



All-Party Parliamentary Group for Funerals and Bereavement

Annual Report

2020/2021



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Foreword



Sir John Hayes MP

Welcome to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Funerals and Bereavement's inaugural annual report.

In this report you will hear about the funerals, bereavement and death care sector's role in our lives, particularly over the challenging last eighteen months. The report will not only examine the sector's response to COVID-19, in its role as a critical responder, but also explore the need to address outdated laws and regulations, brought to the fore by the pandemic. This will allow the sector to better respond to future national emergencies.

This report also shines a light on the impact of COVID-19 on bereaved people: the isolation felt by many families, unable to be supported at the funeral by their loved ones or communities; the unresolved grief of those unable to attend a funeral due to restrictions; and the inability, particularly in the early months of the pandemic, of families to carry out important funeral rituals and customs.

And, finally, this report takes a closer look at the dramatic changes currently occurring in a very traditional sector, one that includes some of the UK's oldest family businesses and organisations in both the public and private sector. The report will consider how the sector is investing in its people and rapidly adapting to changing consumer needs and the introduction of new regulations. It will consider how the sector is developing products and services which actively reduce the impact of funerals on the environment.

Over the last eighteen months, the pandemic has created unique and unprecedented challenges for individuals, families and businesses right across the UK. The funerals, bereavement and death care sector has been no exception. Under extraordinary circumstances, the funerals, bereavement and death care sector stepped up and delivered for the nation, caring for all those who died during the pandemic with compassion and professionalism. This occurred against the backdrop of sudden and severe restrictions on the services the sector provides. Despite this, at no time was the funerals, bereavement and death care sector overwhelmed, as was seen in other countries around the world.

In the midst of the highest single-year rise in the death rate since the Second World War, funeral and death care service staff diligently continued their work. Staff found ways to provide personal, safe and meaningful funerals. This included rerouting hearses via the homes of bereaved families to enable them to say a final goodbye, to providing video links of funeral services to ensure all those that were mourning a death could participate in some way. This was provided despite government guidance, altered by necessity due to an ever-changing situation and tremendous personal worry about daily exposure to an unknown and potentially lethal virus.

The driving force behind their hard work, dedication and compassion was, as it always is, a desire to help those who are grieving to cope during one of the most difficult times in their lives. Despite being at the frontline of the pandemic, the sector had to fight for access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing, work to secure involvement in local and national decision making, and campaign for priority access to vaccination. None of this was automatically available to the sector. The Government, through its consultation on the National Resilience Strategy, needs to learn from the pandemic and ensure the sector's needs are taken into account.

As Chair of the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement, I have had the privilege to hear firsthand from those working in the sector, and I understand the significant impact that providing this care has had on them. On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of bereaved families who have lost loved ones during the pandemic, I pay tribute to them for being pillars of support for their communities, particularly for those unable to grieve in the normal ways.

William Gladstone famously wrote 'Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead, and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land and their loyalty to high ideals.' It is a reality of the human condition that we will all, at some point in our lives, need to call upon the services of the funerals, bereavement and death care sector. Recognising the fantastic work of these professionals, and ensuring they have the necessary support in the future, is to the benefit of us all - and I would warmly encourage all Parliamentarians to learn more about the sector and to consider joining the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement.

The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP
Chair of the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement



The APPG for Funerals and Bereavement and the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG)

Deceased Management
Advisory Group

This inaugural annual report for the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement represents an opportunity to detail the work of the funerals, bereavement and death care sector. The APPG has expanded its membership in the last eighteen months to include more Parliamentarians, as well as involving representatives from DMAG.

Formed in March 2020, DMAG provides a central coordination point for the sector in its work supporting the UK Government and the devolved administrations during the pandemic and to develop a consensus approach to the challenging issues facing the sector. DMAG comprises the national trade organisations and associations for funeral services, cremations and burials, as well as funeral suppliers.

Its members are the Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries (APCC); Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities (FBCA); Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers' Association (FFMA); Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM); National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD); National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF); and The Cremation Society.

The APPG for Funerals and Bereavement brings together all those involved in funerals, burials, and cremation to discuss the approach to the many challenging issues which face the sector. DMAG's aim is to provide a first port of call for anyone looking for advice, information, or assistance from any representative organisation of this vital sector.

During the pandemic, DMAG has played an important role in advising Government by detailing the various and substantial pressures facing the sector. DMAG currently meets regularly with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat of the Cabinet Office. It has raised issues such as treating workers in the sector as priority workers, calling for priority vaccination, and the need for daily testing.

Executive summary

The death of someone we know and love is arguably the most difficult experience that any of us will face in our lives.

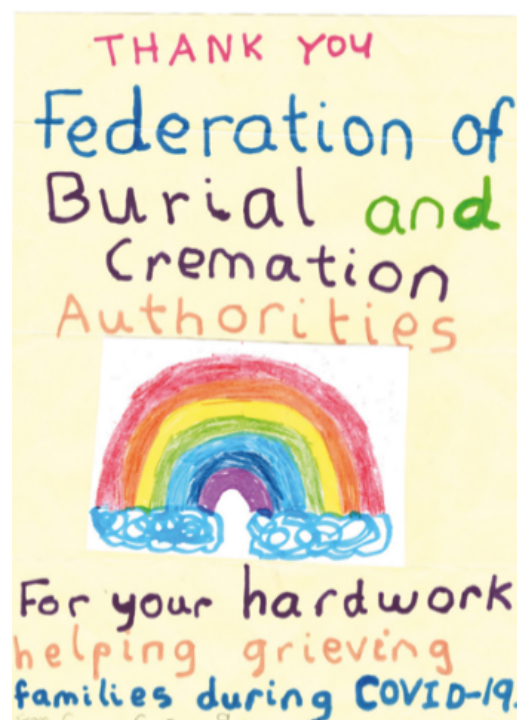
We will all come into contact with the professionals working in the funeral and bereavement sector at some time. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), National Records of Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, there were 697,000 deaths in the UK in 2020. Excess deaths caused by the COVID-19 pandemic increased this figure.

The funerals, bereavement and death care sector perform a vital role in society. With around 7,000 funeral homes in the UK, 310 crematoria and countless cemeteries and churchyards, the sector significantly contributes to local and regional economies, employing and training around 20,000 people¹. A sector dominated by small, independent and often family businesses, the annual turnover of the funeral sector was estimated to be £2 billion in 2018, although this has been significantly affected by the pandemic².

The real value of the sector is something you cannot put a price on - and often goes unrecognised, other than by the families whose lives it touches. All those who choose caring for deceased and bereaved people as their vocation perform a difficult and demanding role. They are there to care for those who have died, and to walk alongside bereaved families, as they learn to live in a world without their loved one. Anyone who encounters the professionals in the funeral and bereavement sector knows their value and we need to champion these unsung heroes. The intention of this report is to do this, to some degree.

The pandemic has also highlighted frailties in the UK's current resilience structure. Throughout the year, the sector effectively acted as Category Two critical responders, even though the Civil Contingencies Act does not designate funeral sector workers as such. This made the work of the sector more difficult. In some cases, it led to shortages of PPE, reduced access to testing, lower priority for vaccinations and a lack of automatic inclusion in critical responder discussions at local levels.

This report brings together the key organisations in the sector to explore the bereavement process and examine the sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic - with consideration of the impact upon all kinds of funerals, for people of all faiths and beliefs - and of none. It also examines how the sector is focusing on the development of its people, through a raft of training opportunities, how it is adapting to a changing regulatory climate, and how it is using new technologies to advance its green credentials.



A letter received by the FBCA during the pandemic



¹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0261018320932279>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fdb557e8fa8f54d5733f5a1/Funerals_-_Final_report.pdf

The pandemic at a glance

Timeline of events

March 2020

18 March - DMAG is formed.

19 March - The Government confirms those in the 'management of the deceased' are considered key workers.

23 March - PM announces the first lockdown in the UK, ordering people to "stay at home".
- Funeral attendance is limited to immediate family only.

