

Toowoomba Photographic Society – an analysis of demographics, member interests and club activities, June 2020

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Summary

- The majority of TPS members are above 60 years of age, retired, but have only been members for 1-5 years.
- There is a strong interest in learning new skills through workshops and outings. There is also interest in the micro-skills nights and the skills nights.
- A significant proportion of members often to always participate in club competitions, Skill nights and the Jilly's Micro-Skills Night.
- Many members indicated that they would attend outings, photography and software training and social functions when possible.
- Members actively participate in club competition, and with some exceptions, the majority (63 per cent of respondents) find the judging comments helpful.
- Many have been interested in photography for a considerable number of years prior to joining TPS, and have considerable investment in photographic equipment.
- The desire to belong to an organisation of people sharing a common interest is a strong motivation to join TPS.

Recommendations

- The current emphasis on training and workshops should continue, be more systematic, and utilise on-line conferencing such as Zoom to allow wider participation.
- The considerable effort and resources expended by TPS management in organising club competitions should continue as there is strong interest and participation by members.
- There were a number of specific suggestions made by participants which should be considered:
 - Use of guest speakers who can focus on artistic and philosophical aspects of photography
 - Mentoring of members to attain their Photographic Honours

Introduction

- Community groups often report a struggle to attract members and office bearers. Levels of volunteering are claimed to be declining, but this varies depending on the type of organisation. Emergency situations such as bushfire often result in a marked increase in volunteering rates. In addition, traditional or long standing community groups including photographic groups face new challenges from on line groups where individual commitment is generally lower; e.g. for executive positions, fund-raising, maintenance of club houses and the like.
- Toowoomba Photographic Society (TPS) turns 115 years old this year. While this is a remarkable period of longevity, it is obvious that the club will be a very different organisation during the years to come as technology and society continue to undergo increasingly rapid change. At the time this survey was conducted and report prepared, TPS meetings and club competitions were held remotely using the Zoom program. Already, it is evident that Zoom will be a tool used into the future.

Method

Survey questions were prepared and survey designed using the Survey Monkey program. Members were sent a broadcast email from the TPS site directing them to the survey link. The initial response was 24 respondents, then the balance of the 41 total respondents after a second email and two non-specific reminders on the TPS Facebook page, as the survey was intended for financial members only.

Accuracy of survey

There were 41 surveys completed by members, just over 50% of member total. There are 81 financial members of TPS, but one of these is either in error or in the process of being deleted, as there are no entries and no grading given for this member. Hence a total of 80 members is being used in this study. Forty respondents indicated their grading.

	A grade	B grade	Salon grade
Total number of members	26	45	9
% of total members	33	56	11
Number of respondents	13	20	7
% of total respondents	32	49	17

The gender ratio of respondents (Q 2), 55% male: 45% female, accords with the total club membership of 56% male: 44% female.

Although this survey is self-selecting rather than being randomised, the high percentage of returns (50%), roughly equivalent percentages of the various grades in the survey compared to the TPS total and gender ratios, gives confidence the sample set represents the TPS membership. The high

number of salon grade respondents (one does not have a computer and could not participate) shows a keen interest by senior photographers in the welfare of the club.

Results

All results from the survey are summarised in the Appendix.

Member Demographics

Age and occupation (Q1 and Q3) show that over half of the respondents (60 per cent) are over 60 years of age and nearly half are retired (47.5 per cent). Slightly more than half have been a member of camera club for less than five years (54 per cent). Around 60 per cent have been a member of TPS for less than 5 years, with 12.5% having been members for more than 15 years. There is a close correlation with the number of years of TPS membership (Q5 and Q6). These data confirm a general observation that people tend to join organisations, especially interest groups, at a later stage in their lives compared to previously.

The reasons usually given for this are lack of time, family commitments, irregular working hours and affordability:

<https://theconversation.com/why-dont-more-people-volunteer-misconceptions-dont-help-69284#:~:text=The%20most%20regularly%20cited%20reasons,as%20health%20or%20aged%20care>

If the trend of joining organisations at a later stage of life continues, then the percentage of members who have been in TPS more than 10 years may fall (Q6).

Although 60% of members have been taking photographs for more than 20 years (61.5 per cent, in itself a reflection of the dominant age group), over half the respondents have been a member of a camera group for less than five years, and that group is TPS (Q4-6). Despite many years of taking photographs, the majority of respondents (72.5 per cent) have found workshops most useful in developing their photographic skills (Q 12). A significant proportion of respondents also have used other approaches to develop these skills – use of videos (49 per cent), magazines (37 per cent) and books (29 per cent).

