



Judging Q&A – Output from Clubs’ Question Time

This Q&A results from the Clubs ‘Judging Question Time’ seminars held in April 2021 and March 2022. It is an unattributed collation of questions.

I have collated the questions into broad subject areas – See Table of Contents. It is clear that there are many more questions out there, and I am looking at ways to make all of this more accessible as a quick reference or even a comprehensive guide.

As always, some of the questions could be answered with “*we should be [doing so] but [sometimes] we aren’t*” and vice-versa. But every question and the thinking it stimulates for us is extremely valuable and helps us to develop our practice in consultation with you. So we are very grateful; thank you.

The answers provided are mine, so may not represent a consensus view, but they have been reviewed by the Judging Advisory Team.

If you need any clarifications or have further questions, please do raise them with us on the team at any time.

Thank you again to all clubs who participated.

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Section 1 - Online judging (using Zoom or similar)

There were many questions arising out of online judging, which has been a new experience for everyone over the last two years. This period hastened on us a period of very rapid learning, where clubs and judges have had to adapt to new ways of working.

1.1 Preview Images

1.1.1 *Is it mandated that judges should see preview images in advance for online judging?*

No, but we have agreed that it should be standard practice going forwards, remote or not. A club and judge may agree between them in advance that it is not necessary.

1.1.2 *Why do we need to provide preview images when we did not previously do so?*

We owe it to every photographer to see your work in the best light, as it would be in the club room. That means being able to see a projection-resolution image on a decent monitor or projector at home. When broadcast by Zoom, the quality of what we see is not guaranteed, which may advantage some images and disadvantage others.

It is also worth bearing in mind that it is still standard practice in many Federations to have images assessed in advance. Some clubs have always provided preview PDIs.

1.1.3 *Because judges have images in advance, there seems to be a decline in spontaneity and a rise in judges reading from script, which can make for a very dull evening. What can we do about this?*

Adapting to judging online has been difficult, even for experienced commentators, because there is no immediate audience feedback or rapport – the social cues we rely on for fluency. Some note taking can be useful, and we recommend that judges use a cue card approach to recall key points of the critique, if they need to, not to read from a full set of notes.

One benefit of spontaneity is that we can listen to what we say and then tune marks accordingly. I never settle on my final mark until I hear what I have to say about the image in real time.

1.1.4 *Are judges using harsher language because they are within the safety of their own homes?*

‘Online disinhibition’ is a recognised psychological effect. But we have no feedback evidence to suggest that this is the case, and we hope it is a one-off perception. If you (clubs) have any concerns about a judging performance, then you must use the feedback process.

We expect that criticism is given in a constructive and positive way, because negative criticism is always destructive. Judges know the Core Qualities we expect. But club photographers should also understand and accept that a low mark and a critical appraisal might be entirely justified – it is a competition after all.

1.1.5 *It seems that some judges – having images in advance – are zooming in and becoming over-zealous about minor technical issues that they would not see in the club room. What are you recommending?*



Seeing an image at 100%, whether on a calibrated screen or projector, is essential to our being able to give a fair critique. Note this is 100% display resolution (e.g. HD), the same as we would see in the club room.

In both home and club settings, looking too closely can result in a failure to see the whole picture and to give a critique that is overly-technical. We always recommend viewing images from a normal viewing distance – at least arm’s length on a HD monitor.

But to reiterate, it is a photography competition. If a technical fault is visible at a normal viewing distance then we should point this out in a way that encourages you to improve your technical skill. Technical matters make up a small proportion (10-15%) of the credit weight in an image, but an avoidable fault can represent a greater debit, especially in advanced classes.

1.1.6 Some club members have indicated that they might submit different images (ones with more immediate impact) for a no-preview than for a zoom judging with previewing. We now advise members when images are being sent in advance to the judge. What is your view?

It is for every individual to choose the images you want to submit, for whatever reason. From a judging perspective it really should make no difference. When assessing Expressive Quality, we guide judges to look beyond initial impact, to notice whether it lasts, and also to let the merits of more subtle images come through – holdbacks can be used for this purpose.

1.2 Holdbacks

1.2.1 Why are judges still holding back images on Zoom if marks have been pre-prepared?

We have found anecdotally that the need to hold back is reduced if we can preview and mark provisionally in advance. However, holdbacks still create anticipation for the audience, so if you as a club would like holdbacks, then please do agree that with the judge. As I mention above, I always request the right to amend a pre-prepared mark up or down slightly depending upon what I hear myself say.

