

The Grenfell effect

A visual analysis of the construction industry's reputational damage





The Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 was the UK's worst residential fire since the Blitz. 72 people died. Their names and faces are remembered [here](#).

This tragedy profoundly impacted the local community and left lasting trauma to the victims' families, neighbours and friends. They are still waiting for justice.

It also inflicted significant reputational damage to the construction industry. And, while there has been significant work since, such as implementing a new building safety regime focused on accountability and competence, product testing and marketing, among other things, that negative reputational impact persists.

For seven years, we have tracked the technical and reputational issues surrounding the Grenfell tragedy. When looking at this through a communications lens, we could not monitor all the media coverage of the fire, but we have been keeping an eye on a small section of national media and influential journalists to see how the story would unfold. We were interested to see how the construction industry would be portrayed, and to identify the themes and patterns over time.

This report summarises what we've noticed so far. Our research is continuing and further insights will be published on our website following the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's final report and recommendations.

Overview of our findings

We analysed a selection of media coverage over the last seven years, including articles, videos, and interviews about the Grenfell Tower fire published by the BBC, Daily Mail, The Guardian, The Sun, The Times and Sunday Times.



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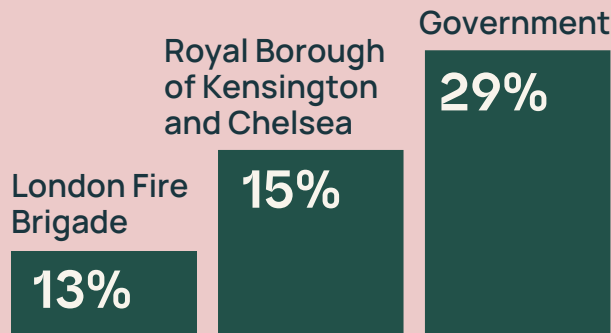
articles, videos and interviews about the Grenfell Tower fire and construction reported on in mainstream media



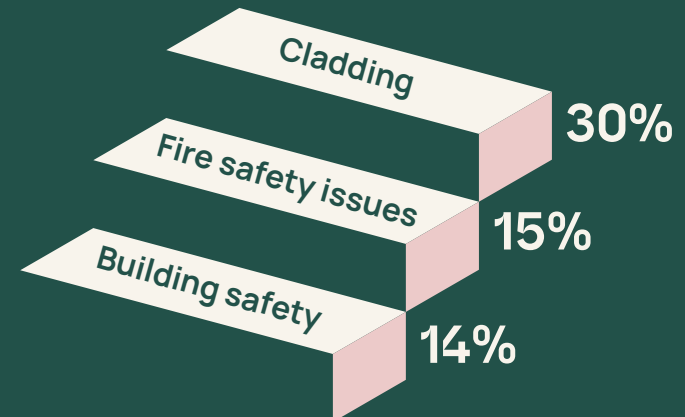
77%

of articles had a negative sentiment

Organisations that the media mentioned/blamed the most for the Grenfell Tower Fire



Why the media thought Grenfell happened





Victims



Inquiry and report



Cost cutting



Social issues



Lack of responsibility



Building safety



Fire safety issues



Cladding and materials

We identified the topics most frequently discussed and reported on in a selection of national media in relation to the Grenfell Tower fire. Shockingly, victims were mentioned the least, accounting for only **4%** of the coverage.

The most discussed topic was cladding and materials, which appears in **30%** of the articles we analysed.

It is evident that the national media primarily focused on the role of the cladding used in the tragedy, along with related fire and building safety issues.

This tracks with our experience of how many tragedies are reported in the media, with journalists seeking to find out the reason why the event occurred.

Most talked about topics

Key themes across the years

2017

Fire safety issues and unsafe building materials

Fire safety regulations in high-rise buildings deemed unfit for purpose. It was also mentioned that unsafe cladding contributed to the spread of the fire.

2019

Response to the fire

The firefighters response time and actions was questioned.

2021

Criminal charges and negligence

Grenfell United's #demandcharges campaign was highlighted in the national media.

2018

New cladding bans put into place

It was reported that the insulation and cladding used on the tower did not meet safety standards, with the Combustible Cladding ban effective in December 2018.

2020

Cladding firms stretch the truth: sacrificing safety for cost

The Inquiry examines claims that the cladding was appropriate for use on high-rise buildings.

2024

Survivors left in limbo

No decision made about the tower's future. Talks of a memorial build and anticipation for The Inquiry's final report.

2023

Compensation claims and delayed justice

The national media highlights the government's request for compensation from cladding companies.