More than 50% of respondents have more than \$5000 invested in their photographic equipment: an indicator of their commitment to their artistic pursuit (Q 8). One in five respondents has achieved photographic honours, another indicator of commitment (Q 9).

Q12 also had space for extended written answers on which of the following had been most useful in developing photographic skills (13 responses). These ranged across the spectrum of club activities with Jilly's Café microskills sessions cited twice, club competition five times, but feedback and one-on-one conversations were mentioned several times.

TPS Activity Feedback

There is some support for the proposition that competition helps develop photographic skills, but there is a clear preference for workshops over competition for this purpose (Q 13 and 16). There is significant interest in the TPS competitions (77 per cent) and a similar level of interest in workshops to develop photographic skills (78 per cent interested). Respondents (63 per cent) also found

competitions to be a means of assessing progress compared to others (Q 16), suggesting a level of competitive interest.

The highest level of participation is in club competitions (Q14 – over 40% always enter competitions), with strongest agreement with the proposition that competition allows participants to measure progress over time (Q16). Nearly 2/3 find comments by the competition judges to be either helpful or very helpful, but 1/3 are neutral on this question (Q 17).

The social aspect of being with people with a common interest was seen as the best part of monthly meetings by 78 per cent of respondents (Q 18). This suggests that while members have adapted to Zoom meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, there is strong support for resumption of the normal round of face-to-face meetings.

There were 7 written responses to the question asking what the best part of TPS monthly meetings were - judges' comments were mentioned 3 times, and learning new things, seeing other people's images and sister club relationships once each.

There was a range of responses given to Q 11 on the reasons for joining TPS and several written responses. The most important reasons were:

- wanting to use a camera better (60 per cent of respondents)
- enjoying seeing other people's images (55 per cent of respondents)
- attending a TPS meeting and deciding to join (45 per cent of respondents)
- comparing skills, were most significant (30 per cent of respondents)

The least important were meeting a TPS member at the Toowoomba Show (20 per cent of respondents), being invited by a friend (15 per cent of respondents) and seeing club information on-line (5 per cent of respondents).

In the 11 written responses the dominant theme is meeting people with similar interests followed by wishing to improve skills.

More than half of the survey respondents provided written comments to the open ended final question on suggestions for club activities (Q 19). More workshops and field days were mentioned several times in the 21 replies. Suggestions included workshops on software and equipment.

Image processing and discussion about an individual's images separate to that given during club competition was another suggestion. Specific advice on printing photos was also mentioned. On-line training sessions using Zoom introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic should be continued.

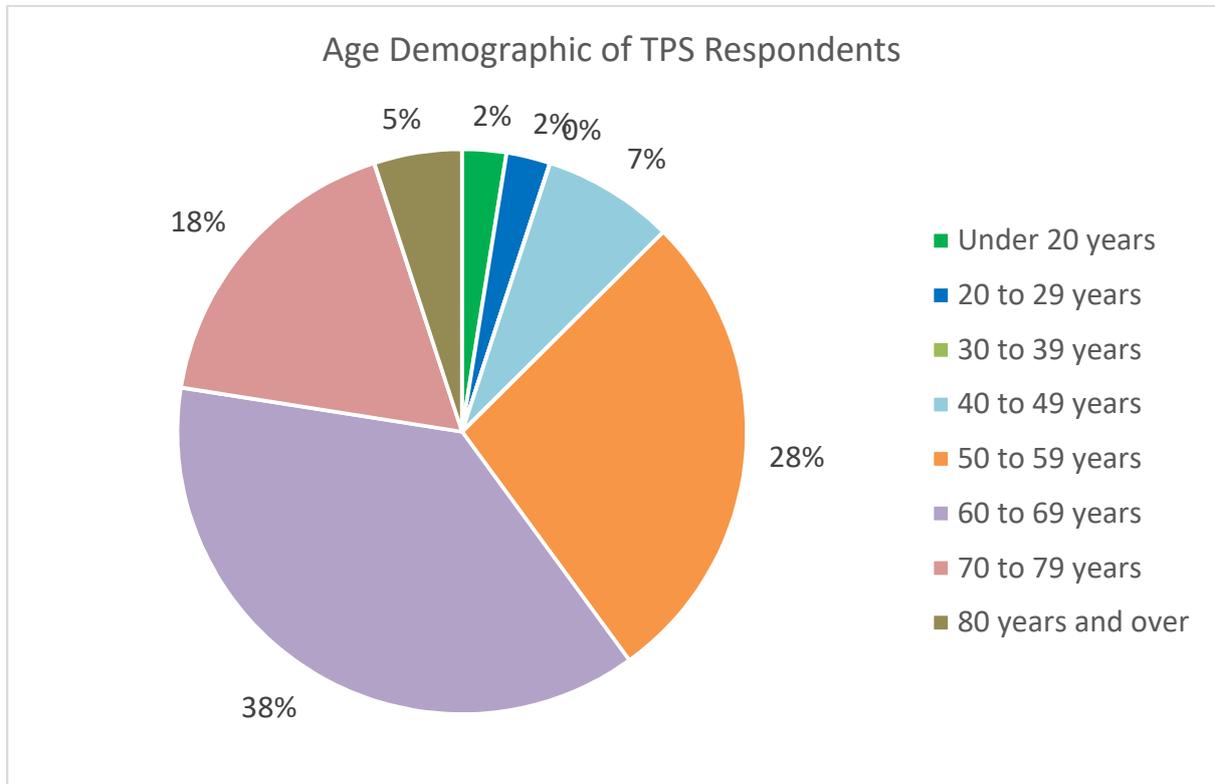
One comment suggested club training sessions be organised in a more structured as "I feel we jump from one subject to another". The senior author of this paper considers this is fair comment and is something for the TPS committee to consider.