24 March - DMAG issues joint guidance to the public on the number of mourners attending funerals following the Government's announcement.

25 March - The Government passes the Coronavirus Act 2020.

27 March - DMAG writes to the Chief Executive of Public Health England (PHE) urging him to release specific guidance for those caring for deceased people.

May 2020

11 May
ONS confirm funeral directors and deathcare workers are one of the very few non-medical professions with a high degree of exposure to COVID-19.

July 2020

4 July
Funeral restrictions are eased in the UK, limiting the number of mourners to no more than 30 people and depending on the size of the venue.

April 2020

9 April
Following meetings with DMAG, the Government confirms the sector will be eligible for testing when it is rolled out across the UK.

19 April
Following DMAG campaigning, the Government asks local authorities to ensure families can attend funeral services in person and to reopen cemeteries for visits.

June 2020

12-29 June
Phased reopening of non-essential retail throughout the UK nations, including those supplying funeral and cremation services.

October 2020

31 October
PM announces a second lockdown in England, bringing restrictions into line with the rest of the UK.

December 2020

18 December The Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) publishes its final report into the funerals market.

19 December PM announces a 'Stay at Home' alert level. Wakes are limited to six people.

March 2021

2 March
The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) launches its consultation into pre-paid funeral plans.

May 2021

Successful campaigning by DMAG and the APPG for Funerals & Bereavement culminated in the removal of the cap on mourners at funerals.

26 May
The APPG for Funerals and Bereavement hosts a child bereavement roundtable.

January 2021

4 January
England and Scotland enter third national lockdown (DMAG members highlight concern that workers are facing increased risk with no extra support, e.g. limited access to testing or vaccinations.)

8 January
DMAG make representations to the Cabinet Office and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. (Frontline funeral workers and mortuary technicians/embalmers included in the list of frontline healthcare staff for whom occupational immunisation with the COVID-19 vaccine is recommended in England and Wales.)

April 2021

12 April
Following DMAG advice to the Cabinet Office, the number of attendees permitted to attend wakes and other commemorative events increases from six to 15.

13 April
The FCA pre-paid funeral plans consultation closes. SAIF and the NAFD responded to this.

July 2021

21 July
As part of the roadmap out of lockdown, all funeral restrictions are removed.

- DMAG meets with the Cabinet Office and calls for the double vaccinated self-isolation exemption to be brought forward, following high numbers of workers being forced to self-isolate.
- DMAG calls for the extension of free COVID-19 testing for the sector.
- DMAG and the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement seek urgent reassurance from Government that funerals will not be treated as 'mass gatherings'.



Bereavement

Grief during the pandemic

Steven Wibberley, Chief Executive of Cruse Bereavement Care

In the past eighteen months we have seen death, bereavement and grief take centre stage in the world news. During each wave of COVID we have seen the awful statistics in the media. At Cruse Bereavement Care, we know that each of those deaths leaves family and friends devastated by the loss of a loved one. There may now be light at the end of the tunnel, but the burden of death and bereavement does not go away.

Bereavement is one of the most traumatic events in our lives. The death of a loved one is always heartbreaking. But death during a pandemic has been so much more painful and complicated. Many families could not spend the last few days in hospital with their loved one as they died. They were not able to comfort them, say goodbye, or be consoled by spending time together.

Often families were not able to hold the funerals they wanted because of isolation rules and social distancing restrictions. At times there has been a limit of only six mourners at a funeral compared with an average of fifty in a normal year. Many people could not get together to say their goodbyes, share support, and commemorate someone's life in the way that is so important for the grieving process. At Cruse, we hear directly from those affected about the distress this has caused.

After a death, most bereaved people get the support they need from friends, family, communities and faith groups. Lockdown changed this. People have not been able to meet as before and too often the support has been missing altogether. Bereaved people have been locked in their homes for months, isolated, alone, not even able to receive a simple hug.

Alongside the awful emotional toll of bereavement, there is also a massive financial and practical impact after someone dies. This includes the administrative burden of dealing with a loved one's estate and the impact of losing a household salary. For many, just the practical challenge of managing without a partner or family member's support can be immense.

The pandemic has had an even bigger impact on specific communities. We know people from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds have suffered a disproportionate number of deaths. People from more deprived backgrounds have also been more severely affected.



Steven Wibberley, Chief Executive of Cruse Bereavement Care

Cruse support changed overnight

At Cruse, we have continued to support those grieving in communities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland throughout the pandemic. Our sister organisation Cruse Scotland provides similar support north of the border. Before the pandemic, almost all of our work was done in person. That changed in March 2020. Our incredible team of over 4,000 volunteers changed the way they worked overnight, to support people on the phone or by video call.

We also adapted in other ways. We provided support through organisations such as the NHS, by developing the first comprehensive set of advice and information to support people grieving during lockdown. As the waves of the pandemic went on, we were able to develop more ways to help bereaved people. Thanks to a grant from the Department of Health and Social Care, we increased the volunteers working on our helpline, trebled the number of bereaved people we supported and extended the service to seven days a week. Emergency funding from the National Lottery and National Emergency Trust enabled us to recruit more volunteers and launch “Cruse Chat” – a web chat service linking almost 3,000 people a month with a bereavement counsellor. We trained volunteers to respond to every bereavement story posted on our social media channels, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We cannot support every grieving person ourselves. But we work closely with many organisations who work with bereaved people to share best practice and support each other. Alongside members of DMAG we work with hospitals, medical examiners, general practices and, of course, other bereavement charities. For example, we are collaborating with the Royal College of GPs to develop a “compassionate bereavement response” for everyone working in primary care.



What needs to happen now

Despite our hard work, and the excellent work of bereavement charities across the country, we know many people grieving do not get the support they need. Recent research shows that despite high levels of need, most people surveyed had not sought support from bereavement services or their GP³. Of those who had sought support, half experienced difficulty accessing it.

To tackle the issues of unmet need and barriers to accessing support, I am delighted to be working with Marie Curie and others in the sector to support the UK Commission on Bereavement⁴. The commission, chaired by Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, Bishop of London, will explore these issues and make recommendations to better support bereaved people.

However, there continues to be a need for greater leadership from the Government. Whilst we welcome the appointment of a Minister for Bereavement in the Department of Health and Social Care, we still need a strategic cross-departmental response. Bereavement straddles many government departments – Housing, Communities and Local Government, Health and Social Care, Work and Pensions, Ministry of Justice, Education, Culture, Media Culture and Sport and more. We need those departments to work together alongside bereavement charities and DMAG to ensure bereaved people receive the support they need in the years to come.

³ <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.06.11.21258575v1>

⁴ <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/professionals/uk-commission-bereavement>

The funerals, bereavement and death care sector's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

An inclusive look at the sector

Introduction

COVID-19 had a significant impact on funeral rites. All faith and belief groups (and those of no faith or belief) swiftly adapted when restrictions were imposed on our daily lives. This in turn has changed the way faith and belief groups and others prepare and conduct funerals, how people mourn, and how they respond to grief.

Through our research, and interviews conducted with faith and belief groups, we have captured the experiences of these groups and identified some key themes across the funeral and death care sector. These include examining how communities adapted to the bereavement process, cremation and burial, funeral services during the pandemic, and responding to new government regulations.

It is clear, however, that anyone who has been involved in the funeral processes during the pandemic will have noticed a stark change in the way we mark the passing of someone we knew and loved. Those involved comprise the entire sector, and include ministers, celebrants, mourners, crematoria staff, grave diggers, funeral directors, morticians, florists, manufacturers, ground staff, and bereavement counsellors.

