

WHAT THE PUBLIC THINK OF CREMATORIA Part II

Abstract

This report builds upon the initial reports findings about the publics views on crematoria. The key focus is upon understanding what the public want from a crematorium and how the industry can achieve this.



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Key Findings

- Price is a complex issue, people think that crematoria represent value for money whilst at the same time believing that they are too expensive. People link value to time and possibly privacy.
- There is no one universal list of priorities that all the public agree upon. The main issues that have already been considered by the industry are important. However, the three key issues are: proximity of the crematoria; the amount of time allowed at the venue; and privacy for the families.
- Crematoria grounds are widely praised, but unsurprisingly older buildings are less liked than newer ones. The same is true for the interior of the venues.
- Whilst the amount of time allowed for the ceremony was generally deemed acceptable, when it is too short it can cause a very strong negative reaction.

Introduction

The public have had very few opportunities to express their feelings on crematorium, last year's paper painted a picture of overall contentment with the service and how it was performed. However, it did expose areas where further clarification or understanding was required. Therefore, this paper is written as a follow up to **What the Public think of Crematorium** and should be read in sequence.

The first paper exposed:

- Areas that needed greater clarification, namely whether people felt any distinction in an appreciation between the interior and the exterior of a venue.
- The need to rephrase certain questions to ensure that the meaning extrapolated from the results was 100% accurate, primarily this was with understanding the cost versus value for money element.
- A need to get deeper into the length of time required at the crematorium.
- A need for greater understanding about the public's key priorities.

This paper aims to clarify the issues raised above in order to create a fuller picture for those working inside and with the industry.

Executive Summary

The way people use crematoria is changing along with their attitude to death and to funerals.

Despite all this change the overall level of happiness with the service performed at crematoria remains high. However, perhaps the question is not how happy are they with the service they are currently getting but what do they actually want? We need to gain a more in-depth understanding of what people desire from an interaction with a crematorium and how can we use this knowledge to maintain and improve standards and services provided by the industry.

People's attitudes toward the crematorium grounds and gardens is more positive than the buildings. The age of the building was a strong indicator of whether the public thought it was acceptable, the newer the building the more positive the response.

The appreciation of the building interior did have a correlation with age, the more negative comments were directed towards older buildings, although in a change from the previous survey there was significantly more commentary on the interior being less important than the reason for being there.

Time allowed for the ceremony should be considered an important factor and compared to last year's survey, more people felt they did not get long enough. The absolute number of people who were very unhappy did not change, but there has been an increase in people who felt it was too rushed. This is strongly linked to privacy, mourners commented about their proximity to other groups, which is a time related issue. *This could well be linked to the increase in numbers who use the crematoria for the whole funeral.*

This report further explored the issue of cost and when asked most people felt that it was too expensive, where in the previous report they felt overall it was value for money. This is common when the person being asked has very limited data from which to compare. When using all available data in this situation, people appear to use time and potentially privacy to determined value and not purely cost. If they got all the time they needed to say goodbye, which was private, then they would generally consider that to be value for money.

When asked to prioritise the most important aspects of the crematoria the survey showed there was no clear ranking. All the issues the industry think are important to people are indeed important. Key factors being: distance to get there; time allocated; and privacy. Nothing can be done about where you are situated, but time and privacy are to a certain extent within the gift of the crematoria operator and should be considered. Cost was fourth on the list.

Sampling and Methodology

We asked the following questions:

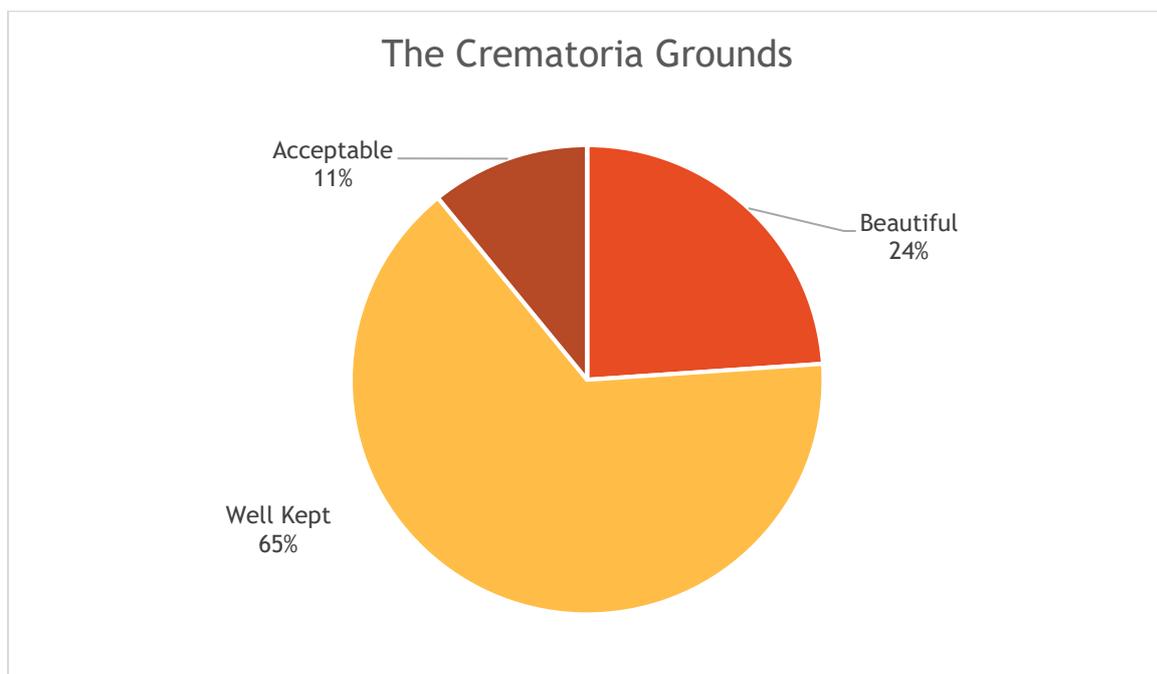
1. What did you think of the grounds?
2. What did you think of the building from the outside?
3. How old do you think the building was?
4. Was the interior and decor welcoming?
5. Did you feel you have long enough for your ceremony?
6. Apart from the nature of the visit, what would have made your experience better?
7. Please rank the following in order (1 being the most important)
 - Appearance of the building and grounds
 - The building interior, decor and cleanliness
 - The cost
 - The location / distance to travelled to get there
 - Car parking
 - Information about the services and facilities
 - Quality of the Music / PA system
 - Time allowed for getting in, the service and getting out again
 - Someone to meet greet and guide you
 - Space away from other mourners

The report is based on 106 responses collected in 2018/19. The participants were self-selected, and we have no profile of age or gender of the respondents. It is possible that they would be representative of the overall profile of the those coming to the website which is 60% female and 40-65 years in age but again as the survey was anonymous, we have no breakdown of respondent profiles.

To compliment the survey, we also conducted 18 qualitative interviews, six with funeral directors, six with celebrants and six with members of the public that had used the facility in the last twelve months in this data. Their input was not used in the quantitative data but added to the narrative and to sense-check the findings.

What did you think of the grounds?

In the previous survey we asked about the grounds and the building as if it was one aspect, in the responses we got we noticed commentary that seemed to suggest that there was appreciation of the grounds but not necessarily the building. In this survey we separated the two factors.



As you can see from the graph above there was an overwhelming appreciation of crematoria grounds.

Not one person thought the grounds were less than acceptable. In fact, 89% thought the grounds were well kept or beautiful.

There was no clear significance between older and more modern crematoria.