Acknowledgements

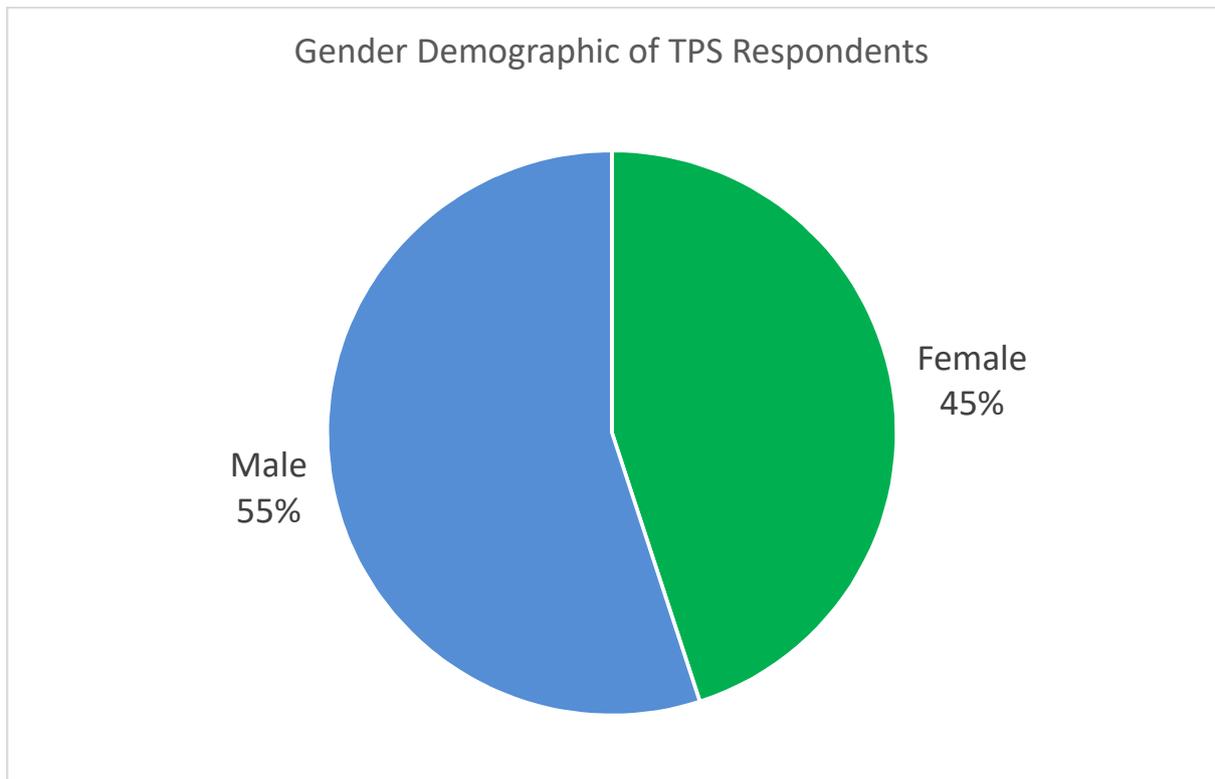
I wish to thank my co-author Graham Harris, without whose guidance and technical assistance this study would not have been possible, and also the members of TPS who completed the survey questions.