Cremation and burial statistics

Members of DMAG have worked hard during the pandemic to respond to the circa 700,000 funerals that have taken place in 2020-21⁵. The Cremation Society has gathered data from the British Isles' 310 crematoria and has made this cremation data publicly available via its website.

The Cremation Society's statistics show that in 2020, out of 691,078 deaths, there were 542,744 cremations representing 78.54% of the total UK population who died that year⁶. Interestingly, there is an accompanying increase in the number of direct cremations, but it is too early to conclude whether this is a result of the pandemic. For example, where a direct cremation took place, mourners may have held a service in the crematorium car park; or mourners may simply not have had the choice to hold an attended funeral due to self-isolation, travel restrictions, or the closure of a crematorium chapel.

Definition: Direct cremations can be seen as an alternative to the traditional funeral many people recognise. Direct cremation is an unattended cremation; there is no funeral service; the coffin is simply received at the crematorium and cremated. After cremation, the ashes are returned to the family who then choose how to give a farewell.

⁵ <https://www.ibisworld.com/uk/bed/number-of-deaths/44175/>

⁶ The Official Journal of The Cremation Society, Pharos International, Statistics Issue 2021

Findings from faith and belief communities

Government restrictions required changes to funeral services, reduced the number of attendees, and required fewer service operatives on site at any one time. The sector demonstrated its resilience once again and continued to provide the highest level of care to those in need ensuring as normal a goodbye as possible.



Christianity

Church of England

The Church of England officiates at 25% of all funerals in the UK⁷. The Reverend Canon Dr Sandra Millar, Head of Life Events and Welcome for the Church of England, said the Church responded quickly to restrictions imposed on worship and funerals. The Church effectively supported the bereaved by providing resources and a short service for mourners to use at home on the day of the funeral. This was available online, free to all and communicated to parishioners. Furthermore, when a minister was unavailable to attend the funeral, clergy provided funeral directors with prayers to read.

According to the Church's data, one in ten of those who experienced someone's death were not able to attend funerals. Furthermore, more than eight in ten agreed that people have not been able to say goodbye properly or fulfil funeral wishes⁸.

Simple services therefore became the norm. However, according to the Church, 'simple' did not necessarily result in a loss of meaning. Dr Millar noted that small services encouraged intimacy for the mourners and allowed them to grieve, albeit in a different way. The fact only close family could attend the funeral was, however, incredibly difficult for some.

One of the positive initiatives emanating from the pandemic was the successful use of technology in crematoria, the graveside and in churches. Research from the Church showed that around four in ten funerals were livestreamed during the pandemic. This meant those in care homes and overseas found this to be comforting as they could still mourn and say goodbye to those they knew and loved.

Catholic Church

The Catholic Church's response to the pandemic was broadly similar to other Christian denominations where funeral rites changed. The Catholic Church provided resources and support to parishioners following the closure of churches. In the beginning, it was not possible for the faithful to have the funeral rites of their loved ones carried out within the context of a funeral mass and accompanying rites (for example the receiving of the remains in church the night before). Furthermore, the traditional rites such as ritual, music, funeral directors, flowers, choice of coffin, vehicles and orders of service could not proceed. As a result, this caused deep distress to the bereaved, as well as increasing pressure on the clergy and funeral directors.



"I shall never forget the howling and wailing of the children of a West Indian lady, who had died from COVID-19 and who were forbidden to see her body. I had to become involved as my staff could no longer endure their raw emotion and grief. I remember the son getting down on his knees in front of me and begging me to open his mother's coffin so that he could look upon her face one last time. He told me that in his culture the dead were thought not to be able to rest until their loved ones had looked upon them one last time."

- Provided by the Catholic Church

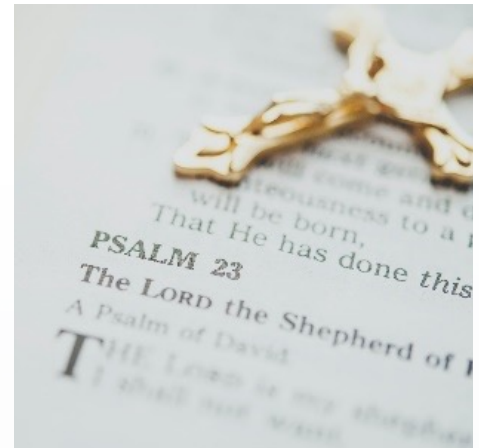
⁷ Revd Canon Dr Sandra Millar, Church of England

⁸ <https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Funerals-and-Bereavement-Research.pdf>

Methodist Church

Similar to other Christian denominations, the Methodist community responded to the pandemic by supporting congregations to have a dignified funeral, celebrating the life of the deceased.

Throughout the pandemic, Methodist Ministers conducted funerals in crematoria, and at the graveside. When restrictions initially eased in the middle of 2020, funerals were able to take place in church and chapel, albeit with social distancing and reduced attendance. The Methodist community provided information online for people who could not attend the funeral of someone they knew and loved, which included prayers, Bible readings, and reflections⁹.



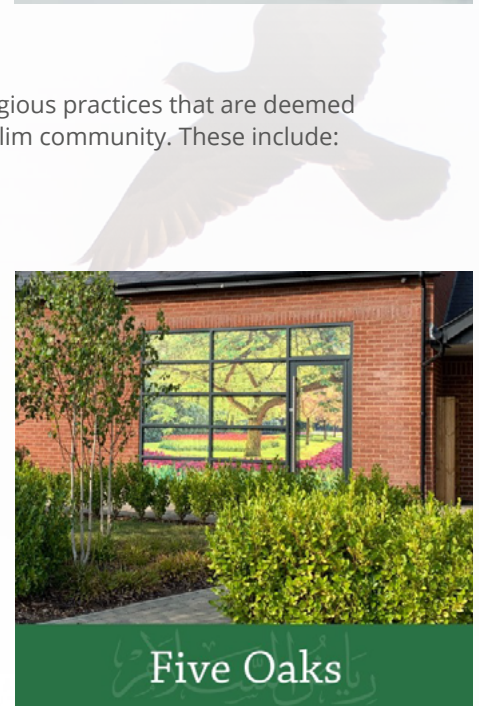
Islam

Islamic adherents comprise five per cent of the UK population, and have certain religious practices that are deemed obligatory to carry out upon death. Certain rites carry great significance for the Muslim community. These include:

- The Ghusl (ritual washing of the deceased)
- Kafan (shrouding of the deceased in white cotton sheets)
- Salat al-Janazah (community gathering in prayer)
- The burial which must occur within 24 hours after death

According to Mohamed Omer, Chair of the National Burial Council (an umbrella organisation dealing with burials and deaths for the Muslim community), the pandemic had a significant impact on the community and funeral rites. The Gardens of Peace, which is the largest Muslim cemetery in Europe, never compromised on the burial ritual. Upon death, the body was immediately released, and the community worked with scholars and Public Health England to ensure burial occurred within one day of death. The washing of the body occurred in accordance with public health guidance and PPE was used, despite PPE being difficult to source during the first wave.

The pandemic further brought the community together, and Mr Omer noted that they would not have been able to carry out the functions of the funeral without the support of volunteers. This is especially relevant because, at one stage, the Gardens of Peace were conducting 20 burials per day.



Gardens of Peace Muslim Cemetery

Case Study

Ben Blunt, General Manager at C.P.J Field and Co. Ltd, a member of the NAFD, provided useful information on how the Muslim community were comforted throughout the grieving process.

At C.P.J Field's funeral homes in Buckinghamshire, they offered their mortuary facilities for members of the local Muslim community, free of charge, to support the faith needs for care of COVID positive deceased. Some local funeral directors had been unable to provide this support during the pandemic. This support was to enable ritual washing to take place by the faith community, with support of C.P.J Field and Co. colleagues. This was undertaken with appropriate PPE, and social distancing was maintained.

