

EVER CONSIDERED FUNERAL SERVICE AS A CAREER?

Every person that we meet in our day-to-day lives has two essential things in common with every other person – that they were born and that they will die.

Both of these events are viewed or governed by two extremes of human emotion. The birth of a new life is generally a very happy and exciting time, looked upon with pleasure, expectation and a great deal of hope for the future. Death, on the other hand, is greatly feared and the death of one that we love is so often greeted with disbelief, deep sadness and fear of the future.

The role of the Funeral Director and his or her staff is one which can be misunderstood and largely ignored. Yet it is a most demanding career.

The demands are not only for dedicated attention to every small detail; it is essential that a caring, sympathetic and understanding approach be offered to the bereaved. The ability to mix the harsh practicalities of death with the 'human' side of a caring and supportive nature is only one of the special qualities that any good funeral director needs.

It is often said that funeral service is a vocation rather than a job and it is easy to see why. Funeral services are run by either family businesses or by larger organisations with a number of branches. The Staff employed need to have varied skills and a genuine desire to offer as much help, guidance and assistance as is required by those they are called upon to serve. Funeral service is by no means an easy career option but, it must be said, it can be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding of the service careers.

What are the options in Funeral Service?

There are a wide range of jobs to choose from within the funeral service industry, including:

- Funeral Director
- Receptionist
- Operator
- Secretary
- Account Administrator
- Coordinator/Administrator
- Driver/Coffin Bearer
- Coffin Fitter
- Bereavement Counsellor/After Care Service Provider
- Embalmer/Carer for the Deceased
- Branch Manager/Area Manager

In many businesses, particularly small businesses, a variety of tasks may be performed by one person and the skills needed for these various tasks may need to be acquired.

In many cases you will need the ability to deal with a variety of people – members of the medical profession, ministers of all faiths,

crematoria and cemetery personnel and, most importantly of all, the recently bereaved.

Drivers and support service staff require a clean driving licence and the role may include a variety of different duties including the cleaning and maintenance of the company's vehicles.

For those wishing to become Funeral Directors, there is a need to have a complete awareness of all aspects of the service. It is helpful, therefore, if you look to begin your career as a funeral service operative, with training based upon the day-to-day tasks involved in funeral arrangements. This way you will have the opportunity to discover which part of the profession your skills and talents are most suited for.

Training is often carried out within the business, with managers and colleagues being involved as trainers. To study for a qualification you will need to contact us at the NAFD Support Centre. Or look us up on the web.

What does a Funeral Director actually do?

The role of a Funeral Director is incredibly varied and so every funeral director has to be multi-skilled, for example he or she must be able to:

- Organise and conduct funerals
- Be on call 24 hours a day, every day
- Arrange transport of the deceased to a place of rest prior to the funeral
- Be aware of the various religious factors which may affect decisions
- Be aware of all the options available to clients and be able to advise them accordingly
- Advise on all aspects of the funeral arrangements
- Advise on what help may be available to pay funeral costs
- Offer guidance on legal requirement, registration procedures etc
- Assist with cremation forms and legal details
- Advise clients on obituary and death notices
- Advise on floral tributes and charitable donations
- Complete all forms relating to funeral arrangements
- Be able to advise on Coroners' procedures
- Submit a written estimate of all funeral costs
- Advise on memorials of all types
- Arrange and conduct visits to the chapel of rest
- Be available, often out of normal hours, to help, comfort and advise, even after the funeral is over

What qualities will I need to work in the Funeral Service?

Care, compassion and the ability to absorb other peoples' distress without it affecting you personally requires a very special personality. You will need to become accustomed to the various types of bereavement and the various stages of grief through which each bereavement progresses – whilst never losing the emotional strength needed to cope with the massive range of feelings different people display as reactions vary greatly from person to person.

You must accept that this is no 'ordinary' job with set hours of work. The funeral service operates 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year in all weathers and in any circumstances. Death is no respecter of Bank Holidays, personal situations or private lives.

What skills do I need?