The commentary also reflected this, here is a small sample of the common responses:

“Lovely place well looked after”

“Grounds are clean and litter free”

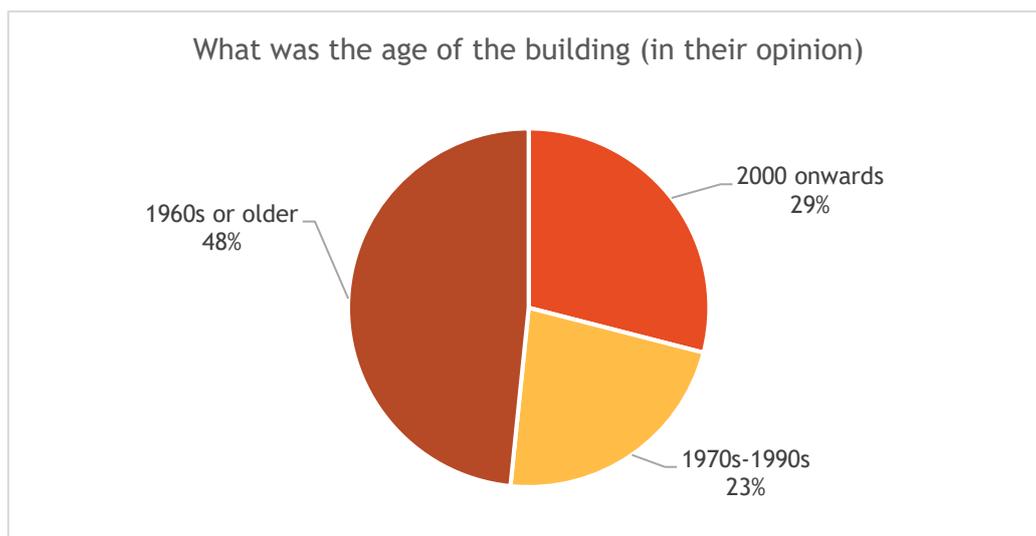
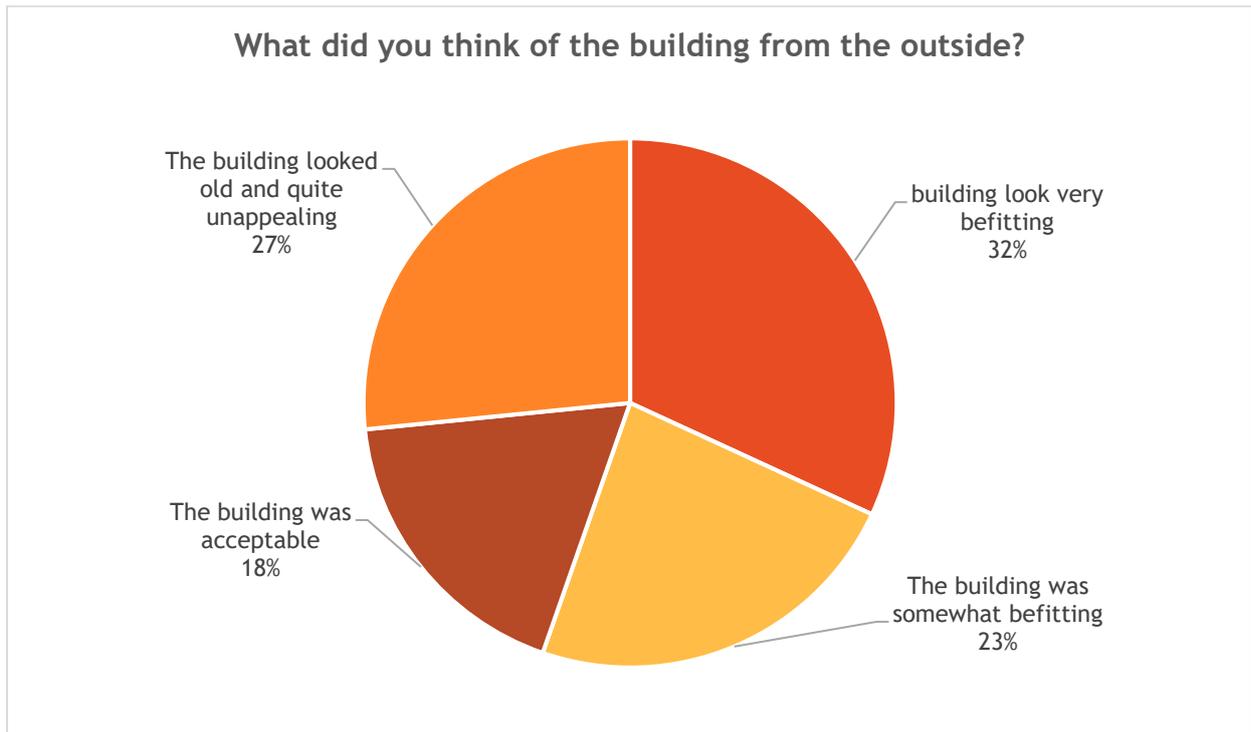
“Recent changes to the grounds have made the grounds beautiful”

