

NVQ: County funeral director offers qualification

THIS EXAM IS DEAD UNUSUAL

IT must be one of the most unusual qualifications on any CV in the country – an NVQ in helping to bury the dead.

But Oxfordshire's biggest funeral director chain has become the first company in the country to launch a nationally recognised qualification in the funeral service industry.

Midcounties Co-operative Funeralcare, which has 15 branches across Oxfordshire, has developed the qualifications to help staff

Mum-of-two Sue Oldham, 47, is one of the first people to enrol on the course, having swapped a job selling shoes to become an assistant funeral director at the firm's Hendred Street branch in Cowley two years ago.

Her role involves making funeral arrangements with family members and seeing through the process.

She said: "My last job was

■ Liam Sloan

just the same old thing every day.

"Selling shoes didn't give as much sense of achievement and a feeling you were helping people out.

"I thought hard about going into this, because I didn't know how I would get on with seeing the deceased, but it was fine."

Seven staff in Cowley, including two mortuary workers, signed up to the course, and the qualification will be recognised by other companies.

The course starts with health and safety training, before going on to all aspects of customer service associated with organising funerals. It takes about eight months to complete.

Mrs Oldham added: "It is actually a very satisfying job, particularly when families come back and the funeral has gone right.

"You have to realise that when people walk through

the door, everybody thinks about funerals and death in a different way.

"Understandably for some people it is very serious and upsetting, but others are actually quite jokey and have a laugh.

"You have to get their trust and get every part of the funeral right for them."

The Co-Operative devised the customer services NVQ programme, which is the equivalent to five GCSEs.

Mrs Oldham, from Bicester, admitted some customers had made some unusual requests.

"The thing that gets me is the music that people choose. It's never the standard hymns these days. Some people want 'Burn Baby Burn!'

"The job does make conversation. When I'm at a party,

everybody talks about it and what they want at their funeral."

