



THE FUNERAL STANDARDS COUNCIL
ANNUAL REVIEW 2002-2003

President's Report

Graham Lymn, FSC President



Taking over from Brian West mid-term was always going to be a hard act to follow. I am, nevertheless, proud to be President of the FSC and hope that I, together with your Executive, can continue to enhance its reputation.

Since the last annual review, we have seen the demise of the Funeral Ombudsman Scheme. The Scheme was innovative for the funeral industry, and initiated mainly by the membership of the FSC. For a variety of reasons, that have been well documented, the Scheme became unsustainable and it is a matter of some regret that it is no longer in being.

In October we hosted a Health & Safety Day in Daventry. This was very well attended and it is hoped that other similar industry related awareness events can be organised.

Together with the Executive Director, I attended the offices of the Office of Fair Trading to establish whether our Code of Practice would meet the criteria required to become accepted under Stage 1 of their new consumer codes of practice regime. At the time of writing, we are very close to realising this.

The quality of The Standard continues to improve every issue, with Kate keeping the publishers on their toes with regard to content and accuracy. We distributed FSC literature to all UK Citizens Advice Bureaux in recent months and the website continues to improve.

The Executive Director produced a strategic marketing plan to enable us to have some structure to the next few years. Many of the points raised in this have been, or are going to be, implemented over the coming months.

The finances continue to be in a healthy state. This is quite an achievement by your Executive as the fall out from the FOS closure could have been costly to us if it had not been handled correctly.

Your Executive continue to keep up to date with such as the Retained Organs Commission, Civil Registration, The Shipman Inquiry, Review of Death Certification and the Coroner's Service, Council of British Funeral Services, Consumer Services Industry Authority etc.

We are still trying very hard to ensure that those members who wish to attend and support regional meetings are given the opportunity to do so. Many meetings are taking place over the UK with considerable success. It is however, up to the membership to let the office in Cardiff know when they would like a meeting in their area. Cardiff will do the rest for you.

It has been my pleasure and honour to represent FSC on a number of occasions both socially at kindred associations' events and at FSE2003 in Stoneleigh where it was great to meet so many members. Also at dedication services where the standard of premises of our membership continues to reach new heights.

The work of any President is, generally, that of a figurehead for his/her organisation. The Funeral Standards Council and its membership, benefits from having an experienced and extremely conscientious Executive who work tirelessly on your behalf, often unsung and unseen and I would like to thank them all for their support.

There are three people without whom the FSC might cease to function. Executive Director Kate Edwards who always keeps the administration running smoothly. Catherine Cattaneo who supports Kate efficiently in the office, and Jenny Tomlinson-Walsh who is the FSC's Premises Inspector. I have already made mention of the quality of our members' premises and Jenny plays her part in this. Thank you all for your hard work during my Presidency.

Executive Director's Report

Kate Edwards

Membership

During the past eighteen months, the increase in membership of the Funeral Standards Council has continued to grow by a satisfying 2%. The Council represents some 48% of all funerals conducted throughout the UK.

Contact

The Council received a great number of queries regarding all aspects of the profession from both members of the public and trade/government bodies. More and more people are now contacting the FSC and it is pleasing that the name of the FSC has become more widespread.

Membership Support

This is an important function of the FSC. There have been a number of ways in which we've assisted our members, from providing them with regular updates on industry matters to being used as a 'sounding board' when the members themselves have any concerns.

It is also planned to issue every member with a 'Members' Guide'. This guide will include the Directory of Membership, Code of Practice, Code of Conduct, Inspection Criteria – all relevant information on the FSC the member may need.

Best Value

Best value has been obtained from stationers, designers (website and The Standard), computer maintenance suppliers, printers etc.

Records

Records, such as the directory of membership, are regularly updated so as to ensure accuracy.

Finances

Work is undertaken on the finances of the Council monthly, together with quarterly meetings of the Finance Committee to include setting and monitoring budgets and agreeing year-end accounts.

PR, Media & Marketing

The Standard With the help of our Ad. Agency, The Standard has been given a new and fresh look and is filled not only with member news but also information the member may need on industry matters as well as issues of interest.

Both the publications and media work rely heavily on contributions by members. The response from many members and PR departments has been excellent and information may be sent by letter, e-mail, phone or fax and no news should be considered too small or insignificant!

Media I have represented both the FSC and its membership in a number of radio interviews including BBC Radio 3 Counties, LBC Radio - the Jackie King Consumer Show and the Jimmy Young show, BBC Radio 2, The Sunday Telegraph and the Radio 4 'You and Yours' show to name just a few.

Promotion The FSC took a half page advert in The House Magazine, the internal publication of the House of Commons. Following on from this, the FSC promotes itself throughout Government on a Government website. Members may wish to take a look at this on www.epolitix.com

Members were issued with a 'Support Pack'. The pack gives guidance and information on how best to promote not only your business but also your membership of the FSC and has been welcomed by the membership.

Within the last couple of months, all members were distributed with a supply of information leaflets, together with a leaflet dispenser. These were also distributed to all UK Citizens Advice Bureaux.

In support of our marketing objective of branding the FSC as the leading trade association we hope to embark upon a direct mail campaign, starting with CAB offices and eventually rolling out to other relevant personnel who offer bereavement advice.

