

Press release: CMA proposes major funerals probe after identifying serious concerns

Today's interim report presents the issues the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has identified since launching a Market Study into the funerals sector 6 months ago.

Its initial work indicates problems with the market that have led to above inflation price rises for well over a decade – both for funeral director services and crematoria services. The scale of these price rises does not currently appear to be justified by cost increases or quality improvements.

Given the nature and significance of the issues the CMA has identified, it believes the full powers of a Market Investigation – carried out by an independent group of CMA panel members – are required. Issues include that:

- Today, people generally spend between £3,000 and £5,000 organising a funeral, and the price of the essential elements has increased by more than two-thirds in the last 10 years, almost 3 times the rate of inflation. Organising a funeral would now cost those on the lowest incomes nearly 40% of their annual outgoings, more than they spend on food, clothing and energy combined.
- Customers could save over £1,000 by looking at a range of choices in their local area. However, people organising a funeral are usually distressed and often not in a position to do this – making it easier for some funeral directors to charge higher prices. Prices are also often not available online, making it difficult to compare options.
- While some smaller funeral directors have sought to keep their prices low, other providers – the larger chains in particular – have implemented policies of consistently high year-on-year price increases. A number of these have now introduced lower cost funeral options, but this doesn't go far enough to make up for years of above inflation price hikes. The CMA's evidence also indicates most people who organise a funeral remain extremely vulnerable to exploitation and future rises in charges.
- Cremations account for 77% of funerals, yet there are limited choices for most people in their local area and fees charged by crematoria have increased by 84% on average in the past 10 years, more than 3 times the rate of inflation.

Andrea Coscelli, chief executive of the CMA, said:

People mourning the loss of a loved one are extremely vulnerable and at risk of being exploited. We need to make sure that they are protected at such an emotional time, and we're very concerned about the substantial increases in funeral prices over the past decade.

We now feel that the full powers of a market investigation are required to address the issues we have found. We also want to hear from people who have experienced poor practices in the sector, so that we can take any action needed to fix these problems.

The CMA will now be consulting on the potential market investigation reference and welcomes any views on the issues identified in its report by 4 January 2019.

It would also like to hear from people involved in the industry and others, who may have observed instances of poor quality standards in the back-of-house facilities of funeral directors. Details on how to respond are available on the [funerals market study page](#).

Notes to editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law.
2. The average price of the core elements of a funeral is now £4,271 (2018) and the average cremation fee is £737 (2017). Funeral director prices increased by 68% and crematoria fees rose by 84% over the most recent 10-year periods for which we have data. By comparison, inflation (CPI) increased by around 25% over this time.
3. In parallel to the CMA's market study, the Government (HM Treasury) has been [seeking evidence](#) to aid in the design of a more appropriate regulatory framework for the pre-paid funeral plan sector. Because of this, the CMA is not looking at the pre-paid sector.
4. Enquiries should be directed to the press@cma.gov.uk, on 020 3738 6460.
5. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Sign up to our [email alerts](#) to receive updates on the markets cases.

[News story: New partnership with Muscular Dystrophy UK to improve](#)

journeys for disabled road users

- Department for Transport announces new partnership with Muscular Dystrophy UK
- £2 million funding commitment for Changing Places accessible toilets
- new facilities to give greater confidence to disabled people travelling on the roads

A new partnership with charity Muscular Dystrophy UK (MDUK) will bring Changing Places accessible toilets to the majority of motorway service areas – making journeys easier for disabled people across England.

The charity will work with the Department for Transport to allocate £2 million of funding for Changing Places toilets, which will be built in the early 2020s.

The funding was announced as part of the government's [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#), which aims to provide equal access to the transport network by 2030.

Transport Accessibility Minister Nusrat Ghani said:

It is not good enough that only 15 of England's 112 motorway service areas currently have facilities that all disabled people can use with confidence.

I am committed to delivering an inclusive transport network, and our partnership with MDUK is the next step in ensuring that everyone, disabled or not, can use our roads.

