

L&CPU MENTORING SCHEME FOR THE PAGB APM

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Some months ago we changed our qualifying requirements for prospective candidates to the PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit (APM). The new requirement is only that candidates are "active members" of an affiliated club. They must be able to show that they have been active within that club in entering internal competitions - not just social members. We were aware that the relaxation of our qualification rule, which has now been adopted generally by the PAGB, might open the flood gates and allowing a deluge of entries by club members who had no real idea what the pass standard is. We felt a responsibility to the candidates to help them as much as we could to achieve the required levels so we decided to set up a mentoring.

The mentors are currently Gwen Charnock, Phil Charnock, Colin Smith, David Butler, Gordon Jenkins, Christine Widdall, and Bob Dennis. All have served on the PAGB APM panel of judges and/or have experience of judging at National and International Exhibition level within the UK. The mentors met to discuss how the scheme would work. Each L&CPU candidate for the APM is entitled to have a mentor appointed and we decided that the best way to do this was to use a co-ordinator, Bob Dennis, who appoints a mentor and puts candidate and mentor in touch with each other.

How the scheme works. Mentoring is not a condition of entry to the APM but all new candidates who approach our Awards Officer for the necessary paperwork are strongly advised to enrol for the scheme, if possible before making an application to the PAGB, so that the mentor can recommend delaying their application for candidates not considered to be ready. Of course, at the start of our scheme, we also have picked up a number of candidates who are already working to the date of November 2011 or spring 2012 and there is limited time to help those individuals, especially anyone who at present is not producing enough work at the required standard.

Mentors have between 5 and 9 candidates each at the moment. Once in touch with the mentor, the candidate sends a CD of his/her best images, probably around 30, to the mentor, who will give feedback. Once the process has begun, mentors need to give feedback as quickly as possible, since a delay could put the candidates behind in booking an Adjudication and could lessen the time they have to rectify problems with their images. Much of the advice is given by email or telephone and often it is an iterative process, with improved images being sent back for further comment. Some candidates may need a minimum of help and some visit the mentor for detailed discussions. For CPAGB, a mentor works "one to one" with the

candidate. At DPAGB and MPAGB level, up to three mentors can be involved with a single candidate. Sometimes a candidate wants to go straight for the DPAGB. We generally recommend starting with the CPAGB, but the final decision is up to the candidate.

The First L&CPU Mentoring Seminar. We ran our first mentoring seminar and mock adjudication at Chorley. Fifty prospective candidates attended with a packed lunch. All projected images, sets of 10, 15 and 20 according to the level being applied for, were sent beforehand and put into a Dicentra "competition". (Dicentra cannot deal with 6 judges marking out of 5 at present so it was set up for a single judge marking out of 30 so that marks could be recorded). A calibrated projection system was used. Prints were brought on the day, with titles beforehand.

The emphasis on the day was "help" not criticism. We outlined the APM process, including the criteria for the pass level followed by an explanation of the judging and a presentation on how to prepare the digital files for projection, including the colour space and file format.

This was followed by a presentation of CPAGB level images that "should score between 18 and 24", supplied beforehand by the PAGB, and then a mock adjudication for the CPAGB. After this there was an appraisal of the work that had not reached the required score (each mentor took an image in turn and discussed with the candidate, in front of the audience, why it may have received a lower mark). Candidates received the appraisal well, showing a willingness to accept the comments and learn from the process. After lunch a similar procedure was followed for D and M level candidates' work, though time did not allow individual feedback to be given for all the work not reaching the pass standard. We had not foreseen how much there would be and how long feedback takes!

Candidates for D and M levels were strongly advised to try out their work by entering UK-based International Exhibitions and BPE Exhibitions. Caution was expressed about work that only does well in internationals abroad, as taste does vary between countries. The day ended with a "question and answer" session. We think the whole process is very worthwhile and the seminar may become an annual event.

and finally... We would be pleased to hear from other Federations to find out how they work with APM candidates. We also await with interest the outcome of the real adjudications that our candidates will experience in due course!