“It looked like they made a real effort to make them seem appealing”

What did you think of the building from the outside?

And, what was the age of the building?

These two questions should be considered in conjunction with each other. In the previous survey there was also no way to distinguish whether the age of the facility had bearing on people's attitudes towards it.



In the top pie-chart you will see the overall response to the building. Below it we see a graph on the age of the buildings.

It is hard to claim any categorical findings due to the small number of respondents used in the survey however when the results were matched up age of the building there was a more positive response towards the newer buildings.

Commentary for the more modern facilities was generally, although not exclusively, positive and can be seen in the following examples:

“Wonderful natural light and stained glass”

“Very nice from the inside and outside”

“Lovely building, we were not greeted, but clean and fit for purpose it's what it built for, not over welcoming”

“Looks a bit like a family pub chain!”

Whereas that for the older building was less positive:

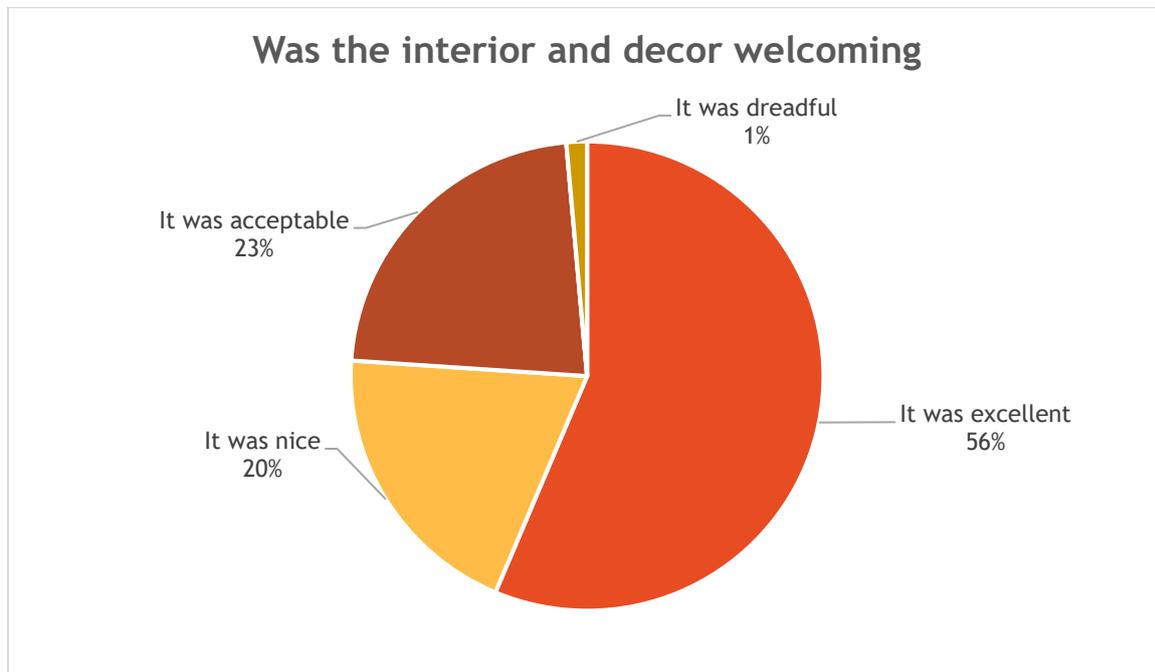
“Very dated and shabby”

“Bit 60s looking and functional. Flat roof. Unappealing”

“Building looked scruffy and very 'office' like”

Was the interior and decor welcoming?

