IRISH PHOTOGRAPHIC FEDERATION

NPC

NATIONAL
PHOTOGRAPHY
COMPETITION

HANDBOOK

2026

The Race by Charlie O'Donovan, Cork Camera Group

ipf

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1. Introduction

I am pleased to present the handbook for the 2026 Irish Photographic Federation National Photography Competition (NPC).

The NPC is a central part of the Federation's annual programme, providing member clubs with a national forum in which work can be presented, judged and recognised.

This year's competition reflects long-standing feedback from clubs. The competition includes print and digital sections, supported by regional qualifying rounds, and offers six categories, including the introduction of Open Colour and Open Monochrome sections.

New awards are introduced in 2026, including national-level awards for non-advanced photographers, together with Image of the Year and Photographer of the Year, recognising both individual excellence and sustained quality across a body of work. The first four images entered are free of charge.

A digital catalogue of entries and prize winners will be produced following the final.

The National Photography Competition is delivered over several weeks and across multiple locations, and relies on the commitment of a relatively small number of volunteers who coordinate software, events and the judging and handling of entries to ensure the competition is run fairly, consistently and to a high standard.

My thanks go to the national and regional coordinators, judges and volunteers who take on that work and see it through. The regional rounds also provide an important opportunity for the Federation to meet clubs in person, to engage directly with members, and to continue conversations already underway. I look forward to meeting many of you over the coming weeks and to seeing this year's work at first hand.

Ita Hegarty
President, IPF

2. The Competition

Encouraging the highest standards in Irish photography

Entry to the competition is open to all members of clubs, societies and groups affiliated to the Irish Photographic Federation. Please ensure your club is currently affiliated for 2026 prior to entering the competition. The competition closes Tuesday February 24th at 9 PM.

Competition Format

- The 2026 NPC is a mixed print/digital image event, consisting of qualifying regional rounds and a national final. Images are entered only once to the relevant region on the IPF Competition Management System (CMS) at: https://ipfhost.org/main/main.php

- The regional qualifiers will be held across March in four regional locations as follows:

  - Mid-West (Feb 28th)
  - North East (March 8th)
  - Southern Association of Camera Clubs (March 21st)
  - Mid-East (March 29th)

- Venues and times will be announced locally.

- The Final will be an open judging session held on Saturday April 11th (venue to be announced).

- Qualifying images from the regional rounds will be automatically entered in the the 'Final'. The qualifying score for the final will be 12 for both advanced and non-advanced entrants.

- Regions will run a non-advanced competition within the overall competition, with the top non-advanced image from each category going forward to compete in the final against equivalent images from each region (this will include images below the qualifying total of 12 for the overall competition should these images be the awarded images).

- Regions are at liberty to award additional non-advanced awards to be agreed locally.

- There will be no distinction between advanced and non-advanced sections in the overall finals of the IPF National Photography Competition (NPC).

- Each region will present its top non-advanced images at the national final. These images will be judged separately for non-advanced awards, regardless of whether they reached the overall qualifying score.

The Competition

Competition Format continued...

- All images (advanced and non-advanced) that achieve a score of 12 or greater will also progress to the national final for consideration in the overall competition.

- All images, advanced and non-advanced that achieve a score of 12 will be forwarded to the final for participation in the overall competition.

Competition Categories and Sections

The 2026 IPF NPC consists of two categories (print and digital) divided into six sections. Entrants are allowed a maximum of 24 entries and can choose to distribute these as they see fit across the six sections up to a maximum of six in any single section. This will enable entrants to concentrate their entries into their preferred section. Guidelines and definitions set out in Section 3.

Competition Awards

- The national final will result in IPF Gold, Silver and Bronze medals, together with two Honourable Mentions (HMs) per section.

- Separate IPF Gold, Silver and Bronze awards, together with two HMs, will be presented for the non-advanced competition, based on the regional award-winning images presented at the final (up to six per region).

- IPF-NPC Image of the Year will be selected by the judges from the section gold medal winners and the winner will be awarded a trophy.

