

**SURVEY OF VAPS CLUB JUDGING**  
**The Views of Clubs and Judges**  
**26/March 2010**

In January 2010 all judges on the VAPS Judges List and all VAPS Affiliated Clubs were circulated with a questionnaire seeking information about the nature and activity of VAPS sponsored judging. 37 out of 46 listed judges replied and of the clubs 16 metropolitan and 15 country clubs made their returns in time for inclusion in the analysis.

In part the Q/A was designed to address the criticism that the judging list had become out of date with judges who were no longer active or whose profile had changed. It seems quite reasonable to require judges to update their profile listing on an annual basis. 19 of the listed judges did not reply to the Q/A and these individuals were followed up by phone to determine whether they wished to remain on the list. Seven have been removed from the list as they were either not contactable or have withdrawn.

The second aim of the questionnaire was to determine the practices of clubs in relation to judging and the extent to which they were using VAPS sponsored judges. Both groups were invited to make suggestions as to how judging could be made more useful to club members on one hand and more satisfying for judges on the other.

Questions were also framed to determine if the skill profile of judges matched the requirements of clubs. Over the past year at least there have been reports of instances where the judges technical abilities were well short of that expected by some clubs and other situations where tensions have arisen because judges over-estimated the understanding of digital editing techniques by their audience. The following is an attempt to summarise these responses and give some future direction.

## Summary of Survey Responses

### 1. Judging Activity

Judges were asked to note the number of judging engagements they had over the past year. Their activity ranged between 2 to 28 engagements in a year with an average of eight.

Clubs were asked how many judges they used over the past year. The responses ranged between 0 – 18 judges with ten the most common.

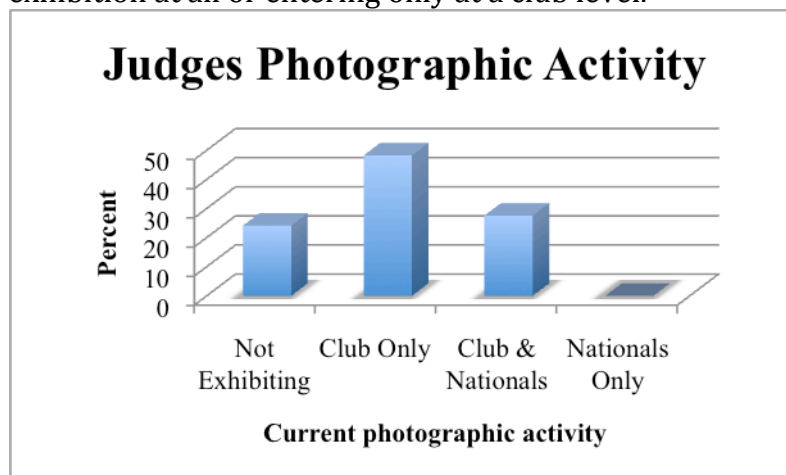
12 Clubs used VAPS Judges more than 75% of the time and 16 used VAPS judges less than 51% of the time.

### 2. Relative importance of Grading vs Critique of images

Clubs were asked to nominate the relative importance of grading and the image critique. The results were; Equally important (15) Critique most important (14) Grading most important (0)

### 3. Current Level of Judges Photographic Activity

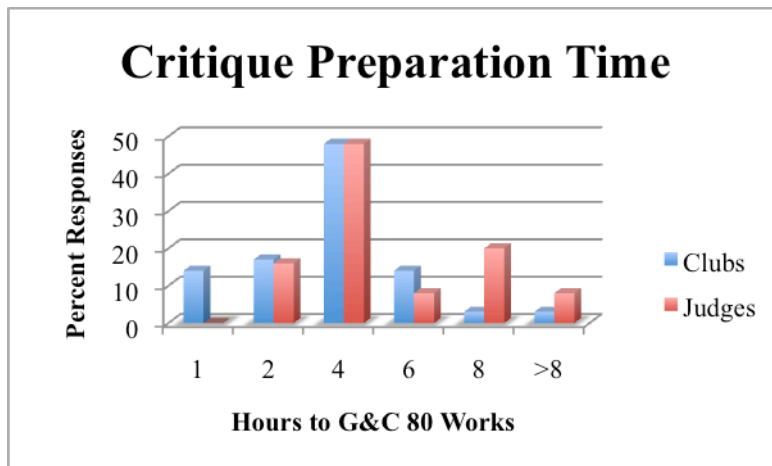
Judges were asked to record whether they were currently entering work at Club or National level. Three quarters of judges were either not submitting work for exhibition at all or entering only at a club level.



