

Mandatory Building Official Qualifications

Introduction to Trainee Classes

VERSION 2

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Photo: Trades Training Centre, Okanagan College, Vernon B.C.

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Purpose

This document introduces the trainee classes that will be available for registrants when the building official qualifications scheme becomes mandatory on February 28, 2021.

Note: In this document, the term 'building official' includes 'plumbing official'.

Background

The Building Act (the Act) was passed in 2015 to modernize and improve the building regulatory system in British Columbia. In order to help increase the competency of building officials and support a more consistent application of the BC Building Code, the Building Act sets out a requirement that all individuals practicing as a building official must be qualified in order to make code compliance decisions on behalf of a local authority. Prior to this, there were no mandatory requirements for training, examination, or continuing professional development, although many building officials chose to participate in the Building Officials' Association of BC (BOABC) voluntary certification programs.

The building official qualification scheme establishes classes of building officials, requires officials to be registered in at least one class in order to be qualified, limits their work to the scope of practice that corresponds to their qualification (class) level, and other requirements described in the Act and regulation. These requirements have become mandatory in two phases over the four-year transition period that began in 2017:

- Phase 1 of the program began on August 28, 2017, when membership in the BOABC became a mandatory qualification requirement.
- Phase 2 will take effect on February 28, 2021, when building officials must fulfill additional requirements in order to be qualified under the Act:
 - be entered into a public register of qualified building officials,
 - pass exam(s) according to the scope of their responsibilities,
 - undertake continuing professional development every year,
 - pay an annual registration fee and make an annual report, and
 - fulfill any other regulatory requirements for their class.

Many of the final details explaining how to become and remain qualified are being established now. The Province is finalizing regulatory amendments and the BOABC is establishing related administrative procedures and policies. One of the most important changes soon to come will be a regulatory amendment to describe how qualified persons can enter the trainee classes that were established in December 2019.

There are five classes originally established by the building official qualification scheme, shown below in figure 1, with a scope of practice associated with each. These are commonly referred to as the 'regular classes'.

Fig.1 Regular Building and Plumbing Classes and Associated Incremental Scopes of Practice

Building Types:			Plumbing Systems:	
Level 1			Level 1	
Level 2			Level 2	
Level 3			Level 2	
Single-family dwellings and basic building types (Simple Part 9)	Small industrial and multi-family dwellings (Complex Part 9)	Large or complex industrial and public buildings (Part 3)	Simple plumbing matters. Some kinds of buildings, such as hospitals, are excluded.	Advanced plumbing matters which can be found in any kind of building.
<i>E.g. Houses, duplexes and rowhouses under four storeys.</i>	<i>E.g. Low-rise apartments and townhouses, small industrial, mercantile.</i>	<i>E.g. High-rise apartments, industrial and mercantile, public buildings.</i>		
<i>Note that it is possible for an official to be registered in both a building and a plumbing class.</i>				
<i>Note that 'Part 9' and 'Part 3' are commonly used generalizations. For a more detailed description of the types of buildings that fall into each level's scope of work, please refer to the Introduction to Trainee Classes available on the building codes and standards website linked below.</i>				

The scope of practice for each level builds upon the scope of practice for the previous level, adding incremental areas of responsibility and decision making-authority.

In December 2019, five trainee classes were added to the available classes, one for each of the regular classes. The trainee classes represent an optional pathway for individuals to enter the building official profession or to increase their qualification level. Trainee officials will be allowed to work temporarily in a class one level higher than their existing qualification while being supported by their local authority employer. During this period, trainees are expected to gain the skills and knowledge required to successfully graduate to the next regular level. Those without qualifications can apply to become a Level 1 – in Training official, while those with a Level 1 or 2 qualification can apply to register in the trainee class that is one higher than their own.

The local authority employer will play an active and crucial role in the training program by creating a supportive learning environment for their trainee and ensuring the trainee has access to learning opportunities. Examples include courses, having a mentor, and access to a peer network. Without the support of a local authority employer, an individual will not be eligible to enter a trainee class. Those who are not employed by a local authority will obtain higher level qualification *before* they can practice as a member of that class.