- IPF-NPC Photographer of the Year will be awarded to the photographer achieving the highest cumulative score from their top 15 images across all sections and will be awarded a trophy.

- Individual regions are at liberty to decide the nature and structure of their awards for advanced and non-advanced, ensuring that at a minimum there is a top image nominated for each section for non-advanced to allow for participation at the national final.

The Competition

Non-Advanced Competition

This year's competition is structured to recognise the work of non-advanced photographers. Non-advanced photographers who wish to be considered separately for non-advanced awards should indicate their non-advanced status in the 'edit details' tab of the competition system (second row to the right, click 'novice')

The competition system will enable regions to identify the non-advanced photographers and award them separately. The top awarded image from each section will be forwarded to the final to compete against the equivalent images from the other regions. At national level there will be an IPF gold, silver, bronze and two honourable mentions for these non-advanced competitors.

All non-advanced entrants are included in the overall competition also, and where their images score 12 or greater they will qualify for the national final. Hence, nominating themselves as non-advanced does not impact on the photographers participation in the overall competition. If you **do not meet the criteria for advanced** set out below you are eligible to nominate yourself as non-advanced and to compete for this additional set of awards

Advanced photographers are defined by the IPF, for the purpose of this competition as:
(a) photographers who have received an IPF distinction or similar, i.e., FIAP, PSA, RPS or any other distinctions;
(b) photographers who have been awarded more than one IPF medal in IPF national competitions;
(c) photographers who have produced image(s) that have represented the IPF in international competitions;
(d) photographers who have received an acceptance or acceptances with five or more image titles, or one or more awards, including a ribbon, in FIAP and/or PSA recognized salons.
(e) photographers whose club considers them to be of advanced standard in any disciplines of photography (e.g., monochrome print, colour print, digital image, AV etc.);
(f) photographers who, in the opinion of the IPF, are of advanced standard.

The Competition

Permitted Photographic Techniques and Editing

All photography and editing techniques conducted/produced by the entrant are allowed, except where specified otherwise in the relevant notes in Section 3.

The Use of Drones

- The use of images taken from drones is permitted. However, the drone should not cause any interference with other individuals or animals, a disturbance in their normal activity, or disrupt the way any individuals or animals interact with their environment.

- Entrants should comply with all relevant laws and regulations, associated with aerial photography, in the country in which the image was taken

Disturbance of People and Wildlife

- It is the competitor's responsibility to ensure appropriate consent when photographing people in images, especially when photographing minors. Competitors should respect the laws of the relevant country when taking/presenting images.

- Competitors should be aware that the IPF will create a catalogue of images which will be freely available on the Federation's website and may appear on other publicity platforms.

- Photographers must respect the laws of the relevant country in regard to the taking/presenting of wildlife images and the prevention of harm, distress or disturbance of the natural environment or life of animals in captivity or in the wild.

The Competition

General Considerations

- It is the competitor's responsibility to read and understand category and section definitions and photography/editing rules. Submission of entries is deemed to confirm acceptance.

- Interpretation and implementation of the rules shall be at the discretion of the competition co-ordinator/s who shall be honour-bound to adjudicate all disputes fairly and without favour.

- All entrants are expected to comply with the Federation's code of fairness for competitions, available in the competition section of the IPF website.

- Authors should maintain the RAW images (or JPG plus 3 either side where RAW is not utilised) for all images entered should there be any question regarding (i) the use of AI or (ii) in regard to sections with special considerations (e.g. People).

- The co-ordinator may request to see original images should any question arise.

- All content of each image entered must originate as images made by the entrant. Images may not incorporate identifiable images produced by anyone else, e.g., clip art or stock images of backgrounds, skies, etc. Images created in whole or in part by artificial intelligence (AI) are not allowed

- Your entry remains your copyright. It is, however, a condition of entry that the IPF may use your entered images for inclusion in competition brochures and/or for the purpose of promoting photography in Ireland and abroad and the work of the IPF and its regions and special interest groups.

