RPS Distinctions vs PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit

The RPS offers three distinctions: Licentiate (LRPS), Associate (ARPS), and Fellowship (FRPS). The PAGB offers five levels of Merit: Badge (BPAGB), Credit (CPAGB), Distinction (DPAGB), Excellence (EPAGB) and Master (MPAGB).

RPS Distinctions

The RPS distinctions are open to both members and non-members, however non-members must join before the distinction is activated, and the letters may only be used for as long as membership is maintained - they are not held for life unconditionally.

The RPS recommends applicants start with the Licentiate unless they are already experienced photographers.

Assessment events are held at the RPS headquarters in Bath.

LRPS: Awarded for a good level of basic skill and competence. Requires 10 images that reflect your ability as a photographer. Applicants must show variety in approach and techniques, but not necessarily in subject matter. No Statement of Intent is required.

ARPS: Awarded for a high standard of technical competence and individual creative ability. Requires a body of work or project of 15 images of a high standard and a written Statement of Intent. The Statement of Intent must define the purpose of the work, identifying its aims and objectives, and the submitted body of work must communicate an individual's vision and understanding. Specialist categories include Fine Art, Conceptual and Contemporary, Film, Multimedia, Natural History, Research, Science, and Travel.

FRPS: Applicants must show clear evidence of distinctive photographic ability as well as the highest technical standard, demonstrating an individual approach to their specialist category. Requires a body of work or project of 20–21 images of a distinguished photographic and creative standard, accompanied by a Statement of Intent. You must have achieved the ARPS before you can apply for the FRPS.

The ARPS and FRPS are thematic and category-specific: the work must cohere as a project with a declared intent, and the FRPS requires prior attainment of the ARPS.

PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit

Traditionally the PAGB offered three levels: Credit, Distinction, and Master for prints or PDIs and Audio Visuals. Two further levels were introduced in 2023 for prints only: Badge and Excellence. Badge was introduced to encourage photographers to begin their distinctions journey; Excellence is seen as a stepping-stone towards Master.

Applicants must qualify and apply via their Federations. Entrants must have been active members of an affiliated Club for a minimum of 2 years for CPAGB, 3 years for DPAGB, and 5

years for MPAGB. Unlike the RPS, the PAGB awards are exclusively for club members within the federation structure. Again, unlike the RPS, awards are held for life with no annual fee and holders are for ever entitled to use the designated letters after their name.

BPAGB (prints only): 7 prints are required; a total score (q.v.) of 125 or more (maximum 168) gains the award. Standard: approaching good club photography.

CPAGB: 10 prints or PDIs are required; a total score of 200 or more (maximum 240) gains the award. Standard: good club photography.

DPAGB: 15 PDIs or 15 prints are required; a total score of 300 or more (maximum 360) gains the award. Standard: open exhibition photography.

EPAGB (prints only, DPAGB holders only): 15 prints are required; a total score of 330 or more (maximum 360) gains the award. None of the images used at DPAGB may be reused. Standard: good enough to achieve a high level of acceptance in open exhibitions.

MPAGB: 20 prints or PDIs are required; a total score of 450 or more (maximum 480) gains the award. Applicants must have held DPAGB for at least 11 months on the date of adjudication. Standard: highest standard of UK amateur photography - each of the 20 photographs should be likely to achieve consistent success at international exhibition level and also likely to win at least an occasional award.

Assessments are Hosted by Federations in rotation across the UK.

Scoring system

Each of 6 adjudicators votes YES (4 points) or NO (2 points) on each photograph, with a near-miss option (3 points) and a “good enough for the next level” option (5 points).

Images are not presented as a coherent panel but are mixed with those of all other entrants in the section and judged as individual photographs.

Key Similarities

1. Both are hierarchical systems where difficulty and expected standard increase with each level.
2. Both use multi-judge panels to assess submitted images.
3. Both result in postnominal letters.
4. Both have a top tier (FRPS / MPAGB) that explicitly requires prior attainment of a lower award (ARPS / DPAGB respectively).
5. Both welcome a broad range of photographic genres and media.