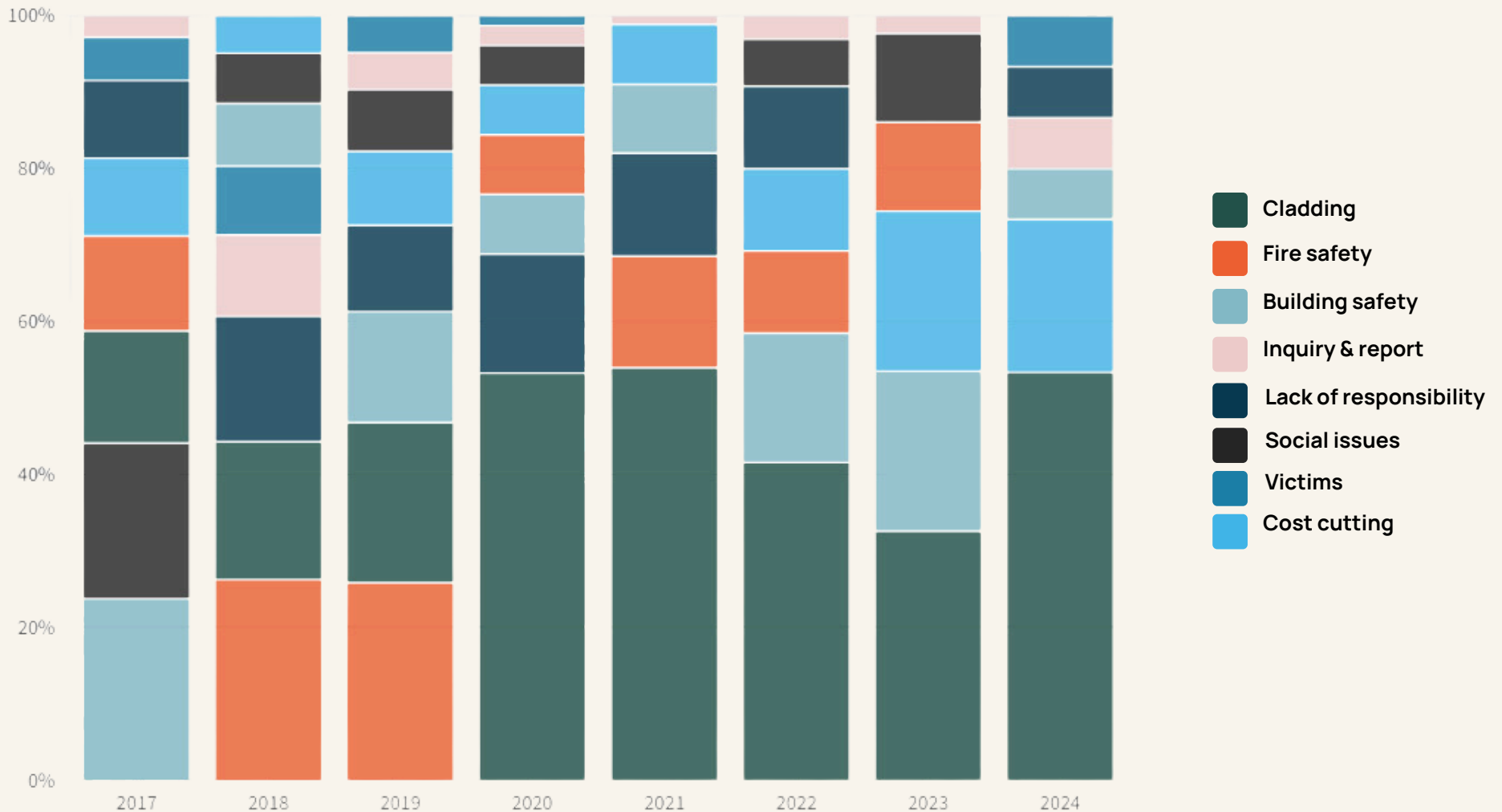
2022

Five years on...

Reports that high-rise buildings still have Grenfell style cladding five years on. The Government commits to better building safety.

Most talked about topics over time

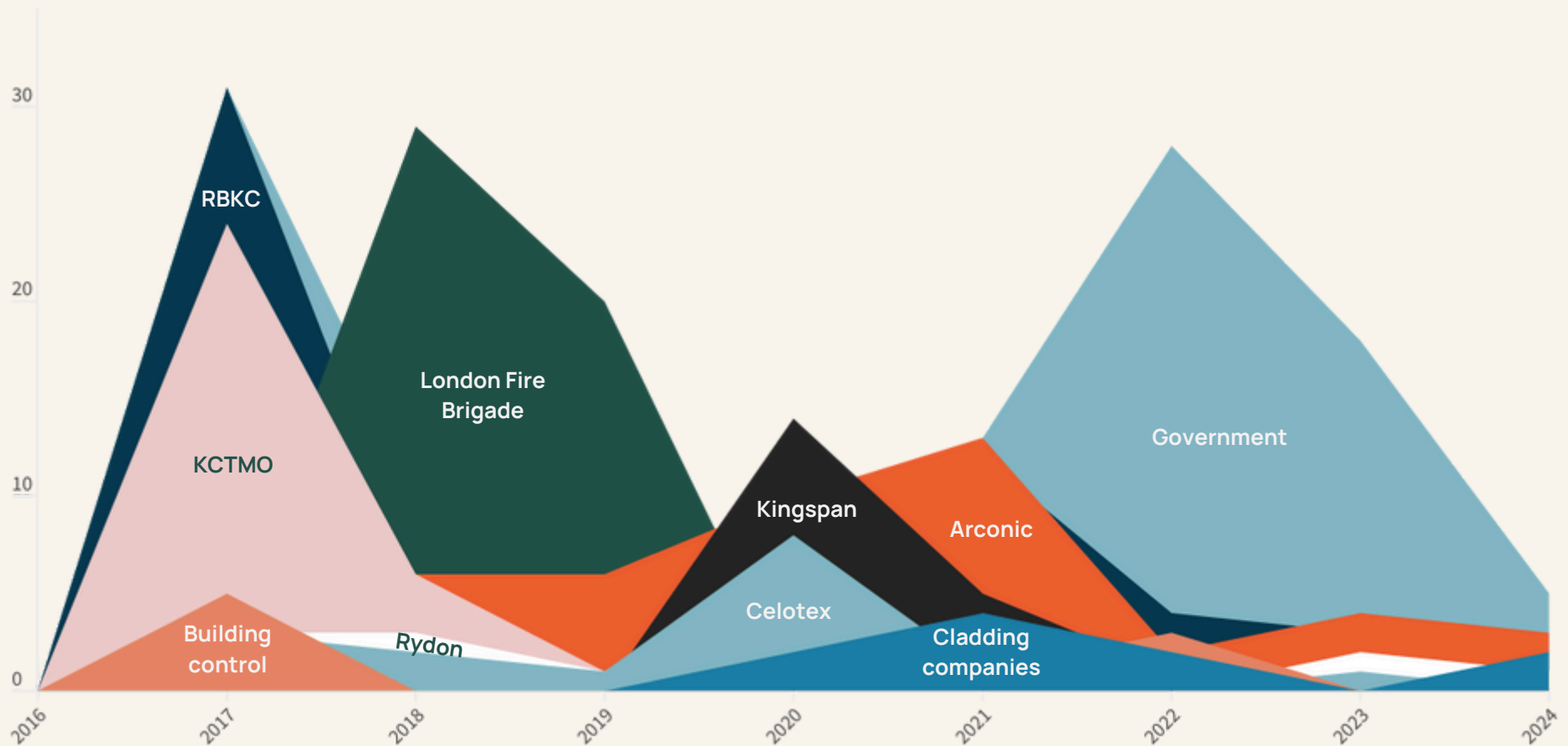
Over the years, the topics most frequently discussed in our selection of national media evolved, mostly reflecting issues and evidence raised within the Public Inquiry. Cladding and materials remained the dominant topic throughout.