Changing Places facilities differ from standard accessible toilets, providing more space and specialised equipment, including adult-sized changing benches and hoists, to allow people with conditions like muscular dystrophy and cerebral palsy to use them safely and comfortably.

Catherine Woodhead, Chief Executive of Muscular Dystrophy UK, said:

We welcome the Department for Transport's investment in Changing Places toilets at motorway service stations across England. By building more Changing Places across the road network, disabled people and their families can travel in the knowledge there will be fully accessible toilets they can use safely and with dignity.

Investing in Changing Places toilets means we can tackle the exclusion many disabled people face. We look forward to working in partnership with the Department for Transport and our campaigners in delivering this project.

The Inclusive Transport Strategy also included:

- £300 million to make railway stations more accessible through [Access for All](#)
- £2 million for audio and visual equipment on buses, so that passengers on almost every bus will know where and when to alight
- a £2 million passenger awareness campaign to increase disability awareness and reduce hate crime on our network
- an accreditation scheme for transport operators to receive formal recognition for positive work to improve disabled passengers' experiences, such as training frontline staff and senior management on disability awareness
- measures to ensure future technology is designed inclusively from the outset, with opportunities sought to harness innovation

This followed an announcement in May 2018, when the [Prime Minister said she wanted people to enjoy an extra 5 years of healthy and independent living by 2035, while also narrowing the gap between the richest and poorest.](#)

[Press release: Charities encouraged to bid for £15 million Tampon Tax Fund](#)

- £15 million available for charities working with vulnerable women and girls
- Each successful project will receive at least £1 million in funding
- £47 million has been allocated to projects since the programme established in 2015

Thousands of women and girls across the country are set to benefit from a new £15 million round of the [Tampon Tax Fund](#), launched today by the Minister for Sport and Civil Society, Mims Davies.

Charities across the country can now bid for at least £1 million in funding for projects that support victims of domestic violence or work to reduce rough sleeping and homelessness among women.

The money will also be available to programmes that help vulnerable women through music therapy, encourage them to participate in sport to improve their physical and mental wellbeing or charities that make onward grants to smaller organisations, so they can deliver tailored services to support women.

Mims Davies, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

It is vital that disadvantaged women and girls and those who face

violence or homelessness are given the help they need to rebuild their lives and reach their full potential.

This fund is already having a resoundingly positive impact across our country and I am delighted that thousands more women and girls will be helped as a result of this round of funding.

All grants from this round will be offered to charities for two year projects.

Over 70 charities have received grants from the Tampon Tax Fund, with £47 million allocated since Autumn Statement 2015. This additional £15m brings the total to £62m.

To find out more and apply for the [Tampon Tax Fund](#). Applications close Sunday 20 January 2019.

NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information contact the DCMS press office on: 0207 211 6276.

[News story: Apprenticeship stars take centre stage at National Apprenticeship Awards 2018 ceremony](#)

Now in its fifteenth year, the awards are the largest and most prestigious celebration of apprentices and apprentice employers across the country.

The 'Excellence in Apprenticeships' themed Awards ceremony showcased individual and employer success stories, recognising apprenticeships as a fast-track to a great career and enabler of business growth.

A Special Recognition Award was presented for the first time and was won by The Armed Forces – The Royal Air Force; Royal Navy and The British Army – for their commitment to apprenticeships. All three services are have been recognised as Outstanding by OfSTED and combined, are the largest apprenticeship employer in England.

Damian Hinds, Education Secretary said:

Apprenticeships are an excellent way for anyone to gain new skills and forge a career in anything from aerospace engineering to nursing. The National Apprenticeship Awards is a fantastic event to celebrate the achievements of apprentices, employers and training

providers, and I want to wish all the winners and nominees congratulations on their incredible efforts.

This year's awards also saw the launch of the new 'Rising Star' category. This category showcased the apprentices who have made impressive progress in their careers to date and have the potential to go even further in their chosen profession.

