

## **Distinctions Procedure: Panel Assessments ( The Distinctions Department are currently rewriting and updating this document. Publishing date: February 2019 )**

**Approved by Council: November 2015**

### Scope

This document is intended to provide an overview of The Society's Distinctions assessment processes to assist all who are involved. The emphasis is on the assessment of images but the general principles will apply to all Distinctions. In addition, more detailed guidance on specific topics is also available in the associated documents listed below.

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**Associated Documents:** DP001; DP003; DP004; DP006; DP009; DP010; DP011; MP008; MF003

### 1. Introduction

The Society recognises the photographic ability and competence of its members through the distinctions process and successful applicants are given different levels of membership. These are Licentiate (LRPS), Associate (ARPS) and Fellowship (FRPS) and are awarded for three increasing levels of attainment. The awards are made by Council following an assessment of evidence submitted by the applicant. The assessments are made by Panels of experts appointed by Council.



Normally, each Associate and Fellowship Panel will consist of five Fellows and a Chair. The Licentiate Panel may include Associates.

Distinctions are also awarded to members who have approved academic qualifications.

Direct Fellowship may be awarded on the basis of CV's and references. (See DP006)

The standards and evidence required are described in the current revision Distinctions and Qualifications Information (DP004) available on The Society's website.

Administration of the Distinctions activities is the responsibility of the Distinctions Manager. The Distinctions Advisory Board (DAB) under a Chair appointed by Council advises Council on Distinctions issues and assists with monitoring the Distinctions processes. The DAB members are experienced in the Distinctions system and include non-members of The Society as external advisors, and the President. The Distinctions Chairman's Committee (DCC) provides a forum for the Panel Chair to meet and have a say in Distinctions policies.

## 2. Role of the Chair

(see DP009)

**2.1:** Chairs are appointed for their experience, knowledge and management abilities. They have a key role in the Distinctions assessment process to ensure that each application has a fair assessment, that adequate feedback is provided as necessary and, most importantly, that standards are maintained. In summary, the responsibilities of the Chair at an assessment are as follows:

- Chair the Panel for the assessment meetings
- Train / brief Panel Members
- Maintain consistent standards
- Provide feedback on not recommended submissions.
- Advise on and respond to complaints in liaison with the Distinctions Manager.
- To work with the Distinctions Advisory Board Moderator during the assessment
- To attend the Fellowship Board (not LRPS)

**2.2:** When a Panel receives an application which does not fall within its published requirements the Chair may:

- Make a pass/fail decision if it is considered that the application is relevant to the Panel's requirements even though it is not presented in the exact form specified;
- Transfer the application to a more appropriate Specialist Panel prior to a vote being taken. No further comment is made, nor feedback provided. If it is considered that the application falls outside the specific competence of any of the specialist Panels and the relevant panel has already sat in the round of assessments it will transfer the application to the DAB. The Chair that panel will be informed.

**2.3:** One of the underlying principles of the Distinctions system is that assessments are made by persons who are expert in the specialism of the applicant. It is the Chair's responsibility to arrange, in collaboration with the Distinctions Manager, that appropriately qualified Panel members are available to assess the applications at each meeting. If necessary, with agreement of the DAB, one or more experts who are not approved members of the Panel may be co-opted to advise on a



specific application. Those co-opted should be experienced Fellows or non members of The Society of equivalent status.

### 3. Conduct of Assessments

The Panels make recommendations to the Distinctions Advisory Board and Council; they do not make the award and this must be made clear to all applicants.

**3.1 Quorum:** A Panel will normally consist of 5 Panel members plus the Panel chair. There should be at least **three** Panel members present plus the Chair. If a quorum is not available, a Fellow with suitable Panel experience may be co-opted by the Panel Chair, and with the approval of the Distinctions Manager and DAB Chair.

