REPORT OF THE INQUIRY INTO THE 2019 ELECTION

by Michael King, Queen Square Advisory Limited

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain ("RPS") is a learned society governed under its Royal Charter dated 27th July 2004 and registered as a charity with the Charity Commission under No. 1107831.

Terms of Inquiry

On 17th October 2019 I was asked by the Council (Trustees) of the RPS to report on issues arising during the recent Election and in particular to:

- Investigate validity of complaints/concerns raised by, both RPS members and non-members.
- Consider whether behaviour of candidates, Council members, RPS members and staff was appropriate.
- Consider guidance provided from the RPS, both before and during the election period, about the use of Society communication channels and whether this has been adhered to during the election process.
- Advise whether the election for this Council has adequate credibility or whether this has been compromised.
- Suggest lessons learned and to make recommendations for the future.

Conduct of the 2019 Election

As is the custom in the RPS, the Election, held biennially, took place over a 2 month period leading up to the AGM on 28 September 2019. For the first time in the Society’s history the Election vote was conducted online by an independent company, MiVoice.

The Election Process was governed by the Society’s By-Laws & Rules and also by the Society’s Code of Conduct which was approved by the Council in October 2018 and is set out in Appendix 3, together with further Guidance issued during the Election Process by the Chief Operating Officer (“COO”) as set out in Appendix 4.

Outcome of the Election

At the 2019 AGM Dr Del Barratt, having previously served as Vice President, succeeded Robert Albright as President, as the result of a change to the By-Laws and Rules of the Society agreed by members at the AGM held on 30 September 2018 whereby the Vice President then in office was deemed both to be and perform the duties of the President Elect.

The 2019 Election results were announced at the AGM and the successful candidates, together with the votes received, are set out in Appendix 1. The Council at that stage
numbered 7 trustees, though Dr Barratt resigned as President on 5\textsuperscript{th} November 2019 and her place was taken by the newly-elected President Elect, Dr Alan Hodgson.

At the time of writing therefore, the Council numbers 6 and there are no co-opted members, though it would be possible for the Council to co-opt up to 3 members of the Society to Council as trustees.

\textit{Interviews}

I have during the months of October to December held 16 interviews with present or former trustees, the Chief Operating Officer and other members of the Society who had raised concerns, about half in person and the remainder on telephone.

I have sought to name interviewees when quoting them but one interviewee asked to remain anonymous and several interviewees have asked me not to quote them directly but rather to provide a précis or synopsis of what they have told me. While I told the latter that I would have preferred the openness of direct quotes, I consider that I have no option but to comply with their requests for anonymity.

The interviewees are listed in Appendix 2 and I should like to thank them all for their assistance and obvious wish to see the RPS flourish.

1. COMPLAINTS

During the Election Period and following the Election, the Society through members of Council and its COO, Mike Taylor, received a number of complaints or concerns which for the purpose of this report are encapsulated as follows. Some complaints which I have received during the Inquiry, in interviews or texts, relate to actions of the Council or of its members or of RPS staff after the Election result had been announced but these are outside my terms of reference.

1.1 Nomination of and Information about Candidates

1.1.1 All candidates received the required 10 nominations from members. Surprise was expressed by some members that Jennie Ricketts had been nominated as President Elect though apparently not widely known to members and questions were then asked about her activities in the Society. As one long-standing member told me,

\begin{quote}
\textit{I take an interest in the RPS Council elections as the Society is important to me. I already had biographical information about one of the candidates for President Elect (Dr Alan Hodgson) but I wanted to know more about Jennie Ricketts and what she could do for the Society.}
\end{quote}

Jennie Ricketts had been co-opted as a member of Council in January 2019 and was nominated as President Elect for the 2019 Election. Unfortunately, it was only discovered some 10 days before nominations for the Election closed on 28 July that she had for several years enjoyed a free subscription to the Society’s Journal but was not formally a member of the Society and so, under By-Law 13.3, was not therefore eligible for either co-option or election to Council. As noted by the COO (see para 1.1.4 below), she applied for
membership of the Society and was re-nominated as President Elect before nominations closed.

Jennie Ricketts had, like all other candidates, produced a personal statement within the 250 word maximum and I find that the Society’s election rules did not require her to produce more than that.

1.1.2 In interview on 21 November 2019 Barrie Brown, a member of the Society, told me that he was critical of the Council about the nomination of Jennie Ricketts as President Elect:

In essence trustees have not been listening closely enough to members. I was the proposer of a resolution supported by more than 120 members which sought to close an unintended loophole in the rule change in 2017 regarding the election of the President-elect. That loophole allowed a co-opted member of Council to be elected without a single member being able to cast a vote for or against him or her if unopposed. This resolution was submitted to Council before the nominations closed for the 2019 elections and, therefore, was not intended to block the nomination of any individual for the office of President-elect.

The resolution was considered by Council but the legal advice was apparently that it should not be put forward at the AGM as the election procedure was already underway. I believe this advice to have been incorrect.

As to Jennie Ricketts, credit should be given to her substantial contribution to the 100 Heroines project but, if she was interested in the Society, why had she never become a full member?

With hindsight, it beggars belief that the fact that Jennie was not a member of the RPS, and therefore ineligible to be co-opted to Council or be nominated as President Elect, was not known to any Council member or member of staff, although Jennie herself quite reasonably might not have known about the rules.

At best, the failure to implement the rules was evidence of unacceptable standards of governance. It would be an even more serious matter if it were the case that the then President, President-Elect, Chief Operating Officer, any member of Council or any member of staff was aware of Jennie’s ineligibility and failed to intervene.

1.1.3 On 16 September 2019 Jennie Ricketts resigned as a trustee and hence as a candidate in the Election. On 25 September she resigned as a member of the Society and on the following day raised a formal complaint with Mike Taylor, the Chief Operating Officer of the Society in these terms:

Subject: Complaint regarding the RPS Council elections.

Dear Mike

I would like to make a formal complaint about the recent election process on the grounds that the procedure has been conducted with bias and double standards, forcing me to withdraw my candidacy and resign as an RPS Trustee.

Some candidates have been given preferential assistance including personal introductions to influential members. While others have campaigned secretly via social media to raise votes using
Facebook accounts, and issued an e-zine with their name displayed throughout, even after an email was sent out requesting that social media was not to be used for this purpose.

I was co-opted and invited onto the board to assist with shaping the organisation for the future but attempts to block me have been made from the moment I registered an interest in the election. First by 80 members issuing an email to Council trying to reverse the resolution allowing me to be co-opted, then a member contacting the membership departing seeking my personal data. I have also been singled out via my own Twitter account and questioned in a hostile manner about my relationship to the RPS.

Most of what has transpired is in the public domain and I would like an investigation under the Charity Commission Guidance Rules to ascertain how this has been allowed to happen.

I have cancelled my membership this week but my previous number was 61453.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Your sincerely

Jennie Ricketts.

The COO acknowledged Jennie Rickett’s complaint on the same date and immediately informed Council in order to allow the complaint to be considered at the following board meeting at which it was decided to establish this Inquiry.

