

Unanswered Questions from the DIG Members' Evening, 5 October 2026

Assessors

Maggie Bullock: What background will the assessor have, i.e. will they have been assessors from the previous process?

Chas Hockin: Having spoken to some assessors, there is a reluctance to take up the new role of examiners; how are you going to populate the newer roles which will need a larger number of individuals? (E.g. tutorials, etc.)

Sabine Tillie-Davidson: Who will the assessors be?

Martin Keene: How will an examiner approach a portfolio in the future, compared to how an assessor does it now. What will they be looking for?

Maggie Bullock: Will the assessor's experience be matched to the photographic area of the submission?

We are recruiting examiners through an open process. Existing assessors are very welcome to apply, and we value the knowledge and experience they bring. Previous appointments will not automatically transfer into the revised programme. Recruitment is also open to people with photographic and assessment expertise who have not previously assessed for the RPS. Holding an RPS Distinction is not a requirement.

We recognise that some existing assessors may not wish to take on the new roles. Recruitment, training and scheduling are being planned to provide sufficient capacity for both tutorials and assessment. Appointments have not yet been made, so we cannot confirm who the examiners will be.

Examiners will assess submissions against the published standard and assessment criteria for the relevant level. These set out what applicants need to demonstrate and what examiners will look for. Each submission will be assessed independently by two examiners, with a third examiner involved where their judgements differ. Every applicant will receive written feedback. Training and moderation will support consistent application of the standards and criteria.

At ARPS, applicants choose the Area of Practice that best represents their body of work. At FRPS, applicants present a broader photographic practice, which may draw on more than one Area of Practice. At both levels, submissions will be matched with appropriate examiner expertise. The standard and assessment criteria for each level apply across all Areas of Practice.

Costs

Anonymous participant: So, is this going to cost so much more money to attend open days, tutorials, etc., on top of membership, online and in-person workshops, and the cost of application?

David Taylor: How has the pricing changed with this new pathway?

Trevor Litherland: Whilst it is early days and there has been information released on the RPS Distinctions page, which I thought was very encouraging, I think the question on most members' minds is: is there any indication of pricing, seeing as the examiners are paid?

Edgar Gibbs: Is the new process affordable within the RPS?

Anonymous participant: Submission training / tutorials etc. clearly will come at a cost as well as the assessments themselves. It seems the OVERALL costs will inevitably increase significantly. Has the RPS acknowledged this and the impact on reduced applications?

Carol Olerud: What if the Board does not approve of the costing details??

Fees for the revised programme are being developed and will be published later this autumn. We cannot yet confirm the amounts.

We recognise the concern about the total cost of pursuing a Distinction, including preparation, tutorials and assessment. Affordability is part of the planning, alongside the need to cover delivery costs and make the programme sustainable for the RPS. This includes considering how pricing could affect applications.

The assessment package will include tutorials, independent assessment and written feedback for every applicant, supported by paid examiners. Tutorials will be included in the package fee, rather than charged separately. Fees will reflect the costs of delivering the programme as a whole.

When we publish the fees, we will explain what is included, what is optional and any additional charges, so applicants can understand the costs before committing. RPS workshops and courses are separate opportunities for learning and development; they are not additional requirements for a Distinction.

The financial proposals are subject to the RPS's approval process. Any changes required through that process will be addressed before final fees are announced.

Photobooks

Tracy: Are handmade books included

Steve Hartley: What does 'collaboration' mean for the photobook area of practice?

Edgar Gibbs: Can Travel, Landscape, documentary and photobook be combined in one submissions

Neil Purcell: Having seen a successful F submission for a photo book that had already been published, and went well beyond the then required number of images, can you say whether there will be any flexibility with regards to the number of images in a photobook, as well as the amount of text. Clearer details on this would be much appreciated

Further guidance on book submissions will be published later this autumn. This will clarify the requirements for handmade and previously published books, the number of photographs and the inclusion of text.

Collaboration is an established part of professional photographic and publishing practice and may involve contributions from a designer, writer, printer, editor or other practitioner. Applicants will need to identify significant contributions by others and explain their own role and decisions, so that examiners can assess the applicant's photographic achievement within the work submitted.

Photobooks is an Area of Practice at ARPS. The body of work presented in a photobook may draw on several areas of photographic practice, including travel, landscape and documentary. At FRPS, a body of work may also draw on several areas of photographic practice, whatever its submission format. At both levels, the work must be coherent and meet the relevant standard and assessment criteria.

Process

Anonymous participant: How do tutorials differ from 1,2,1s?

David Taylor: Are we going to get the option of one-to-one support that we used to get from experienced members?

Jan Gibson: When applying for a distinction, will there be a space on the application form to include my access needs, e.g. dyslexia?

Steve Hartley: Does the change remove the risk of mentors indicating a panel/book is 'good to go' and assessors not agreeing?

Anonymous participant: as there will be no categories at Fellowship level, how do you ensure that the assessors are the best people to assess a particular panel?

