AGM 2026 Q&As submitted in advance

Annual Report & Accounts 2025

1. **Martin Keene** – Distinctions - This year's annual report shows the distinctions programme cost the Society £211,679 to deliver, generated revenue of £78,642, and processed 486 submissions. That is a subsidy from membership income of approximately £133,000, equivalent to 62% of the cost of running the programme, or around £273 per submission. Could the Board answer three questions:
    a. Does the Board believe this level of subsidy, in percentage terms, is appropriate? If not, how will it change under the proposed distinctions programme?
    b. Does the Board consider the distinctions programme a profit centre, and
    c. Will it commit to publishing the financial costings and budgetary implications when details of the new scheme are released.

    Answer

    As Martin notes in the preamble to his question, Distinctions generated revenue of £79k last year, compared with fully loaded costs of £212k, the latter comprising £110k of direct costs and £102k as a share of general overheads. Direct costs relate principally to salaries and related costs of the RPS Distinctions team and volunteer assessors' expenses.

    Question 1: In recent years income attributable to distinctions has been insufficient to cover the cost of the programme. Prospectively, distinction fees will need to cover at least the direct costs of operating the programme and arguably contribute to the associated overhead costs.

    Question 2: As I said, historically distinctions have not been a source of surplus for the Society. Prospectively, if the new distinctions programme is well supported and successful, there is, in principle, no reason why the programme could not make a contribution to surplus.

    Question 3: In short, no - neither the Board nor the executive publishes detailed budgeting assumptions for the financial operations of the Society. The financial results for the new distinctions programme will feature in the Annual Report 2027 and thereafter.

2. **Martin Keene** – Financial Accountability - The annual report tells us that "the Society continues to work towards achieving a cash-neutral operating position by the end of the 2027 financial year." At the Annual General Meeting in 2023, members were told that: "The Society's main financial objective is a target of cash neutrality by the end of 2024. Achieving this in current conditions is a significant challenge, but it's one that absolutely must be met and the plans on how to achieve this are already underway." Could the Board explain:
    a. the precise definition of "cash-neutral"; and
    b. which individual or governance body owns this target and is responsible for its delivery?

    Could the Board then answer these questions:

c. Which specific forecasting assumptions or operational failures caused the 2024 target to be missed by such a wide margin?
d. Recognising that trustees do not have operational responsibility, which individual or governance body within the leadership structure takes direct accountability for this three-year slippage?
e. What specific financial milestones are now in place to ensure this revised 2027 deadline is not similarly missed, and what are the financial consequences if it is

Answer

Personally, I don't favour the term "cash neutral" as it is somewhat open to interpretation. In practice, the Board is now asked to approve a budget for the operating income and expenditure that is within management's control. So, that means charitable and trading income, but not income related to donations, legacies, and interest income; and expenditure on charitable activities, but excluding depreciation. It is this operating budget for which neutrality is currently targeted.

The Board of Trustees collectively owns the strategic objective of achieving a financially sustainable Society and is ultimately accountable for the stewardship of the charity's resources.

Trustees do not, however, manage the Society's day-to-day operations. Responsibility for developing and delivering the operational plans necessary to achieve the Board-approved financial objectives rests with the Chief Executive and senior leadership team.

A Board sub-committee - Finance Committee (FinCom) - membership of which includes qualified and commercially experienced financial professionals, advises and supports the Board in delivering its financial responsibilities.

1. Why was the 2024 target missed?

There was no single cause for the persistent operating deficit in 2024, or indeed since. Its elimination requires income growth and control of discretionary expenditure. Although expenditure on charitable activities in 2024 reduced by over £600k compared with the previous year, the Society's income remained stubbornly flat.

2. Who is accountable for the three-year slippage?

As I noted just now, the Trustees are collectively accountable for governance, financial stewardship and oversight of the charity. They cannot transfer that accountability. Equally, trustees cannot assume the operational responsibilities of the Chief Executive and the senior leadership team, which include implementing the business plan, managing income and expenditure, and delivering against the Board-approved budget.

3. What milestones are in place for 2027, and what happens if they are missed?

Financial planning and scenario analysis is currently underway to support management's proposal for a 2027 budget. This budget is expected to come to the Finance Committee and Board for review and approval, respectively, during Q4.

At this time, management has been tasked with presenting a realistic budget that also delivers the operational break-even that I referred to a moment ago. But we are under no illusion as to the challenge that this will present. It may well be that more radical budgetary levers need to be pulled next year, with the pricing of subscriptions, events, distinctions, etc., and all the major elements of expenditure in scope.