APPENDIX

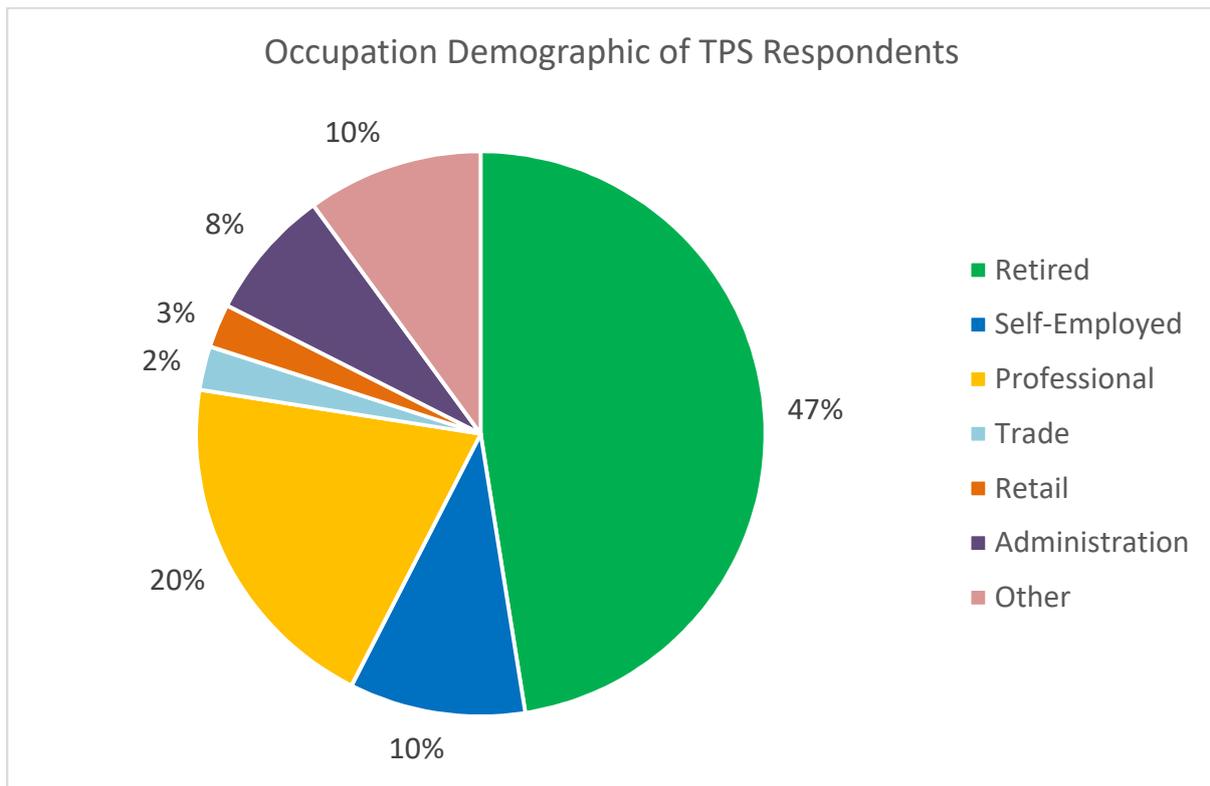
Question 1 - Please select your age group from the list