Over the years

Across our research we saw many named companies, organisations and individuals who the media mentioned in relation to the Grenfell incident. This infographic shows the shift and change in who the media named most over the years.

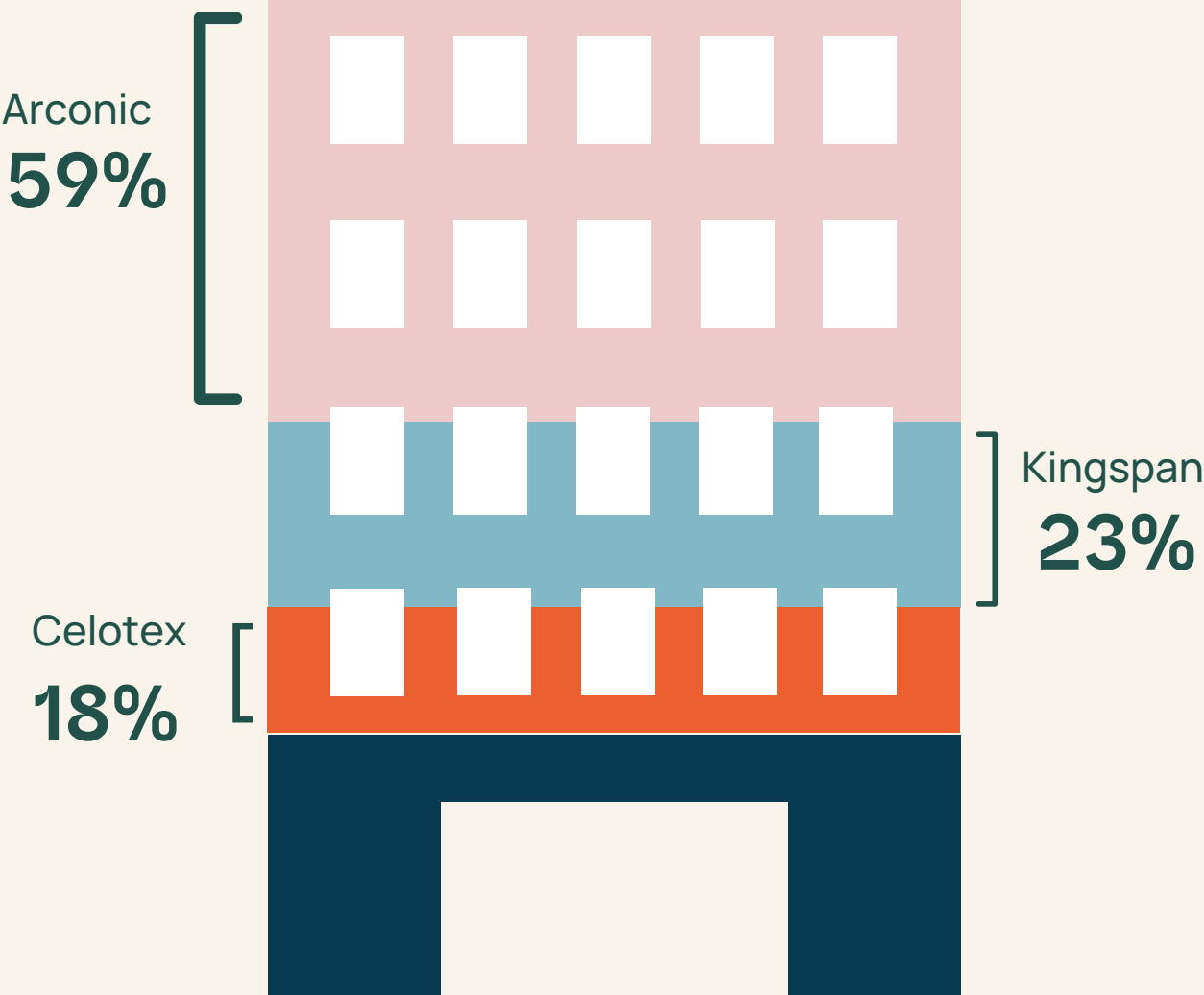
From first glance, you can see in 2017, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council were mentioned the most in the national media. This changed to the the London Fire Brigade in 2018 - 2019. The construction product companies Kingspan, Arconic and Celotex are brought into the picture throughout 2020 and 2021, closely followed by a shift towards the Government's failings from late 2021. This pattern reflects the reporting of the Public Inquiry.



