**Some Personal Thoughts on the KCPA, its Judges and its Associates**

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**Summary**

I *have emphasised that the responsibility for selecting an appropriate judge for a particular competition is shared between the club when selecting a possible candidate, and the judge when agreeing to accept the booking. I have also tried to indicate that judging and marking is subjective and its success depends very much on the experience and open mindedness of the judge in question and the open mindedness and support of the club and its members. It is an interesting fact that although club A might not like a particular judge, it is often the case that club B finds them totally acceptable. Such is the nature of clubs, judges and photographers*

*In my view there is nothing wrong with associates using “in house” judge evaluation schemes provided certain provisos are meet. It is recognised that such information could be useful in furthering KCPA judge training, provided it is obtained in an open and supportive way keeping the judge in the loop. Training plays an important part in improving our judges, and is one of a number of key areas for improving performance.*

*We should not forget how important KCPA judges are. They give up their time on numerous nights each year, they often undertake significant journeys, many in the winter months and operate on an expenses only basis. Just think what club life would be like without their valuable input?*

*If we criticise judges too much, or make their position untenable by constant social media comment, we run the risk of existing judges voting with their feet and the recruitment of new judges becoming impossible.*

**1. Background**

Several months ago the President suggested that I might make a short presentation to the 2016 KCPA Annual General Meeting on a topic of my choice. After some thought, I chose to discuss the history of the KCPA judges scheme and its continued relevance for the future, despite recent social media comments. I felt that my comments might have some relevance, as I have been privileged to judge at all levels over more than 40 years and have also sat on PAGB and RPS Distinction Panels.

**2. History**

The KCPA was established in 1951, when the county was recovering from the aftermath of the second world war. During its first thirty years, becoming a KCPA judge was a simple matter. Any KCPA club member wishing to become a KCPA judge had only to apply to the KCPA secretary for inclusion on the Judges List.

This process was accepted as the norm, as all clubs had lists of their preferred judges and they accepted that the responsibility for selecting a suitable judge was theirs alone, and not that of the KCPA. This policy reflected the fact that all KCPA clubs are autonomous and totally responsible for their programme content and judge selection. It also reflected the fact that judges could and still can accept or reject invitations from clubs should they wish. It should also be noted that at that time the KCPA was smaller and less significant than now and was affiliated to the PAGB via the Central Association (CA). It was just one of a number of small sister associations operating under the broad Central Association umbrella.

In the early eighties I attended a specially convened meeting of all KCPA judges under the guidance of President Frank Coppins ARPS. At this meeting the beginning of the current assessment, training and development scheme for KCPA judges was conceived. This was subsequently accepted and promoted by the KCPA committee and has developed into the scheme included in the KCPA Yearbook and Website. It was recognised at the start that KCPA judges needed to have a demonstrable knowledge of photographic and darkroom skills to enable them to not only evaluate a selection of images, but also suggest ways images might, if necessary, be improved. The responsibility for training and assessing KCPA judges was placed in the hands of a small group of the KCPA’s most experienced and respected judges, this after all is what all other federations, the PAGB and the RPS also do.

From the onset it was envisioned that both clubs and judges should be able to comment/complain on individual judging performances via the two response forms in the yearbook. It was made clear however that filling in either of the forms was not a trivial matter. Details of any problems noted needed to be substantiated in order that further action could be carefully considered and followed up by the judges’ panel if considered necessary.

**3. A Big Change**

During the nineties it became clear that the Central Association (CA) was too large and increasingly dysfunctional. In 1998 the KCPA made a successful application to the PAGB for full Federation status, the consequences of which were many. As far as our judges were concerned however it meant that KCPA Accredited and Premier judges were subsequently listed in the PAGB handbook and their details distributed for other federations to note and contact as appropriate.

**4. KCPA Judges**

Nothing promotes more discussion and comment within our clubs than the performance of visiting judges and after reading recent social media comments you could be forgiven for thinking that this was something new. Let me assure you this is not the case, although things may have become a little excessive recently.

You will have noted from my earlier comments that it has always been accepted that each club is responsible for their own judge selection. It is important that every club competition secretary and/or programme committee recognises this situation. This simple and informal arrangement has operated very successfully for more than half a century. In support of the policy it is an interesting fact that although club A might not like a particular judge, it is often the case that club B finds them totally acceptable. Such is the nature of clubs, judges and photographers. It is also simplistic to think that if all our judges were of adequate standard, the club selection process would not be required. Judges are human, not automatons, and are simply members of KCPA clubs just like everyone else, regularly having their work judged by other judges. It should also be remembered that all clubs do not hold similar views and opinions on what is photographically acceptable or correct.

We should never forget how important our judges are. They give up their time on numerous nights each year, they often undertake significant journeys, many in the winter months and operate on an expenses only basis. Just think what club life would be like without their valuable input? If we criticise our judges too much, or make their situation untenable by constant critical comment, we run the risk of existing judges voting with their feet and the recruitment of new judges becoming impossible.

During the last two or three years a small number of clubs have begun to carry out more detailed and discrete judge performance assessments using “in house” assessment panels. Their claim is that this has a twofold benefit of updating their judge performance database while also providing additional information which can be beneficial to future KCPA judge training. In my view there is nothing wrong with any club adopting this type of approach provided certain important provisos are met.