1.1.4 In the light of Jennie Rickett’s complaint and the concerns expressed by Barrie Brown and others about the nominations for President Elect for the Election, I asked the COO to trawl his records and produce an order of events; his response dated 28 November 2019 is as follows:

Hi Michael

Here is the order of events with respect to Jennie Ricketts’ membership of Council. I can pull out various emails and so forth if you require evidence or specific dates. Please let me know if this is along the right lines and if needed, I will add the detail:

- Jennie Ricketts was co-opted to Council (along with Carol) after observing a Council meeting in Jan 2019. I was not in any meeting of trustees to formalise that decision, so I don’t have minutes of it.
- I arranged an induction day soon after for Jennie and Carol.
- Since we do not register Directorships with Companies House, this felt more informal than usual. Members were notified of the co-options in a subsequent issue of the Journal.
- I must admit, we did not verify Jennie’s Membership at this point. I “took it as read” that she was known to be a member. So, there was no cross-check at this point.
- At the beginning of the nominations period, Jennie requested nominations and received enough to be a candidate in the elections.
- About 10 days before the end of the nominations period, we validated all of the nominees against our database, and discovered Jennie was not a member.
- I was under the impression that her membership would be validated at the point of first nomination but discovered that whilst nominators were validated at the point of
nomination, the nominees were validated manually in one sweep, and this is what flagged the issue.

- Jennie was in our database as a “complimentary subscriber” and it seems she had been receiving copies of the Journal when she was Picture Editor for the Observer (ended 2004), and this had continued ever since. What seems strange to me, is that (I assume) she must have changed her address in order to continue receiving the Journal. As she was in our database, she had a record number, that is also what we use for Member numbers.
- I flagged the problem with Robert (President) as soon as I found out.
- He agreed with all the other members of Council (as I understand) the following approach:
  - I contacted Jennie and explained she was not a Member, and therefore not a Member of Council. I offered the option (as instructed by Robert) that she pay a membership subscription immediately so that she could be co-opted again, and that she would have to be nominated again.
  - Jennie paid her membership subscription over the phone a day later as I recall.
  - Robert confirmed with me that she had been re-co-opted by email agreement of Council.
  - Jennie then canvassed to be nominated again, and she received the required number of new nominations.
  - This process was completed before the end of the nominations period, and Jennie was included as a candidate.

All of my communication on the matter was with Robert, as I recall. I don’t know what debate was had between the other members of Council, or to what degree they were included in decision-making or made aware of all the information available. I can trawl though email to verify when Council were copied in to emails if you wish**.

During the voting period, some members started asking what Jennie’s history was with the RPS. They appeared concerned that a co-opted Council member, with no history of involvement in the RPS could end up being President in such a short period of time. They search the member listings on our website but she was set as private so couldn’t find her. They asked me, and I believe Jennie (by Twitter, and I think email) what her history was. I said I couldn’t share any personal information, the staff couldn’t assist with ad hoc enquiries about candidates, and that it was Jennie’s responsibility to share what information she wished.

My understanding is that eventually Jennie, made her member profile public. I don’t know what information became available at this point, but I believe Jennie withdrew soon after that.

Best

Mike

I have read the contemporaneous email correspondence between the COO and the President together with other members of Council and they confirm the COO’s recollection, marked ** in the COO’s response. I find nothing in the By-Laws or Rules of the RPS to prohibit the nomination of Jennie Ricketts for election as President Elect, except in so far as she was, when first nominated, not a member of the Society. As already mentioned, that failing was corrected before the nominations were closed.
1.1.5 Clause 13.3 of the Society’s By-Laws reads “Only members of the Society shall, in any circumstances, be eligible to hold office as a member of the Council” and could not be clearer.

It is very much to be regretted that Jennie Rickett’s lack of membership was not spotted by those who co-opted her in January 2019 or later nominated her for election, or that it was not until a late stage in the Election process noticed by herself or by the RPS staff but I am satisfied that this was an administrative failing rather than a conspiracy to avoid clause 13.3 of the By-Laws.

I comment in para 3 below on the complaints made by or on behalf of Jennie Ricketts, her withdrawal of her candidature as President Elect and her resignation as a member of the Society.

1.2 Guidance to Candidates and their Supporters on their Conduct during the Election

1.2.1 Complaints have been made to the Society and to me that candidates and those supporting them failed to comply with the Society’s Codes of Conduct and with other Guidance reiterated by the COO during the Election. In particular, it is alleged that the Society’s own media channels were used to support individual candidates and that some candidates attended meetings and events in order to promote themselves.

1.2.2. The Code of Conduct for members, mentioned in my Introduction and set out in Appendix 3, underlines the necessity of avoiding damage to the reputation of the Society, not least in the use of RPS mailing lists or membership data, corporate logos and the like for personal or private business purposes.

1.2.3 Further Guidance to RPS Staff, to Candidates and to Regional Organisers & Chairs was issued by the COO during the Election Process, as set out in Appendix 4. This Guidance does warn all those involved in the Election to avoid the use of RPS social media and mailing platforms to promote the candidatures of themselves or of those whom they wished to support.

1.2.4 One long-standing member of Council has told me that the latter was the first guidance of which candidates were made aware but in my view the COO’s Guidance simply builds on the 2018 Code of Conduct and was a reasonable action. While with easy hindsight it could be argued that the COO’s Guidance should have been produced before the Election process commenced, this further Guidance was properly directed at preserving the reputation of the Society and ensuring that the contest was as fair as possible, as soon as it appeared necessary.

1.3 Use of Social and other Communication Media by Candidates and Supporters

1.3.1 In relation to the use of the RPS’s own mailing lists and platforms such as the Journal and the website, Roger Reynolds, a former RPS President, wrote to me as follows:

You may not know that some members raised this issue of the use of Twitter by [Jennie Ricketts] with me as a former President. This was so, as it appears that a number of tweets in the chain purported to come from or contain indication of the Royal Photographic Society, inferring they were official. I was led to understand that Ms Ricketts appeared to have used
both her Twitter Account and the Royal Photographic Society Account. One member also raised concern how Jennie Rickets had obtained her Twitter details as she was most particular who knew this.

Having been the President who to oversee the 2005 Society Election I was fully aware that a similar issue had occurred with the use of the then Society “Forum”. One individual had attempted to use this for electioneering purposes. The Council investigated the propriety of this and passed a resolution forbidding the use of any Society Forum by candidates standing for election to Council for the purpose of electioneering. It did not seek to prevent candidates making personal contact through private avenues.

In the light of what I had been told I contacted both the COO Mike Taylor and the President Robert Albright Hon FRPS to inform them of this issue and alert them to the Council directive of 2005. I also pointed out that this directive had also been further strengthened during the Presidency of Roy Roberts Hon FRPS in 2013.

I do not wish to be disparaging to the above individuals but I felt that my concerns were dismissed as superfluous and with a ‘there not a lot we can do attitude’ which I found concerning. They gave no indication that they would investigate my concerns.

