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HCLG Select Committee
Houses of Parliament
Westminster
London

Original email dated 4 June 2018

Enquiry into Construction Industry Culture.

Dear Sir,

An insider's version of current cultural problems.

I am a 64-year-old who has worked for main contractors, sub-contractors, headed up my own limited company and been self-employed.

I think that the failings at Grenfell Tower are indeed due to culture in the industry, but they are not limited to issues surrounding fire.

Your committee has been quoted saying it strongly disagreed with Dame Judith Hackitt's light-touch outcomes-based approach. I disagree. This email hopes to succinctly explain why.

Throughout the first half of my career most projects had a clerk of works or resident engineer. These people would pull down any work not up to scratch, so the sub-contractor soon learned to do the work properly.

I think it was when Design and Build started in the 80s that inspections disappeared. Sub-contractors slowly learned they would not be paid properly and if they were to survive they had to cut corners. Since no-one inspected any more, they got away with it and still made some money when retentions and so on were never paid.

When things went wrong the solution was to put the onus on the specifier. The specifier had to over-engineer so that with errors the quality was still good enough.

Next came a reliance upon certification. Specifiers protected themselves by choosing only products with a BBA Certificate.

In my experience, BBA certification is the root cause of the problems today.

Those products I know well that have BBA certificates are not tested honestly or usefully. They get a certificate even if they do not work or are completely unsuitable.

It is as though anything gets a certificate if enough money is paid to BBA.

Then, every specifier in the country feels protected specifying only those products - and 'rubbish' and 'waste' is sold in huge amounts for a lot of profit.

The BBA certificate for the Grenfell Tower cladding includes these words, near the top, in bold: Behaviour in relation to fire – the panels may be regarded as having Class 0 surface... 'low risk' material.

My own expertise is waterproofing concrete and for years I have provided evidence on my web sites that not a single BBA certificate proves that any of the certified products makes un-waterproof concrete waterproof.

There is sufficient evidence on every one of these BBA certificates that they are a waste of money. But the evidence is in hard to comprehend numbers and flowery language.

To me, BBA certification is a criminal abuse of power sold to the highest bidders. And a major reason why unsuitable cladding was approved on the Grenfell Tower.

Specifiers rely upon it completely with no thought to check the outcome.

Dame Judith Hackitt might not have recommended all the answers. But if her report brings back meaningful inspection and someone thoughtfully evaluating the outcome then I think she hit the nail squarely on the head.

Yours faithfully,

Phillip Sacre BA (hons) PgD

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<http://www.basementexpert.co.uk/basement%20architect.htm#waterproof%20concrete>

<http://www.waterproofconcrete.co.uk/how%20waterproof%20concrete.html#third>

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