COMMERCIAL RENOVATION

# Can you build an office inside your factory unit?

By DirectHome Editorial Updated 28 November 2026 12 min read Explore our commercial renovation service ↗

Yes, you can, but three agencies have a say. URA looks at how much of the unit becomes office, SCDF at fire safety and BCA at the building work. Lightweight partitions up to 10 metres high skip BCA's permit, but if they affect escape routes, sprinklers or alarms, a Qualified Person takes them to SCDF. JTC units also need JTC's consent unless the work is exempt.

Need advice for your home? WhatsApp our team ↗



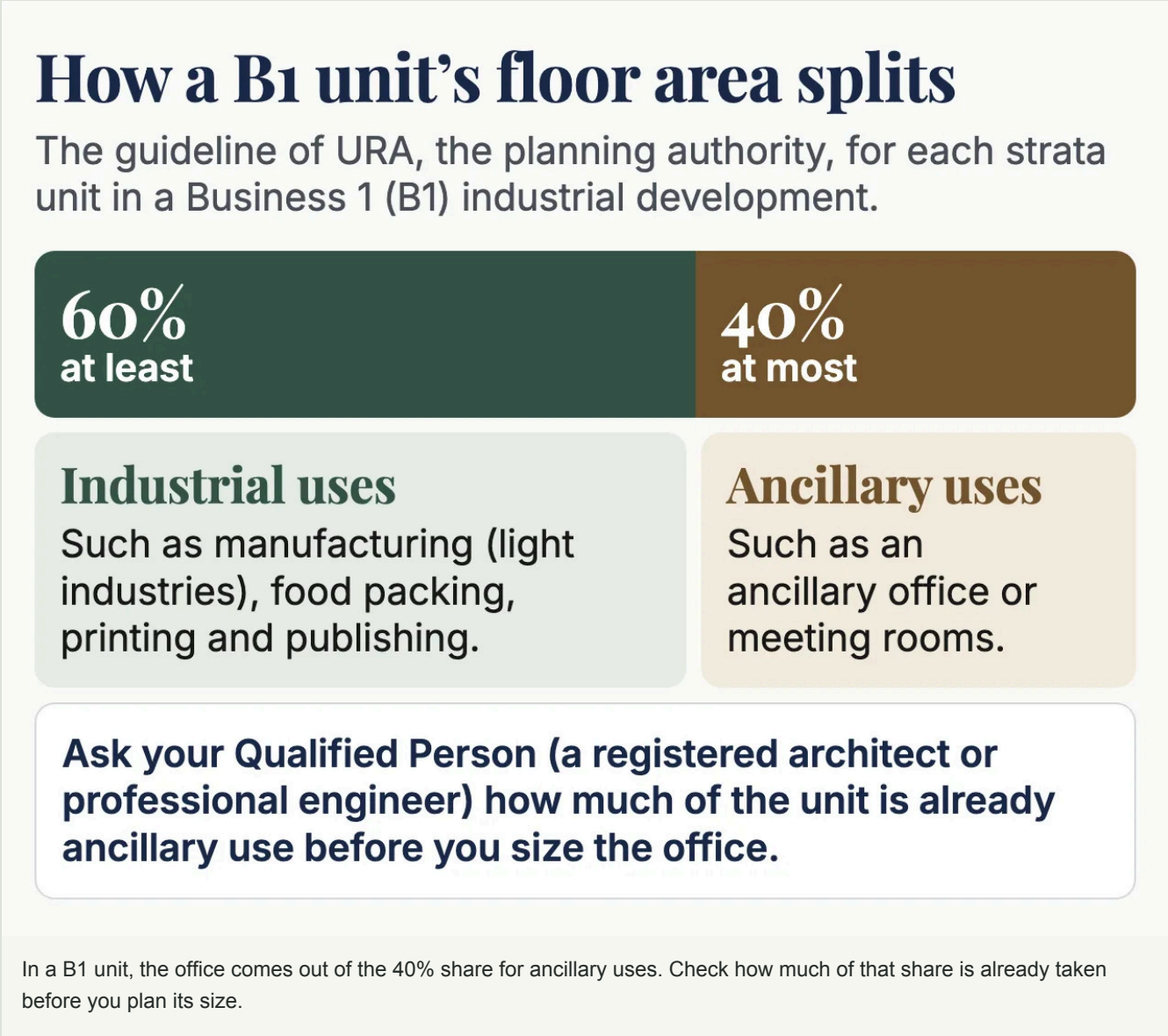
This is the factory side of a commercial renovation. If you're fitting out a shop, office or food outlet instead, our guide to commercial renovation approvals covers those, and the commercial renovation buying guide walks through the whole job.