Winning the Rising Star award was intermediate Retail and Enterprise apprentice Joe Buck from the North West. Joe is employed by Mitchells and Butlers and currently works in Toby Carvery as Duty Manager. Joe has won the first ever 'Rising Star' award after being recognised for the exceptional progress he has shown in his role. Joe's work was recognised as exceptional by a panel of judges and through a public vote where over 7000 people voted for their 'Rising Star.'

Lauren Carroll, Vocational Learning Attraction Manager at Mitchells and Butlers said:

As one of the first apprentices recruited by Mitchells and Butlers, Joe truly is a shining example of what his employer was aiming to achieve through recruiting apprentices. Joe has gone above and beyond his expected role at Toby Carvery, becoming an expert in both the kitchen and front of house, providing the business strong pipeline for management roles both sides of the pass.

Jo Buck, Rising Star award winner

Anne Milton, Apprenticeships and Skills Minister said:

A huge well done to all the winners, finalists and rising stars! I have met so many apprentices up and down the country and all of them stars in their own right. Their passion for what they do, their determination to get things done and their drive to get on is so impressive. The winners tonight will have stepped out of their comfort zone to learn new skills and many will have changed the direction of their life. Congratulations to them all and they should be very proud of all they have achieved.

Keith Smith, Director, Apprenticeships, Education and Skills Funding Agency added:

The National Apprenticeship Awards ceremony is a great opportunity to celebrate individuals and employers who go above and beyond to champion apprenticeships.

This year we introduced the 'Rising Star' category which celebrates

the individuals who have made impressive progress to their careers to date. Voted for by the public, these are the rising stars of English business and I wish them well for the future.

I want to congratulate everyone that was a part of this year's awards. All of the winners stories demonstrate that apprenticeships change lives, lead to rewarding jobs, and transform businesses for the better.

This year's national apprentice winners are:

- The Lloyds Banking Group Award for the Rising Star: Joe Buck, Mitchells & Butlers
- The British Army Award for Intermediate Apprentice of the Year: Muhammad Uddin, Yorkshire Housing
- The Rolls Royce Award for Advanced Apprentice of the Year: Daniel Millington, HydraForce Hydraulics Ltd
- The Nuclear Decommissioning Site Licence Companies Award for Higher or Degree Apprentice of the Year: Jordan Coulton, Weightmans LLP
- Royal Air Force Award for Apprenticeship Champion of the Year: Natalie White, National Nuclear Laboratory

And 2 highly commended in each category:

- The Lloyds Banking Group Award for the Rising Star: Jenny Jones, HM Revenue and Customs and Aleksandra Burzec, Home Group
- The British Army Award for Intermediate Apprentice of the Year: Amelia Wayne, Futures Housing Group and Bethany Geddes, The Automobile Association
- The Rolls Royce Award for Advanced Apprentice of the Year: Muhammad Khan, BT and Lucas Benson, BAE Systems Ltd
- The Nuclear Decommissioning Site Licence Companies Award for Higher or Degree Apprentice of the Year: Joe Powell, HM Revenue & Customs and Michelle Blackwell, Bevan Brittan LLP
- Royal Air Force Award for Apprenticeship Champion of the Year: David

Thompson, NETA Training Group and Susan Gough, Lloyds Banking Group

This year's national employer winners are:

- The PeoplePlus Award for Recruitment Excellence: selected from the Employer of the Year award entries: BAE Systems plc
- The BAE Systems Award for SME Employer of the Year (for organisations with 1 to 249 employees): Troup Bywaters + Anders
- The Royal Navy Award for Large Employer of the Year (for organisations with 250 to 4,999 employees): KMF Precision Sheet Metal Limited
- The Centrica Award for Macro Employer of the Year (for organisations with 5,000+ employees): BAE Systems plc

