

DI AGM 2024 – Chairs report

2023 has proven to be a good year for DI. Coming out of the pandemic we had lost several of our DI Centres, with only the Southern Centre surviving. However, the DI Evolve strategy meant we could move on and slightly restructure, to take account of the inevitable changes in society in general and the RPS. It is noticeable how face to face has diminished, whilst online remains popular. But certainly we needed to cater for both. We therefore decided that outreach needed to come via Regions in the future and to not try to re-establish Centres.

Members were still asking for contact with other members so to achieve that we have offered the **eCircles**. These small groups of like-minded members meet online monthly and elect to be in different groups with differing themes. **7 circles with 46 members** involved. They seem to be proving popular, with a small turnover of members, but an increasing number of different Circles. We thank the individuals who are the organisers for each of the circles.

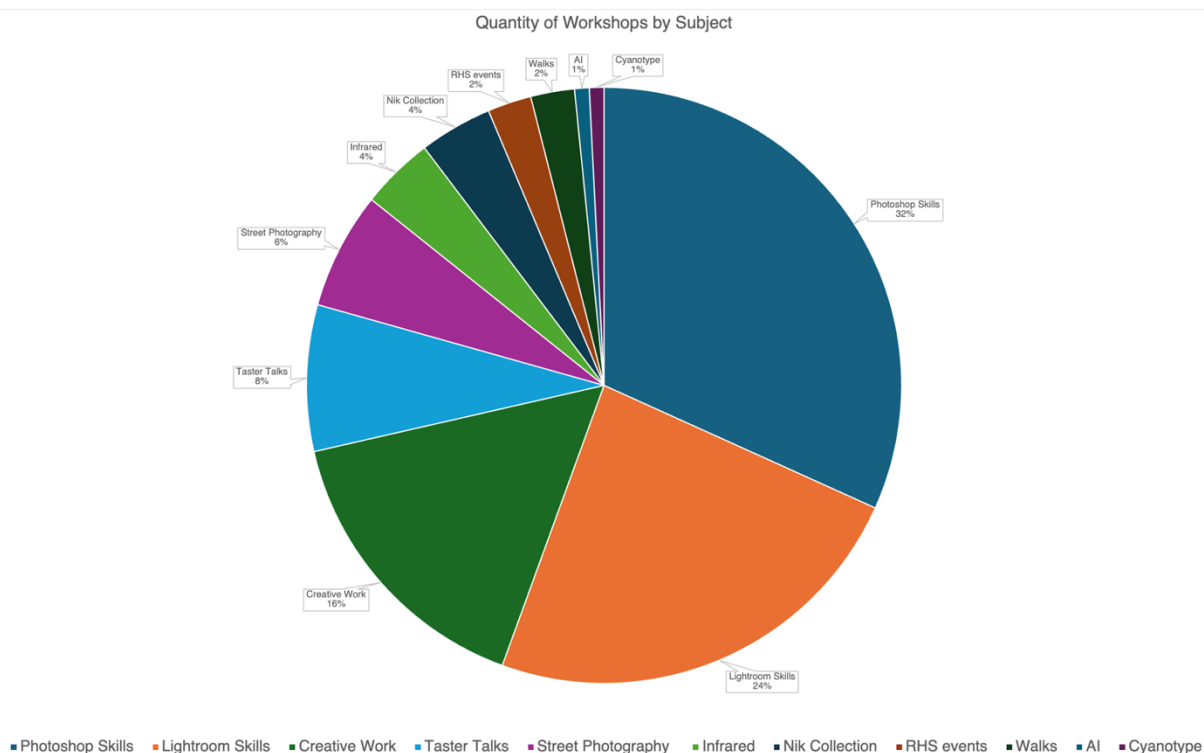
The **Print Circle** continues with regular rounds of prints passing from one member to another for comments. A recent recruitment drive was successful at obtaining several new members.

Another way of getting members together has been the very successful **TALK-WALK-TALK** programme run in conjunction with the Landscape Group. DI did a beta trial of the concept on Street photography, engaging with the SW and Scotland Regions. Having proved the concept Landscape joined us and our first national TWT was Coastal photography in late summer 2023 which attracted **240 participants and over 30 UK walks**. The project reputation has grown and increasingly more Regions are engaging with us.