Throughout the year, emerging income and expenditure is compared with that expected according to the budget and, where possible, actions to course-correct are taken.

3. **Andrea Dahlberg** – I'm a new member and was shocked to hear about the financial position caused, in particular, by spending a large sum of money on a headquarters building in Bristol. Given this, is the Board actively looking to recruit an accountant to the Board to bring a commercial perspective?

   Answer

   The decision to acquire RPS House was made around a decade ago. While the costs associated with ownership of RPS House have undoubtedly contributed to the RPS's current financial position, I might not agree with the premise of the question that the purchase of RPS House in particular caused it. Several other financial challenges In the intervening period have played their parts too.

   In response to the question itself, I would say firstly that a commercial perspective is one of the attributes considered by the Nominations Committee when assessing the suitability of prospective Trustees. That approach is reflected in the considerable breadth of commercial experience and expertise within the current Board. In addition, the Board is supported by the Finance Committee, which itself includes commercial and financial expertise, including that of accountants.

4. **Bruno Vinel** – Has the Board prepared a three-year financial forecast aligned to the strategic plan 2026-2029, and can it set out the expected date by which the Society will return to a balanced operating position?

   Answer

   The short answer is 'no'. The three-year strategy (actually, 2026-28) is just that: a strategy. The financial plan (or budget) is prepared for the next calendar year in Quarter 4 of the current year, together with a high-level indicative 'Year 2' budget for the following year. A three-year financial plan would be somewhat meaningless, given the uncertainties associated with the key financial assumptions.

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While the latest Year 2 plan for 2027 does reach operational break-even, the in-year challenges this year that I referenced in my earlier remarks mean that this will be very challenging to replicate when the 2027 plan is finalised in Q4.

5. **Peter Roberts** – Funding of Groups and Regions: Income for G&R shows a decrease of 9% between 2024 and 2025 - Table 5 | 2024: (£119,058 + £181,145), vs 2025: (£135,151 + £137,947). However expenditure for G&R shows a decrease of 27% for the same period - Table 8 | 2024: £318,472 vs 2025: £231,212. As a result, G&R showed a profit of £41,886 for 2025, against a loss of £18,269 in 2024, representing a net increase in funds of £60,155.
    a. Question 1. Given that Groups are largely financially autonomous, it appears that there was a decision made by RPS to restrict funding of Regions during 2025. Please would you explain this? Referring to Table 21, there is a transfer of £25,000 from G&R, but no indication of where this money was transferred to.
    b. Question 2. What was the purpose of the transfer and what were these funds used for?

Answer

Question 1: Changes to the funding arrangements for regions were agreed in H1 of 2024. Regions submit their proposed operational and budget plans for the forthcoming year, and these are signed off by RPS staff in Q4. The annual capitation amount previously transferred to regional reserves remains accessible to each region, but it requires a region to demonstrate in its annual budget proposal that the funds will be deployed appropriately towards regional activities in the coming year. Funding to regions is not restricted, compared with prior years, but we now avoid the scenario in which the capitation amounts were allowed to build up within the reserves of relatively inactive regions.

Question 2: The captioned transfer of £25,000 is to General Unrestricted Funds, as indicated in the table at Note 21. It represents a management fee, pro-rated across all Groups according to member numbers at the beginning of the year. Its purpose is to contribute towards the overhead costs or operating and supporting Groups within the RPS, which would include, for example, RPS staff costs incurred to support Groups, banking/card payment charges, website and telecoms costs, public liability insurance and RPS branding.

6. **Peter Roberts** – Apportionment of Membership Fee. Please would you provide an indicative breakdown of how the individual membership fee is used by the Society? (For example, 5% on staff costs, 20% on infrastructure, 30% on subsidising workshops, 15% profit etc etc)

Answer

Society subscriptions of £1.1 million in 2025 represent the main source of income from charitable activities. Comparing this figure with the main categories of expenditure on charitable activities that do not have their own corresponding sources of income (such as

events and workshops, distinctions, and exhibitions), expenditure on Membership Services represented 31.9% of Society subscriptions; Marketing Services - 36.8%; Society Journals - 19.3%; and Society Governance - 21.0%. In other words, these four expenditure categories alone consumed 109.1% of general Society subscriptions last year.