### 4. Preparation time for grading and judging 80 works

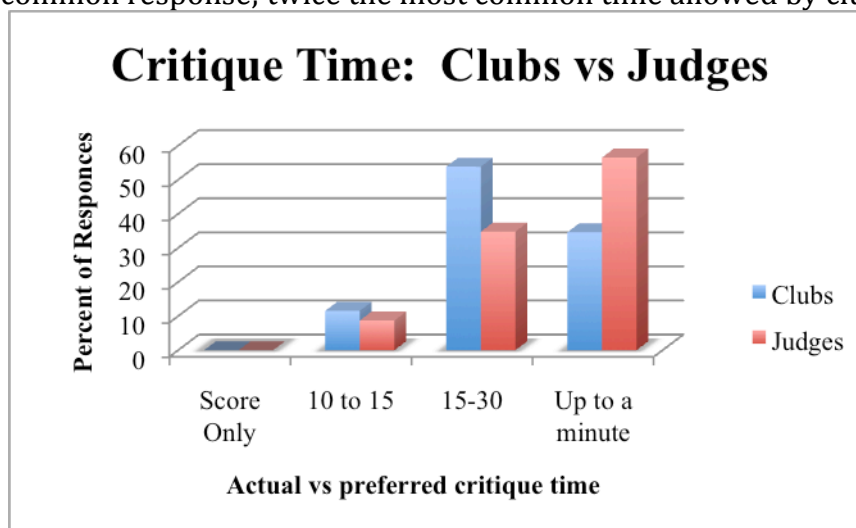
Both groups were asked to estimate how much preparation time was required to grade and prepare 80 works for a critique prior to visiting the club. Clubs tended to estimate less time than the judges claimed to complete the task. The range of responses varied greatly from one to more than eight hours for clubs and 2 to more than eight hours by judges. There were two peaks in the reported time that judges were taking for the task. Twelve percent of judges claimed to be able to grade and prepare critique notes in two hours; a minute and a half per work. Others were spending six minutes or more.

Judges generally claimed to take an extra two hours to perform the task if a written critique was required. A minority of judges offered this service.



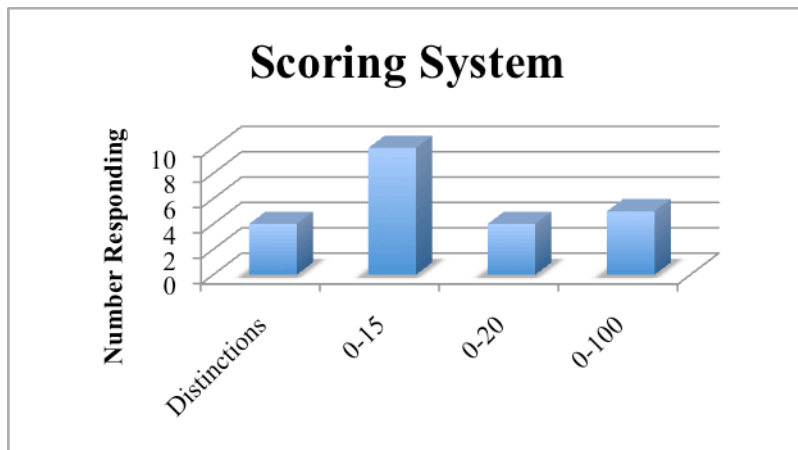
## 5. Critique Time

Clubs and judges were asked to estimate the amount of time that they usually allowed for a judge to critique a particular work. There was variation but agreement that 10-15 seconds was most common. Judges were also asked for their preferred time for presentation and up to one minute was the most common response; twice the most common time allowed by clubs.



## 6. Scoring System

There was quite a variety of scoring systems in use with 0-15 being the most common. Many judges expressed their desire for a more uniform grading scale.



**7. Ability to provide digital photo-editing advice**

Judges were asked if they were able to offer a constructive critique incorporating digital editing techniques. Slightly more than half claimed to be able to, without equivocation.