⁹ <http://bishopmethodist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/when-i-cant-get-to-a-funeral.pdf>

Judaism

Jewish tradition requires rapid burial after death, preferably within 24 hours¹⁰. For Jewish funeral preparations burial societies were required to have appropriate PPE and be trained to use it. Traditional body washing could be carried out only under infectious precautions. Initially there were delays in the release of bodies, due to confusion and overload, but these were resolved later, and did not arise in later waves.

The Levaya (funeral service) (and later stonesetting) was impacted, requiring much flexibility. A six person limit was particularly difficult, especially where ten men were required. Mitzi Kalinsky (Jewish Joint Burial Society) said on-line links and recording of the Levaya (or stone setting) allowed family to participate, including those abroad.

The Jewish community were well prepared for the pandemic. They had procedures in place for handling potential infection. The community were incredibly supportive of each other, helping to cope with excess deaths. Professor David Katz (Professor of Immunopathology, UCL) said the pandemic posed risk for staff, exacerbated by early PPE shortages. Melvyn Hartog (United Synagogue Burial Society) noted coffin supply was challenging: every funeral director wanted coffins, the reserve stock (160) was exhausted, and a manufacturer made 600 additional coffins at short notice. Rabbis reported on strain handling funerals where families had no contact with the deceased during the final illness, and officiating at funeral after funeral under such abnormal conditions.

Buddhism

Buddhists believe that death is part of the cycle known as Samsara, whereby the actions taken in one's current life will impact on their future incarnations. As a religion that believes in reincarnation, Buddhists place great importance on the soul. Upon death, many Buddhists believe that the body should not be touched for at least four hours because the soul does not leave the body immediately after death.

Most Buddhists are cremated, but this is not always the case as some choose burial. Some Buddhist traditions say that at least four days should pass before the body is cremated and that embalming should be avoided if at all possible. The general advice is that the body should be left as undisturbed as possible in the interval between death and cremation or burial.

Sikhism

The format for Sikh funerals can vary widely. Sometimes there will be a service before the cremation, during the cremation, and then another service at the Gurdwara (the Sikh place of worship). Sometimes there will only be a cremation, with a few prayers recited¹¹.

Most Sikh funerals include the recital of Ardas, a community prayer, as well as two daily prayers, Japji and Kirtan Sohila. Services can take place at the home of the bereaved family, at the Gurdwara, outdoors, or at the crematorium. According to the Sikh Council of the UK, Gurdwaras were still able to conduct funerals during the pandemic. However, some Gurdwaras decided not to allow the casket to come to the Gurdwara before going to the crematorium due to the risk of the virus spreading¹².

Hinduism

Hindus believe in reincarnation, and upon death the soul will transfer to another body as the soul is brought closer to Nirvana¹³.

The rites for a Hindu funeral involve 'religious songs at the deathbed, sacred water from the river Ganges to be given before death, and sacred chanting at the deathbed'¹⁴. Following death, the body is washed, anointed with sandalwood, and decorated with flower garlands and wooden beads (malas). The body is then cremated, usually within one to two days following death.

¹⁰ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/10953/html/>

¹¹ <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/religious-funerals/sikh-funerals>

¹² <https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/religious-funerals/sikh-funerals>

¹³ <https://www.paulwilliamsfunerals.co.uk/funeral-services/religious-funeral-services/hindu-funerals>

¹⁴ https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/104143/4/GoodDeath_Report_FINAL.pdf

Humanism

An interview conducted with Teddy Prout, Head of Humanists UK, provided insights into Humanist funeral practices. A Humanist funeral involves celebrating the life of someone who has lived their life without a religion. However, for Humanists, it is important to note that the absence of religion does not mean the absence of belief. Humanists UK note that they focus on the life led, the relationships they forged, and the legacy they left. They are based on the Humanist perspective that every life is individual and valuable¹⁵.

During periods of restriction, Humanist funeral celebrants found ways to adapt the content and choreography of their ceremonies to adhere to guidelines, while providing an emotionally satisfying experience for mourners. Humanist funeral numbers have remained broadly consistent during the pandemic, with around 10,000 funerals conducted per year¹⁶.

In focus:

The Changing Nature of the Funeral Procession

Ben Blunt, from C.P.J. Field, commented that the pandemic has reinvigorated old practices, in a positive manner. Given family and friends could not gather together to collectively mourn, funeral directors re-routed the cortege allowing people to line the streets outside their home and through town centres. Many faith and belief groups also shared this experience with DMAG and the tradition may well continue into the future.

Cost of funerals

For many, the cost of a funeral can cause great stress, especially when also trying to deal with the grief caused by a bereavement. The average cost of the core elements of a funeral is around £4,300, with discretionary items, such as flowers and catering amounting to a further £2,000¹⁷. The funeral and death care sector was conscious of funeral costs during the pandemic, especially where the excess number of deaths meant many people had to find funds to pay for a funeral at short notice. Some families also experienced the deaths of several family members, significantly increasing their financial stress.

DMAG responded to these concerns by calling for support for families so they could meet the costs of funerals, and the Government increased financial support up to £1,000 to help meet the costs of the funeral¹⁸. The Government payment covers burial fees or cremation fees, including the cost of the doctor's certificate; travel to arrange or go to the funeral; death certificates or other documents¹⁹.

The Cremation Society publishes the average cost of cremations in the UK annually. The standard cremation fee includes medical referee fees, environmental surcharges and a chapel slot. In some circumstances, particular crematorium operators charge extra for certain services (for example, an organist, webcasting the service or a weekend surcharge), and this additional cost is not reflected in the standard cremation fee²⁰.

Many crematoria waived or reduced the cost of online streaming and did not charge normal 'out of hours' fees for cremations and burials carried out later in the day, over weekends or even bank holidays, which many had to do to meet the needs of their local communities.



This picture shows the family and friends clapping a recently deceased nurse as her coffin made its way through the town

¹⁵ Teddy Prout, Director of Community Services, Humanists UK

¹⁶ Teddy Prout, Director of Community Services, Humanists UK

¹⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c9ba9bf40f0b633f6c52a7e/funerals_market_study_-_final_report.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.appgfunerals.co.uk/support-towards-funeral-expenses-to-rise-from-tomorrow/>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/funeral-payments>

²⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fdb557e8fa8f54d5733f5a1/Funerals_-_Final_report.pdf

2020 Average Cremation Fee	£821.10
2020 Average Total Crematorium Charge	£836.97
2021 Average Cremation Fee	£835.28
2021 Average Total Crematorium Charge	£848.48²¹

Burial fees are difficult to quantify due to the range of public, private and third sector providers, and there is a disparity between what is charged by these providers. For example, the cost of purchasing a grave and having a burial in a parish council may be a few hundred pounds. However, in urban areas the cost may be several thousand pounds. There are also differences in the cost of different types of graves. For instance a grave in a traditional cemetery may be more expensive than one in a natural burial ground. Unlike cremation, there is no central collation of fee data, and there is also no central database of burial grounds.



A woodland burial

²¹ <https://www.cremation.org.uk/content/files/Table%20of%20Cremations%202020%20for%20Website.pdf>

A closer look at the funeral and death care sector

Our people

A focus on professional development

Throughout the pandemic, those working in the funeral and deathcare sector have faced a variety of unique challenges that have required skills to be adapted. The sector is renowned for the caring nature of its work and the dedication it shows to grieving families. At all stages – from funeral directors to crematorium staff, handlers of the deceased to burial operatives – care, compassion and respect is shown both to the deceased and their loved ones.



Formal education

The NAFD has re-launched the Diploma in Funeral Directing for those already working in the sector who do not have formal qualifications. This is open to people who have worked in the sector for a minimum of three years and have not received any sector specific formal education and training. Karen Vanstone, the NAFD's Education Manager, commented *"We wanted to recognise that many working within the sector had a lot of experience but no formal training. This Diploma recognises the strength of experience whilst also adding recognised certification to an individual's CV."* Due to the success of the programme, the NAFD hopes to expand the Diploma and offer it more widely to those in the sector.