These percentages are not sustainable. While actions are underway to establish additional income streams, these will surely not be enough to address the imbalance. Society subscription income needs to increase, whether by attracting and retaining more RPS members, increasing subscription rates, or some combination of both. The only alternative would be to reduce radically the offering to members.

7. **Peter Roberts** – External Expenditure. A new Distinctions Framework was first suggested early in 2025. Since then, throughout 2025 and 2026, there have been discussions, workshops and consultations with external agencies and consultants to develop the new framework and pathway.
    a. Question 1. What is the total value from 1 Jan 2025 to date of external contracts to support development of the new Distinctions Framework?
    b. Question 2. Please provide a breakdown by agency/consultant, value of contract and statement of work for this expenditure.

Answer

Question 1: The total value of external contracts to support development of the new distinctions programme is approximately £2,500.

Question 2: The only paid-for external party was AlphaPlus, an educational assessment consultant.

8. **Victoria Forrest** - What has the Society spent on external legal fees since September 2024, how much of that relates to governance and internal disciplinary matters, and will the Board provide members with a breakdown in this year's accounts?

Answer

External legal fees appear in the published accounts within Society Governance expenditure. The Board does not intend at this time to provide additional breakdown of such expenses within the annual accounts.

9. **Victoria Forrest** - The RPS's 2025 FAQ told members that we "cannot have a President Elect". The March 2026 members' information document now says the President Elect role comes from By-Law 12.1, which allows the Board to choose a Deputy Chair. Can the Board explain

how it has the power to create the office of President Elect and use it to hand over the Presidency, without members voting to change the By-Laws or electing a President by ballot?

Answer

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees held on 28 November 2025, the Board resolved to reinstate the position of President Elect coupled with the Deputy Chair role to improve leadership succession and continuity within existing By Laws. This is not an office of the Board but simply a designation for a Trustee who has been duly elected by the membership to assume the office of President at the appointed time.

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees held 20 January 2026, there was broad support for the trustee who held the position of President Elect to take on the Deputy Chair and this was reported in the RPS Journal, July-September 2026 issue. Subsequent to this, and effective as at the date of that meeting, a Resolution to this effect was agreed by the Board.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Board will continue to follow the process for electing a Deputy Chair under By-law 12.1, namely that the Deputy Chair shall be elected by the Trustees from amongst their number for such period as the Trustees decide.

As mentioned above, in the interests of good governance, the Board considers it sensible that, at such time, they elect the President Elect the Deputy Chair.

10. **Victoria Forrest** - Can the Board confirm that members have been given all the material information they need to vote on today's motion? At the last AGM, it was only in response to a member question that the Board confirmed that two trustees had been willing to stand for President in 2025.

Answer

The Board, having taken professional advice, is satisfied that it has fully complied with its obligations to members in connection with the Presidential elections process.

11. **Victoria Forrest** - Can the Board confirm whether the Society is currently, or has recently been, subject to a Charity Commission Regulatory Compliance Case or any other regulatory engagement?

Answer

The Board confirms that it takes its obligations to all relevant regulators seriously and complies with them. Beyond that, the Board does not consider it appropriate to comment on the detail of regulatory matters in this forum.

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The following questions were submitted in advance and the answers were included, directly or indirectly, in the relevant agenda item presentations rather than answered individually.

Agenda Item 2. Annual Report & Accounts 2025

1. **Alan Bousfield -** We often hear about the increase in membership over the past year, but no actual numbers are ever given. It would be useful to know the membership at the 2025 AGM compared with the current membership. Alongside that, it would be helpful to see the number of new members who have joined during the same period and the number who have left. In my club, UPP, I seem to hear only about the members resigning and asking for their RPS distinctions to be removed from the Membership Database. It seems rather strange that nobody from RPS Membership appears to contact these members to ask why they have resigned, particularly when some have been members for many years. Surely understanding why long-standing members are leaving would be valuable information for the RPS and could help identify any issues that need addressing.

Agenda item - 4.1 Strategic Plan 2026-2029 Overview

1. **Gordon Brown** - I would appreciate it if you could address the issue of AI under Item 4.4 during the forthcoming AGM of the Society. I was disappointed to note the Annual Report's lack of reference to AI. This is compounded by the fact that the Society's most recent principles and guidance statement on the use of AI in post-processing, from the CEO, dates back to June 2023. That statement also states that the guidance is only valid until the end of 2023 and that the guidelines "will evolve as AI capabilities change and understanding increases". Image post-processing has changed dramatically since 2023, and I am not aware of any further guidance being issued to members in the intervening period. Is it the intention of the Society to provide detailed advice on what aspects of AI are acceptable and what are not acceptable, when the revised Distinctions proposals are presented to members? If not, are there plans to address the matter in the very near future?