Before a prospective trainee will be able to make any building regulation compliance decisions as a trainee, they must pass the trainee qualification exam, prepare a training plan, and become registered in the class. The trainee qualification exam will test the candidate's knowledge of the provincial building regulatory system. Course content is under development and is expected to be available from BOABC in early February 2021. The employer and the prospective trainee will jointly develop an individualized training plan that describes their joint intention for how the trainee will achieve their qualifications. Once these prerequisites are met, the prospective trainee will be eligible to register as a "Level X – in Training" official, and once registered, they will be able to lawfully make decisions on behalf of their employer according to the scope of practice for their trainee class.

Registration in a trainee class will also be time limited. A trainee will have a set amount of time during which they may be registered in the trainee class, at the end of which they will be expected to have graduated to the regular class for which they are in training. To ensure accountability and monitor progress, regular progress reports will need to be submitted to the Registrar describing the activities the trainees has carried out from their training plan, and how they are progressing toward their objective of graduation. If the trainee has not passed the qualification exam(s) and graduated to the corresponding regular level by the end of the trainee period, the trainee will lose the

ability to make decisions that fall within the scope of practice of their trainee class but outside the scope of practice for any existing regular level of qualification. Those without any level of qualification will no longer be able to make decisions on behalf of a local authority about conformance to provincial building regulations, while those who held lesser qualifications will revert to their previous class and its associated scope of practice.

What This Means for Local Authorities

It is important that local authorities recognize how to use the new classes when making staffing decisions for the remainder of the transition period and once the qualification program comes into effect.

(1) Hiring Trainees

When seeking a qualified official for any vacancies, local authorities are encouraged to consider indicating willingness to hire someone who would qualify for a trainee class of the corresponding level, or to seek out trainee candidates in the first place. This latter arrangement may work well for communities that are developing their succession programs, as the trainee classes are a way to recruit local talent and develop their skills ‘in-house.’ Local authorities might consider approaching nearby colleges that offer trades training curriculum, where promising students near graduation might be identified through information sessions, job fairs, or using other recruitment strategies that could be collaboratively developed.

Local authorities should consider their human resources rules and procedures, and those of their union (if applicable), and how best to deal with the onboarding of trainee officials. There are two reasons why this is particularly important when considering hiring someone who holds no current qualification:

- a. These individuals cannot make decisions on behalf of the local authority about conformance with building regulations until they are registered as a qualified building official. To be registered, the trainee must have passed the trainee qualification exam and fulfilled the other regulatory pre-requisites. The employer should consider carefully how to structure the timeline and offer of employment to address both regulatory qualification requirements and employment expectations; and
- b. By the end of their registration in one of the Level 1 – in Training classes, the trainee is expected to have passed the Level 1 qualification exam and graduated to the regular level. If this has not occurred, the individual with no other regular qualifications will no longer qualify as a building official and will not be able to lawfully make decisions about conformance with building regulations on behalf of a local authority.

Local authorities are also encouraged to consider what additional supervision or audit processes they may wish to implement in relation to their trainee. Such processes might be appropriate to better ensure trainee officials in their employ are adequately supported to meet, and are being proactively assessed against, workplace standards and expectations specific to permitting and enforcement staff in that jurisdiction.

(2) Staffing Based on Business Needs

Local authorities may determine their hiring needs based on a number of factors, which might include budgets, permit volumes, desired turn-around times, and the most commonly processed permit types. The new trainee classes are tools that local authorities can use to broaden their options for hiring officials. For example, a community that primarily processes applications or inspections related to what are commonly called “Part 9 buildings” (up to low rise apartments, small industrial and small mercantile), would have the following options for staffing:

- hiring a new official who is already registered as a Building Level 2 official;
- hiring a Building Level 1 official who agrees to enter the Building Level 2 – in Training class immediately and could make decisions within a Building Level 2 official’s scope of practice for a set period of time; or
- encouraging one or more existing staff members registered as Building Level 1 officials to enter the Building Level 2 – in Training class.

This hypothetical community could manage their infrequent need for conformance decisions relating to “Part 3 buildings” by encouraging a Building Level 2 official to enter the Building Level 3 – in Training class or making occasional use of contracts with any of: a professional architect, a professional engineer or Building Level 3 official.

