who do I make my application to?

You must make an application for Building Regulations approval to the council of the area the property is in. If the property is within the Belfast City Council boundary, you must send your application to us (Belfast Building Control Service, Belfast City Council).

When can I start work?

You can start work as soon as you have made a valid application to us. You must tell us when you are starting the work. If you have made a full plans application, waiting till you have our approval before you start work will give you some protection against having to make costly amendments on-site.

With any type of application any possible problems on-site will be prevented through close links between our building control surveyors and the builder. It is very important that you, or your builder, tell us when the work starts and when you reach various stages of the work so we can inspect the work.