

WE ASKED,



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE NAFD MEMBERSHIP SURVEY 2018

The NAFD Membership Survey covered a variety of quantitative and qualitative questions about the sector and the Association and attracted a strong response from funeral home members, giving the NAFD a really useful snapshot of the profession on some key issues and an indicator of how members are feeling.

At a time when the cost of a funeral, and the ability of those on low incomes to pay for the funeral of a loved one, remains in the spotlight, it was encouraging to see that the commitment of NAFD members remains undaunted with 46% of members never having turned down a funeral over concerns about a family's ability to pay. Only 23% of members have seen an upturn in how frequently they've had to turn a family away.

One respondent said: "We are acutely aware that the support available for families of limited means is extremely hard to obtain and, when received, is normally well short of what is needed to pay for a funeral. We do everything we can to help. This includes offering non-ceremonial funerals and then advising them on how to arrange their own remembrance events. Sometimes, however, it has proved necessary to refer families to their local council for a Public Health funeral as even this service is beyond their means."

Continuing on the theme, bad debt continues to be an issue for the profession with 86% of respondents saying they have some level of bad debt. For 12% of members, bad debt has gone down - which is positive news - but, for 36% of respondents, bad debt is on the increase.





It's encouraging to see that more than half of NAFD members now email price lists to clients as well as offering them in branch. However, the number of member firms with some or all of their prices online doesn't appear to have grown significantly in the past twelve months – standing now at around 32%, although this figure is for member firms, not funeral homes, which is

arguably the more important measure for consumers. Given that most of the larger members have package pricing online, as well as detailed pricing being made available by 62.5% of medium-sized members and 32% of smaller members, the number of funeral homes with pricing available online is well over 50% of the total.

Of those respondents that don't put their prices online, though, 27% still remain unconvinced of the merits of doing so (only a small improvement from last year's 30%) and this is something the NAFD will be seeking to address in the months to come. There's an interesting article about research commissioned by Funeral Product, on this theme on page 56.

Value of NAFD membership

After a challenging year, it was encouraging to see that just over three quarters of members feel equally, or more happy with, their membership compared to a year ago, with some members valuing the power of the NAFD logo: "Being a member is really important and adds serious weight to my business," while others recognised the value for money, saying: "It works out at £12.50 a week for an advice service."

Indeed, this advice is considered by some respondents to be vital but it's clear that not all members are aware of all the help that is already available, with respondents asking the Association to "become much more focused on assisting members, practically, with the issues of running a business. Offer professional help especially to smaller members who do not have HR/legal/PR/Health & Safety professionals on their

staff." There are helplines available to members for all of these disciplines, with details available on the members' website – but this is something the Membership Committee will take back to its planned summer strategy day to see how much additional promotion of member benefits may be possible.

Members would also like to see greater engagement from NAFD National Office with the membership and support in re-establishing dormant Local Associations and Area Federations, and there were several requests for regional roadshows to share more information about what's happening on a national level.

Moving forward, members would like even more help and advice on technical topics relating to the profession, as well as legislative and regulatory matters given the pace of change. "I find it

difficult to know if we are ever up to date with a fast changing society," said one respondent.

They'd also like to see the NAFD get even tougher on standards, calling for "far more stringent policing of regulation," and "removing (firms from) membership who are not complying with the Code of Practice."

The timing of proposals to reshape the governance of the NAFD seems to dovetail with a desire by some sections of the membership for change too, with some understandable criticism in respect of the events of the past year and a desire to see the NAFD involving the wider membership in decision making, ensuring all sections of the membership are equally represented and a desire to see the "reform (of) governance and structure for the future."

Benefits of membership

THE MOST USED AND VALUED BENEFITS

For smaller members

- NAFD Code of Practice – 84%
- Free copy of *Funeral Director Monthly* magazine – 76%
- NAFD literature and window stickers for my business – 68%
- Monthly e-newsletter and other email communications – 62%
- NAFD members' website – 61%
- Listing on NAFD members' website *Find an NAFD member* – 59%
- Funeral Arbitration Scheme – 57%
- NAFD qualifications – 52%
- National Funeral Exhibition – 52%
- Local Associations and Area Federations – 50%

For medium and larger members

- Local Associations and Area Federations – 100%
- NAFD Code of Practice – 87%
- NAFD qualifications – 87%
- Government lobbying on regulations relating to the profession – 87%
- Business, public relations and legal helplines – 87%
- Promoting the Association/profession to the media/public – 87%
- Insight from members' surveys and consumer research (eg YouGov) – 87%
- Funeral Arbitration Scheme – 87%
- National Funeral Exhibition – 87%
- Free copy of *Funeral Director Monthly* magazine – 75%

It's clear that members aren't necessarily aware of all the benefits they might be able to take advantage of, with smaller members not necessarily taking advantage of the complimentary HMRC and VAT investigations claims insurance of up to £150,000, complimentary Health and Safety prosecution insurance, the Repatriation helpline or NAFD Energy Club – which, alone, could save them thousands on their utility bills.

For larger members there seems to be a greater awareness of benefits, but the complimentary HMRC and VAT investigations claims insurance of up to £150,000 and complimentary Health and Safety Prosecution insurance still came up as a benefit they weren't previously aware of but may well use now they are.