# Who has a say over an office in your factory

Who looks at an office, meeting room or ceiling inside an industrial unit, from the sources linked below.

| Who | What they look at | When they come in |
|---|---|---|
| URA, the planning authority | What the unit is used for, and how much space each use takes | When the partitions change the unit's main use, the share of space each use takes or the floor area, or affect common areas. In a Business 1 (B1) industrial development, ancillary (supporting) uses such as an office are capped at 40% of the floor area |
| SCDF, the fire safety authority | Escape routes, fire compartments, sprinklers and what each room holds | When new partitions or a false ceiling affect escape routes, sprinklers, alarms or other fire safety measures, through a Qualified Person (a registered architect or professional engineer), by lodgement for minor works or plan approval for the rest |
| BCA, the building authority | Whether the walls and ceiling are building works that need a permit | When partitions aren't lightweight material or a ceiling is one people can get onto, among other limits |
| JTC, if it's your landlord | Your fit-out plans, as the landowner | For any alteration works, unless the work is on its exemption list |
| A private landlord or management corporation | Whether they consent to the works | Before minor fire safety works go ahead under a lodgement |

## How much of your factory unit can be office




In a B1 unit, the office comes out of the 40% share for ancillary uses. Check how much of that share is already taken before you plan its size.

In a Business 1 (B1) industrial development, URA's use quantum guideline, its rule on how much floor space each use may take, says that within each strata-subdivided unit, at least 60% of the floor area shall be used for industrial uses, and ancillary uses such as an ancillary office or meeting rooms shall not occupy more than 40%. A single-user B1 development works to the same split, a minimum of 60% industrial and a maximum of 40% ancillary across its industrial floor area.

URA's examples of allowable B1 uses put manufacturing (light industries), food packing, printing and publishing, core media, e-business and industrial training on the 60% side. On the 40% side they list an ancillary office, meeting room, showroom, industrial canteen and ancillary display area, among others.

Planning permission comes in when the layout changes what the unit was approved for. URA's list of works exempt from planning permission covers internal partitioning in a non-residential unit **without any change in primary use or quantum (how much space each use takes) or floor area**, and

without affecting common areas. The same list exempts partitions of lightweight material in non-residential buildings, replacing a false ceiling with lightweight material, and any aircon works.