Construction product companies mentioned most

With cladding one of the reasons cited for the spread of the fire, there was a focus on the construction product companies who supplied materials used in the building.

Between them, Arconic, Kingspan, and Celotex were named 90 times in the national media, with Arconic the most mentioned cladding manufacturer.



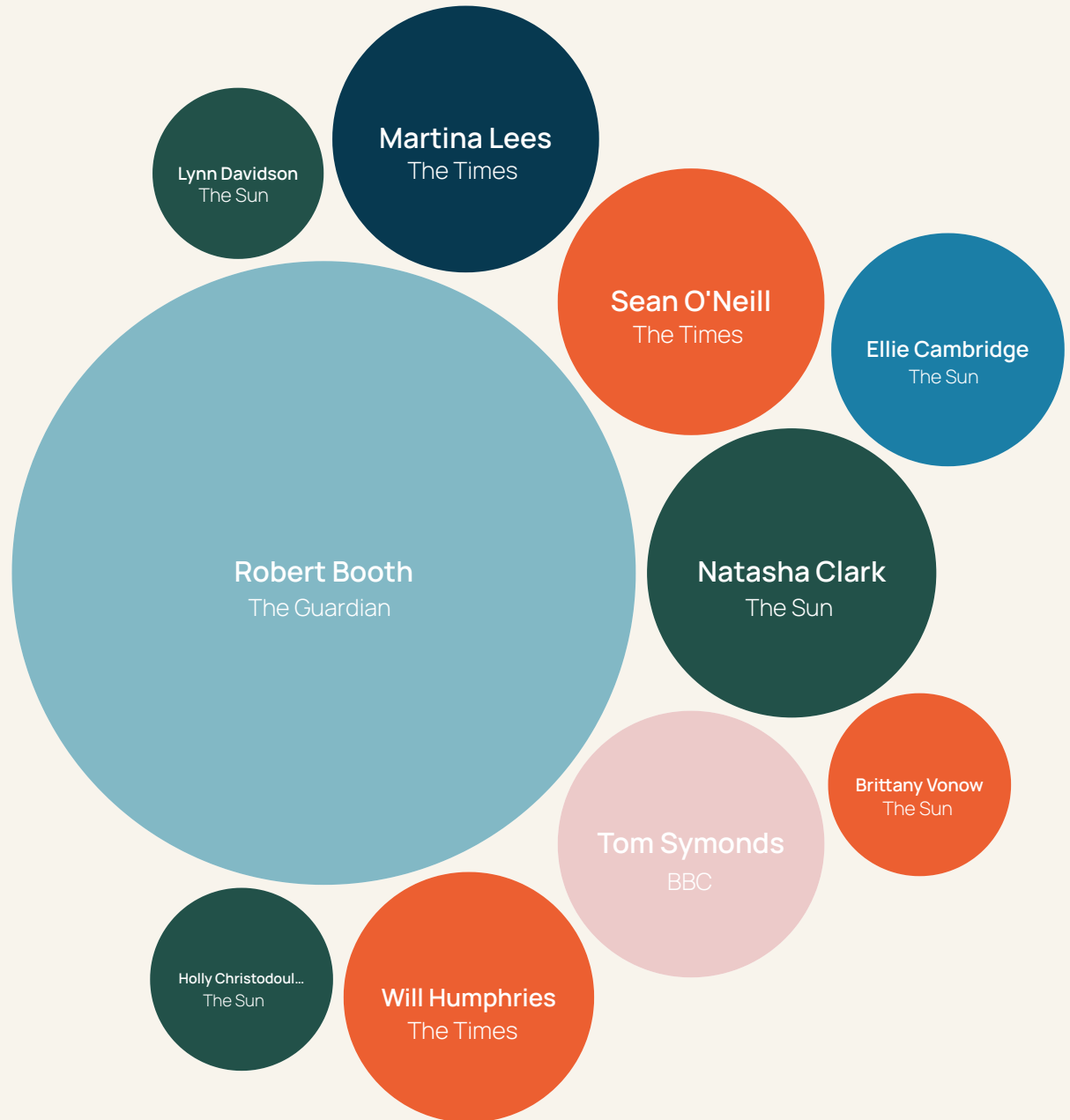
Key journalists reporting on Grenfell

Our analysis of national media coverage revealed the top ten journalists that regularly reported on the Grenfell Tower fire and construction.

Robert Booth, social affairs correspondent at the Guardian, published **93** articles on the incident.

Other journalists that reported on the tragedy include Natasha Clark, online news reporter for The Sun, Tom Symonds, BBC news correspondent, Sean O'Neill, senior writer at The Times, and Martina Lees, senior property writer at the Times.

Kate Lamble has presented **203** episodes of the BBC's 'The Grenfell Inquiry Podcast' covering the evidence and findings of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry since 2020. A new 10-part series was released in August 2024 entitled 'Grenfell: Building a Disaster' that talks about the complexity of the seven-year story of the Grenfell Tower fire.



