Southern Counties Photographic Federation

# Judging Feedback Analysis

*A summary of free-comment data from judging feedback forms received to Summer 2018*

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Judging feedback was introduced in SCPF in 2016 with two main objectives:

- To help judges to improve by receiving specific feedback about performance
- To improve the overall standard of judging

An additional benefit is that we can gather valuable anecdotal evidence for the qualities that clubs wish to see in judges visiting their clubs.

This is an analysis and summary of all the free-comment data from judging feedback forms received to Summer 2018.

## General Stats

- In the eighteen months since launch, 180 feedbacks have been received – most by the official form and some by letter or email in support of upgrades;

- 44 clubs have contributed, 80% of which are SCPF; the remainder equally are clubs in SxPF, SPA and CACC. That means approximately half of SCPF clubs have provided no feedback;

- Clubs providing regular feedback are led by Basingstoke (21); Winchester (16); Bognor Regis (13);

- Feedback covers 45 individual judges, twenty of whom were at Level 1 on receiving their first feedback;

- Feedback has contributed directly to all upgrades since 2016;

## Thanks

We are immensely grateful to clubs for providing such valuable data.

For the Judging Advisory Team, this feedback has been invaluable in helping us to progress judges to the next level fairly and objectively. It has also enabled us to work actively to address criticisms with the individuals concerned.

We are also very grateful to clubs for providing opportunities for Level 1 judges.

However, we would also like to remind clubs that we would like <u>feedback whenever they engage a Level 1 judge</u>. We have had to intervene in a number of cases where Level 1 judges have requested feedback from clubs but none has been forthcoming. They are all keen to progress having trained, so please respect their requests for feedback.

# Summary of Key Points

## About Comments Analysis

From 180 feedbacks, we have distilled approximately 750 useful free comments (both praise and criticism), and categorised them by the judging competencies that we train.

Free comments carry a lot of weight, because they reveal what is important to reviewers.

Many reviewers do not have first-hand knowledge of the judging qualities that we promote. These comments are especially valuable because they support and add to our understanding of the qualities that clubs and members wish to see.

Among the larger clubs, notably where practising judges are contributing to the reviews, knowledge is more evident, both in the detail of the reviews and the language used. There is also some evidence that more prominent clubs – those in the higher divisions of the SCPF league, for example - have higher expectations of judges. This is can be seen where a judge has had reviews from a number of clubs, but it is an assumption that would require further testing.

## Positivity

In our training of judges we stress the importance of a 3:1 ratio of positive comment to criticism (and that criticism should always be constructive).

Overall, clubs' comments were split 68% positive praise and 32% criticism. Thank you.

- There was a slightly higher percentage of criticism in 2018 (32%) than in 2017 (29%)

- Unconsciously at least, based on research that shows customers are twice as likely to complain as give praise, clubs are more likely to provide feedback when there is criticism. From this we might infer that underlying satisfaction is higher than 2.125.

- Most criticisms were expressed as a desired quality lacking or being below expectation.
- Some criticisms were expressed directly as undesirable qualities.