1.2.2 What is the ideal number of holdbacks?

There is no set number. In general, the holdbacks should represent those images that are in contention for awards or top marks – typically those that will score 9, 9.5 or 10. Typically, from experience, that will be between 10-20% max (i.e. 8 in a class of 40).



1.2.3 *Why are holdbacks sometimes marked lower than images marked up front?*

Sometimes we might hold back in order to compare multiple similar images (e.g. butterfly studies). Sometimes we might hold back because the subject matter is difficult and we need to let our thoughts settle and have a second look. A holdback is not a guarantee of a high mark or an award, but we should always explain our reasoning.

Section 2 - About Marking

2.1 Expressive Quality

2.1.1 *According to the SCPF Document 'Judging Guidelines 2020', EQ (expressive quality) counts for 55-60% of the credit weight (score?). The document also states that EQ is 'highly subjective'. Given that EQ makes up a large proportion of the score, how do you ensure judges are consistent in their approach?*

We can and do attempt to achieve a consistency of approach through our training. Consistency of approach is not the same as all judges agreeing on which images are expressively strong, because it is, as stated, highly subjective. There are some aspects of photography that will be universally appealing, but many others that will divide opinion artistically, sometimes between one end of the scale and the other.

We will never achieve consistency across judges on EQ and photographers should not expect it. What should be expected is a fair appraisal, which is reflected in our Core Qualities.

As to the weights; they are only a guide and can vary across genres. It is too simplistic to translate a 'weight' directly into a mark because marks in a relative scheme reflect a ranking rather than an absolute score.

2.1.2 *How are judges' own preferences tempered to avoid bias on marking?*

Every one of us has preferences. In the final reckoning between two exceptional images, every one of us would be influenced by a preference. Some preferences are conscious; the majority are not. It's why some images 'speak to us' and others do not. All we ask, again through our Core Qualities, is that we are aware of our preferences and consider and treat all genres and styles impartially and without bias.

2.2 Marking Coherence

2.2.1 *This season has again seen many judges praising images only to give a low score. The images have no technical or craft flaws pointed out at the time of judging so it must be concluded that the image just didn't appeal to that particular judge on the night. Is this fair?*

The absence of faults does not signify an outstanding image. Most club images have nothing 'wrong' with them; they are perfectly OK and attract an average to good mark of 7-8.5 (using our relative scale of 6-10).

We should not need to look for faults to justify a middle mark; they are just maybe less expressive than those scoring 9 or more. Expressive Quality (EQ) is highly subjective.



In a high-class of competition such as League 1, using a relative scale, it is perfectly possible for a technically-good image to score 6-7 because, relative to the others, it is below average expressively.

We might also overlook a minor technical matter if the image is highly expressive, but we must explain our reasoning. What we have to do better is to manage expectations, both at the start of an evening and in our commentary. And it helps if we are able to explain our thinking before giving every mark. There is also an onus on clubs to understand and communicate this to members.

Finally, this depends to an extent on what you believe a low mark to be. The guidelines try to define this in terms of average – average does not mean low.

2.3 Relative Marking

2.3.1 I understand the relativity argument to images in the competition, but why is it insisted that a 6 must be awarded? Surely judges can use the 9 marks available without being told they have to award a 6 no matter what.

If the low end of the relative scale were optional or variable then we would be back to where we were of awarding a 10 for the best image and low-end marks on notional merit – a mixed methodology. There would be upward bunching and narrow ranges once more. Let's explain this further:

2.3.2 Why do we use Relative Marking (rather than simply mark on merit)?

OK, long answer. There are two scales we could use in separating images in a competition, absolute and relative.

- A **relative** scale is where each photograph is marked relative to the others in the competition. The best scores the highest mark and the least good scores the lowest of the agreed range. It is a ranking.
- In an **absolute** scheme, each photograph is marked on its merits against the highest possible standard, or a defined benchmark.

A trap that judges and clubs fall into is to mix these methodologies, i.e. to mark relatively at the high end – the best on the night scores 10 – but absolutely at the low end, where we feel unjustified in giving perceived low marks to an image that is competent. Then, everyone is confused as to what the marks mean.

If we mark absolutely, there would be bunching, because there are relatively few poor images. Conceivably, in a higher level of competition, everything might score 8 or more. Equally there might be no maximum mark awarded if none is of sufficient quality.

There are pros and cons to both, but we must use one or the other. On the balance of supporting reasons, we recommend a Relative scheme.

