

CMA publishes final report in funerals market investigation

Press release

The CMA has published the final report on its in-depth market investigation into funeral services, confirming its remedies for the sector.



The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has today confirmed its provisional conclusions, issued in August, which identified [a number of issues](#) in the funeral services sector and suggested a package of 'sunlight remedies' to address these.

The [final report](#) sets out further detail on the remedies, which are intended to support customers when choosing a funeral director or crematorium and to place the sector under greater public scrutiny.

They include:

- an obligation for all funeral directors and crematorium operators to disclose prices in a manner that will help customers make more informed decisions;
- that information must be provided in advance of a customer committing to purchase a service so that people know the price they will be charged and the key terms of business – for example if a deposit is required;
- that customers should be made aware of any relevant business, financial and commercial interests of the funeral director, and that certain practices – such as payments which may incentivise hospitals, care homes or hospices to refer customers to a particular funeral director – will be prohibited;
- a recommendation to government to establish an independent inspection

and registration regime to monitor the quality of funeral director services as a first step in the establishment of a broader regulatory regime for funeral services.

As set out in August, the exceptional circumstances of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic mean that some of the remedies the CMA might otherwise have pursued, including measures to control prices, could not be developed.

However, the CMA continues to have serious concerns about the sector and one of the conclusions of the report is that it should consider whether a further market investigation reference is needed when conditions are more stable.

In the meantime, the CMA will continue to monitor the sector using information provided by funeral directors and crematoria detailing their revenues and the volumes of the different services they provide. This will help the CMA ensure that consumers are being fairly treated and decide whether a future market investigation is necessary.

Martin Coleman, CMA Panel Inquiry Chair, said:

Organising a funeral is often very distressing and people can be especially vulnerable during this time.

That's why our remedies are designed to help people make choices that are right for them and ensure they can be confident that their loved one is in good hands.

The CMA will be keeping a close eye on this sector to make sure our remedies are properly implemented and help it to decide whether further action is necessary when circumstances return to a more steady state.

Notes to editors

1. Under section 131 of the Enterprise Act 2002, the CMA makes a reference to the CMA Panel Chair to appoint a Group of members of the CMA Panel to carry out a market investigation. The investigation and decisions of the Group are required to be taken independently of the Board of the CMA, and the Board's oversight and governance role does not extend into the substance of decisions taken by the Group.
2. Media enquiries should be sent to press@cma.gov.uk, or 020 3738 6460

First ballot of the 2021 Youth Mobility Scheme for Japanese nationals

There are a total of 1,000 places available to Japanese nationals for 2021. 800 applicants will be selected in the first ballot in January, while the remainder of the places will be made available in a second ballot in July 2021. If your application is successful you will be able to live, work and study in the UK for up to 2 years.

How to apply

If you would like to apply for the scheme you should send one email per applicant to: Japan.YMS2021@fcdo.gov.uk between midday (12pm) on Monday 25 January 2021 to midday on Wednesday 27 January 2021 (Tokyo time).

The header or subject line of your email must contain your name, date of birth (DD/MM/YYYY) and passport number as shown in your passport.

This must be written in English only.

For example: SUZUKI Miyu – 31/03/2000 – Passport123456789.

The main body of your email should include the following information, written in English:

- Name:
- Date of birth:
- Passport Number:
- Mobile phone number:

The email account will only be open for 48 hours and all emails received within this timeframe will be sent an automated reply confirming receipt.

Once the ballot closes 800 applicants will be chosen at random by UKVI. If you have been successful a second email will be sent to you by week commencing 1 February to confirm acceptance and provide further instructions on how to make an appointment, along with documentary evidence required to apply for your entry clearance.

Please note successful applicants must prepare online applications and online credit card payments no later than 1 March 2021. Failure to submit your payment online by this date will automatically remove your name from the list and your allocation will be retracted. After you have paid online you have 90 days to submit your paperwork for consideration.

If you are a Japanese national living overseas you can also apply following the instructions above, and if you are chosen to apply you will be able to do

so in your country/territory of residence. Applications cannot be submitted for the Youth Mobility Scheme in the UK.

If you're unsuccessful you will receive an email by 5 February and no further action is required.

Further information about the scheme [can be found on gov.uk](#) and any enquiries relating to the application process, online application forms and questions in general should be directed to the [UKVI International Enquiry Line](#).