**3.2 Pre-Briefing:** A short (~15 minute) pre-audience briefing session by the Chair, based on Panel Chairs Outline Briefing Notes (Appendix 1 [for 2016]). This is used to detail any special requirements or other matters which require discretion and to remind the Panel members of policy and procedures. In particular that they must declare an interest when appropriate and that they should wait to speak at the Chair's invitation.

Panel members must be reminded of the Distinctions Confidentiality Statement (Appendix 2) which applies to all discussions of the day, except those made to the audience.

**3.3 Administration:** The Distinctions staff organise the applications and paperwork and makes available information on the Panel and the requirements.

A suitable gap should be left between the seating for the Panel and the audience.

**3.4 Dress Code:** The Society's Policy is that a smart casual dress style is expected of those serving as Panel members.

#### 3.5 Adjudication with an Audience:

A member of the Distinctions staff:

- Welcomes the audience and announces any special arrangements for the day's proceedings, including Health & Safety and confidentiality.
- Reminds the audience that they must not comment, during the assessment and that the Panel makes recommendations which are ratified by Council before the award is made.
- States the audience cannot take photographs, record or post any detail that might identify the applications on social media.
- Introduces special guests and the Chair

The Chair:

- Introduces the Panel members and moderator including distinctions to the audience, explaining their roles



## 4. Assessment

### 4.1 Assessment Procedures:

#### LRPS

This procedure avoids the possibility (sometimes more apparent than real) that the panel are discussing the outcome.

View panel from seats without discussion.

View images carefully. Quiet comments to share concerns may be made in regard to technical issues, no discussion on how to vote is allowed.

Assessment form (Appendix 3) is completed by all panel members.

The chair will collate the assessment forms and announce the recommendation. If successful, the applicant will be named.

After the announcement one panel member will speak about the successful panel. If unsuccessful, the Chair will normally give feedback.

#### ARPS (and FRPS in specialist category)

This procedure avoids the possibility (sometimes more apparent than real) that the first to speak decides the final result.

Written Statements of Intent are read to the Panel members.

View panel from seats without discussion.

View images carefully. Quiet comments to share concerns may be made in regard to technical issues

Indicate initial decision – discrete vote with green/red cards.

Comments as necessary, starting with minority opinions.

Take final vote with green/red cards.

The chair will announce the recommendation. If successful, the applicant will be named.

If the submission is unsuccessful panel members complete the Feedback Form (Appendix 4).

For re-assessment of a Referral see DP010.

**Fellowship Board** - see Fellowship Board Procedure

### 4.2 General:

- Panel members who have advised the applicant on a 'one to one' basis **must** declare this to the Chair before any comment is made. They will then normally be asked to comment last. Panel members may not be involved in submissions by family or close friends and will not take part in the adjudication, and will leave the room during the assessment.
- The applicant must be anonymous until a decision is reached. The identity is then only announced if it is recommended. (LRPS & ARPS)
- No distinction should be made between amateur and professional work
- In exceptional cases the Panel Chair or Moderator may withhold the assessment and call for further supporting evidence.
- All images must reach the required standard.
- The Chair and Moderator (through the Chair) should guide the Panel if it is believed a wrong decision is being reached. In the case of assessments for Licentiate and Associate the Chair



and Moderator (through the Chair) may in exceptional circumstances adjourn with the Panel for a private discussion in the interests of reaching the correct decision. (LRPS & ARPS)

- Information on previous applications will be made available to the Chair who will provide guidance to the Panel to ensure consistency between the current and previous assessments.
- In the case of a resubmission details of the feedback given to the applicant will be made known to the assessors and the observers in order that consideration can be given in regard to the applicant actions in response to that advice.
- Care must be taken that the pass standard is not allowed to fall when the overall standard is low.
- Panel members are appointed for their knowledge and experience and must avoid comments such as this is 'not my scene' which gives a wrong impression to the audience.