This question was exactly the same as the last survey, the reason for repeating it was to overlay it with the buildings' age and secondly to see whether we received similar findings.



The opinion of the building again was predominantly age related with the older properties facing more criticism.

I think it is worth drawing distinctions between the older and new structures through the commentary:

The new structures

"Inside much nicer and very pleasant"

"Very well maintained inside and out"

"You think if they had spent this much money, they could make the seat comfortable"

Whereas the older structures

"Water stains in waiting area and chapel"

"Looked very dull inside, could have been lighter (more natural light)"

"I noticed some peeling paint"

"They had made a real attempt to make the place look nice, clearly someone wants to make it look as nice as possible"

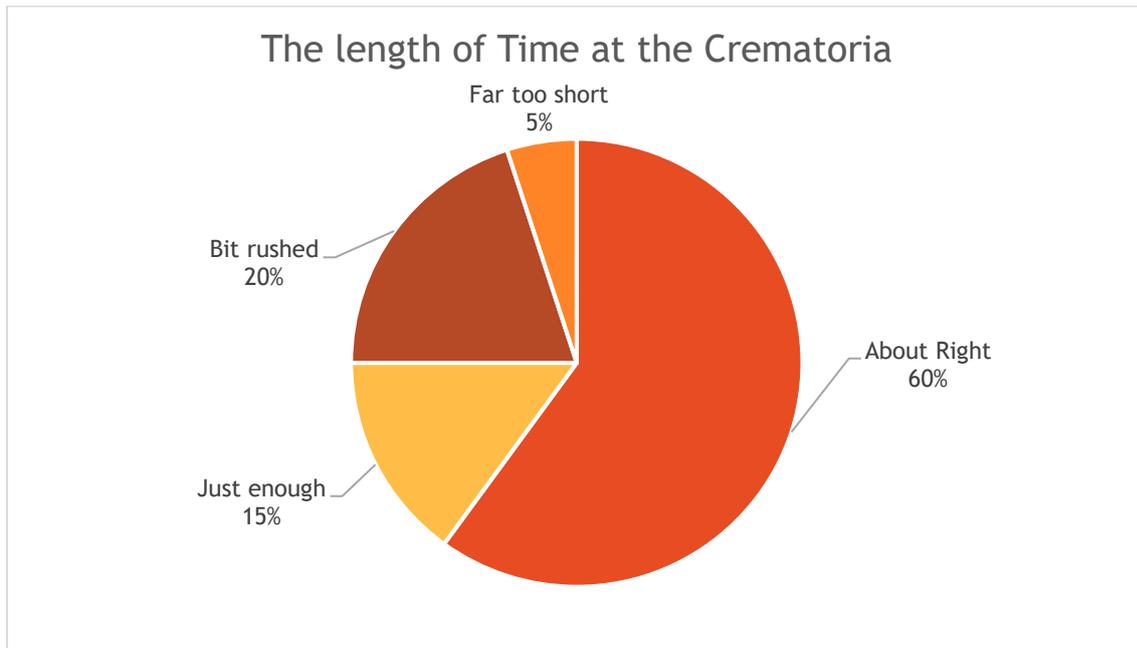
However, several of the comments, more than in last survey, focused away from the physical interior of the building and more upon the nature of the visit and the settings' relative importance

“Don't think the decor is paramount at a time like this”

“To be honest my attention was on his coffin and not the interior specifically”

Did you feel you have long enough for your ceremony?

This question was repeated from the previous questionnaire; the reason being that a similar study carried out by Dignity Plc* found that 3 in 10 customers felt that the time given was too short, as compared with 33% in our previous survey.



Interestingly the results came out slightly different with a greater percentage of people overall flagging up the issue of time. And whilst the same number of people were very dissatisfied (5%). The number who thought it was a 'bit rushed' and 'just enough' increased.