[Prime Minister's call with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen: 17 December 2020](#)

Press release

Prime Minister's call with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen



The Prime Minister spoke to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen this evening about the state of play in the UK / EU negotiations.

The Prime Minister underlined that the negotiations were now in a serious situation. Time was very short and it now looked very likely that agreement would not be reached unless the EU position changed substantially.

He said that we were making every effort to accommodate reasonable EU requests on the level playing field, but even though the gap had narrowed some fundamental areas remained difficult.

On fisheries he stressed that the UK could not accept a situation where it was the only sovereign country in the world not to be able to control access to its own waters for an extended period and to be faced with fisheries quotas which hugely disadvantaged its own industry. The EU's position in this

area was simply not reasonable and if there was to be an agreement it needed to shift significantly.

The Prime Minister repeated that little time was left. He said that, if no agreement could be reached, the UK and the EU would part as friends, with the UK trading with the EU on Australian-style terms.

The leaders agreed to remain in close contact.

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Preparing for a sustainable and inclusive peace in Afghanistan

Thank you, Mr President.

And may I start by thanking Special Representative Lyons and Ambassador Djani in his capacity as Chair of the 1988 Committee for their briefings. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Ms Zadran and to thank her for her powerful statement – her clear call for peaceful future for the youth of Afghanistan.

Mr President,

On the 12th of September, Afghans took a significant step on the road to peace with the start of the Afghanistan peace negotiations in Doha. We welcome the commitment of the two negotiating teams have shown so far, culminating in their agreement on the rules and procedures, with the talks on the 2nd of December. It is vital that the negotiations resume swiftly on the 5th of January.

Mr President, I would like to emphasise three points today:

First, we must be prepared for a long and challenging process ahead. When the talks resume on the 5th of January, the parties will start negotiating on substance for the first time. In many cases, the distance between the two sides' positions may seem unbridgeable. There will be setbacks before there are breakthroughs.

This is normal and probably indeed necessary. A successful outcome will require a long, challenging process of building trust, finding common ground and compromising. International partners will need to show commitment and patience in the process as well. The UK, for our part, stands ready to offer support.

Second, even if a final settlement takes time, Afghans should start to see

the tangible benefits now. Yet, as we have heard many times today, appalling levels of violence continue to blight the lives of Afghans. And let us be clear: the Taliban is responsible for the majority of this violence, violence which not only kills a menace, but also undermines confidence in the negotiations.

The Taliban claim to want a part in Afghanistan's future and the international community, as well as relief from UN sanctions. This requires substantive progress in peace negotiations, an end to violence, and a complete and permanent break from terrorism, including from Al Qaeda.

Third, the outcome of the Afghanistan peace negotiations is for Afghans themselves to decide. But the parties, and especially the Taliban, must recognise Afghanistan is not the place it was 20 years ago.

To be sustainable, a peace settlement will need to be inclusive and preserve the rights and freedoms of all Afghans, including women and minorities. To maintain international support, the new Afghanistan will need to adhere to its treaty obligations, including those concerning human rights. And to reach a settlement that achieves these ends, the process will need to be inclusive and broad-based.

For my own part, I look forward to supporting women's participation in the process in my new role co-chairing the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan with Ambassador Raz.

Mr President,

In Geneva last month, the international community reaffirmed its support to Afghanistan. The UK pledged up to \$207 million dollars in development assistance for 2021.

For its part, the Afghan government renewed its own commitments, as set out in the new Afghanistan Partnership Framework. Together, the commitments made last month can help strengthen Afghan institutions and the government's ability to support its citizens – tasks that are vital even as peace talks unfold.

Today, Afghanistan stands a step closer to being at peace with itself and its neighbours, free from conflict and terrorism, and able to protect the rights and freedoms of all Afghans. We should redouble all our collective efforts to make that a reality.

Thank you.

Written Ministerial Statement on Unconscious Bias Training

This government is committed to levelling up opportunity for everyone, no matter what their background. We are also determined to eliminate discrimination in the workplace. To meet those ambitions, we must ensure that policy and advice on equality is evidence-based, and is delivered in a way that means we can respond quickly to new insights.

Earlier this year, the Government Equalities Office commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team for a summary of the evidence on unconscious bias and diversity training. Titled 'Unconscious bias and diversity training – what the evidence says', the report highlights that 'there is currently no evidence that this training changes behaviour in the long term or improves workplace equality in terms of representation of women, ethnic minorities or other minority groups'. It also states that there is emerging evidence of unintended negative consequences.