Workshops that were established during lockdown and proved very successful have continued. We have grown the number of workshops offered, the subject matter and tutors.

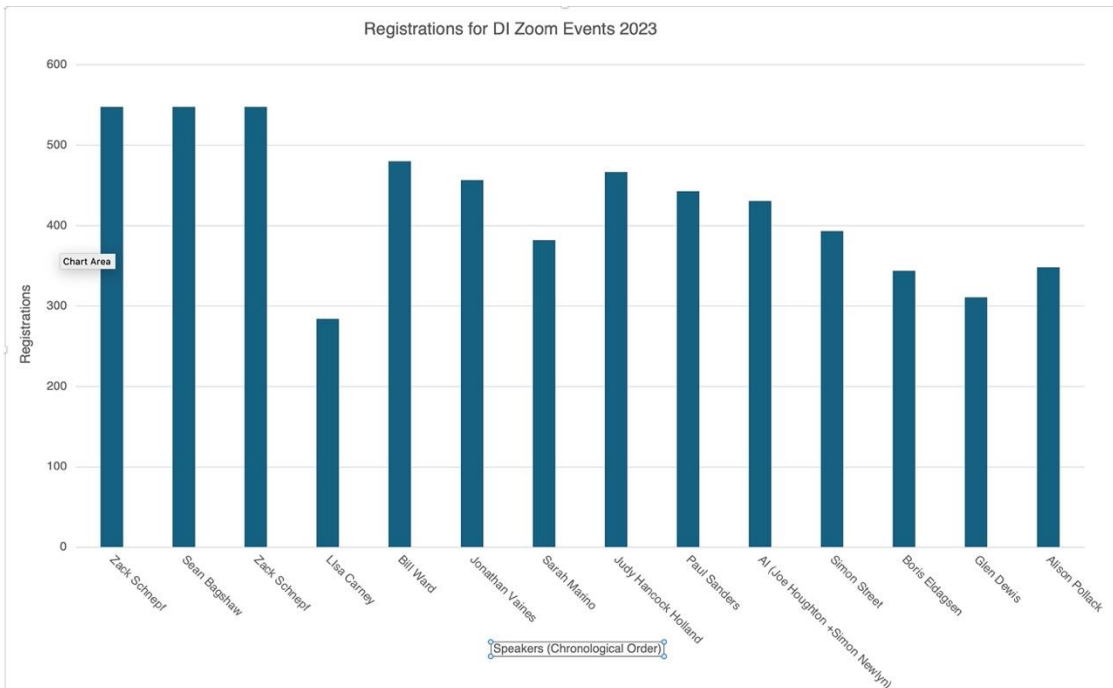
The Range of DI Workshops, Talks and Walks delivered in 2023.

Delivered by our Regular Tutors, Celia Henderson, Joe Houghton, Jonathan Vaines and Hannah Carter Orton, with invited guests, Simon Street and the Team from the RHS.