3. Competition Sections

Section	Description
Open Colour (Print)	Colour images category with no restriction on theme or content. Any subject, style, or creative interpretation is permitted. All photographic and digital techniques may be used, including composites.
Open Mono (Print)	Monochrome images, that is with a single hue from black to white. Toned monochrome (e.g., sepia, selenium) is permitted only if the entire image remains within one tonal scale. All subjects and creative techniques are allowed as long as the image remains monochrome.
Scapes (Sea, Land, Astro & Urban) (Print)	Images of the natural or built environment where the location is the primary subject. Normal photographic processing* is allowed. Permitted in-camera techniques include long exposure, HDR/bracketing, focus stacking, panoramas, and filtering, provided they do not distort or misrepresent the reality of the location. Removal of distracting elements is permitted post-processing provided it does not distort the reality of the location.
Creative (Print)	Images that are imaginative, constructed, conceptual or expressive. Composites, altered-reality imagery, digital art, conceptual work, montage, abstraction, and experimental camera techniques are welcome, provided all elements originate from the photographer.
People - Traditional (Digital)	Images must represent people truthfully, whether posed or candid. Includes street photography, travel, portraits, documentary, photojournalism, etc. Normal photographic processing* is permitted. Not permitted: addition, removal, or relocation of subjects or objects; composites; scene reconstruction; background/sky replacement or any manipulation that alters the factual content of the scene. Retouching is acceptable only when it preserves the reality and integrity of the person.
Activity -Traditional (Digital)	Images showing authentic real-world action or movement - sport, work, performance, leisure, or dynamic scenes. Normal photographic processing* is permitted. Not permitted: composites, added/removed elements, scene reconstruction, set up or constructed scenes, or edits that alter the truth of the moment. The action must remain factual, real world and authentic.

Competition Sections

Section Notes

People Section

The people section contains broad subject matter, with the common aim being a truthful representation of the person or people and the situation they are photographed in. Consequently there are limits on the amount of manipulation allowed in the following subject matter areas:

Portraits: Images that are heavily altered or adjust the reality of the 'story' (e.g., reposition a model to a different location utilising two or more images) should be entered in open colour, monochrome or creative. Standard portrait retouching of the model and background are permitted, but should maintain the reality of the situation.

Environmental portraiture, photo travel, photojournalism and street photography: These images seek to portray the real world we live in as it is found naturally. Techniques that add to, relocate, replace or remove any element of the original image, except by cropping, are not permitted. Correction of camera/lens artifacts is allowed. All adjustments must appear natural. Conversion to full monochrome is acceptable.

Scapes Section

Composite/creative scapes that alter the reality of the image by adding skies from a different shoot, adding elements from other locations, e.g., a building or natural element, or adding heavy textures that alter or conceal the location should be entered in open colour, monochrome orcreative.

Bracketing, focus stacking, long exposure, panoramas, filtering are allowed.

Removal of camera/lens artifacts that are distracting such as dust, scratches, marks is allowed

Removal of certain landscape elements that are distracting is allowed, provided the alteration does not conceal the location, alter any architecture unnaturally or distort the reality of the image. Examples here are telegraph wires or blurs created by moving birds in long exposures.

All alterations should look natural, otherwise enter in open sections or creative.

Competition Sections

Creative Section

Creative photography means different things to different people and can refer to creative camera processes, creative editing, or a combination of both.

Creative photography for the purpose of this competition includes but is not limited to, abstract compositions, minimalism, composites (including composite portraits and landscapes), conceptual, altered reality/surrealism, still life, and experimental photography.

The common thread across this diverse category is that the images are made using an assortment of techniques with a wide range of intentions and outcomes.

4. Entering the Competition

Entry Process

- Entries must be made via the IPF online competition management system at: https://ipfhost.org/main/main.php. The system must be used to enter a digital version of your print so that it can be scored on the system. There is no other entry system or process.