Agenda item - 4.2 Education

1. **Suzanne Parsons** - Could you please include an update on the situation regarding Distinctions at the AGM. It would be good to know what is happening even if the answer is nothing. You have told us to keep working towards a Distinction but that is a bit like working towards an exam and not knowing what subject it will be in. Telling us whether you have decided the various genres are going to stay the same would be helpful even if you have not sorted out the organisational side.

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2. **Alexandra Prescott** - When will the new Distinctions Programme become live. What project management protocols are being followed to ensure the programme will become live on the given date.

3. **Sabine Tillie-Davidson** - What guarantees can you give that consideration will be given to people who prepared panels (sometimes years in the making) under the old framework guidelines but now will have their work assessed according to the criteria of the new framework? I had my assessment cancelled, and I feel it is unreasonable to 'move the goalposts' on work that was ready to be submitted.

Agenda item - 4.3 Marketing & Membership

1. **Martin Keene** - IPE Conversion: At IPE166, the Society received entries from more than 4,000 photographers, of whom approximately 13% were RPS members. That means there were about 3,500 non-member photographers who had already discovered the RPS, considered their work of a sufficiently high standard that they were willing to pay to engage with one of its major programmes, and demonstrated an active interest in photography. Could the Board tell the meeting:
    a. How many of those non-member photographers are now full-price RPS members?
    b. How many have taken up the offer of discounted membership?
    c. What details can the Board provide of any structured follow-up undertaken to convert non-member entrants into members, beyond the standard entrant discount?
    d. If the Society does not currently track these conversions, could the Board explain why not, and whether it considers this the kind of data that would be useful to track going forward?
    e. How many of the 64,500 visitors to IPE166 are known to have since joined the RPS?

2. **Martin Keene** - Community Engagement - The annual report states that the Society is looking to broaden engagement with the wider photographic community. Which parts of the community — in the widest sense of the word — does the Society believe it could engage with better? Please identify the three you consider most significant, and for each, explain:
    a. Why you believe the Society is not currently reaching them effectively;
    b. What specific action you plan to take; and
    c. How you will measure success.

3. **Martin Keene** - Member Attrition - The annual report tells us that 1 in 5 members left the Society last year. Setting aside age and death, what are the three main reasons the Board has

identified for members not renewing their subscriptions? For each, please identify the evidence that informs that assessment and explain what action the Society is taking to address each issue.

4. **Martin Keene** - Meet the Trustees - In 2024 I asked whether the Society would consider a Meet the Trustees type event to provide greater two-way engagement between Trustees and members. I was told: "This is an interesting idea; we will take a look at what we can do." In 2025 I asked what had been done, and was told that the Society would continue to find new ways to engage with a wider range of members. Could the Board tell the meeting:
    a. Two years on, how many formal, organised opportunities have ordinary members - as opposed to those who sit on MemCom, RepCom or similar committees - had to engage directly with Trustees in a genuinely two-way discussion, outside single issue events such as Town Hall meetings relating to the proposed by-laws change and to hear Joanne Segars' plans for the Society.
    b. How many members have taken part?
    c. What has the Board learned or changed as a result?
    d. If no such opportunities have been provided, why not?

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when the revised Distinctions proposals are presented to members? If not, are there plans to address the matter in the very near future?

7. **John Curgenven** - One question - What is the RPS doing, as opposed to planning, to attract, inspire and involve young members?

8. **Andrea Dahlberg** - What are the plans to re-engineer the RPS website?

9. **Andrea Dahlberg** - Current social media activity attracts little engagement. Are there any plans to bring an experienced media or marketing professional onboard to ramp up internet presence? For example, the Instagram account should be a natural site for strong engagement but it attracts little attention because it relies exclusively on hashtags - a strategy known not to attract views/likes etc.

10. **Lin Gregory** - I'd be grateful if the following question could be answered at the AGM as, after two requests, no one seems to be able to answer this question: Can you tell me how many of the 49 accepted entrants were members of the RPS before they submitted their prints to the IPE 167 and how many have since become members. Is the RPS able to produce figures to show the increase in member numbers as a result of running the exhibition in its current format?