The report is published alongside this response, and will be deposited in the House Libraries, today. In light of its findings, Ministers have concluded that unconscious bias training does not achieve its intended aims. It will therefore be phased out in the Civil Service. We encourage other public sector employers to do likewise.

Background

Unconscious bias training typically aims to raise awareness of the potential biases and cognitive shortcuts that may negatively affect decision-making and behaviour in the workplace. The intent is usually to reduce both explicit and implicit bias towards members of particular groups that share characteristics protected under law and change behaviour.

Although unconscious bias training takes a variety of forms, it is normally delivered as a discrete individual or group session that aims to set out the theory behind implicit bias, provide exercises that demonstrate how such biases might potentially affect behaviour, and suggest strategies to participants for avoiding that behaviour in future.

Such training sessions have been introduced by a range of organisations as part of a well-intentioned effort to build fairer and more inclusive workplaces. They have often formed part of a wider employer toolkit aimed at tackling discrimination and building inclusion.

However, in recent years a significant debate has emerged over their effectiveness and quality. Despite a growing diversity training industry and increased adoption of unconscious bias training programmes, a strong body of evidence has emerged that shows that such training has no sustained impact on behaviour and may even be counter-productive.

Lack of evidence to support positive change

To be successful in tackling discrimination, unconscious bias training should change behaviour. However, evidence suggests that attitudes and behaviours are each driven by different psychological systems, so a single intervention is unlikely to impact effectively on both. A systematic review of unconscious bias training examining 492 studies (involving more than 87,000 participants), found changes to unconscious bias measures were not associated with changes in behaviour (1). Formal assessments of bias (eg the Implicit Association Test) have also been criticised for failing to generate replicable results even when the same individuals have been re-tested (2).

Further evidence also suggests that unconscious bias training may even have detrimental effects. The Equality and Human Rights Commission found that evidence for its ability effectively to change behaviour is limited and "there is potential for back-firing effects when UBT participants are exposed to information that suggests stereotypes and biases are unchangeable." Instructions to suppress stereotypes may not only activate and reinforce unhelpful stereotypes, they may provoke negative reactions and actually make people exacerbate their biases (3).

Finally, there is no recognised way of assuring the quality of unconscious bias training and multiple interventions of variable content may be given that label. This has serious implications for organisations, who risk putting funding into poor quality and ineffective training.

Government conclusion

The Civil Service is committed to being an open and inclusive employer. Civil servants work on a range of complex policies every day; working inclusively means that they will make better decisions, solve problems more effectively and ultimately deliver better services to citizens. An individual's background must never be a limiting factor in the workplace. Our aspiration is clear: a Civil Service open to all, with individuals from a variety of backgrounds adding breadth and depth to our understanding of contemporary British society, providing greater challenge to received wisdom and fresh perspectives to the challenges we face as a nation – united by a commitment to the fundamental values of public life and service.

Efforts to ensure the Civil Service is representative of the whole population it serves, and that its workplaces are free from discrimination, must be based on clear evidence of what works, must uphold the merit principle for recruitment and promotion, and must represent value for taxpayers' money. This approach is the reason, for example, that the Civil Service uses clear, standardised assessment techniques for recruitment and tests the fairness of any such tools with diverse user groups before deploying them.

Given the evidence, now captured in the report accompanying this statement, an internal review decided in January 2020 that unconscious bias training would be phased out in departments. In addition, while there is clearly a role for training to support a more inclusive workplace and Civil Service, evidence also suggests that even the broader category of 'diversity training'

as a standalone exercise can undermine such efforts if it appears to be a “tick box exercise”. The Civil Service will therefore integrate principles for inclusion and diversity into mainstream core training and leadership modules in a manner which facilitates positive behaviour change. This new strategy will be published in the new year, and will reassert our commitment to being an inclusive employer with a stronger focus on engaging measurable action.

The government expects other parts of the public sector, including local government, the police, and the NHS, to review their approaches in light of the evidence and the developments in the Civil Service. We will continue to build the evidence on what works to make our workplaces fairer, and unite and level up across our country, with the reformed Equality Hub playing a key role.

The WMS is published on the parliament website [here](#)