It appears from correspondence I have subsequently seen that there was clear evidence that some tweets in the chain of Ms Ricketts clearly displayed the Royal Photographic Society Twitter logo and as such could easily have been construed as official endorsement of her election campaign.

1.3.2 I was unable to ask Jennie Ricketts whether to promote her candidature she used the Society’s media channels or platforms in breach of the Codes of Conduct or COO’s Guidance but I have been given no evidence that she did so.

Unwittingly, however, Jennie Ricketts was promoted by a member of RPS staff within the Society’s corporate social media in that her personal tweet on the subject of her candidature was then retweeted in the 100 Heroines social media account by Vanessa Ansa who was at the time working on the Society’s 100 Heroines project. This error was immediately reported to the COO by the RPS communications manager. I find no evidence of fault on the part of Jennie Ricketts.

1.3.3 Eric Begbie, an RPS member who nominated one successful candidate, Simon Hill, told me:

In the Yorkshire branch Facebook account Simon Hill was directly supported as the only candidate in the area.

Eric Begbie agreed that the COO’s Guidance was not adhered to in that respect but made the point that the Guidance was too late in the Election process.

Clearly this was a breach of the Guidance; I asked the COO for his comments and he told me:

I think Simon did ask for it to be removed [when he heard about the post] but since he was not aware of it, and did not know who had posted it, it took him a few days to make contact with [the Regional Officer]. I believe the RO had already removed it following contact from me.

I find no evidence of fault on the part of Simon Hill in relation to the Guidance.

1.3.4 Derek Trendell, told me, in relation to one successful candidate:
The video by Janet Haines was in very poor taste but probably not against the rules. Concerns had been expressed to me that she may have improperly used email addresses and other information obtained by being Chair of the Digital Information Group. I have no proof of this but hoped that the Inquiry would determine this one way or the other;

I asked Janet Haines whether she used RPS communication channels to promote her candidature and in particular how she had distributed her promotional video. She said she had not used RPS channels to promote herself, that she had sent the video out on her personal Facebook account and that she believed that it had been recirculated by her supporters on their private accounts.

She added: I do not believe that RPS lists were used, nor would I have encouraged that.

I find no evidence that Janet Haines was in breach of the Guidance.

1.3.5 A number of complainants have expressed views that one trustee who was also a candidate in the Election had abused her position as trustee by attending meetings and “blatantly electioneering”. I address these complaints in section 2 below.

1.3.6 Vanessa Slawson has most helpfully provided me with a number of screenshots from Facebook and other media which she considered to be evidence that the Society’s Digital Imaging Group were in the forefront of commenting on the 2019 Election and persuading members to use their votes to support members of the DIG.

I have considered those posts but do not regard them as evidence of blatant or unwarranted electioneering within the Society’s media space. However, I refer in 3.13 below to the more serious claim that certain social media posts were racially discriminatory of Jennie Ricketts.

1.4 Encouragement to vote

1.4.1 The outgoing President, Robert Albright, had written an article in the Society’s September 2019 Journal encouraging members to vote; the article is set out in Appendix 6. It is suggested by Eric Begbie that Mr Albright had gone beyond his brief:

The substance of my complaint is this: The Royal Photographic Society is governed by a Council elected by the membership. In the elections for Council membership, it is absolutely appropriate that candidates and their supporters should use whatever media they have at their disposal to argue for the policies each candidate espouses. This is healthy, democratic and essential to appraising the membership of the policy issues supported or opposed by each candidate and ensuring that the general membership have fair and unlimited opportunities to discuss those issues.

What I contend to be inappropriate, however, is for any official or officer of the Society to use official Society media to attempt to influence the voting in Council elections.

What I wish to specifically complain about are two uses of Society media by the outgoing President to attempt to influence voters against those candidates who had stated positions of supporting and enhancing the provision of services to members within the Society. Those instances relate to an email sent by the President to all members on 1st August 2019 under the heading "An Election Message from the President" and also to an article published by the President in the September 2019 issue of the Society's Journal.
1.4.2 I have considered this complaint and, while respecting Mr Begbie’s views as honestly held, I do not agree that Mr Albright, as outgoing President, was wrong to state his view as to what the Society needed in its Council. Indeed, I consider it the responsibility of the trustees of a charity and particularly of its Chair to ensure appropriate succession in governance of the charity. In relation to the issue of services to members raised by Mr Begbie, I address in section 6 the charitable purposes of the Society and benefits to members.

1.4.3 I have been shown by the COO the Elections Feedback containing comments from members and note a complaint by one member that Mr Albright “did not give the impression that he wanted [to bring about] any change from the Election”.

I consider it important that the Society’s leaders should reflect the mission which Council wishes to achieve by introducing trustees with appropriate skills and experience and perhaps by encouraging a younger and more diverse membership. It could be that Mr Albright missed an opportunity to say this in advance of the Election process.

2. BEHAVIOUR OF CANDIDATES, COUNCIL MEMBERS, RPS MEMBERS & STAFF DURING THE ELECTION

2.1 It is difficult for any voluntary organisation to police the behaviour of its supporters or members, all the more so one which has a membership of over 11,000 members throughout the world. The Society’s ultimate sanction is contained in Clause 6.3 of the By-Laws which provides for the Council “to expel a member from the Society according to the provisions of The Rules” but that is a heavy penalty. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the RPS has regularly issued Codes of Conduct and Guidance for members, including candidates in the Election.

2.2 It is self-evident that, however well such codes are phrased (and the 2018 Code and the COO’s Guidance paper are to my mind brief and clear), not all members, candidates or others whom it may affect, will read or indeed assimilate it. For that reason, it may in future be necessary for the Society to send out appropriate and regular reminders or even re-interpretations of the codes or guidance, for instance to cope with the growing use of social media and the protection of personal data. Perhaps the watchwords should be “little & often”.

2.3 Differences of interpretation will inevitably arise. More than one interviewee has told me that Janet Haines’ campaign video was “distasteful”. I do not consider that this video and its distribution was in breach of the COO’s Guidance but I would add that the video seemed to me inoffensive and I noted that, while asking viewers for votes for herself and for other candidates whom she supported, Janet Haines also quite properly encouraged her audience to take part in the vote.

2.4 I have also been told that individual candidates have wrongly promoted themselves and enhanced their electability by attending committee, chapter and special interest group meetings of the Society.
2.5 One member with a role in Special Interest Groups (SIGs) told me that the attendance at a SIG meeting by a current trustee who was a candidate in the Election provided that trustee with a profile-raising opportunity which was not available to other candidates. The COO tells me that this member raised the issue with the then President and himself, suggesting that another trustee who was not standing should in such circumstances attend the SIG meeting but the response was that it was too late to find another trustee to attend, adding:

_I was concerned that there seemed to be so little awareness at such a senior level or on the part of the candidate concerned as to what was appropriate during an election._

2.6 There is nothing in the Society’s By-Laws or Rules to prohibit a candidate for election as a trustee continuing to attend members’ meetings or indeed to charge expenses for that attendance. I asked the COO for the background to the meeting attended by a particular candidate during the Election period and he told me that all trustees were invited to this meeting, as is the usual practice, and that no other member of Council was in a position to attend. He added:

_Since all trustees were typically invited to these meetings, [the candidate in question] had attended similar meetings since becoming a trustee, so it was not unusual to attend again. It is also usual for trustees to charge expenses for attending committee meetings such as these._

I make suggestions below as to how candidates should conduct themselves, which may serve to avoid such concerns arising in the future.