What is interesting to note is that whilst the commentary on this comes across as particularly strong, you will see that it isn't the main priority as compared with other factors— Page 15

There may be several different reasons for this apparent contradiction. Firstly, the modern nature of death, most people die in a hospital in old age, the death is expected and the mental realisation of the inevitable has been considered if not planned. As such people know what is coming and what to expect including the time spent at the crematorium.

Secondly, as less people use the church for the funeral and use the crematoria for the whole ceremony then timings will inevitably become a greater issue. In previous years the crematorium would have been only the final part with less numbers, less emphasis and therefore more private.

Lastly, does the time or lack of it becomes a bigger issue might where the death is premature or unexpected? It might be that where the death is unexpected, such as a young adult or child, then the time in the crematorium is a much more significant factor and therefore will have a greater impact if the family feel that they haven't had enough time to

say what they need to say. An unexpected death can also mean much greater numbers of attendees.

The comments included:

“It’s Ok, accepted that the crem is like a conveyor belt!”

“This is a busy place as many are, so you feel you must get out of the way for the next funeral”

“I felt rushed by the funeral director at the end of the service”

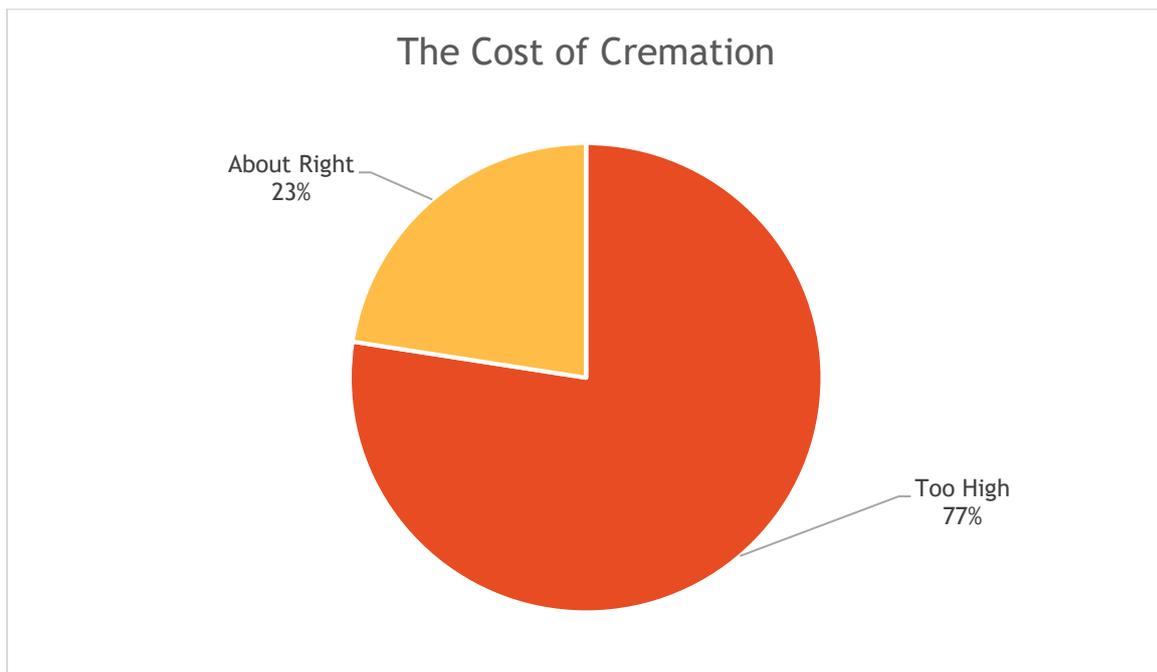
“What are you supposed to do - keep the next family waiting?”

The comments display an acceptance that time was short, they knew and accepted it. Which is both interesting and sad.

[*Cost, Quality, Seclusion and Time What do UK customers want from a cremation funeral](#)

Did you feel the cost of the cremation was...?

Previously we explored whether people thought the cost of a cremation represented value for money. Which should give a more accurate picture. The result was that overall people did believe it was. However, there were several comments such as 'how would I know?' This time we asked a more straight-forward scaled question - too much, too little, just right?