The ICCM provides accredited training and education to those working in cemeteries and crematoria around the UK. At the start of the pandemic, training courses were adapted so that they could be delivered online, ensuring that those working in cemeteries and crematoria continued to have access to training to assist them in carrying out their roles in challenging times.



Upskilling and adding resilience during the pandemic

Throughout the pandemic, limits on the numbers of employees working in various roles throughout the sector resulted in operators becoming more agile and flexible with their workforces. Before the pandemic, formal training was only offered in certain situations and to those in specific positions. However, the pandemic has highlighted the need for greater collaboration between roles within the sector. Richard Barradell from the APCC said that upskilling staff has had a positive impact on the sector and will continue going forward.

Before the pandemic, in-person training helped those taking those first steps in their career. The pandemic required training to move online, enabling it to reach more individuals. This also opened it up to different cultures and demographics. Julie Dunk, Chief Executive of the ICCM, remarked: *"We will continue to offer training online, which we developed at the start of the pandemic and has been really successful. Offering online training removes some of the barriers to entry into the sector and helps to create a more diverse workforce, which can only be a good thing."*

Case Study

In 2021, the NAFD launched the Funeral Service Awareness course, designed to act as a gateway into the funeral profession. Registrations have been high, particularly from those who have not worked in the sector before. Jon Levett, CEO of the NAFD, commented that *"We want to open up the profession to as many as possible and we are delighted at the high uptake of registrations since we introduced the Funeral Service Awareness course earlier on in the year."*

The Independent Funeral Director (IFD) College

The IFD College has recently launched a Diploma level 4 in Funeral Directing, as well as recent modules in child funerals to support funeral directors across the sector. The inductive style of learning is highly appreciated by the sector, and there has been a significant rise in training during the pandemic conducted over video conferencing with funeral staff. This creates a more diverse cohort by widening the accessibility of courses.



IFD College Awards Ceremony

Career paths

Career paths can be varied and incredibly rewarding for people wishing to pursue a career in the sector. The sector is committed to having a diverse range of individuals working and pursuing a career. According to Jon Levett and Karen Vanstone from the NAFD, this represents a wider shift in societal demographics and creates an inclusive and welcoming sector. The sector is keen to develop motivated, ambitious, and hard-working individuals, whatever their level of experience. The case study below highlights two such examples.

Case Study

Simon Helliard-Moore, Crescent Funeral Services

After completing a work experience placement with a local funeral director, Simon saw the diversity of the profession and the range of services offered to those using them. He worked for six years with that same firm, learning new skills, and gaining responsibility usually not afforded to people of his age. This enabled Simon to establish himself in both corporate and independent funeral directors in London, before setting up his own Funeral Home right where it all started, in his hometown of Taunton, Somerset. Terry Tennens, CEO of SAIF, said Simon sits on SAIF's National Executive Committee and is a 'make happen' leader. In this position, Simon helps to nurture the next generation of funeral directors.

Anxious to ensure other, ambitious and driven individuals keen to work in the sector are given the same opportunities, Simon offered training and a placement to James Chorley, who at 15 was keen to pursue a career within the sector. Simon worked with SAIF and the Independent Funeral Director's (IFD) College on safeguarding hurdles and the legal requirements of formal education. Once this had all been agreed and two years on, James became the youngest qualified funeral director in the country and the IFD College's youngest ever graduate.



James Chorley and Simon Helliard-Moore,
Crescent Funeral Services, Taunton

Concluding remarks

The funerals and death care sector take great pride in their professionalism. The sector is committed to further developing the skills of current employees and is conscious of the need to offer wide-ranging training to those looking to enter the sector. Through upskilling and collaboration, the sector is in a good position to respond to any challenges that occur in the coming years.

Caring for the Earth: the death care sector going green

The funeral and death care sector is keenly aware of its responsibility in combating climate change. Whilst this brings with it some challenges, it also provides opportunities for the sector to be at the forefront of environmental progress. Now more than ever, consumers are looking at the products and services they use through an environmental lens. The sector has therefore worked hard to introduce new and innovative methods to reduce their impact on the planet.

The Environmental Stewardship Group

The Environmental Stewardship Group was formed in late 2020 to find solutions to the environmental impacts of the bereavement sector. The Group's members comprise: The Cremation Society, The ICCM, FBCA and The CDS Group. The scope of the Group enables it to reach every part of the sector and to improve sustainable practices across the board²². Julie Dunk from the ICCM remarked *"The Environmental Stewardship Group brings together experts from across the sector to examine and reduce our impact on the environment. The Group comprises of a range of key players, all of whom bring valuable knowledge and expertise so we can make further progress on this important issue."*

The Group recognises that it does not have all the answers and will initially focus on identifying the key environmental practices it can look to implement. By understanding the issues, it can, in the long-term, implement more sustainable and effective practices, whilst actively contributing to the climate conversation and the development of new technologies.

Crematoria

The rise in cremations has coincided with society's move toward a more sustainable and environmentally conscious world. In 1945, only 7% of the UK's population chose to be cremated, compared to almost 80% by 2020²³. This presented some operational challenges, especially relating to sustainable practice. This issue has been on the sector's agenda for decades and it has worked hard to identify issues and implement solutions.

The 1990 Environmental Protection Act calls for the reduction of harmful substances released into the atmosphere²⁴. Regarding crematoria, this applied to the harmful emission of mercury, usually found in fillings in the teeth of the deceased. Mercury is a harmful pollutant once heated and converted into gaseous form. As a result of a £300 million investment by crematoria owners in mercury abatement filtration technology, the sector reduced its mercury emissions by 68% by 2018²⁵. Progress is being made to reduce this figure even further. To guard against this in future, any crematoria that are now built must include mercury abatement filters.

The process of 'carrying over' has also been adopted by the sector in response to growing environmental concerns. Previously, if a single crematorium had three services a day, three different cremators could be used. Considering the high energy output, this was seen as inefficient and a key contributor to the sector's emissions. By 'carrying over', with the permission of families, multiple cremations will be carried out by a single cremator during a working day, limiting the amount of energy used throughout the process.

To encourage sustainable working practices, the FBCA, which represents 85% of crematoria across the UK, developed and introduced its own Environmental Policy Statement. This commitment to the environment provides a framework for members of the Federation to follow, encouraging continual environmental progress and maximising the efficiency of crematoria facilities.

²² <https://www.environmentalstewardshipgroup.org.uk/>

²³ <https://www.cremation.org.uk/progress-of-cremation-united-kingdom>

²⁴ <https://www.cremation.org.uk/environmental-protection-act-1990-part-1-1995-revision>

²⁵ CAMEO (Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions Organisation), the national share burden scheme operated by The FBCA and The Cremation Society.

Case Study

Redditch Crematorium

Redditch Crematorium has worked with the local council to install two new cremators with the necessary mercury abatement equipment. Typically, excess heat from cremators is dispersed into the atmosphere, which contributes to global warming. However, in keeping with current societal shifts towards sustainable practices, the excess energy from the crematorium is now used to heat the local leisure centre, including the swimming pool.



The FBCA – Snapshot

In 2021 the FBCA introduced an Environmental Awareness Report for their sites across the UK. Brendan Day, The Federation's Secretary, remarked *"Introduced in 2021, this Report will help to determine where the sector is currently with regard to environmental practices, and what further steps need to be taken on this key issue."*

The report will investigate the efficiency of each individual site's operating equipment, recycling processes and 'carrying over' techniques. Sites will then be ranked against the sector average and best practice advice shared. This will aim to improve the sector's environmental credentials and the FBCA hope to complete all site visits within the next 5 years.