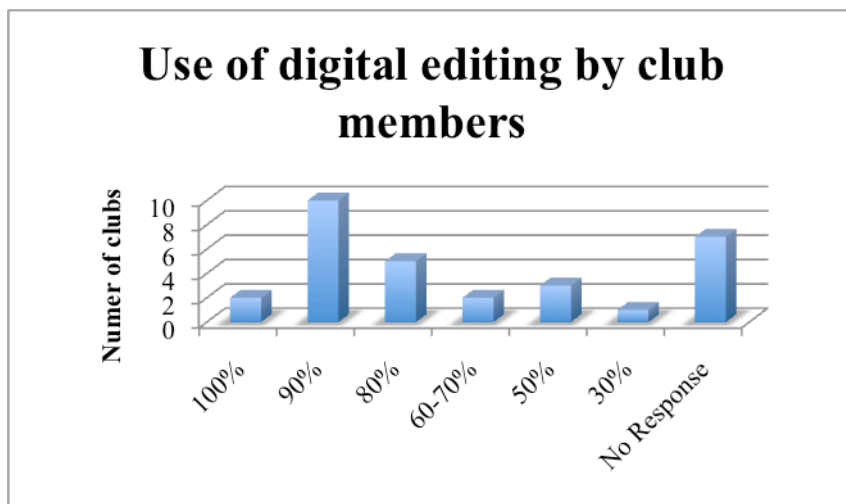
Yes (15), Limited (6), Not able (5)

**8. Value to club members of digital editing advice in the critique**

Useless (3), Useful for a minority (4), Useful for most (21)

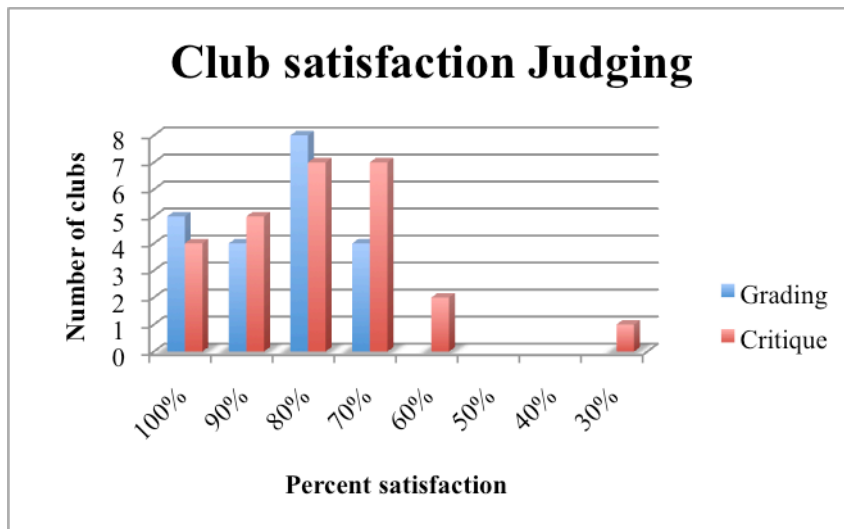
**9. Use of Digital Editing Software by Club Members**

The degree to which clubs have embraced digital image editing is not known but can be a factor in matching clubs to judges. Clubs were asked to make an estimate the extent to which their members were using Photoshop and other forms of software for this purpose. The results were scattered and a significant minority of clubs were unable to answer. Stated use varied from 30 – 100% with Photoshop and Lightroom being most often cited.



**10 Are Judges Meeting Club's Expectations?**

There is a generally high level of satisfaction but higher for grading than for image critique.



### 11. Standard of Hosting Judges at Club Meetings

Judges were asked to rate their satisfaction with club hosting on four criteria. Generally there was satisfaction (12/23) with the standard of hosting by clubs, however there were multiple reports of poor hosting, failure to express gratitude after the judging and poor introductions.

### 12 Recompense for Judges

A financial consideration of \$30 was usual with some clubs also including a small gift. One country club contributed \$100, others accommodation and meals. Unfortunately there were a few reports of clubs receiving written critiques who made no contribution at all as the judge hadn't attended their meeting.

### 13. Attitude of judges to mentoring new judges

The Judging Review Subcommittee has been considering a plan for mentoring new judges and conducting some form of continuing professional education for existing judges. There was overwhelming support for the idea of mentoring with most respondents offering to assist. Some equivocation was expressed depending on the practicalities. Two existing judges offered that they would appreciate some mentoring. Many suggestions were received as to what the Judges forums of conferences should include.