If an associate is operating an “in house” judge assessment scheme, I believe that it is only honest and fair to advise the judge at the time of booking that this is the case. If the judge is unhappy with this situation, they can decline the booking. It is also honest and fair that a copy of any personal performance data produced by the club is sent to the judge for their information. If the scheme is operated secretly, behind the judge’s back, it can only generate mistrust, undermine our current system, discourage new judges and also, if this was not enough, probably also fall foul of the Data Protection Acts (DPA).

**5. The Data Protection Acts**

Should any club feel that they have no need to relinquish secret assessment information they have on visiting judges, they might like to read the two following extracts from recent Data Protection Acts listed below: -

*Under* ***Section 3*** *of the Data Protection Act, any person has a right to find out, free of charge, if a person (an individual or an organisation) holds information about them.  they also have a right to be given a description of the information and to be told the purpose(s) for holding the information.*

*Under* ***Section 4*** *of the Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003, any person has a* ***right to obtain a copy****, clearly explained, of any information relating to them kept on a computer or in a structured manual filing system or intended for such a system by any entity or organisation*

I think it is clear from the above that holding undeclared “confidential” performance data about visiting judges might well breach the Data Protection Acts. It makes sense therefore that all judge assessments made by a club and sent to the KCPA, should also be copied to the judge in question for their information and comment.

In order to be consistent, I also think that all judge/associate complaint forms that are received by the KCPA, should also be copied to the parties in question as a matter of course to ensure KCPA compliance.

**6. Limitations within the Judging process**

Let me make my views on club marking schemes clear from the start. There is a fundamental difficulty in allocating discrete marks to a collection of images. The allocation of marks is objective whereas assessing the relative merits of images is subjective and depends to a great extent on the experience and knowledge of the judge concerned and on the quality range of the entry. The amalgamation of these two operations is therefore personal and will necessarily vary from judge to judge and from competition to competition.

Even at its best, the judging process can be expected to exhibit variability and this is the reason why the PAGB uses a panel of 6 judges and the RPS a panel 5 judges for their respective distinction panels. These bodies accept the fact that even top judges/assessors disagree, hence the need for panel averaging processes and distinction advisory boards to oversee the deliberations. In club situations where there is only one judge, it should be expected that these natural variations will be wider and equally unavoidable. It is worthy of note that those who doubt this inherent variability are often those who do not judge themselves, all the judges I know are fully aware of this situation and learn to operate within its obvious limitations.

**7. Marking Schemes**

Each KCPA club is responsible for the marking scheme it adopts for its competitions. It should be recognised, however, that in choosing a particular system it imposes certain restrictions on judges. A summary of current judging and marking strategies used by KCPA clubs is given below and explains why it is difficult to compare results on a competition to competition, or club to club, basis: -

* Many clubs mark out of 20; scores seldom go below 13 (actually mark out of 8)
* Some mark out of 10 (with half marks); scores seldom go below 5 (actually mark out of 11).
* This means that 7 out of 10 is never equivalent to 14 out of 20.
* Images are judged against their peers “on the night”, this produces a variable standard depending on the quality of the particular entry. Marks are specific only to that individual competition and can be expected to be different in the next as the entry will be different. There are no absolute marking standards, making cross competition comparisons invalid.
* Judges and club marking philosophies vary, some clubs and some judges also like to “encourage” more than others.
* It is also impossible to assess a club’s standard by reference to its competition results as all competition winners, regardless of their quality, generally get the same maximum score.

Over many years of discussion development and training it has proved impossible to overcome these shortcomings, they are endemic in the various systems currently favoured by our clubs.

**8. Judge Training**

The KCPA has recently improved its judge training procedures, this is encouraging as it is hoped that this will inspire new judges and improve the standard of existing ones. Nevertheless, it is my personal view that the requirements for development as a judge are complex and training is only part of the mix. All the following are important: -

* Accept regular judging appointments to increase experience.
* Refuse any appointments you feel you cannot handle.
* Accept more challenging appointments as confidence grows.
* Be aware of current image trends.
* Be aware of photographic standards outside Kent.
* Improve your photography, PAGB/RPS distinctions give added confidence.
* Attend federation exhibitions and be aware of current best images.
* Regularly self-assess your own judging performances.
* Appreciate the requirements for categories you don’t do yourself.
* Attend any judge training courses that are available.
* Keep an open mind, hold to the traditional, but always consider the new.
* Listen to visiting judges, you never stop learning or appreciating new views

**9. Honesty and Collaboration**

The KCPA stands at a crossroad concerning the involvement of individual clubs in the assessment process for KCPA judges. In the past it has been assumed that the best persons to assess judges are those that have the greatest experience of judging, and at the highest levels. This is not an unreasonable assumption and is the principle adopted by most of our PAGB sister Federations and both the PAGB and the RPS. Notwithstanding this, it is reasonable to include an input from our associates as this is where the grass roots action takes place.

If a club wishes to make a simple complaint about a judge, the form in the yearbook/website remains the appropriate method. If clubs wish to take a larger part in the assessment process it is essential, in my view, that they make a number of changes to their current procedures. They must demonstrate that their process is open, honest and accountable, because if you want to exercise authority, then accountability must come with it. It is not acceptable to offer assessments, however plausible, that are made behind a judge’s back, by anonymous persons whose experience and knowledge are either unknown or kept secret. This route has no accountability, credibility or validity and the challenge is to make the necessary changes and be accountable; the data can then be openly considered, shared and discussed.

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