2.7 It seems to me that volunteers who want to help the Society in its mission and therefore to be involved in its activities will inevitably attend meetings and become known to fellow members who might in consequence vote for them in subsequent elections. I accept that becoming a trustee of the Society might be a strong motivation of a member who wishes to influence its future but I am unable to assess candidates’ motivations in joining in such meetings.

2.8 While I see nothing in the By-Laws or Rules to prevent candidates from continuing to involve themselves in the Society’s regional and sector events, I can see why that might be thought to give to a candidate who happens to be present at an RPS event some advantage, even if that is not the candidate’s motivation. If that is thought by Council to be a continuing concern, there might be an argument to change the election rules to put candidates into “purdah” during the election process as long as the Society’s work is able to continue. Such a concern might be diminished, if voting continues online, by foreshortening the election period to say 2 or 3 weeks.

2.9 One interviewee, when asked for evidence of poor behaviour told me that she saw no bullying but rather “belittling, disparaging and dismissive remarks” on social media.

Unkind personal remarks may be short of “bullying” but could nevertheless bring the Society into disrepute, irrespective of whether its communication channels are used and that is particularly so if they are made in the context of a major RPS activity such as the election to Council. In a future Election it may well be necessary to emphasise to candidates and their supporters that members of a long-standing learned society, not least one with the Royal appellation, should always remain respectful of each other.
3. JENNIE RICKETTS’S COMPLAINT AND HER WITHDRAWAL AS A CANDIDATE

3.1 I have set out in para 1.1.3 above Jennie Ricketts’s formal complaint about the background of her nomination as President Elect and about her treatment by RPS members which, she said, resulted in her decision to withdraw her candidature.

3.2 One interviewee, Anne Williams, Chair of the Society’s Education Committee, set out on behalf of herself and other professional photographers in an email to the COO of 26 September 2019 some shared concerns about the way in which they felt that Jennie Ricketts had been treated, and in addition the rationale for the nomination of Jennie Ricketts as President Elect; it is worth repeating that email in extenso:

As professionals in contemporary photography, we would like to express our support for the programme of modernisation that has been underway at the Royal Photographic Society, as well as our concern that progress is being undermined. We are especially concerned at the resignation of Jennie Ricketts, curator and former Picture Editor of The Observer Magazine and RPS Trustee, and the circumstances surrounding it, particularly what appears to be a campaign of harassment via social media aimed at her candidacy for President Elect.

Jennie is a highly regarded figure in the industry, and the support of individuals like herself is vital to the RPS becoming the influential organisation in contemporary photography that it should be, given its Royal designation. There has been a significant response from the photography community to her resignation on Twitter, which has been either critical or dismissive of the RPS. These are precisely the kinds of people that the RPS needs to get on board if it wants to be seen as being at the forefront of developments in photography, and it risks serious reputational damage, not just to its position in the photography community, but in relation to its diversity and inclusivity.

Otherwise it is doomed to continue to be viewed as an outdated and irrelevant organisation, despite the sterling efforts of the Education and Public Affairs team in the gallery and events programme.

3.3 Derek Trendell told me:

There was a concerted attempt made to prevent [Jennie Ricketts] being eligible for election as President to be. Many members proposed a resolution to achieve this. She was by the time of the election a member of the RPS but had previously been co-opted as a trustee. Whilst I was unaware of any overt racism in this attempt, there were concerns that racism had been involved.

3.4 These complaints of discrimination and possibly of racism are the most serious I have to address in this Inquiry. I had arranged an interview with Jennie Ricketts in London but unfortunately, she decided on advice not to meet me; she has not responded to my offer to speak to her via phone or FaceTime. I must therefore confine myself to what I know, largely through her many supporters and, as I have set out above, the email from her to the COO and the Order of Events produced by the COO following a trawl of emails between him and members of Council.

3.5 Del Barratt told me that she considered that the antagonism of certain members towards Jennie Ricketts was due to the colour of her skin which would, if true, be both discriminatory and racist. I have already mentioned that Dr Barratt proposed Jennie Ricketts’ co-option as a trustee in January 2019 as part of the entirely proper planning for succession after her own Presidency expired in September 2021; election of Jennie Ricketts as President Elect would have resulted in her becoming President automatically in September 2021.
Dr Barratt also told me in correspondence that, as a former picture editor of *The Observer* and a member of the Board of Photo Ireland, Jennie Ricketts had the right credentials to lead the RPS in the future and she thought that it was unfortunate that Alan Hodgson had decided to stand for the post in opposition to Jennie Ricketts. She felt that in doing so he was not acting in the interests of the charity.

3.6 In that connection, Dr Alan Hodgson, current President of the Society, told me in interview:

*I was concerned but as the opposing candidate I felt the need to stay silent. As a result, I only shared my concerns with the Chair of Council, outgoing President, Robert Albright, on 2 issues:

1. A succession of tweets by Jennie Ricketts. Through the election period these contained information confidential to Council, incorrect facts and comments that could adversely affect our relationship with Kensington Palace.

2. The breaking of confidentiality of Council candidates in the May Council meeting

Jennie Ricketts had been proposed to stand as President Elect which was not a problem for me, though she was the chosen candidate of Dr Del Barratt the incoming President. I did not realise until it was pointed out, that as a Subscriber Jennie was not a full member so could not run in the election.

Having asked Dr Hodgson to provide details of the alleged sharing of confidential or incorrect information about the Society by Jennie Ricketts, I have been shown:

- A screen shot showing Jennie Ricketts’ claim that she had held honorary membership of the Society since 2003 contrary to the situation set out by the COO in his Order of Events
- A screen shot referring to the membership of the Society as being “11,000 members, 75% aged 65+”
- A screen shot referring to free student membership being discussed [in Council]
- A screen shot referring to the “tokenistic gesture” in relation to collaboration with a children’s charity between RPS Hon Fellows and the Duchess of Cambridge to announce the new patronage by HRH.

As mentioned above, I have not been able to put this evidence of her posts to Jennie Ricketts in interview.

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1 The Membership Secretary of the RPS has supplied the following demographics on 13.9.2019:

**RPS Members**
*(from data of 11,350 members)*

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<th>Category</th>
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<td>Unknown age</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
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3.7 It seems to me from a reading of the COO’s Order of Events that several members considered that the fast-tracking of Jennie Ricketts to Presidency by way co-option onto Council in 2019 and nomination for President Elect within a few months was inappropriate, notwithstanding her credentials. That may be so, though such fast-tracking would not have been against the Society’s rules.

Dr Hodgson told me that because of his concerns he had decided to run as President Elect and other members decided to support him; I see nothing discriminatory in that decision.