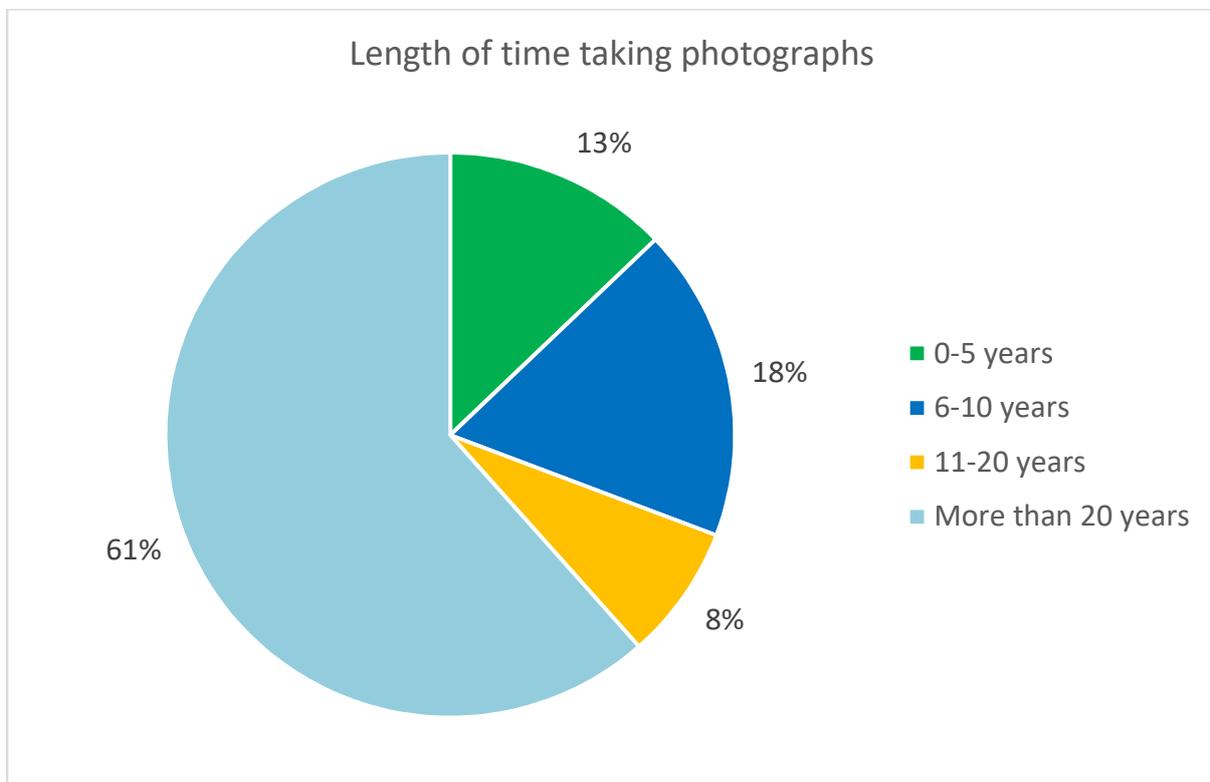
Question 2 – Please specify your gender



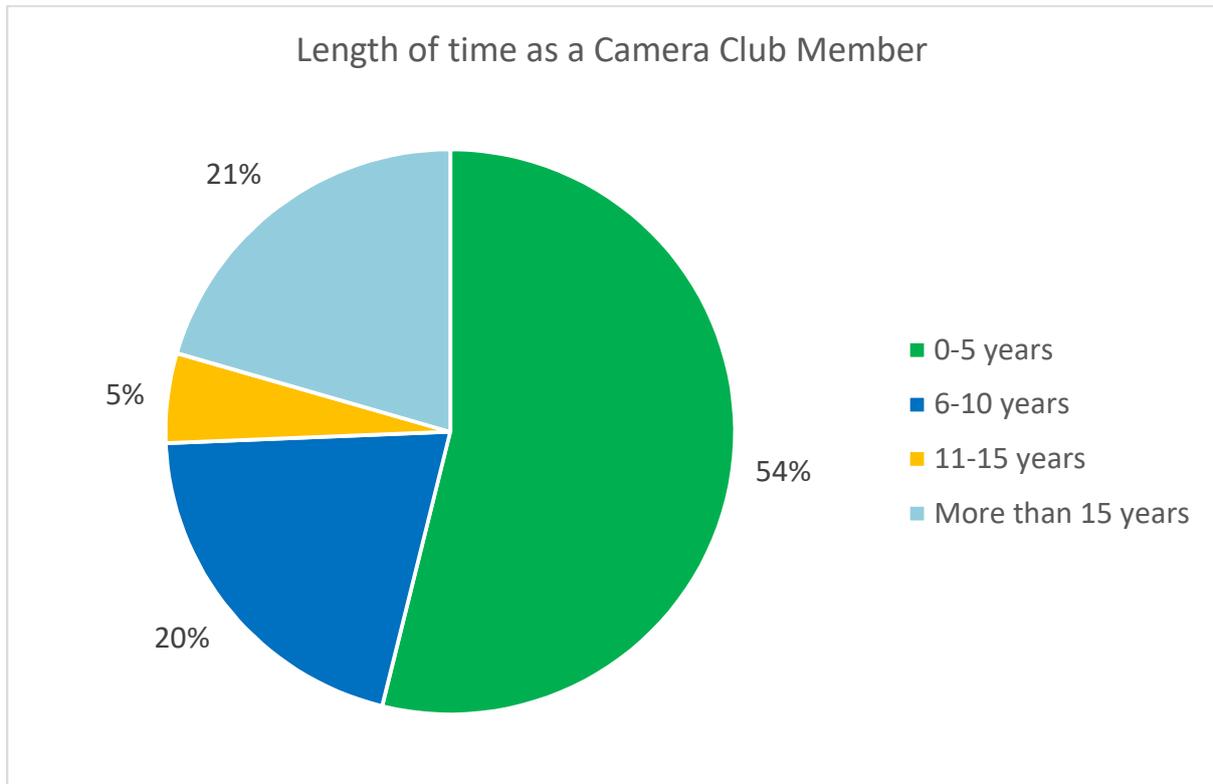
