

Photofinish Training and Qualifications

A position paper by Chris Lockley – January 2010

The Problem. Before Photofinish became recognised as a separate discipline, it was becoming apparent that there were a number of varied problems that would need addressing. One major factor in this was the explosion in availability of photofinish equipment.

The problems included, in no particular order of importance,

- The variation in practice throughout the country
- The need for more operators as systems came into use
- The variable skills of different Officials
- The need for amateur Technicians as well as Operators
- The falling standard of skills on National Teams
- The emergence of 'private' systems where only the owners/managers are allowed to operate
- The lack of a pathway for those who were interested only in Photofinish
- The implications of the multi-disciplinary approach to officiating
- The emergence of new systems, similar yet different
- The need for IT skills, as well as basic photographic knowledge
- The difficulty of cascading effectively the knowledge of the expert core to a significantly greater workforce
- The reluctance of contractors (Tissot/Timetronics/Seiko) to entrust their professional reputation to amateurs not trained by them.

Initial Steps. Technical Committee, and the Education Group, as part of the whole review of Officials training, formed a working party to look into Photofinish. Initial discussions quickly demonstrated that

- There was an awful lot involved
- Everyone seemed to have different ideas as to possible solutions
- There was no clear consensus on objectives, let alone aims or methods
- Satisfying everyone's minimum requirements led to attempting a course that simply could not be delivered in any practicable way.

As a result, although pilot courses were produced (for the level 3 Technology for Timekeepers and Track Judges) there was no real progress.

Next Steps. A re-formed working party made decisions to establish more achievable objectives. Essentially these decisions were

- There would be no attempt to include any technician skills as compulsory for Photofinish Officials
- At this time, Photofinish qualification would only be made available to officials of at least level 2 (in other disciplines).

and as a consequence

- There would be basic theory course (simplified as far as felt possible) which would give Timekeepers and Track Judges the technology skills for their level 3, but not requiring them to become competent operators

- The same basic theory course, followed by practical experience would give an additional level 2 (Endorsement in Photofinish) to interested Officials. These would operate at local meetings.
- There would be an advanced course, level 3 in Photofinish for those who wished to operate at National level

Throughout the proposed training the intention would be that, so far as was at all possible, Photofinish Officials at each point would be trained on a pathway identical to other disciplines, with similar requirements.

It was accepted from the beginning that there would be many Officials who already had appropriate skills. It was felt imperative that those individuals should wherever possible be recognised as qualified. Appeals processes were also provided.

Despite this there will be some who feel ignored and unappreciated.

Phase 2. There remain problems which have not been addressed in the initial work. While discussion is only beginning on priorities and possibilities, matters under consideration will include

- Technician training. Will any of this need to be included in level 3? Will there be separate 'qualification'? How much will individuals be required to commit to this, if it takes them out of operational work?
- Direct entry to Photofinish. At the very least this will involve additional courses to bridge between the level 2 Introduction and Generic module, and the photofinish operational theory of the current Basic course, for example to cover relevant rules. There will need to be discussion on 'number of experiences' required to progress. It cannot be less than for other officials, but must they all be within photofinish? Could they all be photofinish, within an acceptable time period?
- Use of different systems. While general principles apply to all, for beginners especially the nuances of any one system are enough to learn. For pragmatic purposes, courses so far have been built around FinishLynx, but there are strong cases for Omega and Timetronics, at least.
- Multi-disciplinary qualification. There was historically a bar on holding more than one active grade 1 discipline. This has now gone with level 3N, but it is still the case that to maintain the skills needed at the highest level in just one discipline, the time commitment is as much as the average official could offer. Our highest qualified Officials are already having their technical opportunities limited by the opportunities/needs of working in the increasing number of 'management' appointments.