



Chairman's report to the 2015 AGM

In my report to the AGM last year, I detailed the quite large amount of change which the IoCF had undergone which, whilst presenting challenges, also left the council of management in a stronger position to move the Institute forward into its second decade.

The future strength of the IoCF, both in the industry and in its role of supporting its members, lies in the growth of its membership whose subscription payments provide almost all the funds for the day to day running of the Institute and future development.

We have certainly seen an increase in the number of funerals taken by IoCF members, with almost a thousand more ceremonies for the period January to October of this year compared with 2014. As of this week, 43187 funerals are logged on our database.

There has been a steady increase in celebrants joining the IoCF, despite illness and retirement also causing some members to leave us. We are particularly pleased to have welcomed more celebrants in Ireland and, in order to support their needs, are developing an Irish website to run in tandem with the IoCF UK website.

However, we would like to see a greater increase in our membership and indeed many celebrants are now applying to join the IoCF. This year, the council of management reviewed the IoCF admissions policy and have put in place a set of criteria which form an assessment process for those applying to join the Institute who have the required qualification, even though it may have been awarded by an organisation other than our preferred training provider, Civil Ceremonies Ltd.

We must see this increased interest in IoCF membership as an indication of the Institute's growing stature within the funeral profession. Council have worked very hard to help raise the public profile of the IoCF. A 're-branding' programme saw the introduction of a golden rose, which hopefully will be rapidly associated with us; the golden theme being taken up through our merchandise. Trade press coverage of this urged funeral arrangers to associate the gold rose with our gold standard service already represented by our gold badge. And our new slogan, of which we should be justly proud, 'setting the national standard' was incorporated into the IoCF logo.

In order to guarantee that gold standard to funeral arrangers throughout the country, assessment and quality management still take up a large amount of council and our administrator's time. The processes have been streamlined wherever possible, but we shall continue to seek feedback from every funeral ceremony and to assess script and ceremony delivery for every member. We expect all members to comply with the conditions of membership and adhere to the IoCF Code of Practice at all times. Therefore, outcomes of assessment and feedback are always acted upon, whether it be through support and mentoring for the celebrant or representation of them in the resolution of complaints from families or within the industry.

All this can only be achieved by the hard work and dedication of the members of the council of management who voluntarily give much of their valuable time and energy to supporting members and promoting the Institute.

I would particularly like to thank those council members who are stepping down this year: Andrew Hamel-Cook, who has travelled long distances to attend council meetings and provided valuable insight into many of our projects; Sally Band has, for the past two years, probably been one of the first people in the IoCF that new members have spoken to; she has tirelessly encouraged and supported them through those early weeks of getting to know funeral directors and wondering when the next funeral will come along, as well as taking time to contact all members to discuss any feedback issues or just congratulate them on the great job they are doing.

As ever, our special thanks go to our administrator, Barbara Pearce. As we have grown and evolved, so has her job, but she takes everything in her stride: implementing new policies and systems and generally making the ideas put forward by council work! She too works extremely hard to promote the IoCF, including attending industry events or ensuring that others have all the promotion materials they need.

So thank you also to those members who have borrowed banners and publicity materials and attended industry events, funeral home openings, crematorium open days and generally got our name and logos out there.

I would also like to thank those companies without whose hard work on our behalf the IoCF, and its members, would not be as successful. Siserone continues to manage our website and mass emailing and is now working with the Institute to take our website forward to better meet the needs of our members and its public users. Funeralmap provides every member with an up-to-date listing on its funeral supplies website and last, but not least, of course, Civil Ceremonies Ltd.

Our relationship with not only CCL but all the major funeral industry organisations remains strong and we have been represented at their major events and exhibitions throughout the year.

The IoCF is still at the forefront of the civil funeral profession but the council know that there is much work to be done to maintain that position. Last year, I stated that my aim for the second decade of the Institute was for it to raise its public profile, so that both funeral arrangers, families and, indeed, celebrants recognise its significant contribution to setting the standard for funeral ceremonies. After just one year, I believe we are already well on the way to achieving that and, once again, that is due to the professionalism, commitment and dedication of every member of the Institute – they are the present and future strength of the IoCF.

Christine Ogden, Chair
7th November 2015