- First time users are required to register on this site in advance of entering images. It is advised to register and ensure your account is up and running in a separate session from your image upload session. Affiliated club members can register on this system at any time, even when there is no competition running. Previous users do not need to register again.

- **Updating your details:** Once you login your personal information in in the 'edit details' section. Please check to see that your email, address, distinctions and club roles are up to date. Please enter LIPF, AIPF or FIPF in the merit or distinctions section where relevant.

- **Non-advanced entrants:** Those who want to be included in the non-advanced competition should use the 'edit details' tab of the competition system to update their personal details and tick the box to indicate non-advanced using the **'novice'** tick box. If this box is not ticked, the entrant will remain in the overall competition but will not be considered for the special regional and national non-advanced awards. See Section 2 for advanced criteria, if you do not meet these criteria you are eligible to nominate yourself as non-advanced.

- Please note that entering as 'non-advanced' will not affect your entry to the overall competition and all images scoring 12 or greater will be automatically forwarded to the final. Entering in the non-advanced section means you have a chance in both competitions.

4. Entering the Competition

- **Entering the Competition:** For all entrants, use the 'competitions' tab, select 'competitions for '*YOUR NAME*' and available competitions will become visible. Please select National Photography Competition Regional Qualifier 2026.

- Once in the competition section, you will see the relevant sections. This year you may enter up to six images in any one section, but there is a maximum of 24 entries in total across all the sections. For example if your specialist subject is scapes, you may enter 6 and use your entries like credits across the remaining categories until your max of 24 is used up. If you inadvertently uploaded more than 24 images, the system will warn you that you have uploaded too many and you will need to delete your excess.

- Entry fees must be paid by PayPal to complete your entry. There is no other payment method available.

- If you do not receive notification by email within a few minutes, <u>your entry is not complete</u>, please check that all is in order and try again.

- If you have issues with the entry system, use the 'contact us' button on the top right of the system's page. This 'help' function is delivered by people, not AI, so we will respond ASAP.

- **Fees:** The entry fee is €25 and it will be €2 per image thereafter. The first 4 images are free.

Entry Requirements

- Image upload files must be JPG. All other file types will be rejected by the software.

- You must upload digital versions of your print images to have them included on the scoring system and catalogue.

- Each image should be titled with a unique title that will prevent duplication of titles. Titles such as 'sunrise' will not be appropriate. 'Sunset Howth, June' is more likely to be unique.

Entering the Competition

Entry Requirements continued...

- Digital entries must be exported/saved in the sRGB colour space. Entrants are advised to review their exported sRGB files and, where necessary, make minor adjustments to ensure the image appears as intended when viewed in sRGB.

- Individual images should be a maximum of 2.016 KB (2.0 MB)

- Images must be sized correctly in order to be accepted by the online system. Images must be a maximum 1,600 pixels wide and 1,600 pixels high. Images smaller than these maximums will be accepted to the digital sections but will be judged at the size submitted. Small images may be at a disadvantage.

- Identifying marks, such as your name or logo, will result in the image being automatically disqualified.

- An entry may be rejected if, at the reasonable discretion of the IPF, it believes the entry does not conform to the competition rules and requirements, or is of an offensive nature.

- The organisers reserve the right to contact the entrant should they feel the image has been entered in the wrong section.

- The organisers have the right to request the original unedited RAW or unedited JPEG file, negative or slide. Non-compliance with such a request may result in the image being disqualified.

- Competitors are strictly forbidden from using the same or extremely similar image (from the same shoot) that has been entered in previous IPF NPC competitions. Any such image may be disqualified.

Entering the Competition

Print Requirements

- A digital copy of your print image must be uploaded and entered on the online software system.

- Entrants must generate a barcode label from the software, this is done by pressing the "print labels" option located beside the checkout (shopping trolley) icon.

- The barcode must be attached to the rear of the print, <u>ensuring not to obstruct the barcode with tape or to mark it with pen</u>. Printing your barcodes in draft mode is best for scanning. Too much ink on the label may result in the lines on the barcode bleeding making it un-readable.