Let's examine a little more what 'absolute' means. I am often asked why we can't mark images on merit, and my answer is always a question: '*what does better mean*'?

Strictly Come Dancing uses an absolute scheme with a range of 1-10. It can do this because there are clearly defined criteria for what constitutes a great dance of each type. By the end



of the competition, most dancers are scoring 9-10. But, there is still subjective disagreement among the judges.

Can you imagine how it would be to define criteria for every style of photography? We might also have to consider tariffs, like in diving where marks are awarded for execution and multiplied by a difficulty factor. There might also be an Artistic Impression mark, equivalent to our EQ.

Such tariffs for the wide variety of photography that we see would be impossible to implement, especially in Open classes, but might be possible in set genre classes. And then a photographer will come up with something new for which we don't have a tariff! That is art ...

2.4 Communication of the Marking Guidelines

2.4.1 *Have all judges been notified/trained on the Marking Guidelines as some appear not to be aware?*

Yes; many judges were involved in its development. And we should be using it, though it might take still more time to become embedded.

2.4.2 *The standardisation of judging methodology is very helpful in terms of clarity but becomes very frustrating when it is ignored or otherwise not adopted. If a judge is SCPF surely they must adopt the 'new way'?*

Yes, if the club has adopted the guidelines, or in the absence of any preferred scheme at the club, we would expect all judges to be using them.

What is most important is dialogue between judge and club to establish expectations.

The position is that clubs are not mandated to adopt the marking guidelines (except in SCPF League matches). But we do encourage clubs to do so because wide adoption will achieve greater consistency and understanding.

Clubs may also use their own scheme (including not marking), and judges are expected to be flexible in working with that.



Section 3 – About Assessing Prints

3.1 Comparing a Print to the PDI

3.1.1 When people are judging Print competitions and they have the physical prints in front of them, why do they keep comparing them to the PDI? Surely the only thing that matters is the Print?

Yes, that is right.

However, there are some reasons why it might sometimes be useful:

a) to point out something we can see on the print that might not be apparent to you on the PDI, b) to use the PDI as a pointer reference regarding composition, c) in some cases, it might be clear that the print quality doesn't match the PDI quality. Yes, we are assessing the print only, but when the PDI is your reference point, it is occasionally helpful to the critique.

Even in the room, I should add, very few people in the audience are looking at the print when a PDI preview is available ...

3.2 PDI Previews for a Print Event

3.2.1 Should the judge have PDI previews sent to them prior to the competition?

Whether on Zoom or live, it is not necessary to have PDI previews for a print event. What is imperative to see the prints in advance. And we are advising that the judge and the prints must be in the same room during the commentary; it is virtually impossible to talk about the prints over Zoom if they are in the club room with you.

Remote judging of prints, whether the audience is in the room or on Zoom needs a reset.

3.3 Viewing Prints in Ideal Lighting

3.3.1 Are judges viewing the prints (at home) under a daylight lamp? We always print our work with this in mind. If the print was being judged in a hall, it would be on a lit print stand.

We have always expected that images will be assessed at home in the most favourable conditions. That means a calibrated monitor or projector for PDI, and natural daylight at least for prints. We don't all own a daylight-balanced light stand, but we all understand how a print comes to life often in good lighting.

That said, although I never settle on a mark in the club room until I have seen the print on the light stand, rarely does my provisional mark change significantly.



Section 4 - About Feedback for Judges

4.1 *Should feedback be mandatory?*

I don't believe so, no. There would be too many to handle and the value would diminish; it would present too high a workload for us and for clubs, especially as we ask for a collated three-person view.

4.2 *What happens to feedback when we send it? What steps does the SCPF take when unfavourable feedback is received about a judge?*

It is passed on to the judges, because it is intended for our development. Sometimes, if feedback is more critical, then we will correspond with a judge to get their perspective as well, and we will summarise the main criticisms. Your ratings are collated also for the purposes of assessing upgrades to the next level.

4.3 *Why do we need three people to provide feedback?*

To ensure that feedback is balanced and less influenced by strong individual views. It is however important that free comments are curated, i.e. composed from a variety of views, not cut-and-pasted individual comments that might disagree with each other.

4.4 *How do we give feedback on judges outside the SCPF?*

That would depend upon the feedback process operated by that judge's Federation. You could use our forms and we could pass them on, but best to contact the judge's Federation directly.