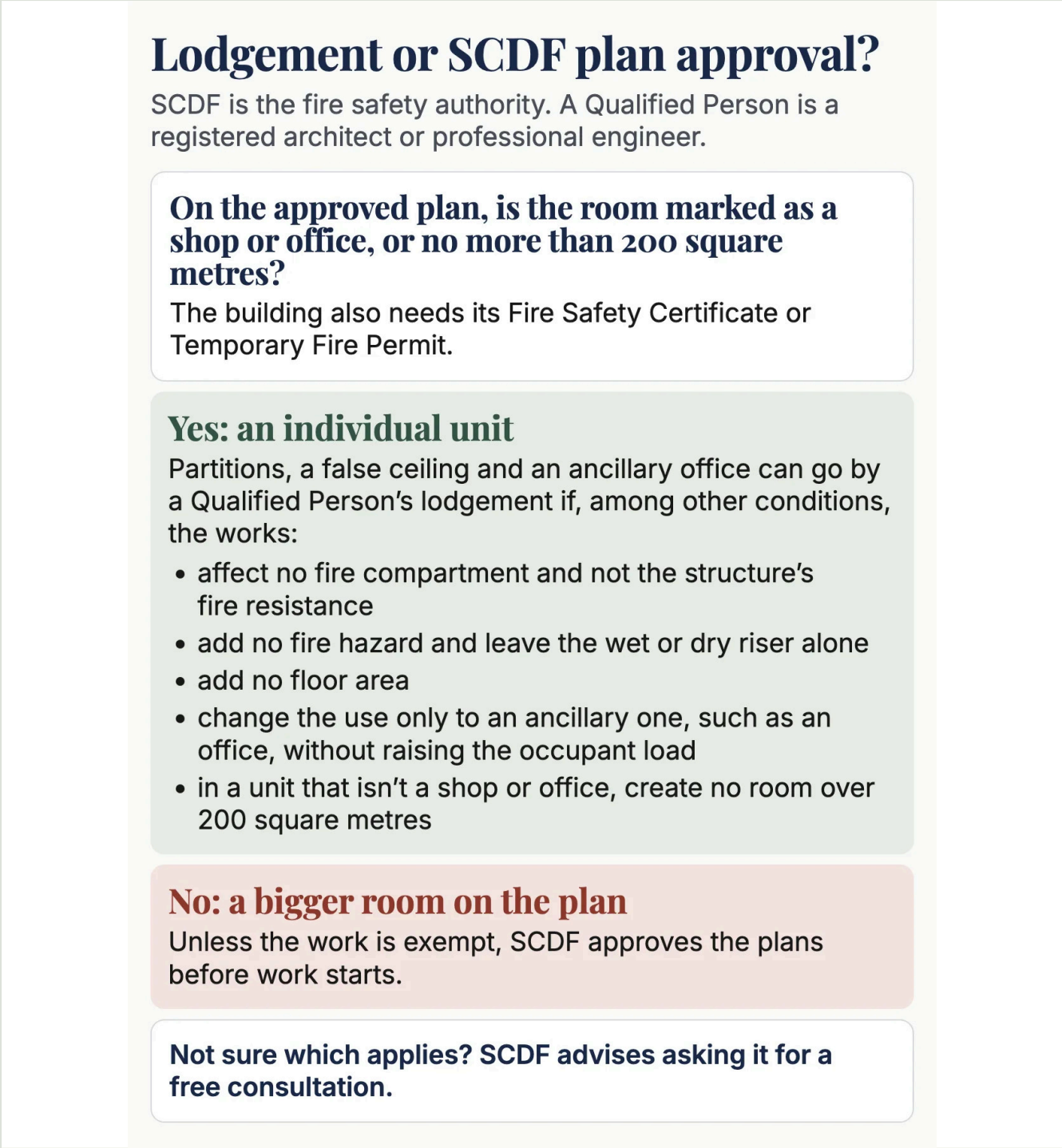
So before you size the office, ask your Qualified Person how much of the unit's approved floor area is already ancillary use, and how the new office changes that. In a JTC unit, the handbook's exemption for a partition wall also depends on there being no impact on planning parameters, which it gives as the 60:40 quantum or changes to gross floor area.


## Need advice for your home?

Tell us what you need on WhatsApp and send a few photos. We'll arrange a free site assessment, then give you a fixed-price quote within 3 to 5 working days.

WhatsApp us  Try the free cost estimator

## When partitions or a ceiling go to SCDF




The room size on the approved plan decides whether lodgement is open at all. A production floor shown as one room over 200 square metres needs plan approval unless the work is exempt.

Under the Fire Safety Act 1993, anyone carrying out fire safety works must first get SCDF's approval of plans, unless the works are exempt or on the minor works list below. The plans are prepared and submitted by a **Qualified Person**, which means a registered architect or professional engineer. SCDF's list of fire safety works includes layout changes that affect escape routes or fire compartments, and adding or moving sprinklers, exit signs or fire alarm panels.

There are two ways through. Works on the minor works list in the fire safety regulations (version in force from 16 March 2026) can go ahead after a Qualified Person lodges them with SCDF before work starts. Anything else that isn't exempt needs plan approval first, and if you can't tell which applies, SCDF advises asking it for a free consultation.

## The 200 square metre test

The list's items for partitions, a false ceiling and an ancillary office only apply to works within or in relation to an **individual unit**. The regulations define that as a room marked as a shop or office on the building's approved plan, or **any room of no more than 200 square metres** on that plan, and the building needs its Fire Safety Certificate or Temporary Fire Permit.

So in a factory unit shown on its approved plan as a room of no more than 200 square metres, partitions for an office can go by lodgement if they meet the conditions below. A production floor shown on the approved plan as one room larger than 200 square metres isn't an individual unit, so those items don't reach it, and unless the work is exempt that leaves plan approval.