3.8 Jennie Ricketts says in her email to the COO of 26 September 2019 that she was singled out by certain RPS members via her Twitter account and subjected to hostile questioning about her relationship with the Society, requiring production of her personal data, and that she was therefore forced to withdraw her candidature and resign as a co-opted trustee of the RPS. I have not been able to examine the tweets of which she complains so I do not know whether they were hostile in tone but it is not apparent to me that other candidates were faced with the level of intrusive questioning as to her background in the Society which she faced.

3.9 Furthermore, a resolution was signed by 80 or more members and presented to Council for inclusion in the agenda for the 2019 AGM, ostensibly to change Rule 5.5 to correct what those members considered an anomaly, because the rule allowed a co-opted trustee to be nominated as President Elect. This resolution was, I believe, aimed directly at Jennie Ricketts’ candidature. To that extent I can understand why Jennie Ricketts would have considered it hostile. In my view Council correctly decided on legal advice to refuse to accept the resolution at a point so close to the AGM.

3.10 I asked Del Barratt whether there was any direct evidence of racist or discriminatory actions or words directed at Jennie Ricketts in the RPS Election process. She did not wish to be directly quoted but she felt that there was no doubt that Jennie Ricketts was very well qualified to become President Elect and to lead the Society in the future. Dr Barrett was also concerned about the fact that a quantity of members had put forward a resolution for the AGM to change the Rules which currently allow a co-opted member (as Jennie Ricketts was) to stand for President Elect. It would, she felt, be understandable if this had been proposed at the 2020 AGM but the coincidence in timing indicated that it was directed towards stopping Jennie’s candidature in its tracks and was thus discriminatory and possibly racially motivated.

3.11 Janet Haines told me:

*I very much value diversity in both members of RPS and therefore in the Council. I am passionate about helping others to enjoy and develop Photography.*

3.12 What I do understand is that the supporters of Jennie Ricketts – and perhaps Jennie herself – perceived that some RPS members did not wish her to be the future face of the Society because of the colour of her skin. Anne Williams told me:

*The impact on ethnic diversity was an indirect repercussion of their opposition to modernisation. I can’t speak for all the signatories [of the email referred to in para 3.2 above], but, in the ones I have spoken to, the assumption has been that it is resistance to modernisation that is the root cause, coupled with unconscious bias, the combination of which led to Jennie’s resignation.*
3.13 Vanessa Slawson was concerned that Barrie Brown had been defamatory and possibly racially discriminatory of Jennie Ricketts in a widely released email dated 1 August in which he noted:

*If you look at her Facebook and Twitter feeds you will get a feel of what she brings to the Society. An academic in the USA, the West Indies and Bradford, she moved to Wexford in Ireland in 2009 and runs an online art photography gallery from there. She has been very active in commercial art photography social media circles in London and elsewhere and working through her twitter feed mostly reveals enthusiastic and high frequency self-promotion and virtue-signalling. You can decide for yourself whether these qualities make her a suitable future President.*

Certainly, Mr Brown made it clear in this and other posts that he did not think that Jennie Ricketts had the qualities to become President in 2021, had she been elected President Elect in 2019, but I do not see that such comments, though doubtless hurtful to Jennie Ricketts, are discriminatory.

3.14 I am unable to say that such evidence as I have been able to see points conclusively to racism or other discrimination against Jennie Ricketts but in these issues perception can become very close to reality. Someone who has never suffered prejudice as the result of being singled out, whether because of skin colour, age, background or any other reason, as being different from the majority in a particular group or community, might lack sufficient understanding or even empathy for others who perceive themselves subject to prejudice.

3.15 I do think that, on all sides of these arguments, some members have made unnecessarily personal and disparaging remarks about fellow members, and indeed about the Society which, whether by design or not, have caused considerable offence. I would, for the long-term good of the RPS, encourage all members of the Society – but particularly its leaders – to be aware that people with diverse ages, ethnic origins or physical or intellectual abilities may nevertheless add value as future members of the Society and have skills and experience which might add significantly to the governance of the RPS.

I suggest that the Society prepares guidelines in best practice to assist its members, trustees and staff in awareness of issues surrounding diversity and the need to avoid discrimination, conscious or not.

4. OUTCOME OF THE 2019 ELECTION

4.1 Complainants have suggested to me that the Election process has been undermined by the complaints which I have listed and of course this is in itself serious. I have already considered the Codes of Conduct and the COO’s Guidance to candidates, staff and others and the extent this was complied with but I now turn to the voting process and the outcome of the Election.

4.2 For the first time in the Society’s history the voting took place online. Mi Voice, an independent company, was engaged to run the process. One member commented that before this company was engaged there should have been better warning to members so that they could avoid emails being spammed and I am sure that that point can be taken into account if the Society continues with online voting.
4.3 Because the voting was online, the voting pattern and the frequency of upward shifts could easily be recorded. The COO has shown me a time-line graph showing that, with one minor exception (in relation to the unfortunate Facebook post relating to Simon Hill referred to in para 1.3.3), the voting rate for candidates was consistent throughout the election period and that the only uplifts or spikes coincided with reminders from HQ of the importance of voting.

4.4 Some might say that an election, where in terms of votes cast for successful candidates, the highest being 690 for John Miskelly and the lowest being 335 for Simon Hill (representing respectively 6% and 3% of the membership), must lack credibility but the turnout was on a par with previous elections in the Society. The reality seems to be that only a small minority of its members are remotely interested in the Society’s governance. Certainly, it is a challenge for the Council to relate its work to the views of the members but a properly-managed election to the Council did take place in accordance with the Society’s By-Laws and Rules so I do not think that Council should consider itself less than empowered to govern the Society.

4.5 Derek Trendell told me I have no proof that the election was compromised but hope that the Inquiry would dig for and obtain at available evidence and establish the truth.

It is some task to dig for the truth when much of the activity complained of was tweets and other non-permanent missives on social media and, despite requests to interviewees, little evidence has been forthcoming, though I do accept Dr Alan Hodgson’s view that, while it has not been compromised, the election ‘has left a nasty taste’. As the current President Dr Hodgson may be in the best position to bring the Society’s members together and expel any remaining nastiness.

5. COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL

5.1 There was much criticism that the Society’s trustees, the Council, are drawn from a narrow group, unrepresentative of the public and with inadequate skills and experience and that there should be a fundamental review of the Council’s constitution to put this right.

5.2 One interviewee told me that the structure of the RPS is weighted against “external” candidates, which is true because, under the Society’s current By-Laws, non-members may not serve as trustees. This interviewee added that:

A board that is wholly appointed by the votes of the members will always contain Trustees who are more familiar to those members, meaning that candidates who have not been active for years in a SIG, Region or RPS committee will not stand a chance against “internal” candidates who have held those positions. Although there is the opportunity to appoint trustees by co-option to the board, any such co-opted Trustees need board approval so this reduces the likelihood of appointing a more diverse board.

