

COVID-19

HOW WELL DID THE NAFD SUPPORT ITS MEMBERS?

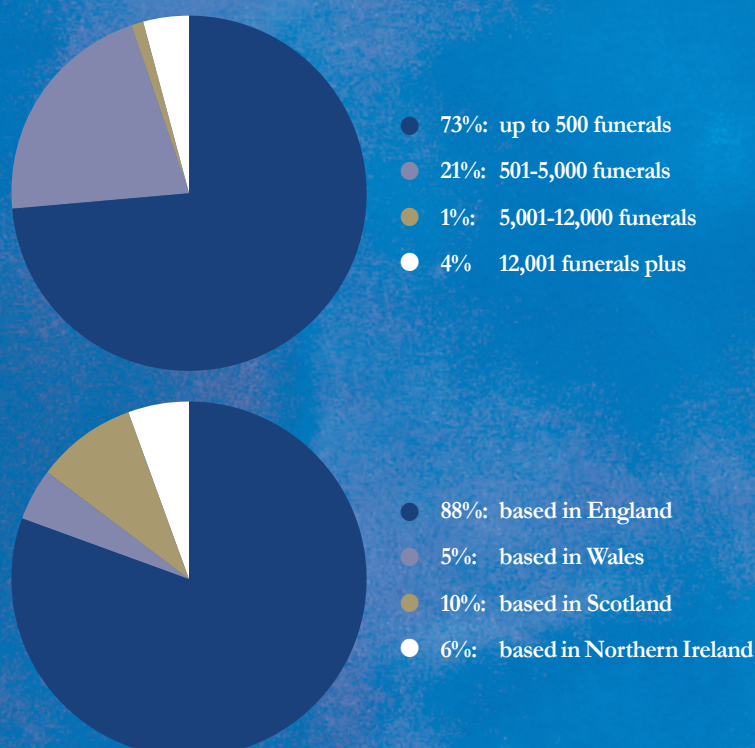
In July, the NAFD reached out to member firms to ask whether the support it offered during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic was useful, well focused and able to provide support where member firms needed assistance.

We knew from feedback that our efforts on behalf of members, including representing your needs to Government, securing media coverage of your work and providing as much

information to you as possible, were appreciated. However, we also knew that we didn't get everything right first time and, with only a small team, we weren't always able to do everything that members might have wanted us to.

The response from members has provided a very valuable and representative selection of views from across the UK and the wide range of members in terms of size.

Respondents to the survey



Were our priorities the right ones?

During the peak, the NAFD's small team prioritised the following actions (in no particular order):-

1. representing the needs of funeral directors (and bereaved people) to Government;
2. providing Government with information from NAFD members to support their planning;
3. campaigning/problem solving on key issues raised with us by members (PPE, key worker status, local resilience forums, etc);
4. communicating key updates/information to the funeral profession as quickly as possible;
5. commissioning insight and data to support your thinking and forward planning;
6. providing clear information to the public.

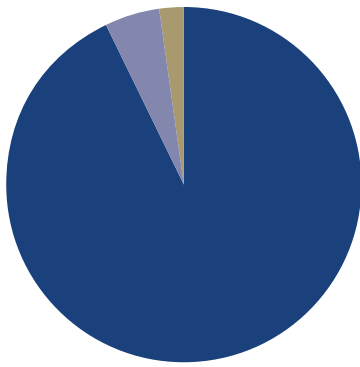
Ninety-two per cent of members felt these were the right priorities to focus, on with a further 4.5% unsure and only 3.5% feeling we could have focused efforts elsewhere.

Said one respondent: "There has been a vast amount of valuable information from all directions - many of it being circulated several times. In a small, busy firm, concise, focused news is really valuable - and especially specific guidance as to correct handling of deceased."

Collaborating with other trade bodies

The NAFD helped to found the Deceased Management Advisory Group (DMAG) which met jointly with Government each week. DMAG enabled the NAFD to influence other parts of the funeral sector during the pandemic, agreeing sensible protocols and joint guidance to make it easier for members to operate.

DMAG has also been an effective vehicle for the sector to speak with one voice when engaging with the Government and it provided opportunities to comment on, and influence, official guidance. We asked if members valued this collaboration between sector trade bodies.



- 93%: Yes
- 5%: No
- 2%: Not sure

One funeral home member said: “You need to maintain DMAG and ensure you continue to speak as a national voice and profession.”

Actions:

In response to comments from members, the NAFD will talk to other DMAG members about inviting other key sector bodies - like the British Institute of Embalmers - to join, collaborating with bereavement sector groups, continuing to lobby on behalf of members and raising its own profile within the funeral sector.

How well did we communicate during COVID-19?

The NAFD sought to communicate as widely and frequently as possible during the pandemic. The Association takes its responsibility seriously to be not only the voice of the funeral profession, but the voice for it too.

In the survey, members told us:-

97% received the NAFD's regular email briefings



80% of members who are on social media now follow the NAFD



72% of members saw at least some of our media coverage



25% of members joined a local chat group, but 56% said there wasn't one in their area



99% read email briefings



92.5% value the DMAG collaboration



92% said we prioritised the right actions



87.5% read the COVID features in *Funeral Director Monthly*



80% of members who are on social media follow the NAFD



77% of respondents valued the COVID-19 website



75% were aware we were pressuring the Government



75% agreed with our approach on PHE guidance



72% saw our media coverage



"Very useful. We have quoted from them for staff and clients. They have been a guidepost for good practice, and a hub for information."