The most valued supplier discounts for members currently includes:-

- Exclusive rates on fleet insurance cover
- Merchant card services
- Personal and commercial insurance discounts
- Exclusive rates on fleet breakdown insurance cover
- NAFD Fast Track Debt Recovery Service

NAFD President Abi Pattenden, who also chairs the Membership Committee, said: "I am especially glad that so many members are as happy, or more happy, with their membership, but we equally need to understand the 18% of members who are less happy. Members who gave a contact number will soon be receiving a telephone call, if they haven't already, to discuss their specific concerns in detail.

"What was interesting, though, was how many benefits of membership were not known about but which were seen to be valuable – such as HMRC/VAT investigation claims insurance. The Membership Committee will be taking these survey results and, in a day-long meeting planned for this summer, examining how we can revise our offer to make it even more beneficial."

In addition, in August's *Funeral Director Monthly* there will be a feature highlighting all the different benefits of membership and how much money members could save by using them.

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A Code to stand by?

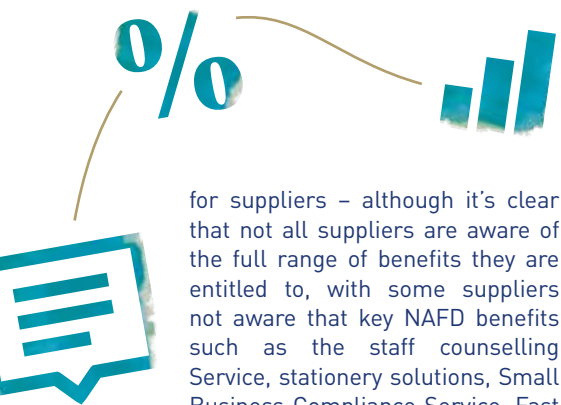
THE MOST USED AND VALUED BENEFITS

A survey of supplier members was also undertaken and, although individual market concerns such as the cost of raw materials, over supply and competition remain the biggest issues for NAFD supplier members, a desire to be able to differentiate themselves through the provision of high standards is one of the most frequent requests from the survey, with several respondents calling upon the NAFD to provide a benchmark.

Said one respondent: "I would like to see a Supplier Membership certificate and be known to be adhering to an NAFD Supplier Member Code of Practice, or Code of Ethics."

Showcasing their products and services in *Funeral Director Monthly* (94%), promoting their business at the National Funeral Exhibition (75%) and the monthly e-newsletter (73%) are, once again, the most valued benefits of NAFD membership

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for suppliers – although it's clear that not all suppliers are aware of the full range of benefits they are entitled to, with some suppliers not aware that key NAFD benefits such as the staff counselling Service, stationery solutions, Small Business Compliance Service, Fast Track Debt Recovery Service and merchant card services are all available to supplier firms too.

The Membership Committee will discuss production of a guide to supplier member benefits over the summer to make sure supplier members feel fully informed of all the ways in which the NAFD can support their business.

It's also great to see suppliers engaging with the NAFD at a regional level, with 56% of respondents saying they attend their Local Association or Area Federation meetings.

In the survey, 87.5% of supplier members said they were equally, or more happy with, the value of their membership, which was extremely encouraging to hear, but the Membership Committee will be speaking with suppliers to make sure it hears the views of the 12.5% that either aren't sure how they feel, or are less happy, to understand what the NAFD needs to do differently to ensure they feel they are receiving value for money. Some suppliers confessed they don't feel the NAFD demonstrates how much it values its supplier members, and there are also requests for new ways to promote themselves to funeral home members – alongside the desire for something that promotes quality and showcases supplier commitment to high standards, such as a Code of Practice.

NAFD President Abi Pattenden said: "I would like to thank all the supplier members who took the time to respond to the survey. Your views – whether positive or not – are extremely important to the NAFD, and the Membership Committee will take the feedback extremely seriously and discuss how the Association can best respond when we get together over the summer."

Survey highlights

46%

- 46% of respondents say they have never turned down a funeral over concerns about a family's ability to pay.
- For 12% of members, bad debt has gone down but, for 36% of respondents, bad debt is on the increase.

63%

- Direct cremation enquiries are on the up for 63% of members.
- The number of enquiries about DIY funerals is also up, but only by 12%,

12%

- More than half of NAFD members now email price lists to clients as well as offering them in branch.

32%

- However, the number of member firms with some or all of their prices online doesn't appear to have grown much in the past twelve months – standing now at 32%.
- Of those who respondents that don't put their prices online, 27% still remain unconvinced of the merits of doing so.

4%

- Almost half of NAFD members have increased their prices in the past twelve months. For those who have, the average increase applied is just over 4%. "Due to high criticism of funeral costs we have not increased our prices for 2 years running now. Frustrating as the increases are on crematorium and burial fees."
- The average price of the coffin sold most frequently by members is around £430.
- More than 50% of members in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have concerns about GPs either refusing to attend a particular location to sign cremation forms or levying additional charges for doing so.

25%

- 25% of respondents said they did not feel they have a satisfactory Coronial Service, and 73% of all respondents would support the introduction of national standards for Coroners.
- In Scotland, some 40% of respondents said they were not aware of the impact of the Inspector of Funeral Directors, with a further 44% saying they'd seen no impact so far and 16% saying they'd seen a positive impact.