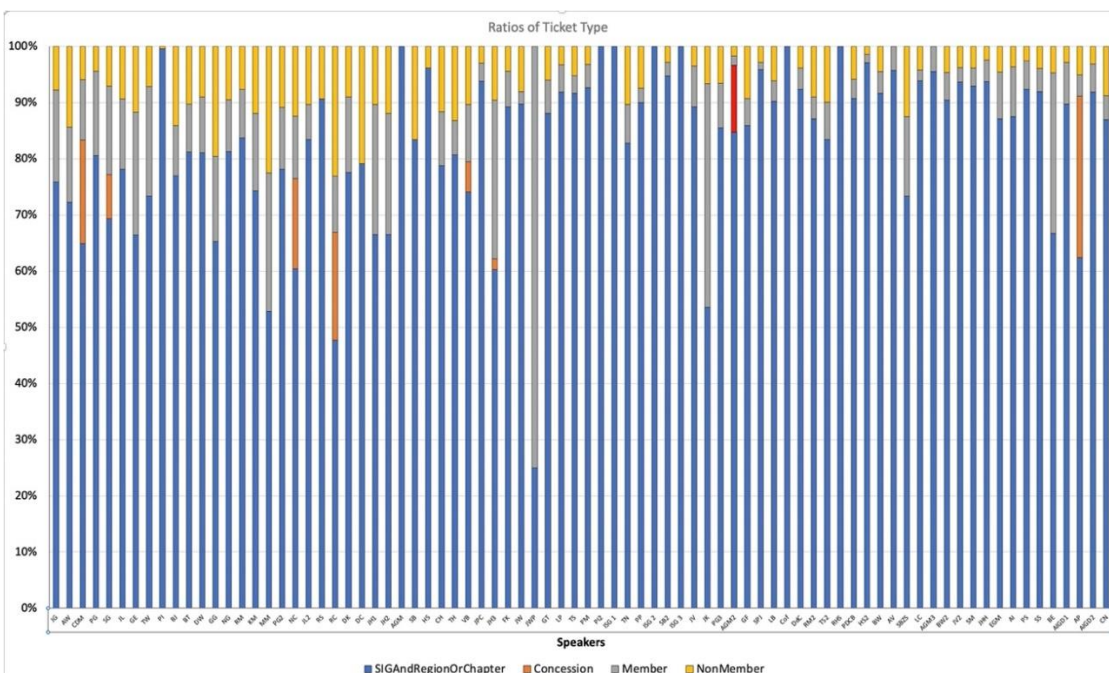
- Taster Talks **400 registered.**
- RHS Talks and Advisory. **385 Registered**
- Workshops organised - **126**
- Workshops approx **1500 registrations.** Including many who attend numerous workshops.
- Many of the workshops have multiple sessions, and we now offer extra clinics and advisory sessions too for members to show work and answer queries.

Saturday webinars are also something that has continued from their inception during the pandemic. Here we endeavour to use the highest calibre of speakers. The number of registrations is extremely impressive.



In total just over **6000 registrants** in 2023. Of course that is not necessarily 6000 individuals as many attend several webinars. But nevertheless proves how popular the webinars are.

It is also interesting to look at who the attendees are in terms of DI members, RPS members and non-RPS members. Remember DI members go free as part of the subscription.



DI News evolved to become DI Online. It was given a fresh new look and now has regular slots for AI, a section where we feature an International member as well as offering ads to not only our own programmes but that of other SIGs and Regions. It is produced via ISSUU and offered as a PDF.

DIGIT rolled on, producing 4 issues in 2023. Returning to Lings for printing definitely improved the reproduction quality over Mixams whom we used in 2022.

Accolade had a rough ride. The team produced issue 12 but unfortunately the lists dried up from HQ and despite many requests were not forthcoming. This made identifying members who had gained a Distinction extremely difficult.

Competitions - these evolved too. Firstly the annual **Digital Imaging Competition** became a themed 5 rounds, with round 6 being the final. We launched this in August with Rounds 1 and 2 in 2023 and the rest following on. It replaced both the informal monthly competition and the annual DI Comp whilst providing an ongoing competition for members to enter. Conceptually we wanted to get members out shooting new work (there is a rule to exclude work older than 6 months) as well as giving them the opportunity to choose the winners of each round. Technology has proven difficult for some – I will return to the topic of technology later in this report.

Previously we held a **Print Exhibition** each year, but since prior to the pandemic that has proven a big challenge. It is extremely resource hungry to organise and put on the exhibitions, as well as moving all the mounted prints around. It had to change as we could no longer support it. So whilst we held the Print Exhibition submission and selection, producing the supporting catalogue of selected images, we did not achieve an exhibition as such.