Question 3 – Current Occupation



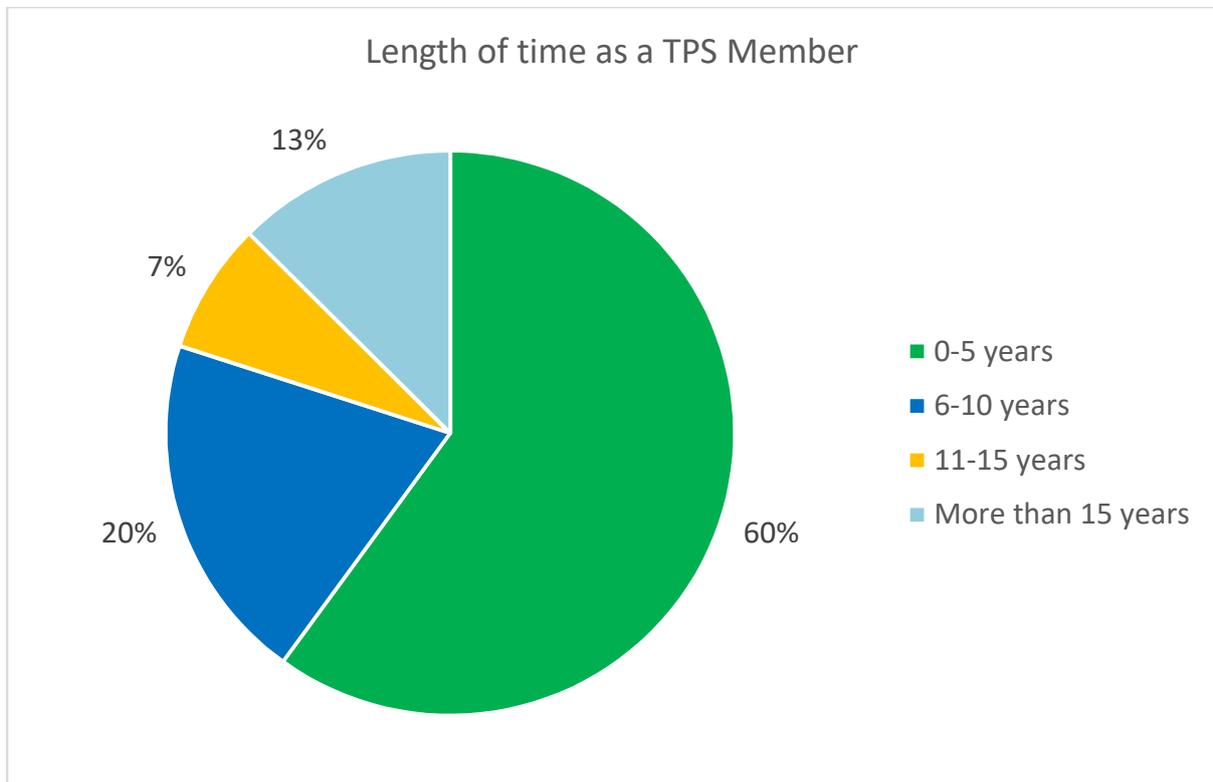
Question 4 – How long have you been taking photographs for