Even inside an individual unit, the works must not, among other conditions:

- affect the fire resistance of the structure, or affect or add any fire compartment (a fire-resisting enclosure that stops a fire spreading), including fire-resisting walls or doors;
- add a fire hazard, or affect the wet or dry riser (the pipe firefighters connect their hoses to);
- add floor area;
- change the use, except to an ancillary pantry, toilet, office, store room (a store room of up to 20 square metres) or similar use without raising the occupant load;
- in a unit that isn't a shop or office, create a room larger than 200 square metres.

The regulations define the **occupant load** as the total number of people who may occupy a building or part of it at any one time. That's why your Qualified Person will ask how many people the office will seat.

## A suspended ceiling over the production area

Adding, moving or replacing a false ceiling is on the same minor works list, so inside an individual unit it can go by lodgement on the same conditions. Over a production floor that isn't an individual unit, the list doesn't cover it, and SCDF's rule is that fire safety works neither exempt nor on the list need plan approval before they start.

If the ceiling means sprinklers have to be moved or added, the list covers up to 9 sprinkler heads outside the higher hazard classes (OH3S and high hazard), and not in a building the regulations exclude, such as one with high fire loads or hazards. Because the answer turns on your approved plan and what's under the ceiling, have your Qualified Person check it, or ask SCDF for its free consultation. Our ceiling and lighting service covers the ceiling itself.

### Aircon for the new office

SCDF counts aircon and ventilation works for non-residential use as fire safety works. The minor works list takes in adding or extending aircon ducts and fans that aren't fire-rated or part of the fire safety system, in buildings it doesn't exclude and on the same conditions, as long as they don't serve exit staircases, fire lift lobbies or smoke control. If the office's aircon pipes will run above the new ceiling, plan the drain route before it closes.

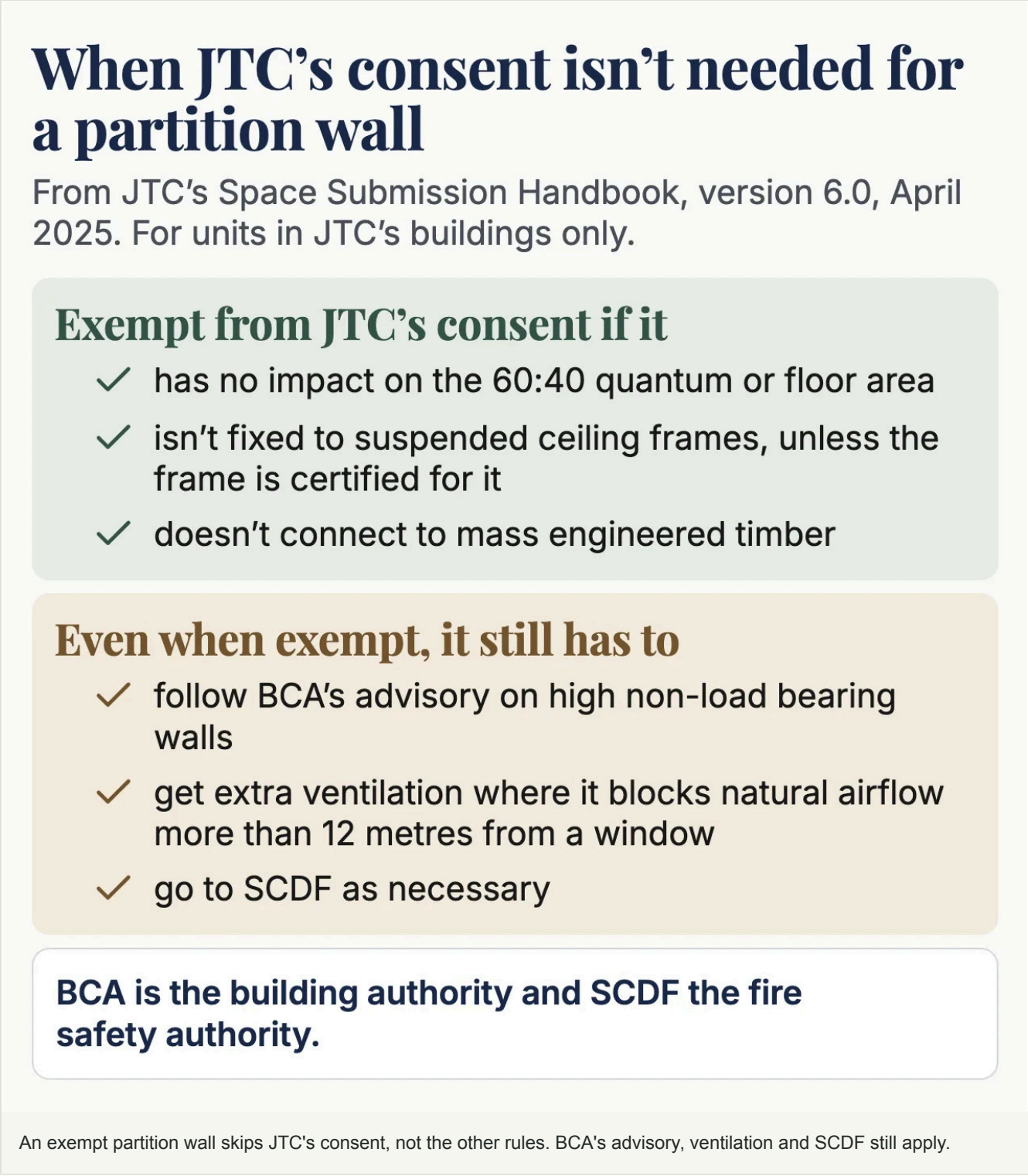
## Partitions and ceilings under BCA's rules