4.5 *When would the SCPF like feedback using the judging competency checklist and how often do they receive it?*

The Competency Checklist is to help you if you are assessing a judge's performance. It is to build understanding on all sides about what we are looking for. The Checklist does not need to be completed and returned to anyone.

4.6 *How does the SCPF verify the ongoing performance of their judges to ensure that the SCPF judging philosophy is maintained?*

We have several times analysed the free comment data sent back via the feedback forms to get a qualitative view on what is important to you about judging and how well it is being done. This informs our progress and future directions.

We also have regular judging newsletters and forums where issues are discussed. The Judging Advisory team looks at all these questions in order to recommend policy and good practice.



Section 5 - About Choosing Judges

5.1 *Given that Zoom judging has made 'judging outside the local area' much more common, can you comment on whether there are efforts to harmonise approaches?*

This will take significant time and effort, and may not be possible. Our SCPF approach has been honed over ten years and 70% of our judges have come through our training.

Federations each have their own approach, some more robust than others. There is scope for working with our neighbouring Federations, and we have already done so with SPA, whose approach is similar. Although booking judges from across the country is fresh and popular, clubs do (or should) have a quality stamp when using SCPF judges.

5.2 *Zoom meetings have opened up a new raft of judges (and presenters) from out of our region, which has been quite refreshing. Do you have any idea how the population of judges, who can actually attend clubs, might look in the near future?*

Not exactly, but indications are that judges and speakers are looking to constrain their miles travelled and the frequency of appointments, each individually according to lifestyle circumstances. There's no doubt that the landscape has changed. Many clubs I believe may continue to hold PDI events sourced by Zoom and meet for prints and more practical purposes.

5.3 *Is it possible to select a judge for a set subject competition based on their experience?*

A new online version of our Directory is intended eventually to allow judges to list specialities, not just in genres but also in the types of appraisal they are willing to give, such as interactive critique and facilitated discussions. These will be self-declared but will be useful, we hope.



Section 6 – About the SCPF League

6.1 *Are the results of the league heats scrutinised, if so how?*

We don't formally look at this. However if a match looks out of range with regard to scoring then it will come to light. We have recently reminded judges and clubs about the mandated scoring range as a result of such anomalies.

We have also been asked about consistency of marking across the same images – for example when an image might score a 6 and a 10 in the same league in different heats. This is entirely to be expected when judges are working with EQ in a relative system – See Marking section above.

6.2 *In view of the fact that many heats are now on Zoom is there the opportunity to use the feedback process for judges in non-hosting heats in the same way as we do now e.g. for cause for concern or exceptional judging?*

Yes, provided three people contribute to the review collaboratively, this would be perfectly acceptable. You should make it clear whether you are from the same club or a collective from the participating clubs.

6.3 *In view of the success of the Zoom judging of the league over the last two years – will this continue in the future? Firstly it allows the fellow clubs to see the other rounds – which isn't always possible in real life. Secondly – it gives (Isle of Wight) clubs far more choice of judges that they can use.*

That will be a decision for Council, but it seems entirely reasonable to consider.



Section 7 – About Genre Specifics

These questions related to Nature photography will be considered separately and further by the judging advisory team, as there are complex answers that need to be unravelled.

7.1 Nature Images

7.1.1 There are defined criteria (PAGB and FIAP) for Natural History and Wildlife images viz: “The story telling value of a Nature photograph must be weighed more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality.” However, when nature images are included in Open classes it has been said that they should be assessed pictorially. What does that mean?

The answer to this is complex and is being held over for further consultation.

7.1.2 What advice has been given to Judges in respect to Natural History in club open competitions?

There has been no specific advice from SCPF, but that needs to change, in my view. Likewise, as with the answer above, further discussion is needed.

7.1.3 Nature images always tend to score highly in both club and wider competitions. Is this a bias?

The quality of nature photography is invariably excellent and made by dedicated, specialist photographers. There is no doubt that they do very well and make up a high proportion of the entries.

Maybe there is a reinforcing loop in the number of nature images we see – they tend to score highly so we see more of them – though that is not the nature photographer’s motivation, I am sure.

There are many reasons why the genre might ‘outperform’ others, including innate subject-matter appeal – see also ‘Exotic Travel’ below. But this needs a much wider discussion to understand it fully.

7.1.4 Many Clubs are using Natural History images in Open Competitions. Would SCPF consider restricting their number in [wider] competitions? I believe this would encourage submissions of images from across the genres. Given that Natural History is clearly very popular then perhaps we could consider a separate competition for it.