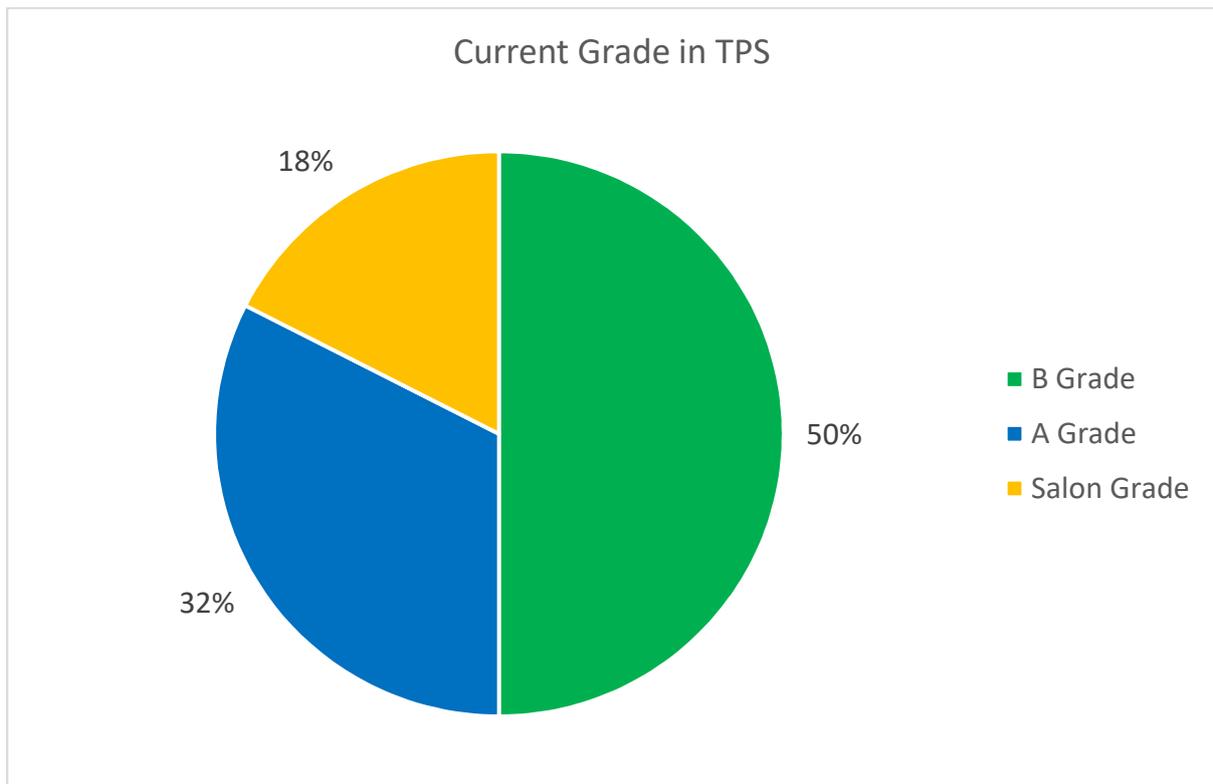
Question 5 - How many years have you been a member of a camera club?



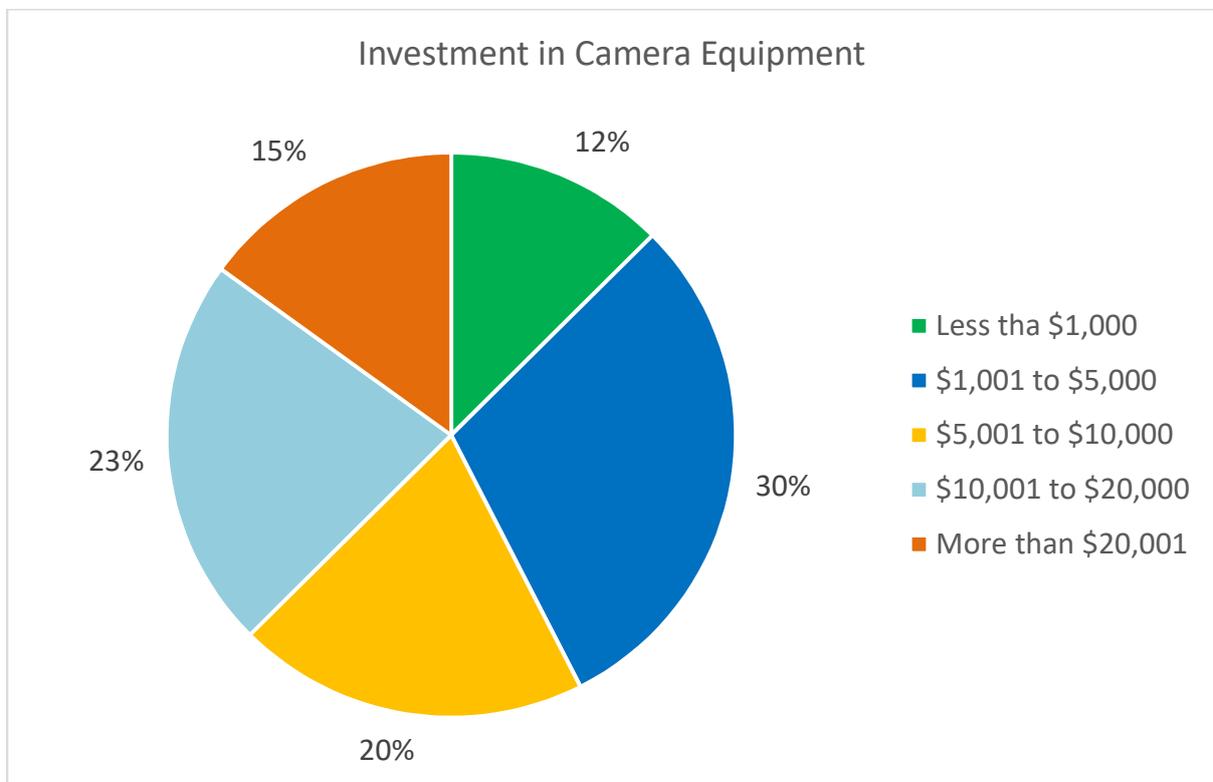
Question 6 - How many years have you been a member of TPS?