 **101**

articles, videos and interviews about the Grenfell Tower fire and construction reported by the BBC



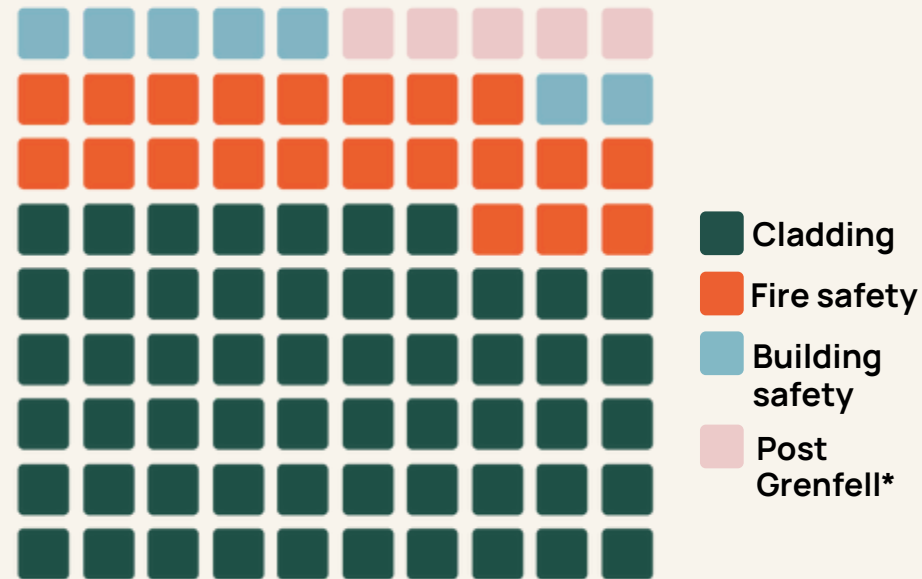
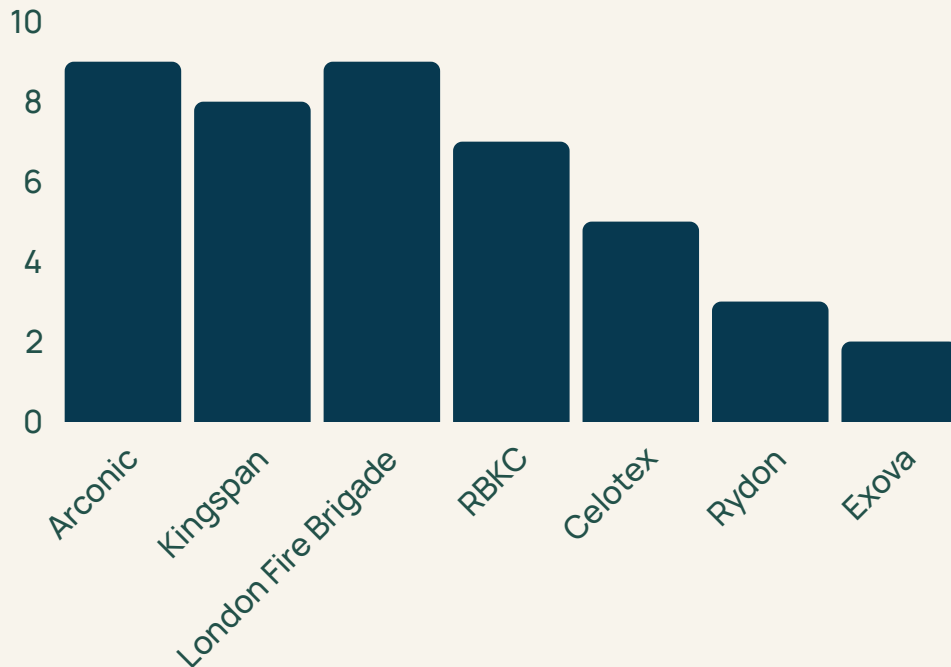
78%

of coverage had a negative sentiment

We found that journalists covered Grenfell from a variety of perspectives, including Arconic's role in the tragedy, as well as the London Fire Brigade's response time and failures.

There were numerous articles published between 2017 and 2018 that focused on the lack of suitable fire testing on the cladding used on the building.

Most mentioned organisations by the BBC



Most talked about topics by the BBC

*events or activities occurring in the aftermath of the incident.

The Guardian

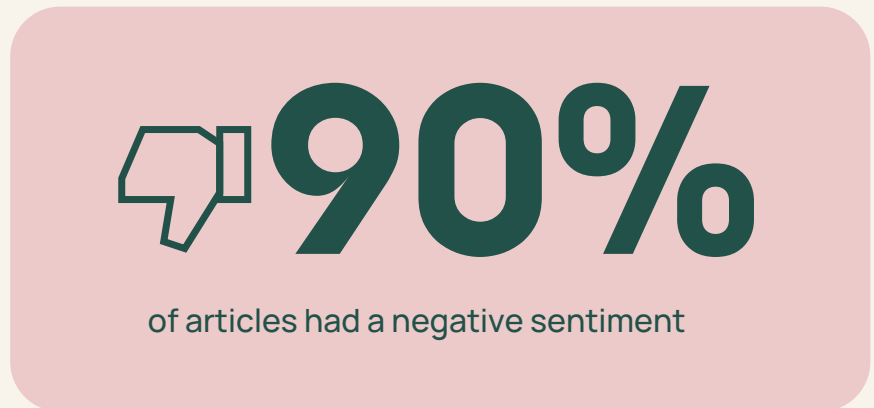
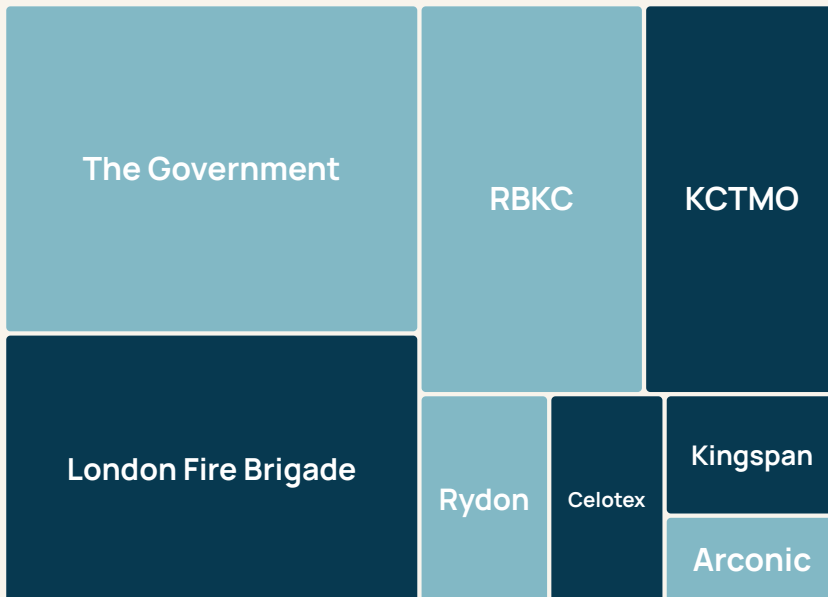
The coverage by The Guardian discussed the failures in building safety and governance, revealing issues of social inequality and safety being compromised for cost.