## Comments Across Competency Areas

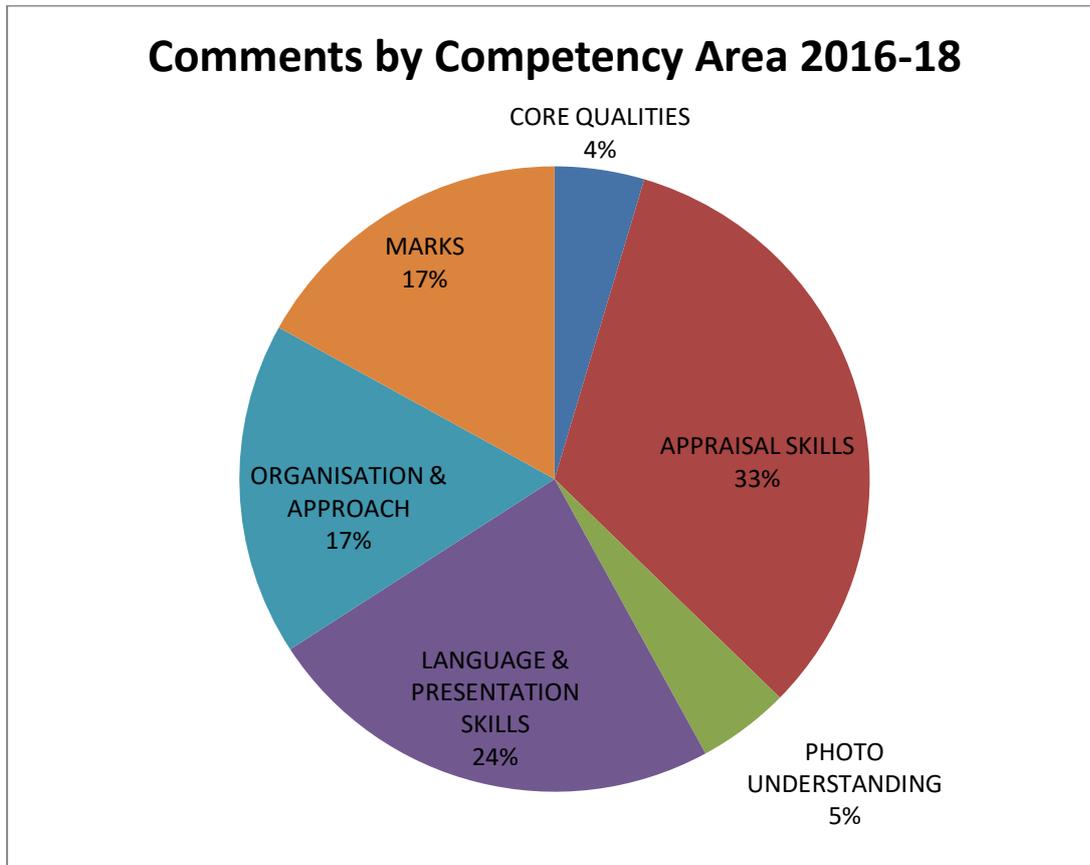Analysis of the comments is broken down into the six competency areas that we train – See Figure 1.
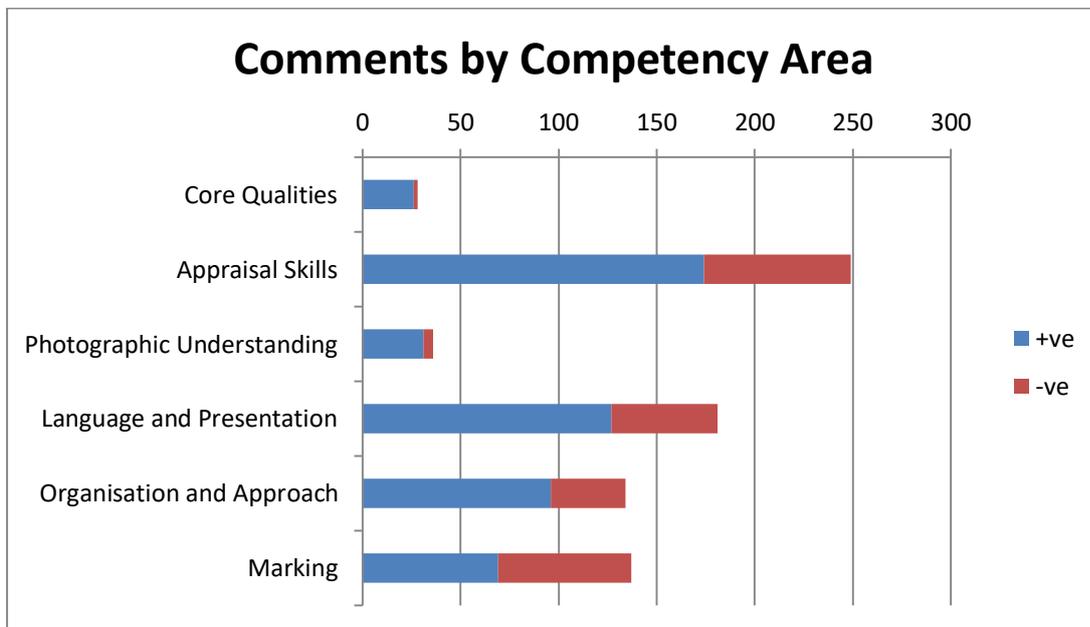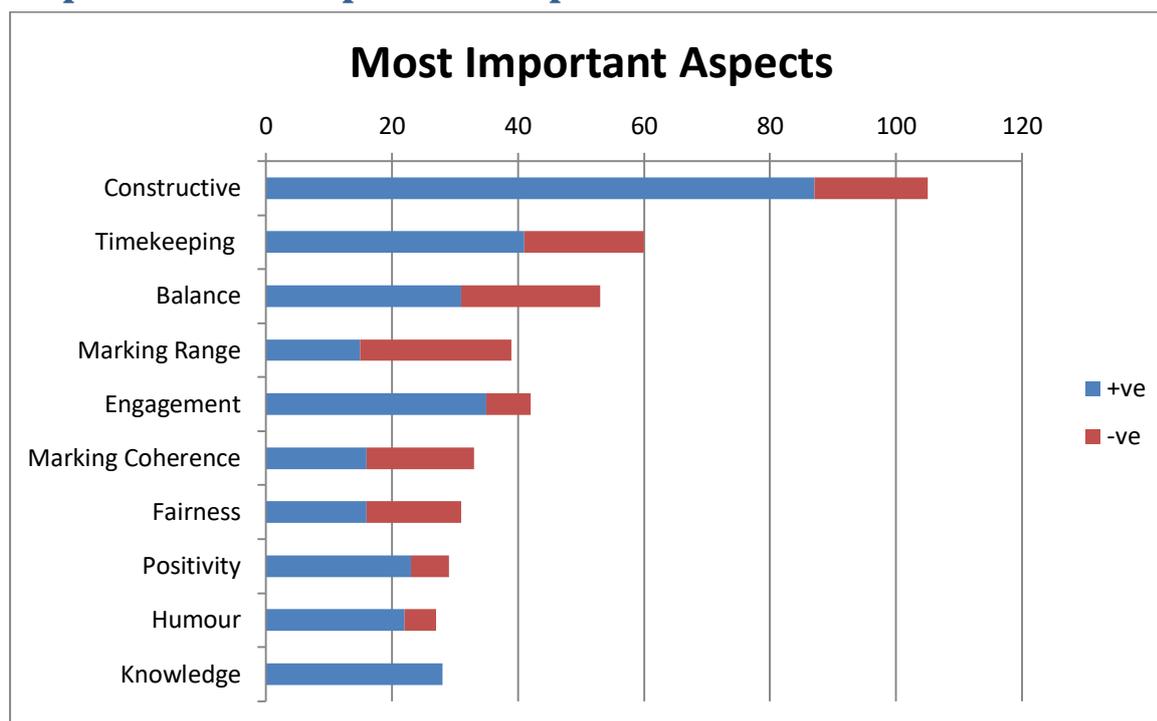