Inspection Report CONTINUED

Jennifer Tomlinson-Walsh, FSC Premises Inspector

UK AREAS VISITED	NUMBER OF VISITS	CERT'S ISSUED	NOT ISSUED	EXPLANATION
Belfast	27	27		
Berks/Hants	14	14		
Bournemouth	18	17	1	Branch closed permanently
Bristol/Bath	18	17	1	Branch under refurbishment
Cambs/Norwich	5	5		
Cheshire	6	4	2	Branches under refurbishment
Devon/Cornwall	30	28	2	Building work in progress
Dorset	16	16		
E. Sussex	20	19	1	Branch closed permanently
Essex & area	50	45	5	3 x branch closed perm, 2 under refurb.
Herts.	2	2		
Isle of Wight	3	3		
Jersey	1	1		
Kent	39	36	3	Branches closed permanently.
Lancs. & area	40	35	5	2 x Concerns with standards, 2 x branches under refurb, 1 x branch closed perm.
Leeds	11	10	1	Closed due to staff on holiday
Leics/Lough	14	13	1	Branch closed permanently
Lincs.	1	1		
Liverpool	7	7		
London	110	104	6	5 x Branch closed perm, 1 x under refurb.
Manchester	35	32	3	2 x Concerns with standards, 1 x Branch closed permanently
Middlesborough	7	7		
Midlands	5	5		
N. England	25	25		
N. Wales	3	3		
NE. England	82	77	5	2 x revisits, 1x branch closed permanently, 1 x closed due to staff hols, 1 x under refurb
Northants.	5	5		
Notts.	14	13	1	Branch permanently closed
NW. England	37	37		
Oxford	1	1		
Peterborough	11	9	2	1 x Branch temporarily closed, 1 x branch permanently closed
Portsmouth	17	17		
S. Wales	17	13	4	3 x Standards of premises very poor, 1 x branch closed permanently
Salisbury	4	4		
Scotland	24	19	5	3 x Standards of premises very poor, 1 x branch permanently closed, 1 x no inspection due to manager on holiday
Somerset	5	5		
Southampton	15	15		
Stoke	1	1		
Surrey	15	15		
W. Sussex	19	17	2	Branches permanently closed
Yorks. & area	45	42	3	2 x branches permanently closed, 1 x branch temporarily closed
Total	819	766	53	

Complaints

Catherine Cattaneo, FSC Administrator

It has been a particularly busy 18 month period and this can be seen with the increase of complaints (detailed below). The closure of the Funeral Ombudsman Scheme has, in part, caused this increase. However, even with the closure of the FOS and the FSC forming the Funeral Standards Council Arbitration Scheme, operated with the assistance of the Institute of Chartered Arbitrators, the FSC 'complaint procedures' have in the main, remained unchanged.

No. of complaints received 1.1.02 – 30.5.03	147
No. Resolved	92
No. referred to either FOS or FSCAS	4
No. of ongoing	23
No. not in Remit	28

Detailed below are a few examples of the types of complaints received.

Conciliation Successful

When Mrs A was making her late mother's funeral arrangements, the Funeral Director asked whether the family would like her to be embalmed as the family had chosen to have an open casket. Upon viewing her late mother, Mrs A was distressed to see that her mother's face and neck were distorted, her skin brightly coloured and her features broad.

The Funeral Director through its own internal investigation initially disputed Mrs A's complaint.

After investigating all the facts of the matter and discussing the same with the Funeral Director, they agreed that Mrs A did in fact have a valid complaint and compensation offered and accepted.

Funeral Standards Council's Findings

Mrs J complained that the funeral arranger was without compassion, made assumptions about the religious service and when the funeral arranger advised the family they could view the deceased, on visiting the Chapel of Rest; they found the deceased was not there.

The FSC attempted to conciliate between the two parties in the hope that we would be able to assist each, in reaching a swift and amicable conclusion.

Unfortunately, this was not the case and a preparatory report was issued for the two parties to consider.

In the main, it was found that most of Mrs J's complaints were valid and the FSC provided Mrs J and our member with full explanations as to why it felt this was the case.

Both sides returned their comments on the report. These were considered and where deemed necessary included in the Council's findings.

The Council awarded Mrs J the sum of £250.00 in full and final settlement. Both parties agreed and the matter resolved.

Conciliation Successful

Mr B arranged his late wife's funeral with a 'trainee' funeral director. No further contact was made by the Funeral Service, leaving Mr B to contact them in an effort to obtain all relevant funeral information. Mr B also raised concerns that the staff were dressed shabbily and he had his late wife's jewellery returned on the morning of the funeral.

The FSC investigated Mr B's complaints and found each to be valid. Contact was made to Mr B requesting what level of compensation would be acceptable in order to resolve the matter.

Mr B responded requesting that the Funeral Service make a donation in the sum of £150.00 and this was accepted and later carried out.

Funeral Standards Council Arbitration Scheme

Mrs W contacted the FSC raising a complaint that the deceased received an injury to the head whilst in the custody and care of the funeral service, that the deceased's clothes were given to a charity without permission of the family and being sent reminders to pay the funeral account, when the family had been advised that the account would be put on hold.

THE FUNERAL STANDARDS COUNCIL



30 North Road, Cardiff CF10 3DY
T 029 2038 2046 F 029 2034 3557

E Kate Edwards, Executive Director – fsckate@aol.com
Catherine Cattaneo, Administrator – fscath@aol.com

www.funeral-standards-council.co.uk