Technology. First I should perhaps highlight the main RPS systems that throughout 2023 continued to be a massive problem for both the Society, members and volunteers as we struggled with a poorly delivered and executed CRM system. This impacted on all aspects of the RPS but made life frustratingly difficult, especially in the areas of the membership database and the events booking system (Blackthorn). The web site was equally unreliable and frustration for committee members. At this point I should thank those individuals who struggled valiantly and literally lost hours of their life and induced stress as a result. The team have had to put up with far too many obstacles in us operating efficiently and effectively. Fortunately your DI Committee members have stuck with it, although on several occasions I feared we would lose key volunteers through the sheer frustration of it all. I thank them for their forbearance and fortitude.

DI often leads the way with taking up new technology to deliver programmes. Rather than spend £7,000 to rework our prior bespoke competition software we concluded that the off the shelf software, PollUnit, could meet the needs of our evolved competitions. That required our committee member to learn a new system and our members to use it. The latter has thrown up a few obstacles as we all get used to it, but these issues are now declining as members become more familiar with PollUnit. It costs us a mere £156 pa. so financially it was an easy decision to transfer to the new system.

For our Workshops the RPS system Blackthorn took a big toll one committee member to the point that a decision had to be taken to move to another off the shelf system – Billetto. This has proven a godsend to the individual as it is easy to administer and has many features lacking in the RPS system. It is fair to say that some members have found it a little difficult to master, as they need to register with Billetto to get all the information for the workshop, but again familiarity should help members find it easier as they use it in 2024. As and when the RPS systems are transformed and working properly we will return to using that.

Finally the TALK-WALK-TALK project simply couldn't be facilitated by the RPS system or for it to come anywhere near that which we required. How lucky are we to have on the committee a member who could

design and deliver the bespoke booking system for the TWT project. Obviously hours of work for the individual, for which we are extremely grateful, but also one of the slickest systems in the RPS is my guess.

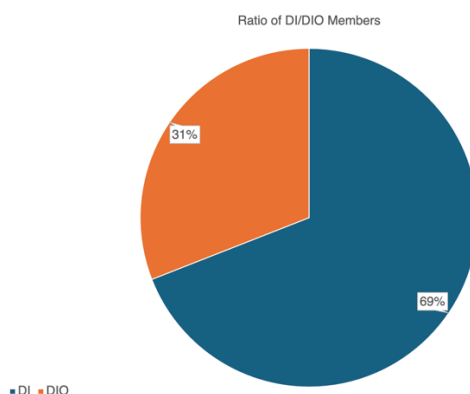
Web site problems have been many. However for this there was really little choice but to soldier on. Again at the expense of the life and health of the volunteer.

So to sum up the 'technology' I must repeat that I cannot thank the committee members enough who have born the brunt of all these system issues during 2023. Without them and their perseverance members would have lost out on some great opportunities to programmes. If you as a member have found things difficult and frustrating, I do assure you it is nothing compared to what I have seen these guy go through on your behalf.

We are being promised resolutions by the CEO but it is fair to say that progress is slow and cannot come soon enough.

Membership – which is key to our DI community. As mentioned above the membership data was extremely unreliable through 2023. We could, on any given day, gain or lose +/- 100 member files. It was difficult to work out who had left or when new members joined us. So if we failed to send you our normal Welcome communication we can but apologies. Things do now appear to be settling down.

In terms of the overall number of members DI has remained steady in 2023 at around 1750. Our gains and losses more or less even out, but interestingly the balance between full DI membership and the online offering has continued to see a slow swing in favour of online membership.



At the end of 2023 the DI Committee took the decision to reduce membership subscriptions. The Treasurer will report further on that aspect.

Your committee. What can I say about them that hasn't already been said. You are so very lucky to have what I believe to be the strongest and most hardworking committee of any group or region in the RPS. Each is a cog in a well oiled wheel. Without any single one of them the wheel wouldn't turn so smoothly. We are a happy lot; ok so we enjoy a little moan occasionally but not at each other. Each has a specific role and all give of their time selflessly, often at the expense of their own time for photography. During 2023 we had one or two new individuals join us taking on roles that suit their skills. In total there are now 18 of us, but there is always room for anyone keen to join us who is prepared to take a role and deliver it effectively.

Finally I personally thank each and every one of them, on behalf of myself and the members, for all their hard work during 2023, and I look forward to more good times through 2024.