## **SUGGESTIONS BY JUDGES**

### **13. Suggestions by Judges that would make Judging more satisfying**

1. Better communication by Club of their requirements
2. Provision of pre meeting meal where travel is beyond 1 hour
3. Clear policy about clubs expectation of time allowed for judging
4. Improvement of hosting practices
5. Clear directions for location of venues
6. Mobile phone contact for club host
7. Better organisation by club stewards
8. Clearer judging guidelines
9. Improvement in display of work being judged
10. More realistic entry numbers
11. Clubs to show more awareness of judges time and effort
12. Implementation of uniform grading standard
13. More time to be allocated for critiques
14. Print Steward take responsibility for eliminating really poor images
15. Print Steward to reject poorly mounted prints that could damage others
16. Standards be set for packaging of prints for post to judges

### **14. Suggestions from Judges for annual Judging Forum**

1. Discussion of concepts and philosophies in judging
2. Better public presentation
3. Discussion of photography as art
4. Critiques techniques
5. Specific digital editing enhancement techniques
6. Annual seminar for judges
7. New trends in photography
8. Dealing with conflict
9. Review awarded AIPP/APPA work annually
10. Review image evaluation criteria
11. Review and discuss top 20 VAPS work annually
12. Encourage less inbreeding of judges
13. Tackle clichéd work
14. Review best practice for display of work, print and EDI
15. History of photography
16. The judging of highly manipulated work

## **SUGGESTIONS BY CLUBS**

### **15. Suggestions to make judging more useful to Club Members**

Clubs were asked to list three factors that would make judging more useful to their members

1. Cater for all needs (differentiate critique for novices)
2. Gentler and constructive critique for novices
3. Don't just describe the work; be constructive
4. Engage the maker in discussion
5. Provide some discussion on the overall presentation of the images
6. Judges presentation of their personal work should be brief
8. Avoid subject bias (hates seagulls, sunsets, likes red cars, busty women)
9. Describe edits to improve images
10. Encourage creativity
11. Judges should arrive on time and adhere to time frames
12. Adhere to work definitions
13. Return work on time
14. Comment on all prints
15. Comments to be brief and to the point, avoid waffle
16. Be constructive in critique
17. Not altering the image
18. Judge to show recent work
19. Need for remote judging by written comment
20. Don't assume that everyone uses high tech equipment/software
21. Score should be consistent with the critique
22. Judges to be capable of critiquing digital images

### **16. Additional information to be included in the published Judges List**

1. Calendar of the year when they are available
2. Number of judgments in the year prior
3. Awards and qualifications
4. Current work and subject matter
5. Keep the list up to date
6. NewsBrief write up on particular judges
7. Number of years a judge has been judging
8. Separate lists for Country and Metro
9. Need to source new judges
10. Preferred method of contact
11. Distance judge is prepared to travel
12. Equipment required for their presentation
13. Particular skills and subject preferences
14. Specify if the judge is able to judge DPI and slides
16. VAPS should recruit new judges

## CONCLUSIONS

- 1.Clubs are using VAPS Judges, the judges have a useful number of engagements and by and large clubs are happy with the result.
- 2.There are a number of areas that require further consideration and there are many suggestions from both Clubs and Judges as to how the system of club judging can be improved.
- 3.There are also a number of measures which in combination maybe cause for concern. These are the trend for judges not to be exhibiting work at the highest level, the admitted inability of nearly half to be able to provide critiques based on current digital imaging capabilities when clubs appear to be strongly embracing this methodology.
- 4.Clubs rate the critiquing of images as very important yet the responses indicate that in many cases they are allowing judges about half the time that judges consider to be necessary to deliver a constructive critique.
- 5.The concept of an annual forum for judges was floated and judges have responded with many useful suggestions for content as well as strongly endorsing the concept of a Judge Mentoring system.
- 6.It will not be possible to address all of the issues raised but there are three avenues for action to be taken in the short to medium term.
  - a.Many issues can be addressed by way of policy guidelines developed by VAPS.
  - b.More extensive and up to date information on judges can be readily made available by way of the published Judges List
  - c.A regular Judges Forum will be valuable for the purpose of improving knowledge and awareness of judging issues.
  - d.Develop an active program for identifying and training new intakes of judges.

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***Note; Members who would like to view a working model of judge identification and mentoring should go to the PSQ Website [www.psq.org.au](http://www.psq.org.au) and follow the various links to judging.***