BCA needs a permit for all building works except the insignificant building works listed in the Building Control Regulations (version in force from 17 April 2026). Three items on that list fit a factory office:

- **Partitions** up to 10 metres high, in a building other than a house, as long as they're built of lightweight material. The regulations' examples include plasterboard, gypsum board, calcium silicate board, aluminium or corrugated metal sheet, hollow concrete blocks and autoclaved aerated concrete blocks.
- **A false ceiling** suspended from the structural ceiling, made of lightweight material, used only for looks (hiding wiring, pipes or ducts counts) and not accessible to anyone, with no span of its supporting frame over 6 metres.
- **All aircon works.**

A wall or ceiling that falls outside those items isn't an insignificant work, so BCA's permit rule applies to it. A ceiling you'd walk on, for instance, isn't "not accessible to any person". If you'd like to store goods on top of the office, read when a mezzanine or storage platform needs approval first, because a ceiling built to carry storage isn't the exempt kind. Where a wall or platform needs an engineer, we arrange one.

## If your landlord is JTC




An exempt partition wall skips JTC's consent, not the other rules. BCA's advisory, ventilation and SCDF still apply.

JTC's Space Submission Handbook (version 6.0, April 2025) says that when you carry out any alteration works to your unit in JTC's buildings, you need JTC's plan consent and, if necessary, the other authorities' clearance. Works on its exemption list need no submission to JTC if they meet its conditions, though other authorities may still need one.

For an office, the exemption list works like this:

- **A partition wall** is exempt from JTC's consent if it has no impact on planning parameters (the 60:40 quantum or floor area), isn't fixed to suspended ceiling frames unless the frame is certified for it, and doesn't connect to mass engineered timber.
- **A false ceiling** is exempt if, among other conditions, it keeps BCA's minimum headroom, hangs from the structure (not from prestressed slabs, hollow core slabs or mass engineered timber, which are particular kinds of floor slab and timber structure), has anchors no deeper than 40 mm into the structure, carries no fan over 35 kg and needs no hacking of slabs or structural members.
- **Extra lighting and power points** are exempt if they stay within the approved electrical load, cut into no structural member, and your Licensed Electrical Worker reviews the design and installation.

Even an exempt partition wall still has to follow BCA's advisory on high non-load bearing walls, get extra ventilation where it blocks natural airflow more than 12 metres from a window, and go to SCDF as necessary.

Anything else goes to JTC with drawings. Where the works need a Qualified Person's design and endorsement, the handbook has a Qualified Person make the submission; where they don't, it can go in without one.

For a masonry or non-load bearing concrete wall, the handbook asks for:

- drawings and calculations endorsed by a civil Professional Engineer, with a structural check of the existing building;
- a Qualified Person's plan showing what each partitioned space is for, where the walls go, how high they are, and how they meet SCDF's requirements.

The handbook also lists partition works as works affecting fire safety that need a Qualified Person's endorsement. Our electrical works service covers the office's lights and power points.