The ICCM – Snapshot

Following a cremation there can be varying amounts of metals remaining. These metals may come from the coffin construction, for example staples and tacks to hold the coffin lining in place, or from the body, such as surgical implants such as hip replacements. Traditionally these metals were collected and periodically buried in the crematorium grounds. In 2007, the ICCM introduced a recycling of metals scheme in conjunction with Orthometals, a Dutch firm with experience of recycling metals from crematoria in other European countries. Families arranging a cremation are asked to give their approval for the metal to be recycled, or if they prefer, can opt to collect themselves. The environmental benefits of the scheme are two-fold: metal can be reused or recycled meaning a reduction in the requirement for new ores to be mined to make new metals, and a reduction in the amount of metal going into the land decreases possible pollutants. Furthermore, the money raised from the sale of the metal is donated to bereavement related charities nominated by the participating crematoria and since 2007, over £10 million has been raised.

Funeral directors

Funeral directors have worked hard to reduce their impact on the environment, at every stage of the process. Research undertaken by funeral directors has looked at all aspects of the supply chain, to find innovative ways of reducing their own environmental impact. Funeral furnishing manufacturers are developing sustainable coffins, offered to customers wanting a more environmentally friendly option. Operationally, funeral directors are embracing new technologies and curbing emissions where possible. For example, many are using electric vehicles when conducting funerals rather than traditional petrol or diesel engines. Additionally, many are limiting the level of chemicals used to embalm the bodies of the deceased.

FFMA in focus

The FFMA has established an environmental committee gathering information on where the sector is currently, and the direction it wishes to travel. Alun Tucker, CEO of the FFMA, said *"Moving toward a more sustainable future is reaching the top of our agenda. Taking advice and expertise from environmental specialists is a key way to look at our impact."*



Case Study

In 2019, P & S Gallagher decided to begin moving away from solely petrol and diesel engines toward a hybrid fleet. According to Pat Gallagher *"The vehicles bring a lot of dignity to the funeral itself and are very quiet when travelling at low speeds within the crematorium, church or cemetery grounds."* The public have been extremely receptive to the new fleet and their positive environmental impact.



Future methods of disposal

Alkaline Hydrolysis

Alkaline Hydrolysis, otherwise known as a water cremation, uses water and an alkaline-based solution which leaves the family of the deceased with ashes in the same way they would after a flame cremation. This alkaline solution acts as a catalyst to replicate the natural process that the human body goes through after death.

The first UK resomations were overseen by the FBCA and Professor Douglas Davies from Durham University. To develop a clearer evidence-based approach to the issues surrounding water cremation, a further scientific study has taken place involving the first five resomations in the UK. The role of the Federation, on behalf of its member authorities, was to ensure the resomations were conducted in accordance with the high standards set out in the Code of Cremation Practice and that suitable processes and administration was implemented at every stage of the process. According to a further study conducted by Professor Lian Lundy *"The results from the samples indicate that there is no technical reason why the liquid from water cremation cannot be discharged to sewer for processing by standard water treatment methods."*²⁶



Consequently, UK's first 'wastewater consent to discharge' license was granted in 2020 by Yorkshire Water. This paves the way for further permits to be granted in future. The landmark decision removes one of the practical hurdles of water cremations and could represent a shift to wider use in the UK.

²⁶ <https://resomation.com/news/successful-study-of-water-cremation-completed-for-yorkshire-water/>

The environmental argument for Alkaline Hydrolysis

Whilst in the UK water cremations are yet to be widely used, they are already offered as a funeral choice in some Canadian provinces and several states in the United States. The process returns the body to ashes, giving families of the deceased the same options as they would a flame cremation.

Research shows that water cremations reduce an individual funeral's greenhouse gas emissions, requires less energy, and stops some harmful chemicals from being released. Howard Pickard, the Managing Director of Resomation Ltd, an organisation at the forefront of UK efforts toward water cremations, commented *"Independent reports have found that water cremation is environmentally friendlier than other end of life options, including a significantly smaller carbon footprint, less energy consumption, and no airborne release of harmful emissions such as nitrous oxides, mercury from dental amalgam and dioxins."*²⁷

The FBCA highlight the need for more evidence when determining the environmental benefits of new approaches. The Federation cites the environmental disposal of the methane produced during the resomation process as an issue that needs to be explored and addressed. However, the environmental case for water cremations is building, but the Government have indicated that they 'currently have no plans to bring forward legislation in this area'²⁸. This shows there is still work to be done to convince both regulators and the public of their benefit.

Natural Organic Reduction

Natural Organic Reduction, otherwise known as human composting, is a relatively new method of disposal first legalised in the United States of America in 2019²⁹. This process replicates the natural decomposition of the human body under optimal conditions that speed up the process. According to researchers, this process only uses an eighth of the amount of energy used in a flame cremation³⁰.

The process of Natural Organic Reduction involves the deceased being placed into a container along with straw, wood chips, alfalfa and other composting materials³¹. The body is then heated to 55°C for a minimum of three days³² to create optimal conditions for decomposition. At this temperature and with the right mix of carbon dioxide, nitrogen and oxygen, microbes accelerate the normal rate of decomposition to a period of between four to six weeks³³. The family of the deceased will then receive the soil to use as they wish.

Concluding remarks

The sector has recognised methods and techniques that it can implement to move toward a more environmental future. It also recognises the part that it can play in helping to achieve key climate milestones. As a responsible sector, it is looking to the future, preparing for and anticipating new legislation. As its track record shows, when called upon, the sector can make the necessary adjustments to align itself with regulation, societal trends and the environmental concerns of the public.



²⁷ <https://resomation.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/Funeral-Services-Journal-blog-by-HP.pdf>

²⁸ <https://members.parliament.uk/member/4481/writtenquestions?page=2#expand-1139234>

²⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/may/21/eco-friendly-ending-washington-state-is-first-to-allow-human-composting>

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/16/human-composting-could-be-the-future-of-deathcare>

³¹ Ibid, The Guardian

³² <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/02/body-composting-promises-sustainable-way-death>

³³ Ibid, The Guardian

Conclusion

Over the past eighteen months, the funeral and death care sector has been thrust into the very forefront of public consciousness. Through this annual report, the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement and DMAG have presented an account which not only demonstrates the work of the sector, but how it has grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. The collaboration between the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement and DMAG has ensured that the sector is speaking with one voice.

The pandemic forced the sector to do things differently. A response to a situation of this magnitude and scope required decisive action and creative thinking. Time and time again, the sector rose to the challenge, assisting those going through some of the toughest times in their lives.

This annual report has documented the achievements and hurdles of the funeral and death care sector. At a time of uncertainty, and with a significant number of people experiencing grief, the importance of bereavement services has never been greater. The sector has listened to the voices of bereaved people and worked to better understand their needs and deliver the right support to meet those needs in a modern world.

Through an inclusive look at how the sector responded to the pandemic, faith and belief groups demonstrated their ability to adapt. The report has aimed to capture how faith and belief groups worked to ensure the bereaved could say goodbye to someone they knew and loved with dignity under difficult circumstances. Restrictions on the number of mourners permitted to attend funerals has, inevitably, resulted in distressing decisions for communities. Despite these challenges, the funeral and death care professionals have been able to keep these funeral services as special as possible.

Finally, in taking a closer look at the sector's work, the report has shed a light on its focus on developing its staff. Focusing on training and development ensures that those who care for people at one of the most difficult points in their life continue to be at the forefront of thinking. Through the sector's training services we will only see more people join the profession. Furthermore, as a caring and sustainable sector, and through the adoption of carbon friendly technologies, the funeral and bereavement sector is doing its part to become sustainable into the future.

As the full impact of the pandemic is yet to be realised, ongoing support to bereaved people will be critical. The APPG and DMAG know that without proper support, those dealing with bereavement will experience more difficulties and their grief may be compounded. The sector will continue to reach out to those in the community who need support, underpinned by their coordinated voice which reaches out to the community.