Unsurprisingly if you ask someone who pays directly/personally for a service - is the price too high? You will get the answer 'yes'. People would prefer things on the whole to be cheaper without even knowing the exact cost of what it is being provided.

This is telling in itself as people will say it is too high because it is a significant sum of money, but no one said *why* they thought it was high, which might reinforce the fact they have nothing to compare it too and as it is significant and they have 'gut' instinct they would mark it down as too high.

Families could perhaps compare one crematorium to another although this is unlikely. Therefore, the answer should be looked at in conjunction with the responses regarding value for money in the last survey and the priority that was given to cost over other aspects or the service.

Again, we can look across to the [Dignity report](#) which make a fascinating point. The report showed that people attitudes towards value did not alter much in relation to cost. Where it did change was with time. With people who got longer at crematoria and away from other mourners thinking they received better value for money.

Apart from the nature of the visit, what would have made your experience better?

This more open question revealed a great deal about people emotions and state of mind. It allowed the respondent to respond within their experience rather than our constructed framework.

These answers can be categorised into the following key areas:

Time: People felt they didn't have enough time to get in for the service or to get out again afterwards, with frequent reference to the 'conveyor belt' system. One interesting point is that respondents directed their annoyance at funeral directors for hurrying them and not at the crematoria for only allotting a standard 40 minutes.

'In out, keep moving keep moving'

'the way the funeral directors hurried us along was disgusting'

'The celebrant looked panicked and went through the service at top speed'

Privacy: Space away from other parties of mourners before or after the service attracted a great deal of comment. It was felt that family privacy wasn't respected and that being with other mourners was unacceptable. Note again that this partially reflected in the last question on prioritisation, and could be due again to a large group of attendees. Most services are modest and the time allocated is reasonable but when you have a large group this has an impact and can cause anger and indignation. Also if the crematoria very short slots.

"Somewhere for mourners to gather pre and post ceremony. The only area is outside and doesn't look good for other mourners arriving for the next funeral"

Space in the chapel: There was commentary around the lack of capacity in some of the Chapels. Again this could be due to the increasing trend for families to use the crematoria for the whole funeral.

"Due to the number of mourners many had to stand at the front on the stage/steps facing the congregation and unable to see the screens. I feel this made them feel quite exposed as they were the last to enter the building"

Feeling supported and welcomed: Families sometimes felt that they didn't know where to go or what to do on arriving at the crematorium.

'It all got a bit confusing at one point my sister nearly joined another party, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry'

Car parking: which relates perhaps to the appropriateness of the building for certain funerals, whilst it is not clear if people expected infinite car parking clear some crematoria appear to have in adequate space even for the average number of attendees is unclear.

'Parking on the verge, really?! There was no overflow or anyone to direct us'

Interior and décor: Many families commented on the appearance of both the exterior and the interiors of the building which has been discussed in the previous sections.

Finally, there were a handful of comments that did not apply to any of the above but are worthy of note:

“As a pall bearer for my gran, we entered with the coffin from the side, it would have been nice to walk up the aisle allowing people to pay respects as she passed”

“Knowing there was a digital screen to display photos on would have been nice”

“An on-site cafe or venue where the wake could be held”

“The family seats don’t have anywhere to put hymn books or order of services. The arrangement of family seating doesn’t easily allow next of kin in wheelchairs to be fully integrated amid other family members”