"We have anticipated receiving them in order to gain further information."

"I was impressed by the level of coverage the NAFD was able to achieve."

"Our local authorities/county authorities did not mention the NAFD in any of their communications perhaps a more local presence would be helpful in my area."

Actions:

1. We will work hard to get the timing of emails right. Avoiding the end of the afternoon where possible, but still sending information as soon as it is available.
2. We will provide more bullet point advice rather than explanatory narrative.
3. We will prioritise Facebook more. It's now our most followed channel (by members).
4. We will ensure we always badge information accurately for the relevant home nations.
5. We will engage directly with members in their local areas to support the setting up of local digital groups.
6. We will investigate new tools, including Apps, webcasts and webinars, to reach members with important information.
7. We will strengthen links with local resilience forums and local authorities to help educate them on the role of a funeral director.

Did we create the right tools to support you in doing your job?

As the NAFD was not in a position to offer concrete guidance, given the lack of firm scientific advice from Government, the NAFD instead created tools to try and support members in their decision-making and signposted to reliable infection control advice as it was published.

In the survey, we asked members which tools they used:-

76% of respondents used and valued the Pandemic Planning Guide

75% of respondents used and valued the Risk Assessment Framework

77% of respondents used and valued the COVID-19 website

37% of respondents used and valued the Europe Economics mortality rate scenario modelling

"Where we didn't specifically use NAFD resources, as above, we did reference these documents in formulating our own internal guidance and planning assumptions."

"Pandemic planning guide was useful at the start to get us thinking about PPE."

"The modelling looked interesting and I was reassured that it was happening. There simply wasn't time to keep on top of every webinar, update, publication and by that time we were focusing on becoming COVID-secure and updating risk assessments."

"Scenarios were only based on Spanish flu."

Actions

1. Update these key resources taking into account COVID-19 experience.
2. Prepare 'how-to' bite-size guides on key topics.
3. Consider the optimum long-term use/role for COVID-19 website.

Did we give you the advice you needed?

Given that the science was still developing about the nature of the risk of transmission of COVID-19, it was not possible, particularly in the early stages, to provide members with simple infection control instructions.

Providing our own instructions, in the absence of (or different to) official guidance, could potentially have put members in a difficult situation with their insurers in the event of something going wrong. Therefore, the NAFD was careful to peg its advice to the developing Public Health guidance, to pressure the Westminster, Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Governments for further clarification and to create tools to try and support members in their decision-making.

- 71% of respondents were aware of the NAFD's efforts to pressure Government for clearer guidance.

- 73% of respondents agreed with the NAFD's view that, despite the concerns it could not offer advice that went beyond government guidance.

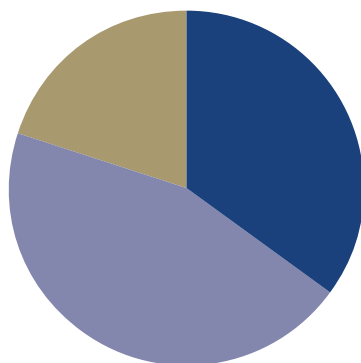
"I understand that it was difficult to go against Government guidelines but at times they were very muddled, confused and open to abuse and misinterpretation. The NAFD did step up but a little late and those crucial early weeks were lost. I hope that robust pandemic planning procedures will now be part and parcel of what you do."

"I think it was irresponsible NOT to give immediate clear instructions of how you would recommend all NAFD firms to handle the deceased. I would have rather had over cautious advice than none for several weeks."

Actions

1. Develop best practice guides.
2. Ensure communication of future changes to guidance is as timely and brief as possible and summarises Government guidance.

Personal Protective Equipment: did we do all that we reasonably could?



- 34.5% of members felt there was no more we could reasonably have done to resolve PPE issues;
- 45% were not sure;
- 20% felt we could have done more.

"The NAFD did what it could but was hampered by the different distribution mechanisms in force locally through the LRFs."

"A more nationally consistent system is required in future."

"It would have been helpful to be able to have a platform to report the amount of PPE available in each area, so we could judge if our entitlement was equal to the national average. As a company we received one package which was enough PPE for one case (hopeless)."

"I am not sure we could have done anything given what we and the whole country were facing - I think the NAFD did all it could have done whilst under extreme pressure."

Actions

Although many members were in agreement that the problem was global, that there was little more the NAFD could have done and that there were issues with LRFs and local authorities, some felt the NAFD could have bought up stocks of PPE and become a distributor to members.

The NAFD's view is that this would not have been possible for several reasons, one of which is that Association simply does not have the financial or logistical

resources to purchase, re-invoice and distribute PPE to more than 900 member firms - with a collective total of more than 4,100 branches. To do so would have led to the section reason we did not do this: it would have exacerbated an already difficult supply situation.

"It might be an idea to speak to suppliers about the NAFD being able to bulk purchase and then sell the items at cost plus delivery to members, in advance of a future pandemic. Also to speak to healthcare suppliers to make them understand that funeral service providers are not less important clients than the NHS for PPE."

Two key actions emerge:

- Feedback key issues to Government and seek support with categorising the profession as first responders (this has been done and was reported in July's *Funeral Director Monthly*)
- Talk to industry sector suppliers about how we might approach the same kind of scenario in the future.

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