Local authorities are encouraged to be creative in exploring options to meet the requirements of the building official qualification scheme, such as the use of these classes to meet their staffing needs, leveraging relationships with nearby local authorities, or exploring the use of new technologies.

The following two figures show how determining appropriate staffing levels can be based on the local government’s permitting and enforcement needs. The figures describe the classes of building (fig. 4) or plumbing (fig. 5) officials and their scopes of practice. For those unfamiliar with the regulation, the figures include a plain language description of the building types and plumbing systems, including a sample illustration of building types. The notation “NEW” refers to the trainee classes that were added in December 2019.

Fig.4 Building Types and Classes of Building Officials


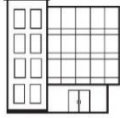
Building Types:			
	Single-family dwellings and basic building types (Simple Part 9)	Small industrial and multi-family dwellings (Complex Part 9)	Large or complex industrial and public buildings (Part 3)
	Simple houses, duplexes, rowhouses under 4 storeys in building height	Low-rise apartments and townhouses, small industrial, mercantile	High-rise apartments, all industrial and mercantile, public buildings
			
Building Official Classes:			
Unqualified persons ¹	✗	✗	✗
Level 1 and Level 1 – in Training <small>NEW</small>	✓	✗	✗
Level 2 and Level 2 – in Training <small>NEW</small>	✓	✓	✗
Level 3 and Level 3 – in Training <small>NEW</small>	✓	✓	✓
Exempt Building Professionals ²	✓	✓	✓
<p>¹After February 28, 2021 it will not be lawful for an unqualified person to make a code decision on behalf of a local authority, or for a local authority to have an unqualified person do so on their behalf.</p> <p>²Exempt building professionals are defined in Part 3 – Division 1 of the Building Act General Regulation, and include architects, professional engineers, and holders of limited licences under the Engineers and Geoscientists Act whose scope of practice includes consulting on building regulations. Other designations for specific limited circumstances and decisions are also identified there.</p>			

Fig.5 Plumbing System and Classes of Plumbing Officials

	Plumbing Systems:	
	Simple Plumbing System ¹	Advanced Plumbing System ¹
Plumbing Official Classes (or Building Official classes, as noted):	NEW Plumbing, foundation drainage or hydronic heating systems of: (a) Part 9 buildings; (b) New Part 3 buildings, except for hospitals, buildings 5 storeys or greater, or that contain advanced plumbing systems or large grease interceptors; or (c) Renovations on Part 3 buildings, except if the building is to become a hospital, is 5 storeys or greater, or if the work being permitted involves an advanced plumbing system or a large grease interceptor.	NEW Any matter in the plumbing code, including those defined as 'advanced', namely: (a) the draining or venting of acid or corrosive wastes, (b) bedpan washers, trade waste systems, vent stacks or yoke vents, (c) circuit vents that serve more than eight fixtures, (d) in the case of a building that contains more than two dwelling units or is a row house, a non-potable water system; and (e) work that involves a large grease interceptor (a flow greater than 189 L/min).
Unqualified persons ²	✗	✗
Level 1 and Level 1 – in Training NEW	✓	✗
Level 3 and Level 3 – in Training NEW Building Officials	✓ ³	✓ ³
Level 2 and Level 2 – in Training NEW	✓	✓
Registered Architects and Engineers	✓	✓
<p>¹The dividing line between Level 1 and Level 2 Plumbing Officials was modified to better reflect what is examined in the qualification program for the two classes.</p> <p>²On and after February 28, 2021 it will be unlawful for an unqualified person to make a code decision on behalf of a local authority, or for a local authority to have an unqualified person do so on their behalf.</p> <p>³Building Level 3 officials and Building Level 3 – in Training officials are able to make decisions on plumbing matters if they make those decisions based on the professional assurances of an Architect or Engineer through Letters of Assurance. By law, these officials cannot inspect plumbing systems for which they are not qualified.</p>		

Those that are interested in pursuing registration as a trainee should refer to the Building Officials' Association of BC for more information, at www.boabc.org. For more information about the building official qualification scheme or the building regulatory system in general, please refer to the Building Act Guide available on the Building and Safety Standard's website at www.gov.bc.ca/buildingcodes.