

FBU calls for Grenfell building safety body to be nationalised

3 years ago



The Fire Brigades Union has committed to fighting for the Building Research Establishment (BRE) to be renationalised.

The commitment came in the form of a motion passed at the union's annual conference, the first in-person conference since the pandemic. In the union's view BRE's private ownership has led to failures of competency, and BRE going too far to please the corporate clients whose products it tested and whom it relied on for income.

The BRE is involved in the testing and certification of materials for the construction industry. It was responsible for testing several of the key materials used in Grenfell Tower's refurbishment, including cladding and insulation materials, and fire safety tests. BRE was privatised in 1997, and continues to test building materials as a private company today.

In the motion the union describes this privatisation as a "disastrous decision, opening the testing regime to commercial pressures and commercial interests", and says that renationalisation would "ensure greater accountability, including a clear obligation to act in the public interest and without pressure from business and commercial interest".

In its submissions to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry the union [has previously expressed the view](#) (page 38, para 101) that errors and oversights at the BRE contributed to the Grenfell Tower fire, and that BRE testing allowed manufacturing companies to persuade others that their products were regulation-compliant, and that these errors and oversights were caused at least in part by the BRE being privately owned.

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said: "Building Research Establishment private ownership has been a

complete disaster. Corners have been cut and building safety compromised as the BRE bowed down to the building material companies which pay its wages. There is even information that suggests that BRE failures may have had a role in Grenfell. It's time to end this utter mess now."

The conference motion specified that "Oversight of this restored public testing and research facility should be by a board, representative of tenants and residents, local and national government, trade unions representing workers in Fire and Rescue Services and the construction industry".

The motion was proposed by the Nottinghamshire, and reads in full below:

Building Research Establishment – Public Ownership

The Grenfell Tower disaster has exposed multiple failings in the building safety regime in the UK, including in the development, testing and certification of materials for the construction industry. The privatisation of the Building Research Establishment (BRE) has been exposed as a disastrous decision, opening the testing regime to commercial pressures and commercial interests.

Conference instructs the Executive Council to lobby for the BRE to be returned to full public ownership. This shall ensure greater accountability, including a clear obligation to act in the public interest and without pressure from business and commercial interest. Oversight of this restored public testing and research facility should be by a board, representative of tenants and residents, local and national government, trade unions representing workers in Fire and Rescue Services and the construction industry.

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