Most talked about topics in the Guardian



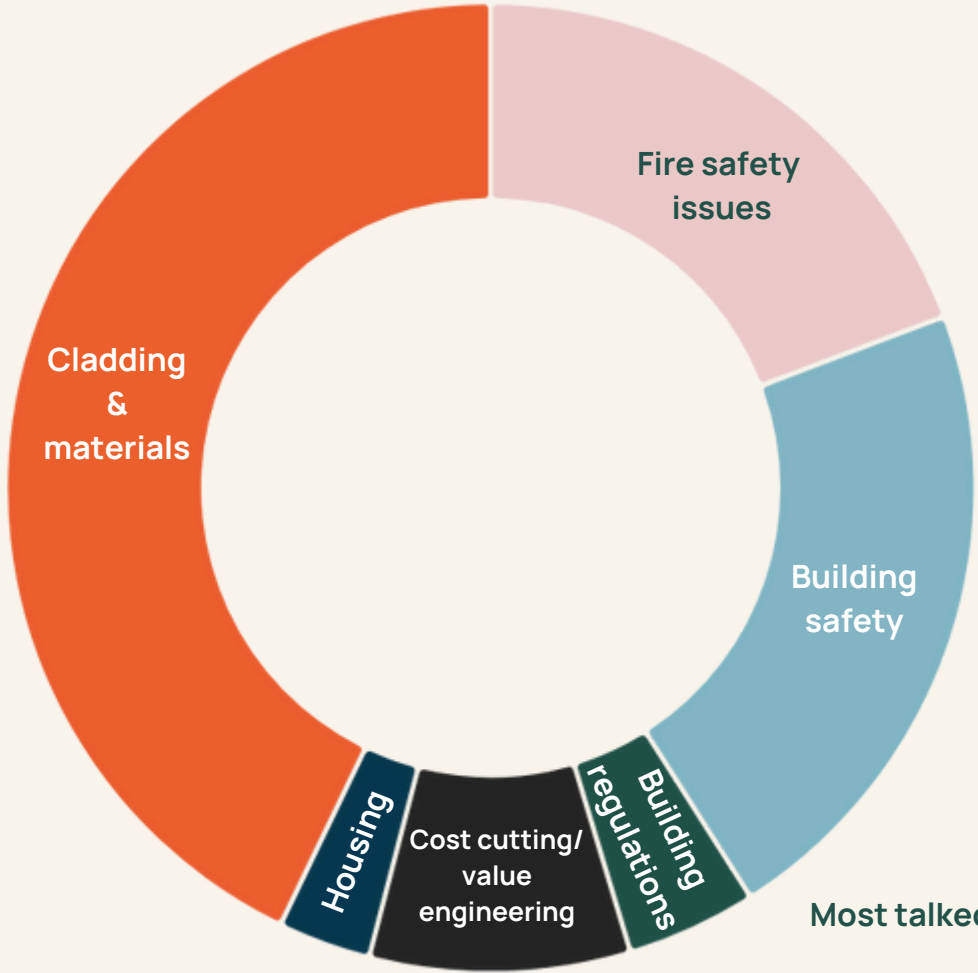
Most mentioned organisations in the Guardian



The Times and Sunday Times

Reporting in the Times and the Sunday Times focused on survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire and the Government's efforts to address buildings with 'Grenfell-style' cladding. **80%** of articles found in the Times and Sunday Times had a negative sentiment.

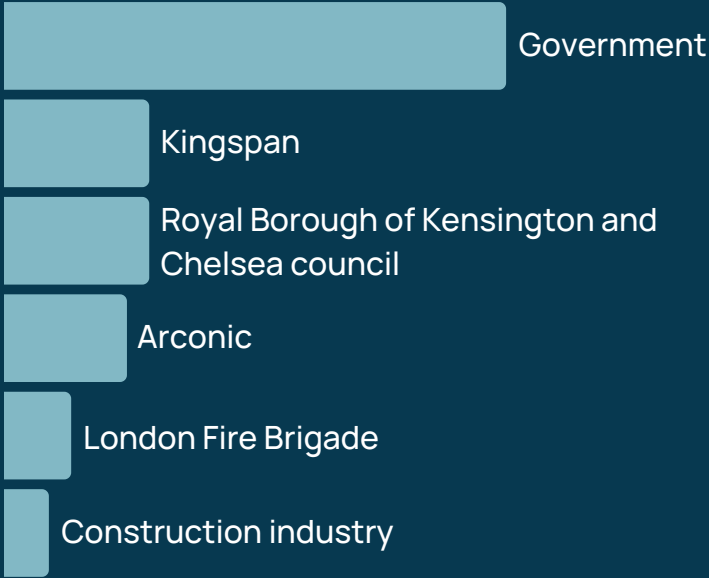
Several articles discussed the impact of Grenfell on the housing industry and the difficulty of rehousing victims.