**Comments by Competency Area 2016-18**

CORE QUALITIES
4%

MARKS
17%

APPRAISAL SKILLS
33%

ORGANISATION &
APPROACH
17%

LANGUAGE &
PRESENTATION
SKILLS
24%

PHOTO
UNDERSTANDING
5%

**Figure 1 - Overall Comments by Competency Area**



**Comments by Competency Area**

+ve
-ve

Core Qualities
Appraisal Skills
Photographic Understanding
Language and Presentation
Organisation and Approach
Marking

**Figure 2 - Comments by Competency Area (+/-)**

## Top Ten Most Important Aspects

### Most Important Aspects



Giving a **Constructive Critique** is overwhelmingly the most important aspect of judging – 13.9% of all comments. With a positivity of 4.83 it is generally done very well. Most of the critical comments related to not providing enough constructive guidance on how images can be improved, especially to beginner groups. Other criticisms included defaulting to cropping (or other technicalities) as a solution.

**Timekeeping** is surprisingly important – 7.9% of total, positivity 2.16. However it is a simple thing to comment upon. Criticisms all concerned either failing to finish on time or being too slow early on and then having to finish in a rush.

**Balance** relates to the aspects of an appraisal, specifically the balance of attention given to technical, craft and expressive qualities of an image  – 7% of total comments, positivity 1.41.
Praise is general, in contrast to the criticism, which is specifically  and mostly for failing to give sufficient consideration to the emotional, expressive, aesthetic or narrative aspects of an image. Sometimes this is expressed as judges over-emphasising technical quality.