It is surely true that in an organisation which falls under its constitution to be governed solely by trustees selected from and by its membership tends to appoint candidates who are best known to the members or at least to those who take the trouble to vote. It may be that the
end result is that those people with the skills and experience to govern that organisation either do not get onto the ballot paper or are not well enough known to be elected.

5.3 Janet Haines told me:

We could also consider co-opting Trustees who are non-RPS members as this might help us with diversity issues. However, if they wished to then stand for further Council positions, at the end of that Council period, we would require them to become members to be eligible. That way we can co-opt Trustees with skill sets we lack on the Board as well as perhaps introducing more diversity. Co-optative trustees are OK but they surely should not as un-elected members of Council be able to stand for election as President-Elect.

5.4 The Society might benefit from access to a broader range of trustees which, as one interviewee told me:

would result in a wider and more diverse pool of talent and experience which would bring fresh perspectives from outside the RPS.

I make recommendations in section 8 of this Report as to how this diverse pool of talent and experience might be put in place.

6. THE CHARITABLE PURPOSE OF THE RPS

6.1 Several interviewees and correspondents have raised with me a debate, which I suspect is long-running, that the Society is a members’ organisation which members have been encouraged to join on the basis of the benefits they receive, whereas the RPS’s charitable objects are to educate members of the public by increasing their knowledge and understanding of Photography and in doing so to promote the highest standards of achievement in Photography in order to encourage public appreciation of Photography.

6.2 As a former charity lawyer, I well understand the counter arguments prevailing:

- On the one hand, the RPS exists as a charity to benefit the public rather than to provide direct services to its 11,000 members.
- On the other hand, the RPS would not exist without the members being engaged, largely in a voluntary capacity, in promoting the highest standards of achievement in photography in order to encourage public appreciation of photography.

6.3 It is a conundrum but the Society’s members who help, through their subscriptions and other voluntary support, deserve a reiteration of the Society’s charitable purpose. What is clear is that the Society is not, in the phrase that several correspondents have used, “an international camera club”. There is nothing wrong with the concept of a camera club but the RPS is not one; it is a learned society designed, as its charitable objects make clear, to encourage public appreciation of photography.

6.4 Some interviewees have suggested to me that the RPS only became a charity in 2004 when the Society obtained its Royal Charter. That is not true: the Society has always been a charity but the Charity Commission insisted that its objects set out in the new Charter should
be restated to underline public benefit by educating the public in photography and in consequence promoting the highest standards of achievement in photography in order to encourage public appreciation of photography.

6.5 The outgoing President, Mr Albright, was criticised for setting out in his Voice Box article (Appendix 6) an attempt to clarify and deliver on this charitable purpose and for quoting the duties of charity trustees. I cannot see that such criticism is justified; all charity trustees should be conscious of their duties as such but a charity’s Chair (in this case the Society’s President) has a particular reason for spelling out what trustees are in place to do.

7. MY OBSERVATIONS ON THE COMPLAINTS

7.1 The RPS is engaged in the education of people in Photography which is as relevant today as it was when permanent photographs became possible in the 1820s or the Brownie camera was first put on sale 120 years ago. Photography has brought to our attention the natural glories of our world, the Man-made pollution under our oceans, the stars and planets very far beyond our own planet and it is constantly engaged in recording the activities of fellow humans, good and bad, now even available through the medium of what we used to call a telephone. This learned Society has much to offer to the Science and Art of Photography and surely needs a governing body with the resources to continue to inspire and promote the development of and education in Photography.

7.2 My considered view, having listened to the many complaints from interviewees about fellow members of the RPS is that their views are in the main honestly held and have been made by members who believe that they have at heart the interests of the Society and wish to preserve the integrity of the RPS as they see it.

7.3 However, for every allegation that candidates have been targeted by rivals or their supporters, and for every view as to how the Society should change its strategy and should best be structured, there is almost always an opposing view. Some views are voiced strongly. I have not found any instances of intentional discrimination but I do think that some members have been careless of how their arguments would be received personally by fellow members.

7.4 It is abundantly clear to me that, under the current system of selecting members of Council, whether or not the board is composed of trustees having the diversity of skills and experience which the RPS needs to meet today’s challenges, depends more on luck than a focused judgement as to what talents the Society actually needs in its governing body.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

8.1 Composition of the Council

8.1.1 Not all charities elect their trustees by means of the vote of a large membership. In the majority of charities, the members are simply the trustees for the time being, though their
terms of office are often time limited, so that it is for the charity’s present trustees to agree what skills, experience and ethnic or socio-economic background are in the current circumstances required of incoming trustees.

8.1.2 That is not to say that a large membership is a bad idea; the RPS has such a membership and, as already discussed, there are considerable advantages to this for educational, messaging and financial reasons. Nevertheless, it is necessary to provide those members who wish to vote with some guidance as to the composition of the Council and for the Council to hear what members want.

8.1.3 In a 2004 Report into Membership Charities (RS7) the Charity Commission summarised their findings in this way:

Membership is a common governance model in the sector and its popularity looks likely to continue. Just over half of the charities surveyed for this report have a membership structure of some description. 44% of charities surveyed have members who can vote in order to influence the charity’s governance and, therefore, influence the decisions that affect them. Extrapolating these results across the register, the Charity Commission estimates that approximately 80,000 charities have a membership structure and will therefore be affected by some or all of the issues covered in the report.

Our findings show that membership charities receive wide-ranging benefits from their members, and these benefits include:

•enhancing the trustee board’s transparency and accountability;

•providing a greater appreciation of the needs of beneficiaries;

•improving a charity’s influence within the charity sector, giving weight to an advocacy role;

•providing fundraising opportunities; and

•providing a consistent source of trustees.

However, Charity Commission experience indicates that those few charities that do run into problems with their membership are likely to have one or more of the following features:

•Trustees are not clear about their role and their legal responsibilities toward their charity’s members.

•Charity members are not clear about their role and responsibilities towards the charity.

•There are insufficient or inadequate governance structures in place to manage the charity’s relationship with its members.

•The trustee body puts up barriers to membership involvement, either deliberately or inadvertently.

•The charity’s membership lacks diversity so the trustee board is self-perpetuating or change-resistant and unrepresentative of its potential beneficiaries.
Members or trustees deliberately abuse voting procedures and rights.

There are weak administrative arrangements in place leading to problems such as accusations of elections being held on the basis of inaccurate membership lists or problems with organising quorate meetings.

8.1.4 It is not easy for a charity with a maximum of 7 trustees plus 3 co-opted trustees on the one hand and 11,000 members on the other hand to inter-communicate as suggested by the Charity Commission but, drawing upon the Commission’s findings, I suggest the following:

- The Council should continue to explain in the Society’s website, Journal, e-zine and other communications what they are trying to do to enhance the Science and Art of Photography and encourage its appreciation; this is the Society’s important charitable mission.

- The Society should continue to tell its members that their work and support are essential to its pursuit of that mission, not least as the science and applications of Photography develop.

- In consequence, the membership of the Society should ideally grow to reflect the diversity of the world with which it interacts and the changing character of the world in which images, still or moving, of people and the environment are recorded, as well as reflecting the diversity of photographers of all descriptions.