Going forward, the sector will continue, as it always has done, to be guided by those it serves. The sense of duty that underpins its work is undiminished and will continue to be the guiding principle. The sector will continue to make progressive strides, learning lessons from the pandemic and incorporating the latest technology into its working practices. The sector has shown that it is mature and responsible, and this will continue to be the case over the years to come.

Setting the agenda for the next year

In the next twelve months the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement and DMAG have an ambitious plan to build on its success over the past year. This will involve working with government on lessons learned, driving forward its policy objectives and growing its reach in Parliament.

Gaining recognition as Category 2 Responders within the Civil Contingencies Act

Gaining recognition as Category 2 Responders would prevent many issues faced by the sector over the past year from reoccurring. Most notably, this recognition would have provided the sector with adequate PPE during the outbreak of the pandemic, access to vaccinations in higher priority groups and free coronavirus testing kits. As the UK emerges into the 'new normal', ensuring timely access to booster vaccine doses and free testing kits is key to ensuring the sector can continue to perform its vital work.

Establishment of a cross-departmental working group

The Death Management Programme, created during the pandemic, fortified links between the sector and government. Building on this cooperation, the sector wants these links to be strengthened further through the establishment of a cross-departmental working group. This will help the sector to better work with government departments ensuring a coordinated voice across Whitehall.

Future methods of operation

Many of the traditions within the sector were long-established and have not changed for generations. The pandemic forced a marked shift operationally. Many of the old ways of doing things will return, however DMAG will campaign to ensure some of the innovations introduced during the pandemic remain. For example, practices and legislation were put in place during the pandemic to support bereaved people and the death registration processor was digitised, and should continue. These examples and others are practical and support both businesses and consumers.

Environmental practices

Environmental practices, as seen at Redditch Crematorium's successful project, should provide a benchmark for the sector going forward. DMAG will ensure Parliamentarians are aware of these practices and encourage these projects in their constituencies. Further examples include the electrification of hearses and the reduction in the use of harmful chemicals when embalming.

Policy Priorities for the APPG for Funerals and Bereavement

- The sector is aware of the acute lack of burial space, particularly within urban areas. Exploring solutions, such as the reuse of graves, will be examined throughout the coming year.
- Beginning in July 2022, companies who sell prepaid funeral plans will have to register with the FCA. DMAG is concerned consumers will be adversely affected, and it will work with government and the FCA to highlight the reputational risk caused by firms who do not register with the FCA.
- Responding to the National Resilience Strategy Consultation. It is important to recognise the sector's work in ensuring the UK is resilient to future threats and is included within flexible response structures.
- Growing the APPG and engaging more Parliamentarians from across the political and geographical spectrum.



Appendix: **DMAG Member Profiles**

The Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers' Association

The Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers' Association (FFMA) represents 80 businesses across the UK involved in the manufacture of coffins, caskets, refrigeration and manual handling equipment to the funeral profession, as well as a number of other service providers to the sector.

Now in its 83rd year the FFMA's aim is to safeguard and improve the traditional high standards of products and services that our members provide.

The FFMA has an important role within the funeral and cremation sector, including an active and continuing dialogue with various government departments on the many technical issues that affect the industry. Over the years, the involvement of the FFMA in various contentious issues has ensured continuation of supplies to the funeral trade.

In recent years, the organisation has developed a rigorous testing protocol which has resulted in the Coffin and Casket Certification scheme and provides reassurance that coffins are fit for purpose. At present this is a voluntary scheme entered into by the majority of the UK's coffin manufacturers. With over 170 coffins accredited to date the FFMA would like to see this become a Government backed scheme with all Crematoria supporting. Other matters affecting members at the present time are environmental changes, rising costs of materials, shipping container costs and matters affecting funeral vehicle manufacturers.

The scheme was achieved through comprehensive meetings with fellow DMAG members including: The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities, Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management, Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries & the support of the Cremation Society of Great Britain.

The FFMA has an Executive Committee which meets regularly. In October 2018 they recruited one of the funeral profession's most respected figures, Alun Tucker, as their Chief Executive. Alun has been in funeral service for over 50 years, most as a funeral director but over the past twenty years has been involved in the leadership of the National Society of Allied & Independent Funeral Directors where he served as National President on two occasions.

For further information please contact Alun Tucker by email chiefexec@ffma.co.uk

Or visit our website www.ffma.co.uk



Alun Tucker, Chief Executive of
The Funeral Furnishing Manufacturers'
Association

The Cremation Society

The Cremation Society is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, established in 1874 and recognised as the pioneer of cremation in Great Britain. Since its formation, it has been committed to promoting the practice of cremation, resulting in approximately 78% of funerals across the British Islands now being by cremation.

The Society gathers cremation statistics from across the world on an annual basis, which are published in a dedicated statistics issue of *Pharos International*, the official journal of The Cremation Society and the International Cremation Federation. The Society also carries out an annual survey of all crematoria from across the UK, following and reporting on trends and changes in practice in the cremation sector. This information has been used regularly by government departments and information was provided to assist during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Cremation Society continues to work with government departments and colleagues from across the funeral sector, in the development of best practice in cremation from ethical, environmental, legislative and practical perspectives.

At the beginning of the pandemic, a dedicated line of communication was established through the Society's website and social media, ensuring that followers could find the latest guidance and advice issued by UK government departments, along with advice being issued from DMAG. This proved an invaluable resource when dealing with enquiries from members of the public and sector colleagues.

Other on-going activities include hosting a joint conference with colleagues at the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities. This year the event was held online and was an opportunity to bring reflections of the sector's experiences throughout the pandemic, and to highlight the challenges for the future. The Society also publishes an annual *Directory of Crematoria*, which provides essential information to the bereavement sector. The Cremation Society remains committed to the continued investigation into alternative methods of dignified disposal of the dead which may prove equal or superior to cremation.



Wendy Buchan, Executive Officer and Secretary to The Cremation Society

The National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors

SAIF's background

SAIF is the largest trade association solely dedicated to representing the interests of independently run funeral directors and their clients. Established in 1989, the Association now has more than 1,000 funeral businesses in membership across the length and breadth of the UK, representing some 2,000 funeral homes. SAIF also represents several suppliers to the funeral profession, ranging from coffin manufacturers and clothing businesses to mortuary equipment and vehicle firms. The past 12 months has perhaps been the most demanding period for SAIF members, and its professional team based in Hertfordshire, with COVID-19, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Order, and developing a co-regulation model taking priority.



Terry Tennens, Chief Executive of
The National Society of Allied and Independent
Funeral Directors

Coronavirus response

Since March 2020, SAIF, represented by its Chief Executive Terry Tennens and Government Liaison Officers Paul Allcock and Joseph Murren (Scotland), has played a key role in representing the views of independent funeral directors to the Cabinet Office, DMAG, Ministry of Justice, PHE, and the devolved governments of the United Kingdom. As part of this work, SAIF advocated strongly for funeral directors to be included in the first phase of vaccinations due to their key worker / first responder status; provided mortuary capacity insights to officials monitoring excess death volumes; and worked closely with police forces to ensure proportionate and sensitive enforcement of mourner number limits across the country.

SAIF's coronavirus response has also centered around disseminating timely information to members about the latest restrictions and advice, keeping independent funeral directors, who are responsible for around 70% of annual funerals in the UK, up to date on legal requirements and emerging risks from the virus.

CMA response

Despite the immense pressures the pandemic has placed on SAIF during the past year, the Society and its regulatory task group have submitted comprehensive responses to the CMA's consultations on the Funerals Market Investigation Order. Since the Order was made on 16th June, SAIF has delivered a series of member communications in the form of newsletters and webinars including with the CMA Staff, with the aim of helping small funeral firms understand what is now required of them. As part of this work, SAIF has consulted members about the CMA Order and is currently compiling a wide range of issues and concerns. These will inform the work of the newly established SAIF CMA Order Response Group, which is preparing to present its thoughts and perspectives on the Order to the CMA over the course of the next year. The Group's overarching aim is to ensure that small firms are heard and that the Order does not cause long-term harm to independent businesses.