### A privately owned or strata unit

JTC's handbook covers units in JTC's own buildings. In any other building, SCDF says you need the building owner's or management corporation's consent before minor fire safety works under a lodgement, so ask your landlord or management corporation for its fit-out rules first. The URA, SCDF and BCA rules above don't change with who owns the building.

## What to tell your Qualified Person about the space

SCDF's lodgement plans have to show the use of every room and area, what the stores hold, the existing fire doors, the sprinkler and detector layout, and how the partitions are built and from what. JTC's handbook asks for the use of each partitioned space when a masonry wall goes in. Have these answers ready:

### What your Qualified Person will ask about the office

- ☐ What each room is for (office, meeting room, pantry, store) and how many people will be in it at once
- ☐ What any store room will hold, and how big it is
- ☐ What the partitions are made of and how high they go
- ☐ Whether the space above the ceiling stays empty or carries ducts, cables or anything stored
- ☐ Where the exits, fire doors, sprinklers and detectors are now, from the approved plans
- ☐ How much of the unit's floor area is already office or other ancillary use, against URA's 40% cap for ancillary uses in B1

Use this blank checklist to record your project review.

We do the site visit and measuring, and arrange the Qualified Person or engineer the works need.

## What happens if you build without approval

Under the Fire Safety Act (version in force from 18 December 2023), it's an offence to carry out, or permit or authorise, fire safety works before SCDF has approved their plans, or other than as approved, with a maximum of **a fine of $200,000, 2 years' jail or both** and up to $1,000 a day if the offence continues after conviction.

SCDF's Commissioner can also order unauthorised fire safety works stopped, altered to comply, or demolished. The offence covers whoever permits or authorises the works, so if you told a contractor to go ahead, it reaches you as well as the firm doing them. Where part of a unit's use changes without approval, SCDF said in 2022 that it issues a Notice of Offence requiring the area to go back to its original use, or the person responsible can engage a Qualified Person to advise on what the new use needs.

After works that needed plan approval, SCDF requires a Fire Safety Certificate before the premises are used or occupied, or a Temporary Fire Permit to use them for a limited period before it. Your Qualified Person applies for it on your behalf, and SCDF says to apply only once the plans have been approved and the works completed to its requirements.

# What to settle before you fix the office layout

### Before the office layout is final

- ☐ The unit's approved floor plan, showing the room sizes SCDF will go by
- ☐ How much ancillary space the unit already has, and how much the office adds
- ☐ Partition and ceiling materials that fit the lists above, or a plan for the approvals they need
- ☐ In a JTC unit, which works are on its exemption list and which need its consent
- ☐ Your landlord's or management corporation's fit-out rules and consent

Use this blank checklist to record your project review.

Then send us the approved floor plan, your landlord's fit-out rules and a sketch of the office you want. We'll do a free site assessment to measure the unit and see what the office involves, then give you a fixed-price quote within 3 to 5 working days of the visit, never from a photo.

## Common questions

### Do I need approval to take the office out when the lease ends?

Not from SCDF if you're only taking the partitions out. The Fire Safety (Exemption) Order lifts SCDF's plan approval where reinstatement works at the end of a tenancy or lease only remove all the partitions put in during or for that tenancy. In a JTC unit, the handbook says you still have to reinstate the unit to its original handover condition when the tenancy ends, unless the building owner agrees otherwise in writing.

### Can I add a pantry or store room next to the office?

You can, and inside an individual unit the minor works list covers partitions for an ancillary pantry, toilet, office or store room of up to 20 square metres, as long as the occupant load doesn't go up and the other conditions are met. A bigger store room isn't on that item. In a JTC unit, a new toilet or wash area goes to JTC with a Qualified Person's plan of the drain pipe routes and waterproofing.

# More on commercial renovation

Article [Do you need a permit for an office or shop renovation?]

## Need help with your project?

Tell us what you need on WhatsApp and send a few photos. We'll arrange a free site assessment, then give you a fixed-price quote within 3 to 5 working days.

WhatsApp us  Get a quote

---

Our service

## Commercial Renovation for your home

Explore the service, then discuss what your home needs with our team.

View service details ↗
Still weighing your options?

## Plan with the buying guide

Bring the choices, costs and questions together before deciding what to do next.

Read the commercial renovation buying guide →

More commercial renovation articles →