#### **4.3 Prints:**

- Prints are assessed as a panel with attention given as necessary to its layout.
- Prints should be examined at an appropriate viewing distance. This avoids poor technical quality being accepted and also indicates a proper concern to the audience. The panel members may handle the prints to view them closer, but must not move them around.
- Normally The Panel should not be told when a third party has printed the images on behalf of the applicant (unless it is a fundamental part of the style or quality). In all cases the applicant is responsible for the images submitted.

#### **4.4 Transparencies:**

- Transparencies are projected twice in sequence before comments are made. The effectiveness of the viewing sequence and evidence of planning of the viewing order should be considered.
- Transparencies over 6x6 cm are displayed on a light box.

#### **4.5 Digital Images:**

- Reference images will be shown before the assessment to establish the monitor is correctly calibrated.
- Digital images are shown twice in sequence before displaying thumbnail images. (LRPS and ARPS only)
- At the conclusion of the viewing at Licentiate level one panel member will be invited to comment and on conclusion of those comments the Chair will invite the other panel members if they have technical concern, if they do the relevant image(s) will be shown full screen and discussed prior to the marking being completed.
- At the conclusion of first vote at Associate level panel member will be invited to comment and ask to view individual images full screen if they have concerns on technical ground or that the image is below the standard of seeing required.

#### **4.6 Book applications:**

- All **significant** images must meet the required standard. (A significant image is one that is 75% or more of the page).
- The quality and design of the book is part of the presentation and is part of the evidence.
- The 3 prints submitted with the book are viewed.



- Supplementary evidence may be requested if necessary to establish the photographer's input.

**4.7 Fellowship:** Applications are assessed in camera without an audience. This is to ensure, in the best interests of obtaining the correct result, that discussion is not inhibited or curtailed. As part of the assessment process, the Fellowship recommendations go forward to a Fellowship Board, appointed by Council and, comprising members of the Distinctions Advisory Board and other senior Fellows for a final decision. The ISQ and Research, Education and Application of Photography categories have separate arrangements.

**Strict confidentiality must be maintained on decisions taken in camera.** To retain an applicant's anonymity Moderators who sit on the Fellowship board, should not normally know the name of Fellowship applicants.

## 5. Outcome

**5.1 Recommendation:** The recommendation is announced together with the candidate's name.

**5.2. Referral:** When the prescribed number of images (1 for LRPS, 3 for ARPS, 4 for FRPS) are unanimously agreed by the panel to be not up to standard the Referral Procedure (DP010) is followed. This is explained to the candidate by a member of staff.

**5.3. Resubmission:** This outcome may be recommended by the Chair when a submission is considered to be worthy of further input. The process is detailed in Referral and Resubmission Procedure (DP010).

**5.4. Not recommended:** In the case of unsuccessful applications every effort must be made to inform the applicant of the reasons for failure and to indicate a course of action for improvement (e.g. attendance at an Advisory Session or discussion with a Panel member). The Chair will decide who should advise the failed applicant.

## 6. Panel Member's Responsibilities

Each Panel member has the responsibility to give a fair judgement based on his or her expertise. Panel members are appointed because of their ability in a particular genre and they are expected to make a recommendation or non-recommendation decision and vote. Abstaining from voting is not an option. Each assessors vote carries equal weight.

Where the applicant is known personally to a Panel member, or where the Panel member has given guidance to the applicant on a one to one basis, the Chair must be advised of this before the assessment takes place. This does not apply to advice given at public Advisory Sessions.

In the interests of achieving and maintaining uniformity of standards across the different categories Panel members and Chairs are encouraged to attend meetings of other Panels as observers. The Society will pay travel expenses for one such attendance per year, agreed in advance with the Distinctions Manager.



It is accepted that Panel members may not always agree with the decisions of their own Panel or with those of other Panels. To state this publicly can cause problems particularly on Advisory Days where obviously the advisor is giving a personal opinion. It is very important that it is made clear that such an opinion is a personal one. A statement such as “This work should not have been awarded a Distinction” is not acceptable. “I would not personally have voted for it” is an acceptable comment but such comments are best avoided.

