

The information provided in this brochure is intended for high school leavers or those who are interested in working in the funeral industry.

It is often said that working in the funeral industry is a vocation rather than a job and it is easy to see why. Funeral homes are generally either family businesses or larger organisations with a number of branches. The staff employed need to have a variety of skills and a genuine desire to offer as much help, guidance and assistance as is required by those they are called upon to serve. The funeral industry is by no means an easy career option; however it can be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding of the service careers.

Australia has an ageing population so the demand for funeral services is likely to increase over the next 15 years. However, current opportunities for funeral directors are considered average.

The funeral services industry is made up of mainly small businesses employing a small number of staff.

The work environment for a funeral director can be both physically and emotionally challenging and sometimes stressful. Funeral directors work irregular hours including evenings and weekends. They are often on call and need to be available when their clients need them. In many businesses, particularly small businesses, a variety of tasks may be performed by one person and the skills needed for these various tasks may need to be acquired.

What does a funeral director actually do?

There are various roles within a funeral home, including funeral arranger, conductor, funeral attendant, funeral director and embalmer.

A funeral director may perform the following tasks:

- provide information over the phone to bereaved people
- arrange for the removal of bodies from private homes, hospitals and sometimes from accident scenes
- give advice on funeral arrangements
- interview relatives to discuss style of funeral coffin/casket, cars, flowers and costs
- preserve, prepare and keep bodies for viewing before burial or cremation

- liaise with clergy or celebrants
- conduct the funeral
- make arrangements for the burial or cremation ceremony
- organise the after-service reception, including the catering
- confirm the issue and verification of a Medical Certificate or obtain a Coroner's Certificate
- register the death, and obtain a Death Certificate
- transport the casket from the service to the burial or cremation
- assist with legal details
- assist and support the relatives and friends through the arrangements and ceremonies
- organise all notices of the death and funeral arrangements in the media
- administer day-to-day branch operations in finances, marketing and human resources
- coordinate and supervise funeral workers including embalmers, drivers, receptionists or clerical assistants
- make arrangements for interment/cremation or repatriation, if required, after checking that all proper documentation has been completed
- arrange the construction of a monument or the disposal of cremated remains
- collect the body from the hospital, mortuary or place of death and drive passenger vehicles, mortuary vans and hearses
- assist in preparing the body and placing it in the coffin
- escort mourners to funeral chapels
- set up burial equipment such as mats and lowering straps
- arrange floral tributes and distribute and collect attendance and tribute cards
- clean parlours, chapels and hearses
- assist with carrying and lowering coffins

What qualities will I need to work in the funeral industry?

The death of a loved one is often a difficult and traumatic time for the family and friends of the deceased and an important role of the funeral director is to provide emotional support. There are also many cultural differences in how people deal with death which need to be treated with sensitivity.

Funeral directors have to be able to put their own emotions aside in order to fully support the relatives and friends of the deceased person. Everybody grieves in different ways, and funeral directors need to be flexible and open in how they offer emotional support. It is important that they develop ways of dealing with the emotional demands of the job to be able to continue to perform their role effectively.

Employees in the funeral industry need a mature and responsible attitude, given the sensitive situations they deal with. They are generally working with clients who are emotionally vulnerable, hence a need for excellent communication skills and an understanding of how people deal with grief.

What skills do I need to be a funeral director?

- an interest in helping people
- maturity and self confidence
- empathy, sensitivity and tact
- ability to work with grieving and distressed clients
- a driver's licence with a good driving record
- physical strength for manual handling
- a well groomed appearance
- ability to work according to fixed procedures and legal requirements
- flexibility to work evenings, weekends and extended hours
- willingness to take responsibility and have confidence in own decisions
- excellent written and oral communication skills
- good practical and organisational skills
- an ability to put people at ease
- an ability to remain calm and maintain composure under stressful circumstances
- you may be required to pass a physical examination

What training and qualifications are available?

It is not essential to have formal qualifications in order to work within the funeral industry, but formal training can help build your skills and your career options. There are a number of nationally recognised qualifications available within the industry.

The training for nationally recognised qualifications can only be delivered by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

Due to the large amount of practical work that is available in the courses, a pre-requisite of training is that participants must be employed in the funeral services industry.

The courses that are available under the National Funeral Services Training Package are:

- **Certificate II in Funeral Operations** is designed to reflect the role of employees who work under supervision, including mortuary assistant, funeral director's assistant and funeral escort or driver.
- **Certificate III in Cemetery and Crematorium Operations** is designed to reflect the role of employees who work relatively autonomously and may coordinate and supervise others, including customer service consultant, sales consultant, administrative officer and crematorium operator.
- **Certificate III in Gravedigging, Grounds and Maintenance** is designed to reflect the role of employees who work relatively autonomously and may coordinate and supervise others, including gravedigger and grounds maintenance worker.
- **Certificate III in Funeral Operations** is designed to reflect the role of employees who work relatively autonomously and may coordinate and supervise others, including funeral director's assistant, funeral arranger or conductor, mortuary assistant and customer service consultant.
- **Certificate IV in Funeral Services** is designed to reflect the role of employees who work autonomously and coordinate and supervise others, including funeral director, cemetery manager and crematorium manager.
- **Certificate IV in Embalming** is designed to reflect the role of employees working in the field of embalming.
- **Diploma of Mortuary Management** is designed to reflect the role of employees who work autonomously and manage the work of others, including mortuary manager.

Can I study by Distance Education?

Some subjects are available to study by correspondence, contact a RTO to find out more information.

What will I earn?

While there is a National Award which applies to the funeral industry, individual companies have different remuneration levels and many pay above Award rates. The Fair Work Online website provides information and advice about Australia's new national workplace relations system from the Fair Work Ombudsman.

What should I do next?

Many people have a strong desire to serve others through work in the funeral industry. However, it is a very difficult industry to enter – many companies are family businesses with a stable team of mature staff, which means that vacancies arise only very rarely.

It may be possible to set up a new business, but it can be difficult and costly. Most firms in the industry are well established.

Seeking employment in the funeral industry is just as challenging as any other career, therefore we suggest that you compile a comprehensive resume and submit it to funeral homes in your preferred area. You may wish to refer to our website to find a list of AFDA Members.

Monitor the careers section of local and state wide newspapers for any job advertisements listed or check out the usual job placement search engine websites.

How do I arrange work experience within the Funeral Industry?

Due to the sensitivity of issues surrounding death, the desire to professionally care for clients and their loved ones, and privacy and confidentiality concerns, many funeral homes do not accept work experience placements. You should make your own enquiries.

Additional Resources

Australian Funeral Directors Association 1300 888 188
www.afda.org.au

Registered Training Organisations 03 8327 0055
Funeral Industry Development Australia www.fida.com.au

Mortuary & Funeral Educators 03 9569 5013
www.mfe.com.au

Job Search Facilities www.seek.com.au
Seek
My Career www.mycareer.com.au
Career One www.careerone.com.au
Australian Job Search www.jobsearch.gov.au

Other Resources 13 38 73
Australian Apprenticeships www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au

Service Industry Skills Council www.serviceskills.com.au
Fair Work Online 13 13 94
www.fairwork.gov.au

So you want to be a funeral director

A guide for school leavers and new entrants to the funeral industry