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- The PeoplePlus Award for Recruitment Excellence: selected from the Employer of the Year award entries: KMF Precision Sheet Metal Limited, Lloyds Banking Group
- The BAE Systems Award for SME Employer of the Year (for organisations with 1 to 249 employees): Invotra, GoSkydive
- The Royal Navy Award for Large Employer of the Year (for organisations with 250 to 4,999 employees): United Kingdom Hydrographic Office, WEC Group Limited
- The Centrica Award for Macro Employer of the Year (for organisations with 5,000+ employees): Engie, Lookers plc

George Clarke and Lois McClure, Hosts

George Clarke, former apprentice and creative director of George Clarke + Partners co-hosted the awards with apprentice Lois McClure. George concluded:

My BTEC learning path was similar to an apprenticeship so I fully appreciate the hard work, skills and talent represented in the National Apprenticeship Awards 2018. The career path I took really did open up doors for me and I am sure this year's winners will find themselves in fortunate positions with their careers – which can all be put down to their hard work, tenacity and excellence.

It's also great to see that the winning employers and apprentices are from such a rich variety of sectors, showcasing beautifully the broad range of skills that apprenticeships deliver. I am delighted to have been part of this celebration of excellence in apprenticeships.

[News story: UK and US agree new open skies arrangements](#)

- Transport Secretary announces conclusion of UK US air services arrangement ahead of EU exit
- arrangement to safeguard flights between the UK and the US after Brexit, crucial to travel and the economy
- one of 9 arrangements agreed with countries around the world, guaranteeing the continuation of vital routes

The Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has today (28 November 2018) announced the conclusion of a new 'open skies' air services arrangement with the United States, ensuring the UK remains one of the world's leading aviation hubs after Brexit for both travellers and businesses.

The arrangement will replace the existing EU aviation agreement with the United States, as the UK continues to cement global ties as we prepare for a future outside of the EU.

It will guarantee the continuation of the vital transatlantic routes used by tens of millions of passengers a year, ensuring people can continue to travel easily between the UK and US and maintaining choice and good value travel. It also protects our £50 billion trading relationship between our 2 countries that is supported by air travel.

Today's announcement shows that the UK is open for business and is another positive step forward as the UK continues to develop as an outward looking global player with other major economies around the world, ready to capitalise on a rich range of new global aviation and business opportunities.

The deal ensures that planes flying from the UK will continue to enjoy the same access they currently have with the US, ensuring the UK maintains its place as Europe's most important aviation hub. These arrangements will allow airlines to continue to operate undisturbed and aid the development of new services for the future.

Chris Grayling, Transport Secretary, said:

The UK and United States have a special relationship which has helped shape the modern world and there is no better example of this than in aviation.

Our transatlantic flights have helped to bring our countries even closer together, strengthening our ties and boosting our economies.

This new arrangement and those concluded with 8 other countries around the world are proof that the UK will continue to be a major player on the world stage after we leave the EU.

Willie Walsh, CEO of International Airlines Group said:

It's critical that Britain maintains full access to international aviation markets so it can continue to develop its global trading links. This agreement is a significant positive development which we welcome.

The agreement, which closely follows the Model US Open Skies Agreement, facilitates strong competition and is clearly pro-consumer. The US is a major destination for British businesses and tourists while the UK welcomes many American visitors to its shores".

The signing comes as discussions regarding a new bilateral air services arrangement with Canada reach an advanced stage and is 1 of 9 new bilateral arrangements the government has already concluded with countries around the world such as Albania, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo, Montenegro, Morocco and Switzerland.

On top of this, the political declaration agreed between the UK and EU provides for a comprehensive air transport agreement to ensure connectivity for passenger and cargo flights through market access for UK and EU airlines.

The government will now work closely with industry to continue to look for opportunities to expand our global aviation network even further and remains committed to a competitive and liberalised aviation sector.

These new arrangements show the UK is open for business and the accessibility of air services will help deliver connectivity, choice and value for money for consumers and businesses both here and abroad.

The government's commitment to growing and investing in the aviation sector remains strong and the aviation strategy, due to be published shortly, will build on today's announcement outlining a range of new measures that benefit the environment, passengers and businesses across the UK.