

AWARDS FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC MERIT

The L&CPU Mentoring Scheme - Christine Widdall MPAGB

When our qualifying rules to enter the PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit (APM) were relaxed, the L&CPU decided to start a mentoring scheme for prospective candidates to help them to understand the different levels and the requirements of entering and to help them to achieve their best entry by giving feedback on their photographs.

The mentoring scheme and seminar were promoted on the L&CPU website and before long enquiries were coming in. We started with about 40 candidates, divided between the seven mentors. Unfortunately, after a very short illness, we lost nature expert Colin Smith.

Mentors ask to see a selection of the candidates' best work, perhaps 30 images to begin with and candidates can send new images for appraisal as they make them. Some candidates take more of the mentors' time than others and mentors vary a little in the way they work. Some candidates are also clearly "ready" and only need a little practical advice before the adjudication, but others are nowhere near ready and need more input. In some cases they may even be advised to delay their application until achieving a higher standard. For that reason, it is helpful to see a candidate's work before they apply to the PAGB and, if the candidate is entering prints, it is important to see their prints and not just PDIs.

In the autumn of 2011 we held a Mentoring Seminar which included a "mock Adjudication" with 6 of the mentors acting as judges.

Clearly, running a mock-adjudication is a risky thing to do, especially as some of our mentors have not yet sat on a PAGB panel. The candidates

were warned that it was only to give a feel for how they might get on and that we could not guarantee the same marks on their real adjudication. However, it did show candidates how their work sat in relation to the standard of other candidates and that gave a severe "wake-up" call to some, resulting in a renewed effort to take better photos, which I know paid off in the end!

Is there a down-side? Well, the mentors may potentially be blamed if the candidates fail, though the few who did fail did not seem to take this view. Successful candidates may think you are their mentor for life and it is certainly a big commitment. It requires willingness and TIME and mentors MUST give feedback quickly as any delay is lost time for their candidates. Now success breeds success, so we need more mentors and have still not replaced our nature specialist.

The L&CPU feel that the advantages of mentoring outweighed the disadvantages. It gave confidence to those whose work was already at the required standard, helped others to improve their work and choose their best images (the final selection MUST be their own). The iterative process maximised the candidates' chance of success and they were able to compare their work with that of candidates from other, maybe stronger, clubs during the Mentoring Seminar.

After our first year we think it was worth doing and is worth continuing and we will certainly consider running more Seminars with mock adjudications.

This is an update of an article first published in e-news 51 in October 2011.

At the April 2012 APM in Pontefract the L&CPU had a bumper entry with 15 passes, including two at MPAGB, and they are confident that the mentoring scheme helped several of the entrants who would not have passed otherwise.

JUDGING SPECIAL ISSUE

Later in the year we hope to publish a special edition of e-news devoted to the Black Art of Photographic Judging. All we need is the material to fill it! If you have any considered views on judging, any amusing or annoying anecdotes, any suggestions for improvement, any questions or any views at all on judging which would be of interest to our readers then please send your contribution to rod@creative-camera.co.uk.

We welcome articles and one-liners from Judges and their victims. Just remember even judges have feelings too. We cannot promise to publish everything but please write now!