

Research replaces REAP

Dr Michael Hallett ASICI FRPS, chair of the Research distinctions panel, talks about changes in this distinction, with relevance to the Historical Group.

Ever since the Historical Group was formed in 1972, it has had a close link with the Society's distinctions. Historically, REAP (Research, Education & Application of Photography) has been in its current form since 1990, though its genesis in education goes back to the early 1960s. The broader canvas of Research, as distinct from its predecessor, REAP, continues to emphasise our collaboration with the Historical Group. The Group's research days enhance the value of this collaboration.

This distinction encompasses research in the arts and sciences of photography. It also looks at how photography is considered, how its history is recorded and preserved, how photography is taught and how it is understood in its own terms and as part of wider visual and artistic culture.

Now, nearly 30 years later, it seems time to acknowledge the Society's strengths, and this is just what we have done.

- Research is an umbrella title which encompasses both the arts and the sciences, and represents the Society's mission statement. Making this change removes the negative belief that REAP represents only the history of photography.

- The Society is an 'educational charity' and a 'learned society' and the Research title accurately supports that.

- The Society's recent move to the Paintworks district of Bristol and its learning / education promotion can additionally be reflected and enhanced by this Research distinction. It draws and promotes academia into this new vision.

- With the introduction of Research, the standards reflected in REAP distinctions have not changed, though it does provide an opportunity to identify our continuing relationships with academia.

- In general an ARPS will have parallels with a bachelors award at 2.1 or above or a credit or above at a taught masters. A research masters (MPhil or equivalent) and above with a distinctive photography / imaging element in the research could lead to an FRPS. Appropriate evidence should be submitted to the panel.

- A candidate with a successful PhD in an appropriate topic from a recognised university need only submit a c.500-word abstract along with the names of the university and any collaborating institution, names of supervisors and names of external examiners. As most PhD theses are now in the public domain, the link to that is advisory but will not be essential to the submission.

Besides me myself as the current chair, the panel includes Professor Afzal Ansary ASIS FRPS, David James ASICI FRPS, and Professor Andrea Liggins ASICI FRPS. Collectively we have knowledge and experience in the arts, the sciences and the photographic professions as well as higher education. If there is a body of work outside our collective knowledge we will bring in an advisor with that specialist knowledge. With our close links to the Creative Industries Qualification and the Imaging Scientist Qualification we have a library of knowledge at our fingertips. The equivalence and the maintenance of standards along with quality issues are essential to what we do. Again, collective knowledge of the Society's distinction and qualification processes and the requirements of further and higher education make our requirements safe. With REAP and now Research, the unexpected is more common than you would think.

Full details of our requirements are on the Society's website. These have been amended to bring us into line with the digital age. Normally, all material should be submitted as a good quality pdf file of less than 20mb that can be easily transmitted to panel members. Additionally one hard copy of the material, suitably bound/presented, should be sent to Headquarters. This is for reference during assessment, and if the application is successful, it will be retained for future reference. There is no specific word length beyond what is appropriate for such a body of work.

The early response to this change has brought in proposals that we would not otherwise have received. Already it raises queries as to whether applicants can deliver without some background in research methodology, and it may be that we are going to have to recommend online courses that offer initial support for the research process. For all of us, this is a continuous learning curve.