

Funeral Services

Industry Overview

The industry is broadly spread according to the share of state and territory population. However, specific factors, such as the number of deaths, are also important and are related to the age distribution of the population, particularly to those aged 65 and over. New South Wales and Victoria hold the largest share of industry establishments, followed by Queensland and South Australia. Western Australia and Tasmania hold smaller shares of industry establishments, while the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory hold only minor shares. ¹

In keeping with consumer expectations, is the desire to have a more personalised service or experience. Higher incomes have also supported a move to more personalised services which often carry higher costs and generate greater revenue.

Australia is now a multicultural, multi-faith country, with funeral directors being required to broaden their range of services to adapt to a growing range of religious and/or cultural preferences. The increasing number of cremations for example is in keeping with the tradition of many cultures. ²

The increase of obesity nationally requires more manual handling skills and has created issues with OH&S, equipment and facilities within funeral homes.

Currently there is no competition in WA for the provision of burials they are all done through the Metropolitan Cemeteries Board or in some regions through the local council. It has been suggested that privatisation of cemeteries would allow for a higher quality service to the consumer. Current burial practices at cemeteries do not provide for the upgrade and provision of services such as:

- mechanical lowering devices at grave sites
- Courtesy vehicles
- Repair of sound systems; and the
- Upgrading of chapels not being undertaken

There has been a shift away from smaller family owned business to large corporations or larger franchise chains of funeral homes.

The industry experiences an attrition rate of around 34% for those employed in the industry for less than one year. The attrition rate is believed to be due to a lack of training pathway and qualifications in WA and due to the specialised nature of the work the industry has traditionally trained their staff on the job.

Supply and demand

Given the predicted increased demand for funeral services over the next four years' industry projections are that additional qualified personnel will be required for funeral director's assistant, funeral arranger/conductor and embalmers. There is a strong demand for embalmers however the supply or training is not available in Western Australia and embalmers are being sourced from interstate, Canada and New Zealand.

¹ IbisWorld 2017

² SkillsIQ, 2018 Personal Services Industry Skills Forecast

Funeral Services

Funeral service organisations are increasingly moving toward providing a streamlined, all-encompassing funeral experience which includes event management, catering and floristry services.

The industry skills are generally job role based where training to a skill level is required through on the job training. Given the demand for funeral services over the next 4 years' industry projections are that they will require additional qualified personnel in the job roles of:

- Funeral Directors Assistants (SIF30313 Certificate III in Funeral Operations)
- Funeral arranger/conductors (SIF40113 Certificate IV in Funeral Services)
- Embalmers (SIF 40213 Certificate IV in Embalming)

To meet the current demand funeral homes have engaged new employees to fill general duties roles with most full time and some part time. Funeral director's assistant positions are also being filled.

Although actual projections are not available, the current situation is expected to increase progressively in all employment roles over the next 4 years.

The industry is always on the watch for qualified embalmers and workers with advanced skills in communication, technology, digital knowledge as well as an empathy to work in the industry

Licensing requirements

Embalming is a licenced occupation within the funeral services industry.

Skills demand and shortages

Demands for Embalmers continues to be an industry concern. The timelines to complete the SIF40213 Certificate IV in Embalming is between 2-3 years. As there are no training providers for this qualification in WA the qualification is on-line through eastern state based providers with the additional cost of traveling east for practical assessments. Another issue faced by the industry is that there is only one assessor for embalming in WA.

Currently embalmers are being assessed or attracted through competitor companies, or recruited from interstate, New Zealand or Canada.

Are current VET delivery meeting demands?

Certificate III in Funeral Operation and Certificate IV in Funeral Services are delivered through South Regional TAFE. Both of these qualification is available as traineeships however it appears there may be some delivery issues of the qualifications.

Entry requirement to all qualification in this industry sector are that the student must be currently employed within the industry.

Funeral Services

Anticipated skill shortages

Information Technology

There are many market requirements and trending changes occurring in the industry. The adoption of technology and the increasing cultural diversity are driving demand for additional funeral director's assistants, funeral arranges/conductors and embalmers.

The adoption of technology within the industry has changed skill requirements for these roles. Operation of audio-visual equipment, webcasting of procedures, advanced customer service skills and service coordination are a few of the skills and tasks now required. IT infrastructure and knowledge of e-learning program methods for ongoing professional development and up to date knowledge requires that the training be flexible and tailored to specific industry needs.

Cultural diversity

The increasing cultural diversity of clients requires an understanding and sensitivity of a variety of cultural needs for both employers and employees. Immigration demands, adapting religious and cultural services and funeral services many of which include specific rituals and personal requests.

Digital requirement and cultural diversity needs are currently being addressed by individual funeral homes with on the job training private trainers.

Specific training product issues

Given the consumer demand for more personalised funeral services and the introduction of digital technology applications, the review of the Funeral Services Training Package proposed for 2019 should include more specialised units which include:

- Using and maintaining digital technology
- Events and function management
- Cultural diversity and communication skills

Strategic directions

Larger funeral companies have strategic plans with much of the content being longer range objectives. The objectives are based on marketing, expansion, sustainability and vertical integration, Smaller operators generally rely on industry leadership and reacting to market trends.

Funeral Services

Policy or priority target for certain workers

Subject to ability there are no age or gender restriction in the funeral services industry. However, the funeral industry is a difficult one to work in and is not suitable for everyone therefor personal, physical or mental stability may preclude many aspirants.

The main issue for the industry is attracting the right people with skills that can be developed into industry standards.

Industry workforce priorities for the next four years

- Existing worker training will be a priority for workers in the funeral services industry
- Funding training for embalmers in WA
- Increase the delivery of the SIF training package in WA
- Upskilling existing workers through a training package that includes units/skill sets that meet the needs of the changing requirements of the industry.
- Addressing modern skill requirements to better provide client services
- Using and maintaining digital technology
- Management and organisation of events and functions
- Understanding diversity and cultural differences
- Develop and improve high level communication skills