Neil Purcell: I am aware of the time it takes for new specifications and assessment criteria to be developed and, more importantly, to train up those who will do the assessing. When do you realistically anticipate all we will be singing from the same hymn sheet?

Alan O'Brian: Will there still be Advisory Days (in-person and online) and one-to-ones?

The previous one-to-one service is being discontinued. The revised pathway introduces tutorials as a structured stage of the application process, linked to the published standard and assessment criteria. These will help applicants understand what is expected, review their work and identify areas for development. LRPS applicants will have an individual tutorial; ARPS and FRPS applicants will have both group and individual tutorials.

Regions and Special Interest Groups can continue to offer Advisory Days and other developmental activities, online and in person. These provide opportunities to discuss work and learn from experienced photographers, complementing the formal applicant pathway.

A tutorial helps applicants prepare for assessment; it does not provide an assessment decision or guarantee success. Tutors and examiners will use the same published standards and criteria, supported by training and moderation. This should improve consistency between advice and assessment, although examiners may still reach a different judgement when considering the completed submission. Tutorial advice should identify what needs further attention and avoid assurances that work will pass.

Applicants will be able to tell us about access needs, including dyslexia, so that appropriate support and reasonable adjustments can be discussed.

At Fellowship, matching submissions with appropriate examiner expertise will take account of the work and its context, including where a practice draws on more than one Area of Practice.

Recruitment, training and preparation for delivery are being planned ahead of the programme's launch in 2027. The published standards and criteria provide a shared basis for this work, with ongoing moderation and review supporting consistency once the programme is operating.

Misc

Martin Keene: Are you expecting pass rates to increase under the new programme? If they do, how will you show members that this reflects better-prepared candidates rather than a lowering of standards?

Jean Jameson: I wonder what the justification was for dropping the requirement for a panel layout - it seemed such an important part of ARPS.

Edgar Gibbs: Will AL go through the L A & F process himself so he can experience the process first hand.

We expect clearer guidance and tutorials to help applicants prepare more effectively. This may lead to higher pass rates, but increasing pass rates is not itself the aim. The aim is for applicants to understand the requirements and for their work to be assessed consistently against the published standard for each level.

Pass rates alone cannot establish whether preparation has improved or standards have changed. We will need to consider assessment evidence, written feedback and moderation findings alongside the figures. The published standards and criteria provide the basis for explaining what each award represents and checking that those expectations are being maintained.

Removing the requirement for a panel layout does not remove the importance of presentation at ARPS. Applicants still need to demonstrate a coherent body of work and make purposeful decisions about its presentation. A panel layout is one way to do this. Sequencing and relationships between photographs can also be demonstrated through other forms of presentation. The emphasis is on how effectively the presentation supports the work and its intentions.

I will not be applying for LRPS, ARPS or FRPS myself. I recognise the value of understanding the process from an applicant's perspective. My responsibility is to bring my experience as a photographer and educator to leading the programme, alongside the expertise of colleagues and examiners, and to ensure that applicants' experiences inform its delivery and development.

Distinctions-specific

Gordon Brown: Am I correct in understanding that for the LRPS Examination, there will only be two examiners considering the images? What is the thinking behind having only two examiners as against, say, three or more? Is there not a risk that there could be bias by one of the examiners, either for or against the style of the applicant?

Candia Lutyens: There is nothing on the Fellowship page to indicate whether the body of work submitted is themed as previously or is a collection of random images across a body of work??

Ioline Stanley: When will there be more information on what is required for the new installation category - I had been working towards contemporary but now think my installation work may be relevant

Sue Champion: Will they give more detailed info about the Project Statement (ARPS) - until there have been some successes we won't have any examples to understand what they are looking for.

At LRPS, each submission will initially be assessed independently by two examiners, with a third involved where their judgements differ. This provides two separate judgements against the published standard and criteria, with a further judgement where needed.

The number of examiners is only one consideration in managing the risk of bias. Independent assessment means each examiner forms their own judgement without being influenced by another examiner's view. Examiners must assess the achievement demonstrated in the work, rather than whether it reflects their personal taste or preferred photographic style. Training, moderation and arrangements for managing conflicts of interest will support this approach.

At Fellowship, a broader photographic practice does not mean a random collection of unrelated images. The submission needs to demonstrate a mature and distinctive practice, with a clear relationship between its purpose, development and presentation. It may encompass more than one project or Area of Practice, but applicants must make clear how the work comes together as a submission. A single theme is one way to achieve coherence, but it is not the only way.

Further guidance on installation submissions will be published later this autumn. Installation is a submission format, rather than a replacement for the previous Contemporary category. The guidance will explain how to present and document the work so examiners can understand the installation, its context and the photographic achievement it demonstrates.

Further guidance will also explain the purpose and requirements of the ARPS Project Statement. The statement should help examiners understand what the applicant set out to do and the decisions that shaped the body of work. The statement supports the photographs and cannot substitute for the achievement demonstrated through them. The guidance should enable applicants to prepare without having to wait for examples of successful submissions under the revised programme.