- Please ensure you match the correct barcode with the correct print, double check the title and details on your barcode and affix to the matching print.

- If for any reason you have changed or replaced an image after finalising your entry you must ensure you <u>reprint your barcodes</u> as a new barcode will have been generated on the system for your replacement image.

- Non-advanced entrants who have selected 'novice' in the competition system should mark the back of their print on the top right side with a clearly visible N. This will assist the print handlers in sorting the prints for selection of awards by the judges.

- Printed images for relevant categories may be any size/orientation, as long as they fit in/on the maximum mount board size of 20"x16" (50 x 40 cm). The most important consideration when choosing a print size is that it should be sympathetic to your image.

- There should be no identifying marks on the front of the print.

- Poorly mounted prints or framed prints will not be accepted. Very small mounts may be problematic as they will not stand well on the lightbox. 50 x 40 cms is advised.

- Entrants may use their own choice of paper and choice of mount colour.

Entering the Competition

Print Requirements continued…

- Entrants should be aware that judges will be seated a minimum of 1.5mtrs from the lightbox when judging the initial round of prints, therefore very small prints may be at a disadvantage.

- At regional rounds, entrants should present their prints to the print receipt desk from 9.30AM – 10.15 AM. Prints will not be accepted after 10.15 AM on the morning of the competition.

- Please organise you prints per category as there will be 4 separate print receipt desks.

- All prints not qualifying for the final should be collected after the competition is completed. Images not collected will not be stored by the IPF or host club. If you can not be there for collection please arrange this with an attending club member, etc.

- All images should be collected after the final. Please arrange for your images to be collected if you cannot attend.

5. Judging

Encouraging the highest standards in photography

- Regional rounds will be judged by three qualified judges chosen by the regions, nominated by the IPF.

- Images scoring 12 or above at the regional round will progress to the national final.

- Regional judges will select award winners as agreed with that region.

- The final will be judged by three experienced judges selected by the IPF Judges' Committee. Judging will be conducted in accordance with good judging practices.

- The IPF Competition Management System (CMS) will be used to run and score the competition.

- The judges will view the prints in random order under appropriate lighting conditions in the IPF lightbox.

- Digital images will be judged on a 32 inch calibrated monitor.

- Images will be scored out of five points per judge using a digital keypad.

- Judges may not consult with each other until all three have submitted their scores.

- Judges may consult when adjudicating on selection of images for awards.

- Prize-winning images will be chosen from the top scoring images in each category.

- Judges will have an opportunity to view images up close prior to selecting the award winners.

- The non-advanced golds from each category per region will be judged in keeping with the selection of awards process used for the overall competition, with judges having the opportunity to view the images up close prior to deciding.

- Judging will be anonymous. Any form of canvassing of any judge or organiser, before, during or after the competition is strictly forbidden.

Results

Regional Rounds

- Awards (at discretion of each region) will be announced/presented on the day.
- Scores and acceptances for advanced and non-advanced will be made known to entrants same day via the CMS and email.

The Final

- Results will be announced at the final and awards will be presented to advanced and non/advanced entrants in an awards ceremony.
- Personal results will be available same day on the CMS and posted by email within two days.
- All images scoring 14, and 15 in the Final will be compiled in a digital catalogue that will be made available to entrants.

Calendar

2026

Opening date for entries	Monday February 2nd 2026	9:00 PM
Closing date for entries	Tuesday 24th February 2026	9:00 PM
Regional Judging	February 28th – March 29th	
Mid-West	Saturday 28th February	
North East	Sunday 8th March	
SACC	Saturday 21st March	
Mid East	Sunday 29th March	
National Final	Saturday April 11th 2026	

IRISH PHOTOGRAPHIC FEDERATION

NPC

NPC 2026 Checklist All Entrants

A) Before you start
□ Check with the club secretary that your club is affiliated for 2026.
□ Read the section definitions and enter images in the correct section.