Depending upon the role within the profession that you decide upon, there are a series of training and education programmes and examinations/diploma courses available to you. The ability to communicate with clients and colleagues is very important and you will also need to have strong organisational skills. You'll need to learn the fine balance between necessary routine and outstanding customer service and then combine this with a caring, almost protective attitude. You will learn how to guide your clients through the emotional and traumatic experiences they are being subjected to, probably for the first time in their lives.

What training do I need to become a funeral director?

The NAFD offers a variety of nationally recognised courses including the 'Foundation Certificate in Funeral Service', the 'Diploma in Funeral Directing and the 'Diploma in Funeral Service Management'. Tuition for these examinations is offered under the guidance of the British Institute of Funeral Directors who have tutors throughout the UK. The examinations are handled by the NAFD Board of Examiners. Many firms will encourage staff to take these, or other, funeral related qualifications and will be prepared to stand the cost. Students may also undertake these qualifications in their own time and at their own cost.

In order to be granted the certificates for these qualifications it is necessary to be employed in funeral service.

Is there a preferred or ideal age requirement for a career in funeral service?

There are no age preferences or restrictions for funeral service, though a mature approach is, of course, essential. The funeral service is available to all, irrespective of age, sex, race, creed or ethnic origin.

What will I get out of a career in funeral service?

That's simple – plenty of job satisfaction and the chance to advance your career. Funeral service is one of the most secure businesses to be involved with, so you can expect a secure and regular income and genuine prospects to develop your career, particularly if you join one of the larger firms. There's even a possibility that you could branch out on your own at some point in the future – though a note of caution; the capital outlay for such ventures is substantial!

What should I do next?

Well, probably the best way to find out more about funeral service is to approach a local funeral directing firm and ask if you can pop in and talk to them about their work. They'll probably be delighted to help you.

If, on the other hand, you feel you need advice about who to contact, please feel free to get in touch with us at the NAFD Support Centre. All our contact details can be found on the back cover of this leaflet.

CAREER HISTORIES

Paul Brown

My name is Paul Brown, I am 21 years old and live in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. My first insight into the funeral profession was two weeks work experience with a local, established firm.

I had a natural interest in this line of work because I like working with people and every situation that I deal with in the funeral profession is different.

After I completed my two weeks work experience I felt very certain that the funeral profession was right for me so my next step was to work on a part time basis on the call out team for the same firm, which I found very interesting. The work included attending out of hours removals of the deceased to a more appropriate location.

During this time I began gathering information and made many enquiries about courses and activities I could take part in to enable me to join the profession full time. Luckily for me, a suitable position came up at the funeral directors where I had already gained so much experience and I knew they were the firm I wanted to work for.

I have now received a substantial amount of training and can carry out the following duties:

- Coffin Preparation
- Body Preparation
- Duty Call Out
- Attending and Driving for Funeral Services
- Removals from Hospitals
- Arranging Funerals (which I am thrilled to have achieved!)

I have found the experience very interesting and have learnt a lot from it. Until you actually do the job you don't appreciate how much is involved, but I thoroughly enjoy every minute of it. My ambition now is to become fully qualified.

Ian Hazel

A fourth generation funeral director, Ian Hazel is the great-grandson of Arthur Hazel, a gravedigger from Erdington, near Birmingham, who began to undertake funerals for his local community after acquiring a horse-drawn, hearse. Arthur founded A Hazel & Sons in 1901 and Ian worked within the family business until 1987, when it was acquired by the Hodgson Group now Dignity Funeral Service.

At this point Ian Hazel, who holds the Diploma in Funeral Directing and was admitted into full membership of the British Institute of Embalmers in 1979, decided to pursue his interests as an independent funeral director. Keen to provide that personal service for which his great-grandfather was so respected, Ian set up his own business, Ian Hazel Funeral Limited.

Ian's thriving business prides itself on supporting bereaved families 24 hours a day, 353 days a year. The business has its head office in Four Oaks and opened branches in Aldridge and Great Barr in 1991 and 2000 respectively. The only family-owned funeral director business in the area, Ian Hazel Funerals is well-supported by local doctors, clergy and nursing homes and was the first in the Midlands to own a fleet of the latest purpose-built Daimler funeral cars and hearses.



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