This has been widely discussed in SCPF and our approach is now in line with other Federations and PAGB events.



7.2 Studio / Workshop Images

7.2.1 *Studio images appear to be scoring lower as they are marked down on technical so the impact appears to become secondary. Is this right?*

Studio images, e.g. still life or portraits, do have certain technical demands or standards that are defined by decades of practice. When lighting and focus are all under the photographer's control, they carry arguably more weight than for an outdoor subject. Craft in these settings can influence Expressive Quality greatly. Expressive Quality is surely still the objective, so it is important for us to highlight the contribution of Craft and Technical elements to the impact of the image.

We have said in our Workshop Images guidance that an image may be excellent on technical and craft but lack Expressive Quality, especially if it is of a type seen often (i.e. it becomes cliché). If an image is perceived to be lacking quality on technical and craft then it is irrelevant how the image was made or in which genre it might be placed.

7.2.2 *Are judges' assumptions on the taking of the photograph causing photographers to become disillusioned with the process with the result they no longer wish to enter their work?*

This question related to studio or workshop images where the photographer has complete artistic control in their own studio, but sometimes judges appear to assume that it was made on a workshop event (or question to that effect). See also 'Making Assumptions' below.

We cannot speak for photographers, but we understand why photographers might become so disillusioned in these circumstances. It is beholden on us as judges NOT to make assumptions. In our recent guidance relating to such images, we have been very specific, viz:

1. We will continue not to make assumptions. No image should be appraised differently solely because it may have been made under workshop conditions. We will assume that that any image presented to us IS eligible and 'largely the photographer's own work'.
2. Instead we will use our already robust methodology for appraisal: that is to assess all images on the basis of Technical, Craft and Expressive Quality (EQ), with EQ carrying the credit weight. If many people make similar images on repeated workshop events, they quickly become fashionable and unavoidably cliché.
3. If we feel that EQ is limited for whatever reason, including (in advanced classes) cliché, then we will appraise and mark appropriately on that basis. We will do so subjectively and without bias.

And we recommend that:

4. Clubs consider whether images made at workshop-type events should be permitted into their competitions, based on the question: 'To what extent is this image the photographer's own work?'



7.3 Genre-specific Inconsistency

7.3.1 *Over the last year or so I have noticed a couple of inconsistencies that make it difficult when selecting images for the League. Judges appear to like to see movement in sports images otherwise they say they are too static. On the other hand, with Nature/Wildlife, they are now asking for everything to be pin sharp even with birds in flight and where there is real action / interaction between predators.*

Another topic for a Guideline Paper, I feel – See also 8.2.3 - *Is there a recognised source of definitions for Set Genre / Theme competitions?*

There can be no hard and fast 'rules'. Sport / Action, for example, does not 'require' movement. Some sports like motorsport do often benefit from panning or wheel movement, yet others like white-water canoeing and athletics often benefit from freezing the action. Nature does not 'require' pin-sharpness for action as it might for a static portrait, but bear in mind that somewhere in between pin-sharp and artistic motion blur is the wrong choice of shutter speed ...

All judges should be able to differentiate between artistic craft and a technical mistake.

How you select images for the League is another question entirely. But it is not realistic to expect consistency of marks and critique across judges for the same images; consistency of approach, yes.

Section 8 – Miscellaneous

8.1 Titles

8.1.1 *Is there any guidance on titles? Has the emphasis on the relevance of a title of a photograph in camera club competitions changed?*

There isn't, though perhaps there should be. A title can guide the viewer as to the photographer's intention but can also distract – there is no doubt that the title does influence in some unconscious way how I see the image.

The guidance I offer is this: if the title correlates quickly in my mind with the image I see, then the title is fine. If it doesn't then I have a problem – is it a poor title, do I not get it, or does the image simply not well-illustrate the idea?

Irrespective of title, our job is still to appraise the image and to make our own interpretations.

Maybe there is scope for us to rethink the use of titles in club images, where we tend to have a 'one size fits all genres approach'. Pictorial images, it could be argued, should be able to stand alone with No Title. Whereas journalistic images often acquire hugely more power from a fuller caption. Could we allow a short statement from the photographer about their intent for an image? To help us to appraise against that rather than against notional standards? Food for thought.



8.2 Set Subjects / Themes

8.2.1 *In Set Subject competitions, how should the judge deal with images they would consider to be off topic?*

If I believe that the image does not fit the theme then it will score lowest, however good it might be in an open or other class.