B) Register (if not already registered) and check your competition system account
□ Go to the IPF Competition Management System (CMS) and register (first-time users).
□ Log in and open Edit Details:
  □ Check your email address (critical for confirmations/results).
  □ Check your address and club are correct.
  □ Update distinctions/merits if relevant (LIPF / AIPF / FIPF, etc.).

C) Leave the CMS and prepare your digital upload files (prints + digital sections)
□ Export JPG only (other formats will be rejected).
□ Export in sRGB colour space.
□ After exporting, open the exported JPG and check it looks as intended in sRGB.
□ Resize to meet CMS limits:
  □ Max 1600 px wide and 1600 px high.
  □ Max 3.5MB per image (3500KB).
□ Ensure your image has no identifying marks (name/logo/watermark).
□ Give each image a unique title (avoid generic titles like "Sunrise").

D) Enter the competition online using the CMS (www.ipfhost)
□ Go to Competitions → choose competitions for "YOUR NAME".
□ Select National Photography Competition Regional Qualifier 2026 for your region.
□ Upload images into the correct sections:
  □ Max 24 images total.
  □ Max 6 images per section.
□ Pay the fee by PayPal to complete entry:
  □ Entry fee €25.
  □ First 4 images free.
  □ €2 per image thereafter.
□ Wait for the confirmation email (if you don't get it, your entry isn't complete).

E) Print entries: print labels and mount prints
□ Upload a digital copy of each print image to the CMS (required for scoring/catalogue).
□ Generate and print barcode labels:
  □ Click "Print labels" beside the checkout (shopping trolley) icon.
  □ Print in draft mode if possible (cleaner scan; avoids ink bleed).

NPC 2026 Checklist All Entrants

□ Mount your prints correctly:
   □ Max mount size 20″ x 16″ (50 x 40 cm).
   □ No frames. No poor mounting.
   □ Avoid very small mounts (may not stand well / may disadvantage the image).
□ Attach the correct barcode label to the back of each mounted print:
□ Match label to print title (double-check).
□ Don't obscure the barcode with tape.
□ Don't mark through it with pen.
□ Make sure it is flat and readable.

F) If you change an image after finalising
□ If you replace or update an image after checkout/finalising:
   □ Re-upload the new file to the CMS.
   □ Reprint the barcode label (a new barcode will be generated).
   □ Remove the old barcode and attach the new one.

G) On the morning of your regional round
□ Arrive in time for print intake (or arrange for your prints to be handed in):
□ Print receipt desk opens 9.30am.
□ Last acceptance 10.15am (late prints will not be accepted).
□ Bring prints sorted by category (there may be separate print receipt desks).
□ Before handing in, do a final check:
   □ Correct section/category.
   □ Barcode label present, correct, readable, not obscured.
   □ No identifying marks on the front.

H) After judging
□ Collect prints after the event (non-qualifiers after regionals; all prints after the final).
□ If you can't stay, arrange collection with another club member — prints won't be stored.

NPC 2026 Checklist
Non-Advanced Entrants

(Complete all steps in the All Entrants Checklist, plus the steps below)

A) Confirm eligibility and nominate yourself
☐ Read the advanced criteria in the handbook.
☐ If you do not meet the advanced criteria, nominate yourself as non-advanced:
   ☐ Log in → Edit Details → tick the "Novice" box second row, towards the right hand side.
   ☐ Confirm the change is saved (if the box is not ticked, you will not be considered for non-advanced awards) (close and open again).

B) Enter as normal (you are in BOTH competitions)
☐ Upload and enter images exactly as for all entrants.
☐ You remain eligible for the overall competition; images scoring 12+ still progress to the final.
Print entries: add the "N" mark
☐ On the back of each mounted print, mark a clear "N" at the top right.
☐ Ensure the barcode remains fully visible and scannable.

C) Final check before you hand in prints
☐ "Novice" box ticked in CMS.
☐ Prints mounted to specification.
☐ Correct barcode label attached and readable.
☐ "N" clearly marked on the back (top right).