

# AOIC

In his first column of 2019, the executive chair of the Association of Independent Celebrants, **Philip Spicksley** looks at the importance of networking



**T**he announcement, made at September's Celebrants Convention, about the newly formed Funeral Celebrant Council, prompted me to consider the value of networking. I have been involved in many networking events over the 12 years that I have been a celebrant. There are lots of benefits from speaking to other professionals both in our own industry, kindred industries and even businesses not connected to our own interests.

I have been a member of the Federation of Small Businesses for over 15 years, not only do I get invitations to network with other professionals, I also receive help, advice and resources to enable me to run my own small business.

Probably the most important benefit from membership is the support of the FSB in the event of a HMIC taxation enquiry. If this were to happen, then the FSB would appoint one of their taxation experts to assist me through the process of the enquiry. The HMIC is not so keen to take on a small business if it is aware that the business is also engaged with the FSB. It is therefore one of the most valuable tools that I have and so welcome the FSB

membership logo on my websites.

Speaking and networking with other trade associations is important too. The Association of Independent Celebrants is a member of the NAFD and SAIF. We value our membership of both organisations and try to represent our own organisation at all levels.

Through attending meetings, I know how difficult it is to get members of all types and categories interested. I recently attended the NAFD Yorkshire Area meeting where we were invited to meet at the AH Hainsworth Wool Mill in Pontefract. It was a long journey from Lincolnshire with my friend and NAFD colleague and past president Gillian Huteson, however it was a chance to catch up on industry matters as we negotiated our way through Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, (another form of networking).

At the mill we were welcomed by the owners who provided a nice buffet reception before taking us on a tour - the most interesting part for us of course was to see the production of woollen coffins. It was a surprise to be offered a sample to take home and back to our businesses at the end of the evening.

Yorkshire is a huge county and the NAFD area takes in surrounding areas too, so it was a disappointment to see so few members and associate members of the NAFD there. Perhaps like many organisations, the members do not realise the importance of networking. At that meeting I suggested to the Yorkshire Area President Danny Doherty that he might like to share some thoughts about networking for this publication.

This is what he said: "Throughout my career in funeral services I have attended the local and area meetings of the NAFD for around 18 years. During this time, I have met a vast number of fellow professionals and supplier members who support our organisation.

"In my last two years as the Yorkshire Area President, the secretary and myself have worked to ensure that there has been a speaker at every one of our general meetings. They have ranged from suppliers introducing new products or services, to charity representatives, who have always given interactive and thought-provoking discussions. There is always time for networking, which usually takes place before the general business meeting over a coffee and a sandwich. It's during these conversations that members usually benefit from someone's advice.

"These meetings are only as good as the effort individuals make to attend them so whilst it isn't always easy, I would appeal to people to make every effort as they don't know what they are missing out on. We have a dedicated team on the executive committee working to ensure members get the opportunity to meet regularly, learn something new from time to time and make acquaintances.

"So, to all reading this, you see how important it is to network and share professional ideas. Let's sit up and look to the future by getting together and sharing our ideas. Whatever trade association you are in, look around - if there isn't a local NAFD or SAIF group, or celebrant networking group near you, encourage one to be formed. Working together is not only good for the industry, it's good for personal development and business planning too." ■

*For more on the AOIC go to [www.independentcelebrants.com](http://www.independentcelebrants.com)*