Most talked about topics in the Times and Sunday Times

 **185**

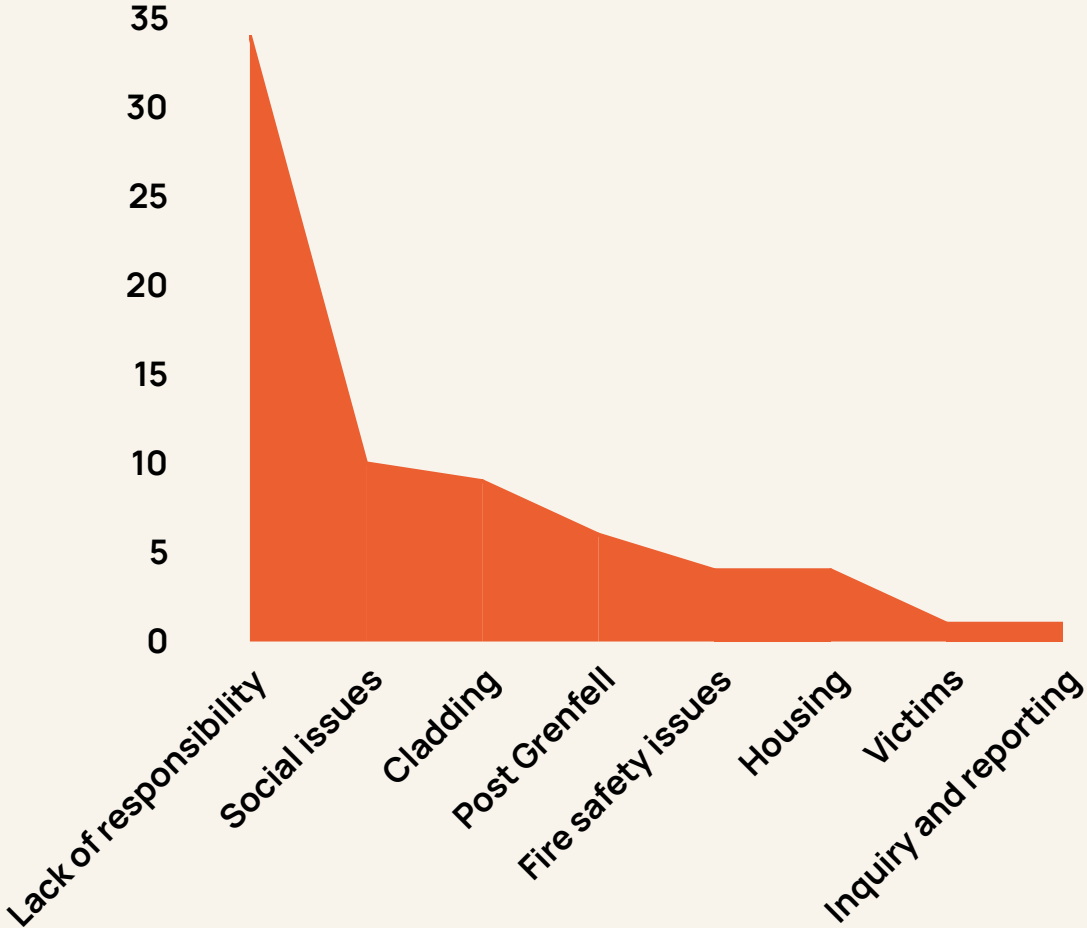
articles, videos and interviews about the Grenfell Tower fire and construction reported on by The Times & The Sunday Times



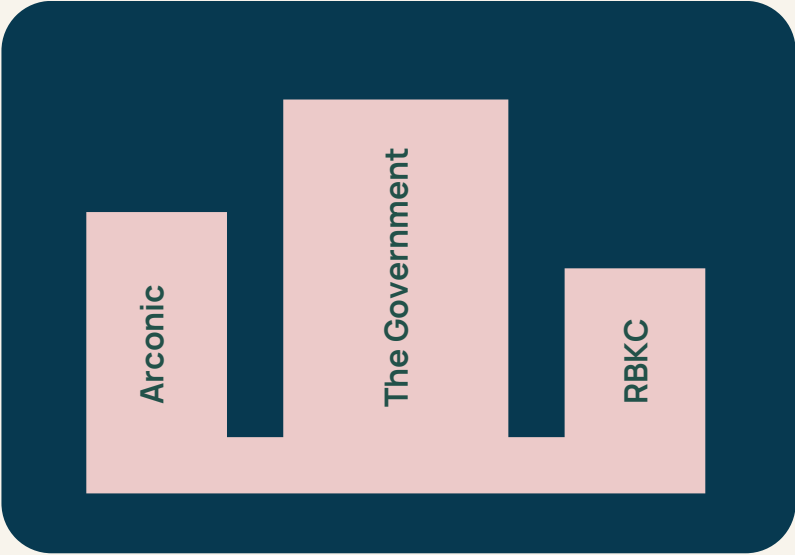
The Daily Mail

The Daily Mail’s reporting on Grenfell highlighted survivors opinions on the Government’s actions post Grenfell. It also focused on the mental health effects of the fire on victims and survivors as well as the role of London Fire Brigade in the tragedy.

Most talked about topics in the Daily Mail



Most mentioned organisations in the Daily Mail



articles, videos and interviews about the Grenfell Tower fire and construction reported by The Daily Mail

The Sun

The Sun's media coverage on the Grenfell Tower Fire focused heavily on building safety and the London Fire Brigade's response to the fire. 69% of articles found had a negative sentiment.