When commenting on work at an Assessment or Advisory Day unkind or humorous comments on applicants’ work can cause problems. Whilst genuine humour helps to lower tension, it must not be allowed to detract from the professionalism which The Society expects.

## 7. Responsibility to Applicants

All Panels are expected to give each application a full and fair evaluation based on their experience and knowledge; they must not be biased in any way, and are voting on whether the submission has fulfilled the criteria.

Although some applications may not be to an individual members’ taste the evidence must be assessed on its merit and an even standard maintained, bearing in mind that styles may vary considerably.

## 8. Relationship with the Audience

Fellowship adjudications are held in camera. Licentiate and Associate assessments are open to an audience in order to give applicants and aspiring applicants the opportunity to observe how standards are set and what a particular Panel requires. This works well and is popular with members and applicants. From the Panel’s point of view there are two minor disadvantages:

- It takes longer to get through applications, when each Panel member gives the reasons for their decisions
- It is obvious that the audience will not agree with a Panel’s decision in every case. It is because of this latter disadvantage that Panel members must explain clearly in a voice loud enough to be heard, exactly why they are ‘for’ or ‘against’ the application. (Except at Licentiate level when they will comment on the outcome of the assessment and the reasons why)

Neither the applicant nor any member of the audience is allowed to comment on or become involved in any way with the Panel’s deliberations.

## 9. Relationship with Applicants

Until an applicant dispatches their application to The Society it is permissible for Panel members to discuss with and guide applicants regarding their application. Panel members must avoid selecting the entire portfolio of work, which is submitted. The final selection must always be that of the candidate.

From the time of dispatch until AFTER the applicant has been informed of Council’s decision there must be no communication between applicant and any Panel member. Except at an Advisory Day the names of those receiving advice should remain confidential.



When a Panel member has been involved in advising on an application on a one to one basis it is essential that this is discretely declared to the Chair before the assessment starts. The Panel member may comment and vote at the discretion of the Chair. It is policy that the Panel member should not sit on an assessment panel if a family member, relative or close friend applies.

When Panel members give advice to applicants, either before submission or after notification of failure, they should inform the applicant that they are doing so as an individual. It should be made absolutely clear that their opinion may NOT be that of the Panel as a whole and that advice given does not commit the Panel in any way. It frequently occurs in cases of failure that the Chair may ask a particular Panel member if they would advise the applicant. Such advice and guidance will be personal and the applicant must be made to realise that it does not commit a future Panel in any way.

Distinction Advisory Sessions run by Panel members are held regularly by The Society. The sessions are aimed specifically at the potential or failed applicant. The latter should be particularly encouraged to attend.

## 10. Complaints

If a Panel member receives a complaint verbally or in writing, it **must** be referred to the Panel Chair and the Distinctions Manager must also be informed. Chairs should use their discretion as to whether a complaint can be dealt with immediately, or whether it should be passed on to the Distinctions Manager for consideration by the DAB. The complainant should expect a reply within 28 working days. In either case, it is important that the Distinctions Manager is notified of all complaints - and positive feedback - so that they can be recorded and monitored.

## 11. Expenses

Reasonable out of pocket expenses, approved in advance and, in line with the current guidelines on expenses (MF003) will be paid.

All Panel members and Chairs give their time voluntarily and no fees are payable by The Society.

## 12. Council Regulations

From time to time Council passes resolutions which affect the conduct of the Distinctions. These will be promptly circulated to Panel members by the Distinctions Manager and it is the responsibility of Panel Chairs and Panel members to comply with these instructions.



## Appendix 1

### **Chair briefing notes**

To follow for 2016

## Appendix 2

### **Statement of Confidentiality**

The deliberations of this board / committee / panel are confidential and by being part of that group its membership of the day, be they observer or serving member, both individually and collectively, agree to that confidentiality. It is acknowledged that while part of the process can be in public, other parts of the process are private and confidential and should remain so.