**Marking Range** is commented frequently – 5.2% of the total, with a positivity of 0.63, meaning there are more criticisms than praise. Interestingly, most criticisms are for too narrow a range, but there is little agreement on what that range should be – See Points of Interest

**Engagement** is a judge's relationship with the audience, through eye contact and rapport – positivity 5.00. Most of the praise is for friendliness of manner and for speaking to the audience. Criticism is for speaking to the screen or print, or  for a downbeat delivery. Engagement is also affected by where a judge stands (for PDI in particular) - See Points of Interest.

**Marking Coherence** is about matching marks to comments – positivity 0.94. When an image is praised and attracts a low score, or vice versa, this brings criticism. Balancing this with being constructive is clearly an aspect for judges to work on – See Points of Interest
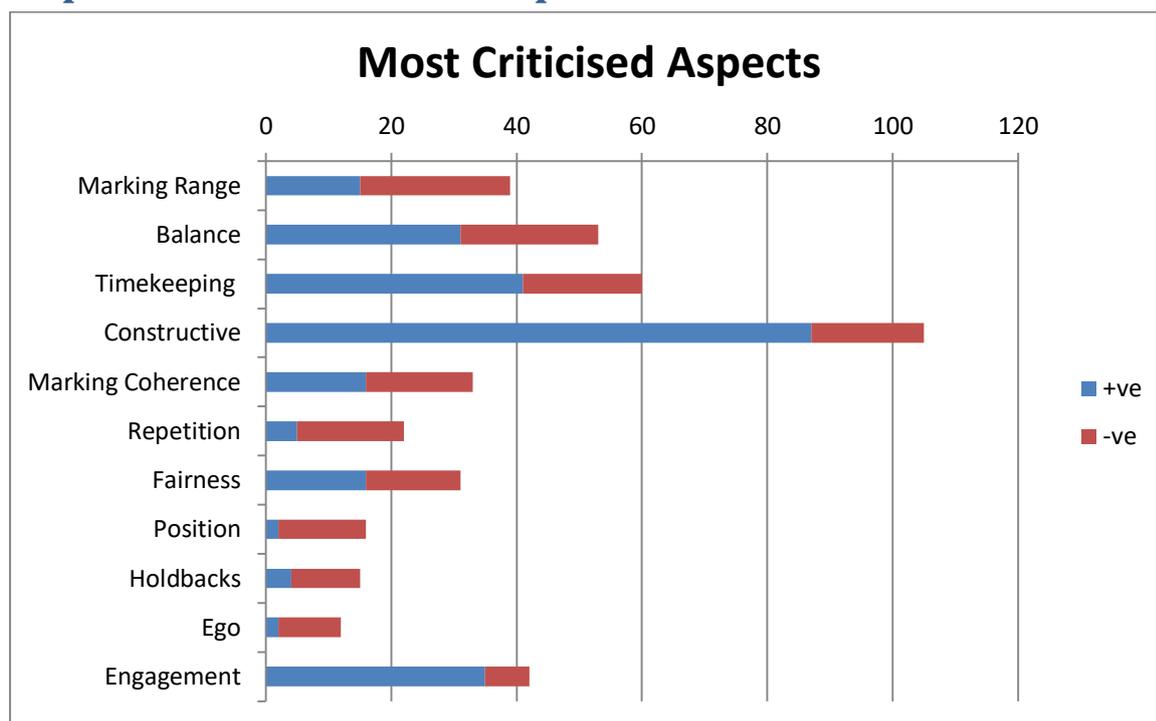
**Fairness** - positivity 1.07 - is seen as giving equal appreciation and fair critique to all styles of work, and is seen as unfair when there is a perceived bias to or against one genre or another. It also arises if there is a perceived over-emphasis on certain techniques e.g. movement.

**Positivity** is criticised either when not giving sufficient encouragement or being too positive! However it is praised far more often than not – positivity 3.83.

**Knowledge** – no criticism at all – is valued when a judge is able to demonstrate photographic knowledge and to share that freely, especially with less experienced photographers.

**Humour** is relatively important in the delivery of an entertaining evening – positivity 4.4, but it MUST be appropriate; all of the criticism was for inappropriate humour, which in one or two isolated instances was considered offensive by some.