Key Differences

Dimension	RPS	PAGB
Eligibility	Open to members and non-members	Club members of PAGB-affiliated federations only
Number of levels	3	5 (3 for PDI; 5 for prints)
Image count	10 / 15 / 20–21	7 / 10 / 15 / 15 / 20
Thematic coherence	Required at ARPS and FRPS (Statement of Intent + cohesive project)	Not required; images judged individually on merit
Assessment format	Panel presented together	Images mixed with all other entrants; assessed individually
Scoring	Holistic pass/fail judgement	Numerical score threshold (200 / 300 / 330 / 450)
Specialisation	Category-specific at ARPS/ FRPS	No category specialisation
Club membership prerequisite	None	Yes - with minimum active membership periods
Sequential requirement	ARPS required before FRPS	DPAGB required before EPAGB and MPAGB; lower levels can be skipped if standard warrants
Letters held for life	No - membership must be maintained	Yes - unconditionally for life, no ongoing fee
Location	RPS HQ, Bath	Hosted by Federations in rotation across the UK

The most substantive philosophical difference is that the RPS from ARPS upward rewards a coherent individual vision; the photographer must demonstrate they have something to say and can sustain it across a body of work.

By contrast, the PAGB rewards consistent individual image quality at an increasing standard, without requiring thematic unity.

This makes the PAGB system closer in spirit to exhibition photography, and the RPS system closer to portfolio or fine-art practice, although both ultimately seek evidence of photographic excellence at their respective top tiers.

Submission Requirements by Level

Award	Images judged as	Number	Media	Pass score
LRPS	Panel	10	Print or PDI	Pass / Fail
ARPS	Panel	15	Print or PDI	Pass / Fail
FRPS	Panel	20-21	Print or PDI	Pass / Fail
BPAGB	Individual	7	Print only	125/168
CPAGB	Individual	10	Print or PDI	200/240
DPAGB	Individual	15	Print or PDI	300/360
EPAGB	Individual	15	Print only	330/360
MPAGB	Individual	20	Print or PDI	450/480

Overlap Analysis: Pursuing Both Routes with the Same Images

The fundamental tension is the panel vs individual image distinction. The RPS assesses work as a coherent body with a declared intent; the PAGB assesses each image independently against a standard. An image that works brilliantly within a themed panel may be weaker in isolation, and vice versa. With that caveat:

LRPS + **CPAGB** forms the closest natural pairing. Both require 10 images, both accept prints or PDI, and neither demands thematic coherence (the LRPS requires variety in approach but not subject, and the CPAGB has no thematic requirement at all). A set of 10 strong, technically competent images could realistically be submitted to both, though you'd want to be confident each image stands alone for PAGB purposes. The standards are broadly comparable: competent, skilled photography rather than exhibition level.

ARPS and **DPAGB** both require 15 images and both accept prints or PDI. However, the ARPS demands a Statement of Intent and a cohesive project, whereas the DPAGB wants images judged individually at open exhibition standard. You could potentially draw 15 images from the same shoot or subject area, but they'd need to function both as a unified narrative (ARPS) and as individually strong standalone images (DPAGB). Achievable but requires more careful selection; not every panel image will survive individual scrutiny. The ARPS also has category constraints (e.g. Travel, Natural History) which may or may not align with the breadth of images needed for DPAGB.

FRPS and **MPAGB** both require 20 images and both accept prints or PDI. The MPAGB requires 20 images each capable of consistent international exhibition success and occasional awards -

an extremely high bar. The FRPS requires a very individual, distinguished approach. These are both top-tier distinctions, but the FRPS rewards vision and coherence while the MPAGB rewards consistent individual excellence. Operating at this level you could potentially build a 20-image body of work that satisfies both; but it would take deliberate curation - the MPAGB panel is more likely to contain a spread of your strongest individual images whereas the FRPS demands they tell a story together.

BPAGB is for prints only, there is no RPS equivalent.

EPAGB is for prints only. Sitting between DPAGB and MPAGB standard, but no permitting reuse of any DPAGB images. There is no direct RPS equivalent at this level.

Links

RPS Distinctions **Official Group Facebook page:**

https://www.facebook.com/groups/rpsdistinctions/?locale=en_GB

PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit (APM) Facebook page:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/pagbawardsforphotographicmerit

PAGB Information about eligibility:

https://thepagb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/apm_leaflet_1.pdf

PAGB Information about the Advice Service:

https://thepagb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/apm_leaflet_6.pdf

PAGB Awards for Photographic Merit: Still Images:

https://thepagb.org.uk/awards/apmstill/