- The Society should consider a change in the governance structure to reflect or even lead that change in its membership; I address the possible changes in structure below.

8.2 Governance Review

8.2.1 Derek Trendell told me:

The way in which trustees are appointed [under the Society’s constitution] is not guaranteed to ensure a Council with the requisite skills and experience and this is a weakness and problem and that it would be advantageous if it could be changed.

I agree with Mr Trendell; he voices the need to pursue today’s best practice in governance of charities.

8.2.2 I recommend that a complete and thorough Governance Review should be undertaken, to include those with knowledge of how the Society works but also to bring in external expertise. There is now a period of 20 months before the next Election scheduled for September 2021 and it might be possible to undertake that review and put forward changes to the By-Laws and Rules to a General Meeting well before the 2021 Election process is set in train.

8.2.3 It has always been the case that trustees of a charity must govern in the best interests of their charity but in a seminal case in July 2017 the High Court ruled that the members of a charitable company also owe the charity fiduciary duties to act in its best interests and

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2 The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (UK) v HM Attorney General and others [2017] EWHC 1379 (Ch),
avoid conflicts of interest when deciding on resolutions that are put to them by the charity trustees. It is self-evident that any such members’ resolution should be reasonable and designed to advance the charity’s purposes and mission.

8.3 Recommendations to be considered by the Governance Review

8.3.1 While the processes for nominating and electing candidates are clearly set out in the Society’s By-Laws and Rules, there is nothing in the Society’s governing documents to help the members (or at least the 6% who currently vote) to decide what skills, experience or age, ethnic or socio-economic background are required in Council to govern its activities and to relate to the members. I suggest that Council should immediately re-establish its Nominations Committee ("NomComs"), possibly including on that committee external membership, with a view to setting out for approval by Council and subsequently the membership, what skills, experiences and so on Council will need in order to govern the Society and to pursue its mission in 2020 and beyond.

8.3.2 The NomComs should also consider the ideal number of members of Council and whether it is desirable, having regard to the Charity Commission’s advice quoted in para 8.1.3, to broaden its diversity to take greater account of its potential beneficiaries who must surely include all who take up and use a camera, an iPhone or other image-recording device. While the Commission would never suggest that a board of trustees should comprise any particular number, it seems to me that a board of 10 people, including the Treasurer and up to 3 co-opted members, to govern a charity with an international membership is on the low side, especially as the Society is involved with a science that is ever-developing.

8.3.3 The NomComs should consider agreeing with Council a matrix of skills, background and experience which can be presented to members and particularly to those wishing to nominate candidates.

8.3.4 While I do not agree with one interviewee that the majority of trustees should be externally-appointed, I do suggest that NomComs should also consider whether Council should comprise a limited number who are not members of the Society. Those trustees could be sourced through external advertising or recruitment and might even be nominated by other learned societies, universities or government bodies.

8.3.5 The Charity Commission have long encouraged charities to consider the term or length of office so that, for the benefit of the charity and possibly of the trustees themselves, a trustee would serve for a maximum term; there is little need to change existing terms of office in the RPS, though some may consider that 3 years would be a rather better stretch for a charity’s Chair than 2 years.

8.2.6 While the current terms of office for trustees might be considered reasonable, the NomComs should look at questions surrounding the election of the President Elect and the assumption of the office of President by the President Elect 2 years later without further voting.

8.2.7 Furthermore, the Presidency of a distinguished learned society such as the RPS is naturally a desirable position but it is possibly the case that the presidency of the Society and its leadership as a charity require different skills and I wonder if the Council would function better if it were to choose its own Chair to preside over meetings for a period of say
3 years? This would leave the President to preside at formal events outside Council and to represent it nationally and internationally.

Michael King

13th January 2020

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

List of successful candidates announced to the 28 September 2019 AGM (inc votes received)

President
Dr Del Barratt (elected Vice President 2017 and in consequence President Elect from 2018)

President Elect
Dr Alan Hodgson (551)

Treasurer
John Miskelly FCA (690)

Ordinary members
Janet Haines (601)
Carol McNiven Young (499)
Andy Golding (439)
Simon Hill (335)

Appendix 2

List of people interviewed by Michael King in the course of this Inquiry

Dr Del Barratt, ARPS, President until 5.11.19
Dr Alan Hodgson, ASIS FRPS, President Elect and President from 5.11.19
Andy Golding, ASICI FRPS, Trustee from 2019
Janet Haines ARPS, Chapter Organiser & member DIG, Trustee from 2019
Carol McNiven Young FRPS, Trustee from 2019
Simon Hill, FRPS, Trustee from 2019
Therese Barry, Member & Chair of Women in Photography Group
Derek Trendell, former Trustee and Treasurer 2017-19
Anonymous
Eric Begbie, Member, DIG volunteer
Anne Williams, Chair, Education Committee
Dr Barrie Brown, Member, DIG Committee
Rosemary Wilman, HonFRPS Past President RPS
Roger Reynolds, HonFRPS, Past President RPS
Mike Taylor, Chief Operating Officer RPS
Vanessa Slawson, FRPS, Co-opted Trustee and later Elected Trustee 2016-19
Appendix 3

Code of Conduct

RPS Code of Conduct for Members
(Approved by Council: October 2018)

Purpose of the Code

The standing and respect in which third parties hold The Royal Photographic RPS (RPS) can be affected significantly by the conduct of its Members.

This document sets out the relevant standards of behaviour expected by the RPS in order to maintain a high reputation and respected profile, and to ensure Members enjoy mutual support and respect at all times.

The Code

1. General

1.1 A Member must not act at any time in a manner which may bring The RPS into disrepute. Members are required to conduct themselves in a manner which does not damage or undermine the reputation of RPS, its Members or its staff individually or collectively and should not take part in any activity which is in conflict with the objectives or which might damage the reputation of the RPS.

1.2 A Member performing voluntary tasks for The RPS must comply with the law and RPS procedures. Members acting for The RPS must be familiar with and keep under regular review the constitution, By-Laws and Rules of the RPS.

1.3 A Member wishing to raise governance and other issues with The RPS must use the prescribed procedures.

1.4 Members must not use mailing lists or data on other members for other than the purpose for which the list or data was compiled.

1.5 Members may not use RPS corporate logos, crest or arms on personal notepaper or business cards for personal promotional or business purposes except where specific approved logos are made available.

2. Committee meetings

2.1 Members of committees must strive to attend all meetings regularly, ensuring they prepare for and contribute appropriately and effectively.

2.2 Members of committees should bring a fair and open-minded view to their discussions, respect other persons’ points of view and should ensure that all decisions are made in the RPS’s best interests.
2.3 Every effort must be made to foresee and avoid any conflict of interest. Where one arises, it must be declared, and the member must absent him/herself from any discussion or vote taken on the matter.

2.4 Confidential information or material (relating to users, beneficiaries, Members, staff, commercial business, etc.) provided to, or discussed at a Committee meeting, must remain confidential and within the confines of the Committee and must not be discussed outside with third parties.