## Top Ten Most Criticised Aspects

**Most Criticised Aspects**

Marking Range, Balance, Timekeeping, Constructive, Marking Coherence, Repetition, Fairness, Position, Holdbacks, Ego, Engagement

+ve
-ve

It is perhaps not surprising that the most important aspects listed in the previous section also attract the most critical comments, numerically. There are some aspects, however, that attract more criticism than expected. Those are examined here: Repetition, Position, Holdbacks and Ego.

**Repetition** – repetitive language and phrasing - attracts a high proportion of critical comment - positivity 0.29 - and is occasionally praised when language avoids repetition. Judges must work hard to use a variety of language.

**Position** relates to where a judge stands – positivity 0.14. The majority of the criticism comes when a judge stands in the centre or at the back, or sits in the front row to deliver commentary for PDI, because it limits eye-contact and engagement, and can lead to missing technical details. Occasionally criticism relates to standing in front of the print stand and obscuring the view – See Points of Interest

**Holdbacks** – positivity 0.36, attracts criticism in a variety of ways: holding back too many, not explaining differentiation of final marks, not having or explaining a holdback strategy. This clearly needs guidance – see Points of Interest.

**Ego** relates to a judge appearing overly-concerned with self – positivity 0.09. Criticism is always for commentary straying into personal anecdote, which does not add to the appraisal and wastes time. The only praise received is for NOT doing so.
Interestingly, when this is an issue for reviewing clubs, the feedback is highly-negative overall and verges on complaint.

# Points of Interest

The following points are referred to in the analysis because they are worthy of comment in their own right.

## Marking Ranges

Marking ranges and the merits of relative and absolute scoring need a deeper consideration. There is little to be gained from the comments, except that there is little agreement as to what an acceptable range is. Most criticism continues to be for too narrow a range.

## Marking Coherence

Marking Coherence was also discussed last year. It is about matching marks to comments. When an image is praised and attracts a low score, or vice versa, this brings criticism. Balancing this with being constructive is clearly an aspect for judges to work on.

I intend to make this a specific element of the training – developing the skill of leading the audience carefully to the score that is to be awarded so that there is no perception of incoherence.

A corollary is a tendency that is becoming more noticeable – what we have named the "8-8.5 Problem". This is where an image is OK technically but lacks expression and scores in the high mid-range of 8-8.5. Some of the perceived marking incoherence comes down to this: *"this image is perfectly OK (expectation rising), score 8 (immediate deflation)"*.

That sense is amplified when judges fall back on a technical solution to an expressive shortfall.

We must develop ways of saying that an image as presented is as good as it is going to get, and only more expressive quality will attract a higher mark. Constructive suggestions must be about how to develop the creativity, both in camera and in post-production, so as to make it clear why a mid-range mark is awarded.

Hopefully, this will develop collectively a more realistic expectation of marks.

## Where to stand for PDI

This was raised in 2017 but attracted more criticism this time. It is especially important since audience engagement ranks highly in importance. The majority of the criticism specifically mentions lack of engagement when a judge stands in the centre or at the back, or sits in the front row to deliver commentary for PDI, because it limits eye-contact and engagement, and can lead to missing technical details.

As discussed last year, there is clearly a trade-off between seeing a PDI projection at a distance and square on (ideal) whilst speaking to and engaging with the audience. With PDI, judges often have to stand to the side because there is insufficient space to stand at the front and to see the screen.

Engagement and rapport – in the form of eye contact and speaking to the audience, is so often praised that we cannot ignore it.

Our guidance needs to be revised, I feel:

- Judges <u>must</u> preview PDIs from behind the project, or as square on as possible

- Judges should then seek the best balance available between taking a clear view and being able to speak to the audience – engagement is seen as very important.

- Clubs must think about the positioning, of the front row of seats especially, to enable their judges to both see the screen / print and to speak to the audience – i.e. take up an optimum standing position.

## An Approach to Holdbacks

Comments on holdbacks (as in 2017) continues to suggest that too many images are often held back for later review and marking. This suggests a mix of a) indecision and b) being unable to differentiate sufficiently between images of a high quality. It may also be a consequence of adopting too narrow a marking range earlier in the class.

Too many holdbacks creates time pressure, leading to hurried marking and decision-making with no further explanation. In general, 10%-20% of a class would be an ideal number to hold back.

This should also be included as a specific feature of training going forward.