Summary

Although the pandemic and CMA Order are likely to remain significant areas of focus for SAIF, in the coming 12 months the Society, which has engaged the Ministry of Justice to develop an externally validated regulatory framework for independent funeral directors, will implement a new hybrid rule- and outcomes-based code of practice, aligned with the Scottish Government's Funeral Director Code of Practice. The aim is to ensure funeral directors across the UK work to a common set of standards to avoid complexity and friction between various devolved jurisdictions - and, of course, serve the interests of bereaved families. Additionally, an accredited customer protection scheme is in development, and there will be intensive activity to support members in complying with FCA regulation of prepaid funeral plans from July 2022.

The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management

The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management has a long history, having originally been formed in 1913 as the United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents. The name of the organisation has been changed five times over the years, with each new name reflecting changing times and an increasingly important role. Membership of the Institute is currently in two categories: professional membership for those employed in cemeteries and crematoria in the UK, and corporate membership for authorities and companies providing cemeteries and crematoria. The ICCM is governed by an elected Board of Directors, who set the strategic direction for the organisation. A full time officer team of six deliver day to day support to members, as well as providing training, education, and best practice guidance.

The overall aim of the Institute is to raise standards for bereaved people through the provision of accredited training and education, and the development and promotion of best practice in cemeteries, crematoria and ancillary services. This is achieved through the Institute's BTEC accredited Crematorium Technician's Training Scheme; the City & Guilds NPTC accredited Cemetery Operatives Training Course, and the accredited ICCM Diploma in Cemetery and Crematorium Management. The Institute also owns and promotes the Charter for the Bereaved, which sets high standards of customer care and environmental protection for the bereavement sector. Those authorities and companies that adopt the Charter for the Bereaved demonstrate their commitment to excellence and continuous improvement. The Institute showed their own commitment to these important aspects last year by gaining ISO 9001:2015 accreditation.

The pandemic has been the most challenging situation that the Institute and its members have faced since the Second World War. Although we have prepared for pandemic situations before, for example bird flu and swine flu, and successfully dealt with increased winter death rates on a regular basis, the scale and longevity of the current pandemic is unprecedented. Members have worked hard throughout to ensure that funerals can happen in a timely fashion, and in as 'normal' a way as possible. Restrictions on the number of attendees, and the need for social distancing have brought added pressures for both bereaved people and those helping them, and our members have found it hard to transition from being a caring, people-centred service to a more functional one with limited contact. Many are also tired after working for the whole of the pandemic period with extended hours and limited breaks, as well as coping with health and home situations, and caring for their own families. But, despite these difficulties, our members will continue to be creative in helping bereaved people to have meaningful funerals.



Julie Dunk, Chief Executive of
The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium
Management

The Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries

The Association can trace its origins back to 1924, but its primary objective remains very much the same, almost a century later, namely, to fully represent and promote the interests of the owners and operators of privately owned and operated crematoria and cemeteries who now make up over 35% of the Cremation Sector.

Some 96 new crematoria have been opened in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland since 1985, just under 90% of which were developed by and are now operated by private organisations. A prime objective has always been and still is, to review the prime issues facing the Death Care Sector at any one time and progress them in members' interests. Increasingly, much time is spent interfacing with government ministries, departments and their associated agencies.

The Association has an honorary Chairman and Vice Chairman and a paid part-time Secretary and Treasurer. An Annual General Meeting is held in normal circumstances together with members' meetings as required. The Association is also represented, usually by the Secretary, on key government committees for the sector such as the Burial and Cremation Advisory Group (BCAG) and the National Cremation Working Group (NCWG).



Richard Barradell, Secretary and Treasurer of The Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries

The National Association of Funeral Directors

The National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) represents more than 4,100 UK funeral homes nationwide, suppliers to the profession, and overseas funeral firms. The NAFD provides support and guidance to funeral firms and the bereaved families in their care. The Association has been supporting funeral directing businesses since 1905 and is independent of any single funding body or organisation. NAFD is inclusive and welcomes members from across the industry, which range from small family businesses to PLCs and Co-operatives. Between them, NAFD members conduct in excess of 470,000 funerals every year.

The NAFD's lion logo is acknowledged as a 'kite mark' of quality assurance, guaranteeing the highest professional standards. The NAFD sets high standards for its members in its Funeral Director Code and monitors compliance through an inspection regime. This framework ensures that the public that can expect a high level of service from NAFD member firms, offers fair redress to consumers when things go wrong, and provides for robust action to be taken in cases of misconduct by funeral firms. Bereaved families can turn to an NAFD member firm with confidence to arrange a funeral that is a fitting final farewell to their loved one.

The Association represents the funeral profession at all levels of government in respect of legislation, and campaigns on issues affecting not only funeral directors, but also bereaved people. NAFD provides informed opinion to parliamentarians, government agencies and consumer groups across the UK and beyond, on all funeral related matters. The NAFD also takes the lead in education and CPD within the profession and is responsible for a range of professional development programmes, recognised by major UK educational bodies such as the National Open College Network and Birmingham City University.

In February 2020 the NAFD published the Pandemic Planning Guide, made available to all Funeral Directors, regardless of membership. This was revised in the summer of 2020 ahead of the anticipated second wave. In April 2020, the NAFD launched a dedicated COVID-19 website, with links to government guidance across the UK. This sector-wide collaboration also extended to the creation of a working group of funeral director representatives on local resilience forums (LRFs) to share best practice. This has dramatically improved information flows.

Throughout the pandemic, the Association has informed the sector through regular briefings. This has included the publication of guidance, reviewed by a QC, the Cabinet Office and police forces, on all aspects of the funeral process and enforcing restrictions. These briefings have been further reinforced through frequent meetings the Cabinet Office, Ministry of Justice Department for Health and others. At the Government's request, the NAFD helped to collate qualitative data about local issues, tracked staff absence and provided information on PPE supply chains.

In 2021, the NAFD established the Independent Funeral Standards Organisation (IFSO) as an independent regulatory body to ensure quality standards remain high amongst funeral firms. The Rt Hon. David Heath CBE has been appointed as Chair of IFSO, and along with an independent board, staff team and operating protocol, the NAFD are confident that bereaved consumers will be reassured that funeral directors are operating to the highest possible standard. IFSO will also be available to non-members, and it is hoped that the Government will provide IFSO with the necessary statutory powers to ensure that all funeral firms are required to register.



Jon Levett, Chief Executive of
The National Association of Funeral Directors

The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities

The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities, formed in 1924, is the UK's principal representative of burial and cremation authorities and provides a range of services to support its members across the country care for over 370,000 funerals a year.

The FBCA represents approximately 85% of all cremation authorities in the UK. Membership is open to all burial and cremation authorities and is the only organisation dedicated to representing and furthering the interests of burial and cremation authorities, remaining answerable only to its member authorities.

It represents its members at the highest level and is regularly consulted by Government departments on regulatory issues and has considerable influence with these departments.

The Code of Cremation, which members are required to follow, has been regularly updated since its introduction in 1945. Members are also subject to inspections as part of the Crematorium Compliance Scheme.

The FBCA holds an annual conference with its partners The Cremation Society, which in 2021 was held virtually due to the pandemic. It provides a comprehensive training scheme for Crematorium Technicians, which also includes a specific on-line module relating to the sensitive area of baby and infant cremations.

In recent years it has increasingly focused on environmental issues through the introduction of the CAMEO mercury burden sharing scheme with The Cremation Society, the introduction of a free Environmental Awareness Report for members and an Environmental Policy Statement.



Brendan Day, Secretary of The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities