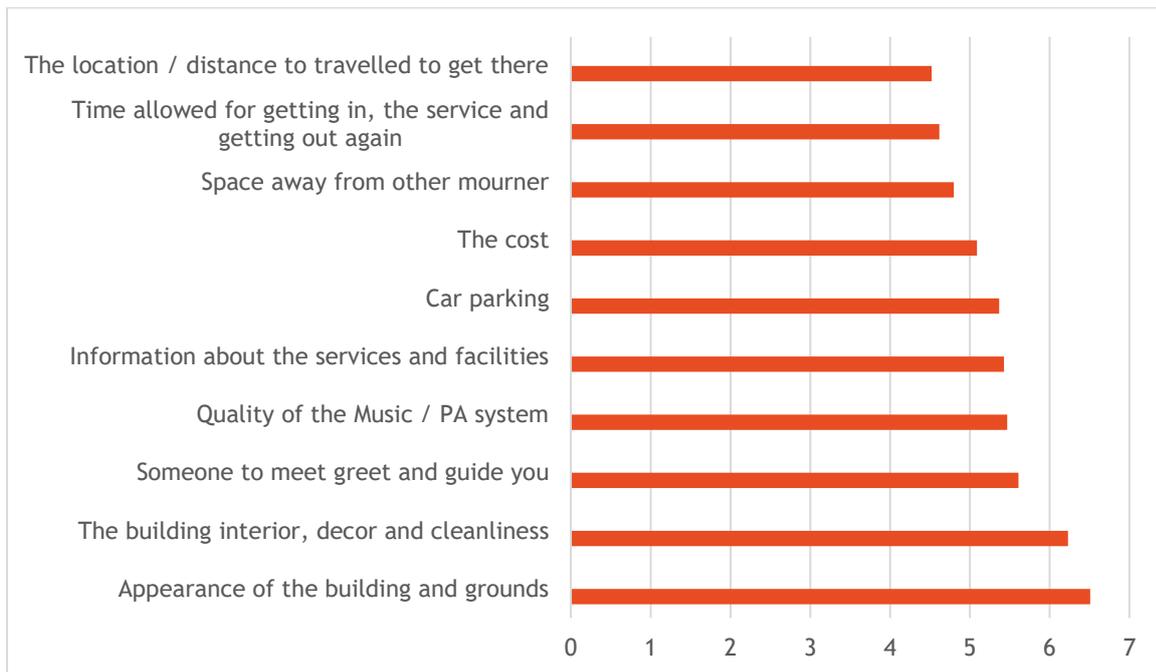
“There was no time to spend alone with my dad before we were ushered out”

Priorities please rank the following in order

Questionnaires can often be a list of ticks or crosses. However, this doesn't really help to identify customer needs. If everything is a priority, then nothing is.

To help prioritise need, we asked people to rank the following in terms of what was most important to them.

Note: in the survey they were randomised and it was made clear that 1 was the most important.



The most illuminating aspect of this result is that there is no magic bullet to the ideal crematorium visit. It is a combination of a number of factors that depend upon the type of cremation event that the family is having and why they are having it, there is no 'one size fits all' service that will please everyone.

The difference between the most important (location /distance to travel to get there – 4.52) is less than 2 places clear of the least important (appearance of the building and ground – 6.51)

As with any rating system there is a bunching towards the middle of the spectrum and so therefore it is in that area that the small variances are important.

As we cannot alter the location of the site in respect to the journey travelled by the family then time and privacy should warrant the biggest consideration. Cost is important but not the greatest consideration.

Conclusion

Each iteration of the research brings us closer to the key considerations that are important for families in cremating their loved ones at a crematorium. As attitudes towards death are gradually altering. The way that families create funerals, and the rise of the discussion around costs and funeral poverty is causing the industry to evaluate the value of any service to a bereaved family, I think we are likely to see increasing trend towards families becoming more vocal in expressing their needs around their cremation service.

This report shows a need for older crematoria to improve the appearance of their facilities and if they cannot build new facilities then revamping their current interiors would be worthwhile.

As Crematoria are increasingly being used as a location for the whole funeral there is a need to provide the family with space to stand away from other funeral parties. Families value their privacy and do not like to have to share entry and/or exit points with others not in their funeral.

Crematoria may also wish to examine the timings of ceremonies, either offering alternative space for families to congregate, such as catered rooms, and/or longer booking slots. This would allow families to book the correct amount of time for their funeral according to who it is for and how many guests would be attending.

All aspects of the crematorium and service are important, and whilst the distance from the family is the most factor when choosing a venue their experience and therefore levels of satisfaction are based upon a multitude of other factors. And of all the aspects that can be altered time and privacy appear to be the most important. Cost is important, but not the most important issue. Value is difficult for customers to articulate but will become increasingly important as the industry becomes more transparent and more options are offered to families.