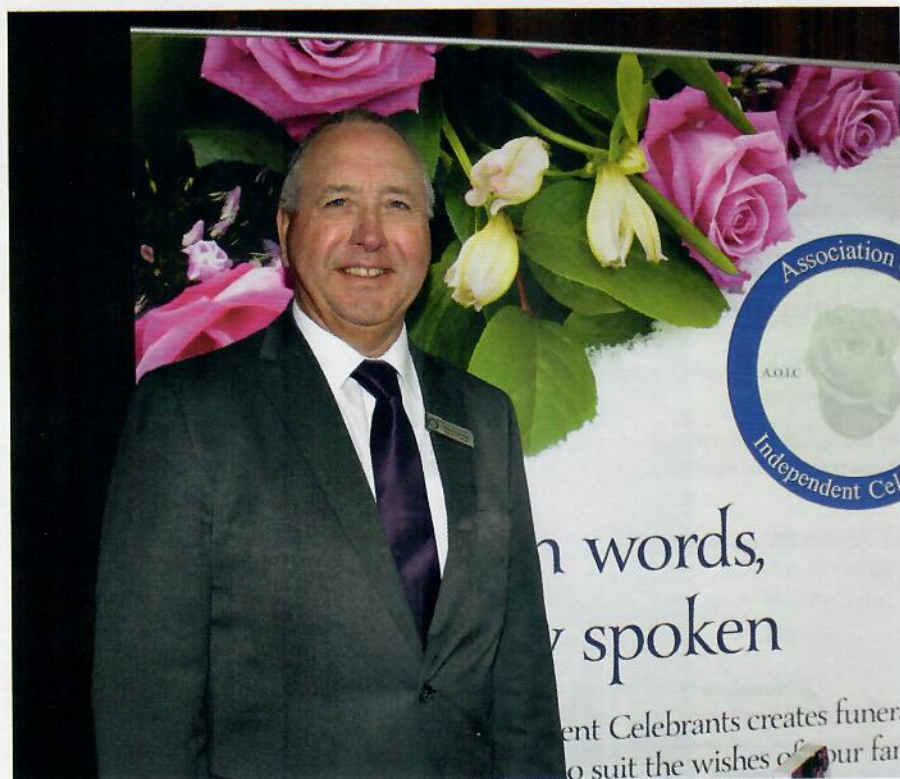


AOIC

Executive chairman of the Association of Independent Celebrants (AOIC) **Philip Spicksley**, looks at why people should invest in a 'Rolls-Royce' service



I have been following the recent CMA review on funeral costs with much interest. There is no doubt that competition within the industry is plentiful and growing, with a huge amount of change to charging models, and I include celebrants and church ministers in my observations. I have been conducting funerals as a celebrant for almost 12 years and during this time I have certainly witnessed such changes.

Taking my area of the country as an example, when I first started the average fee for an independent celebrant was £120. This increased slightly until a big Church of England review four years ago saw a large increase in ministers' fees with costs, including travel, rising from £117 to £175 overnight. This paved the way for an understandable increase in celebrants' charges. The most recent fees published by the C of E now establishes a standard fee for a Minister at the crematorium to be £195 plus travel.

One may ask what value such a fee should give? Having worked with other celebrants and having gained the experience of managing the AOIC, I can say with some authority that £200 is not unreasonable to pay any

professional person for a full day's work. With professional training that can cost thousands of pounds, a professional celebrant must charge a fee that not only demonstrates their qualification and experience, but also one that provides an adequate income.

All too often we hear comments from funeral directors about the growing number of new celebrants appearing in their offices asking for work. As in any industry, a good funeral director will select to use a person who they know will provide a good service and one who is reliable too. Price should come second - behind an assurance of quality and reliability.

Some celebrants are conducting up to 15 funerals a week and I would ask how anyone can cope with that amount of work, when research indicates that each service takes an average of seven hours to prepare and conduct.

Recently I was at an NAFD branch meeting where a funeral director informed us that some celebrants were charging £130. This did not seem enough to me and my enquiries revealed the reason - the market is suppressed due to the large number of celebrants who are seeking

work in that area.

I am myself a classic car enthusiast and would liken the industry to the old analogy of you get what you pay for! If you want a Rolls-Royce, then you must pay for one. Any minister only has one attempt to get the service right and each minister, be they a church representative or a celebrant should only conduct a service if they have the time and ability to do so in a professional manner. That includes spending time with the family and working with the funeral director to make each one special. We have all, at some time or another, experienced a service where there has been a lack of detail because the minister did not spend enough time with the family.

Meanwhile, funeral directors should always engage with celebrants who present themselves in a professional manner and who can prove that they are GDPR compliant, ICO registered and insured. No funeral director should be afraid to ask for sample scripts or witness a new celebrant conduct a service, with appropriate feedback offered. Funeral directors should remember that, unlike a church minister, a celebrant represents their company - after all, the celebrant has been recommended by them. Nor should funeral directors be afraid to turn a celebrant away, with a polite explanation.

Above all, the cost of a good celebrant is a fraction of the total cost of a funeral and, in comparison, perhaps also to the cost of flowers. And, whereas flowers die and wither, the memory of a well presented and professionally conducted funeral service will stay in the memory of the mourners forever.

Bearing in mind all of the above, it is clear that the CMA review allows us to look at the celebrant/minister role in the funeral industry and consider whether we have our priorities right - and so we should all welcome it. ■

For more on the AOIC go to www.independentcelebrants.com