I take the view that of the club presents the image to me, then it is eligible. I would not expect a club to present any ineligible entries, but they should not limit photographers' interpretations.

8.2.2 *Could clubs do more to guide photographers e.g. with a brief?*

A brief can help if it is well set, broad and open to interpretation. Whether or not a club has set a brief, I always research set themes for myself in advance, so that I am prepared for any interpretations that might come my way.

One other thing: I would always advise clubs to avoid narrow, objective set themes – can you image how hard it is for us to comment on sixty images of 'Doors' or 'Brown', and how tedious that can be for the audience! Some of my favourite set themes over the years have been 'Temptation', 'Blot on the Landscape' and 'Minimal' – challenging and open to interpretation, and hard to raid the file!

8.2.3 *Is there a recognised source of definitions for Set Genre / Theme competitions?*

There definitely is scope for genre definitions to help us all with a common broad understanding on what is implied here. We are considering working on some guidelines.

8.3 Editing images and viewing Exif data

8.3.1 *It has been suggested, and admitted occasionally, that some judges are editing an image maybe to test their ideas for improvement. This is unacceptable to club members. Should this be permitted?*

No. And this has been addressed in the guidance to judges. There may be scope for this to form part of a tutorial evening organised by clubs for the purpose. However, in our view this has no place in standard competition and should not be offered whilst wearing a judging hat.

8.3.2 *Should Judges be looking at EXIF data?*

Recent discussions on the national Facebook group dedicated to camera clubs have shown a wide diversity of views. We believe that judges should no more be looking at EXIF data than examining the back of a print, so we have advised judges not to do it.

Metadata might be helpful in a tutorial to be able to give specific advice re camera settings (aperture, shutter, ISO etc.) but judges should be able to express their coaching advice based on principles and what we can see in the image.



8.2 Relating to Judges making assumptions

8.2.1 *Is it relevant when judges comment on how an image is made up, or where it is taken from? Often it seems the assumptions made are incorrect.*

We advise judges not to make any assumptions, because invariably we fall into a hole.

On matters of technique and craft, it might be relevant to the suggestions for improvement we might make – we should be able to diagnose faults accurately from the evidence. But it should be expressed in terms of *'it might be that this effect results from technique x, in which case try a or b ...'* In other words, we open up possibilities without making assumption.

On matters of place it is rarely relevant. There are times when short and relevant anecdote helps the flow, and when the location itself needs a different approach, for example bringing more individuality to a much-photographed iconic location.

8.3 Relating to exotic travel

8.3.1 *Many photographers like to travel overseas for photographic opportunities but we've had judges who declare that they're not a fan of such images because not everyone can afford to travel abroad. Shouldn't images be marked on merit, not the depth of the authors pocket or the continent they were taken on?*

The answer to any question of 'merit' would require a thesis – See *'Relative Marking'* above. Nonetheless, on the surface of this question, we should not differentiate per se.

This is a question of the value or Expressive Quality of an exotic location vs a familiar home one. Same might apply to a rare nature species vs a common or garden one.

There is a psychological given here: that humans are hard-wired to respond to novelty i.e. we have more interest in something new and unusual than something commonplace to which we are habituated.

There are many examples around which there are standards and double-standards at play, and I'll not go into those here. Suffice to say that there is no material photographic difference between a perfect image of a blackbird vs a perfect image of a bird of paradise; it's just that we all might find one more 'interesting' than the other.

We as impartial judges should have the presence of mind to be aware of this and to come back to the image.



8.4 Relating to specialist equipment choices

8.4.1 On several occasions images taken using a Lensbaby Velvet 56 lens have been marked low as being out of focus. These lenses are designed to produce 'dreamy' looking photos, Judges should be aware and think before they dismiss soft looking photos out of hand as being out of focus.

Lensbaby as a choice of equipment is a matter of craft. All judges should be able to discern between a technical fault and a deliberate, artistic 'soft focus' effect, which could be achieved in numerous ways.

We cannot make assumptions about how an image was made. If it looks like a fault, or if artistry is not apparent, then the photographer cannot expect high EQ or technical praise.

8.5 Relating to Judges making moral / value judgements

This observation was raised late for the most recent Q&A but has since been thrown into sharper relief.

8.5.1 Should judges be making moral judgements? A comment that appears to be critical of the photographer's moral approach is surely inappropriate?

The answer to this question is being held over for further consultation, specifically related to how judges respond to images that make challenging social or political statements.