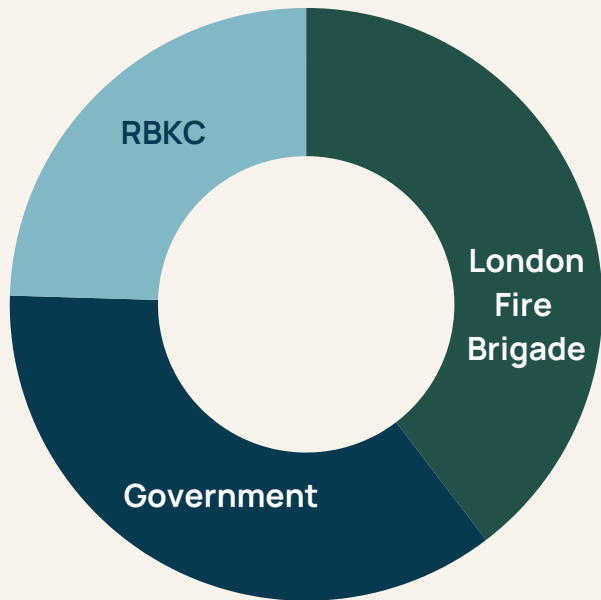
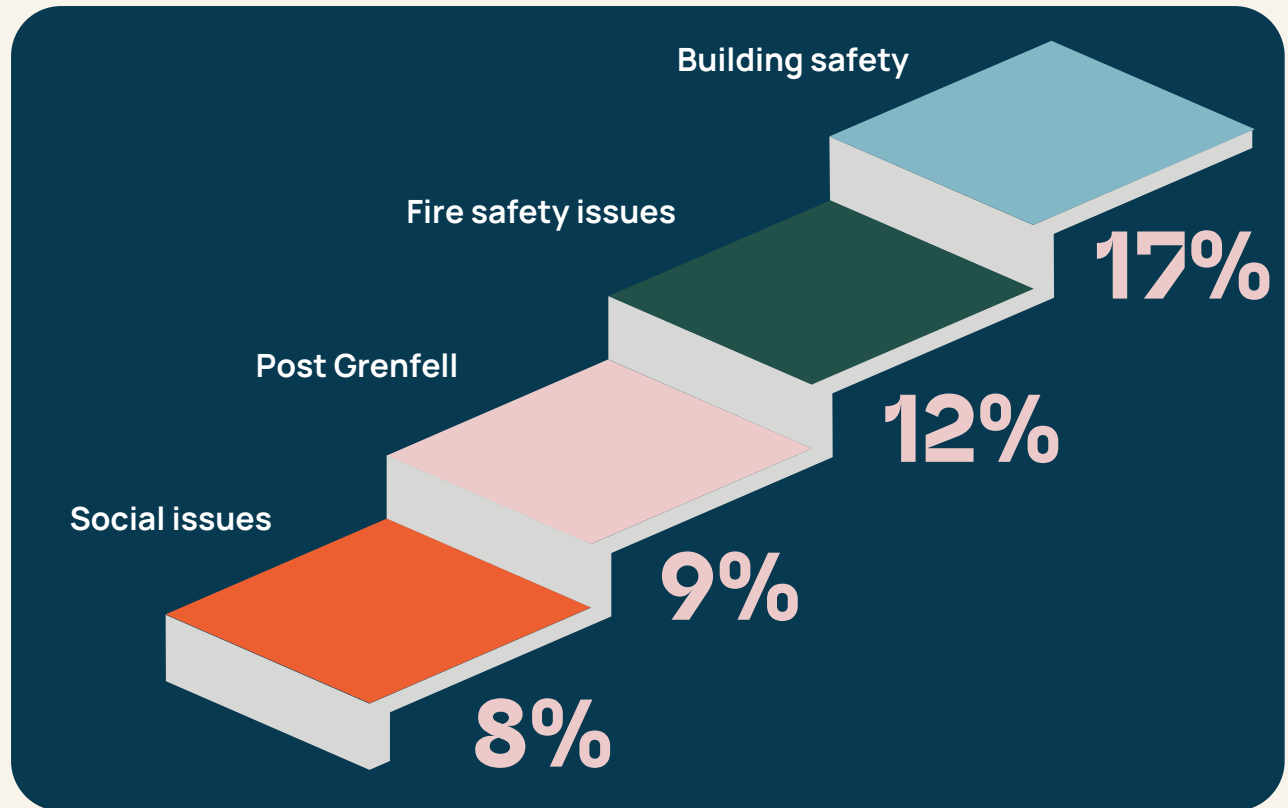
In 2022, the Sun highlighted the lack of progress by the five year anniversary of the tragedy. It shone a light on the housing crisis caused by this incident and survivors stories.



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articles, videos and interviews about the Grenfell Tower fire and construction reported by The Sun

Most talked about topics in the Sun



Most mentioned companies in the Sun

What happens next?

The Phase 2 Report of the Public Inquiry will be published on 4 September 2024. Already, we can see a pattern forming in the national media which will be playing a large role in shaping public opinion about the tragedy.

It shows a construction industry demonstrating a lack of care and responsibility, underpinned by a regulatory regime that was not fit for purpose when it came to building safety.

When the final report is published, it is likely that those themes will continue to be explored. Shortly after its publication, LMC will update this report. It will include our analysis of how the national media has continued to cover the story, alongside our thoughts on how the industry can start to rebuild its reputation and move forward.

If you have any questions about our research and would like to get in touch, please contact dan@lizmale.co.uk