2.5 It is important that RPS representatives speak with one voice to administer the affairs of The RPS effectively. Meetings provide the forum for issues to be debated, views expressed and argued. Decisions will be made in a democratic manner and where there is not a unanimous consensus of opinion the majority view will prevail. Once this majority view has been decided committee members are required to endorse and support it irrespective of their original personal position on the issue.

3. Staff

3.1 Members are expected to be courteous to the staff at all times.

3.2 Members must not directly criticise members of staff nor give them orders. They may ask staff to provide information that is relevant to their work. All other instructions must come through the Chief Operating Officer.

4. Delegated responsibilities

When responsibilities are delegated by Council/Trustees then the following guidelines shall be observed.

The member with delegated responsibility shall:

4.1 Be familiar with the RPS’s procedures, staff and the voluntary structures for the delegated area.

4.2 Prepare reports, proposals etc for discussions decision as requested by the Chief Operating or Council/Trustees.

4.3 Report back to Trustees/Council or the Chief Operating Officer.

4.4 Not enter into or sign financial agreements or contracts with third parties without the express permission of the Treasurer or Chief Operating Officer and then only within the agreed regulations - Finance: Delegation & Control - General.

5. Breach of the code

5.1 Breaches of the code will be dealt with by Trustees/Council in a proportionate manner and any actions recorded.

5.2 Where deemed appropriate, Trustees/Council may rescind an individual’s Membership of the RPS in accordance with the By-Laws and Rules of the RPS.
Appendix 4

COO’s Guidance Papers

COO’s Guidance to RPS Staff

Subject: Council elections - promotion of candidates

Hi everyone

I’m aware there have been some questions about the promotion of individual candidates for the Council elections while I’ve been away, so I wanted to clarify:

The RPS must be even-handed with respect to promoting candidates. Therefore, we ask each to supply a 250 word personal statement and image, which we make available to all our members. The only other thing we can do is encourage members to visit the site and cast their votes based on the information provided. In all other respects, we should not be assisting candidates with promoting their candidacy, and we should remind them that they should not use RPS platforms for promotion.

Of course, candidates will have their own social media accounts and other means for promoting themselves and I don’t see that we can have an issue with this, but our RPS accounts shouldn’t retweet or mention these, because all candidates need to feel that they have been treated equally by us.

Another example that has cropped up includes providing broadcast emails for candidates to our lists of members (well caught Alan).

I’m going to send out a reminder and a little guidance to the candidates this afternoon.

If you have any doubts or questions then please give me a shout.

Many thanks

Mike

COO’s Guidance to Regional Organisers & Group Chairs

Dear Regional Organisers and Group Chairs

I’m writing to you as I have become aware that there has been a lot of activity discussing the RPS Council elections on social media of late and I am becoming concerned about this.

Understandably, members have strongly held views and convictions about the RPS. However, I’m concerned about the impact this can have upon one another, candidates, and the way the Society is perceived from outside.
I have previously written to candidates stressing that the RPS cannot be seen to favour one candidate over another, and that they may not promote their candidacy through RPS platforms, media or publications, and I would like to ask you to support this principle.

Fundamentally, I am concerned that the elections are not prejudiced, that the reputation of the RPS is protected and for the well-being of candidates. I would like to ask that you pay close attention to the RPS social media channels you and your fellow volunteers manage and consider the content and tone of what is being posted. If you have any concerns, I respectfully ask you to err on the side of caution and moderate posts which may cause personal upset to anyone, which may be perceived as prejudiced in any way, or where opinion is in danger of being presented as fact.

You will recall that several months ago I wrote an email to you all with a social media policy attached. I attach this again. The basis of this policy is that our social media channels are for discussion of photography and for mutual support of one another’s photography.

I would be grateful if you could work with your moderators to uphold this principle.

I fully understand the strongly held views that many people have when it comes to governance of the RPS and I appreciate your support with this.

I will be sending more reminders about the AGM and elections to members before the closing dates.

Best

Mike

COO’s Guidance to Candidates

Dear candidates

This is just a quick email to all council candidates regarding a couple of questions that have arisen since the elections opened, which broadly relate to the use of social media for promoting your candidacy.

Of course, social media is a valuable tool for engaging with others, and it is being used more and more. We fully appreciate that you may want to communicate with your personal contacts in this way.

The most important thing is that the RPS needs to be seen to support all candidates equally. Therefore, I hope you will understand that RPS platforms and channels cannot be used for promoting individual candidates. For example, this means we cannot undertake broadcast emails on behalf of candidates, and we cannot use our social media channels to mention, retweet or similar any of your own personal promotion.

I attach a document with some additional guidance, which I have put together based upon that of another similar organisation. It is all common sense and I apologise if it seems so, but I thought it best to give us a common point of reference for the remaining weeks of the elections.

If in doubt, please ask Naomi or I and we will do what we can to help.
In the meantime, we will continue to promote the elections to the membership periodically by email, signposting the elections site where they will be able to read your personal statements.

Many thanks

Mike

Appendix 6

Voice Box Article for The Journal - September 2019

A Higher Goal

Since last writing this column, I have had the tremendous privilege and pleasure of meeting HRH The Duchess of Cambridge. The special occasion was to mark her acceptance of Patronage of the charity. Events on the day were structured for The RPS to work closely with another of HRH’s charities, Action for Children. This collaboration, using photography as the means to enhance children’s lives, was much appreciated by Kensington Palace.

The generous donation by mpb.com of cameras as gifts to the children shows how commercial organisations will get behind charities seen to be working for worthwhile causes. It is very important for our reputation and brand that our actions demonstrate how we use photography for the public benefit.

In last month’s Journal there was a superb feature by Susanna Brown, curator of photographs at the V&A, London. In the article Tim Walker Hon FRPS says about photography: ‘It’s spiritual, it’s medicinal and it’s healing. It’s done so much to nourish me in so many ways, true beauty lifts the spirit.’

Not only do we want take photography into the community for social and educational benefit, we are obliged to do so by our Royal Charter. The RPS charity is not like a global camera club whose primary purpose is to operate for the benefit of its members. Our goal is higher and more ambitious.

If we put membership events at the top of our agenda, we are not fulfilling our social and legal purposes. Members should join to support the beneficial intent of the charity; our other membership benefits are ancillary to this purpose. In my two years as President I have tried to clarify and deliver on this objective. Our magnificent new building is a manifestation of this aim.

If you access gov.uk you will see that UK trustees have six main duties. 1. Ensure your charity is carrying out its purposes for the public benefit 2. Comply with your charity’s governing document and the law 3. Act in your charity’s best interests 4. Ensure your charity is accountable 5. Manage your charity’s resources responsively 6. Act with reasonable skill and care.

By the time of this Journal’s publication, the election period for new trustees will still be open. We have a showpiece headquarters, an enthusiastic Royal Patron and a passion to make The RPS the beneficial and outward-looking society it is designed to be. I wish the new President and trustees every success in carrying out the charity’s remit.
Robert Albright Hon FRPS
President