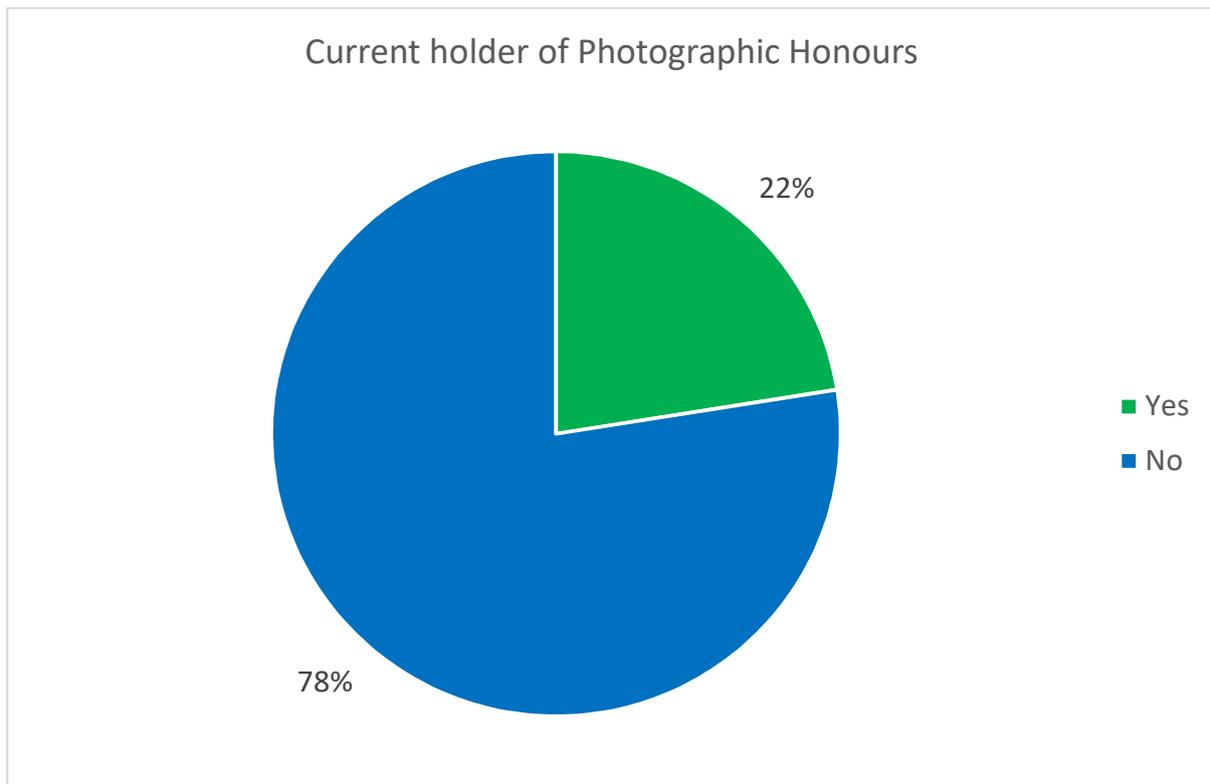
Question 7 - Please select the TPS Grade you are currently in



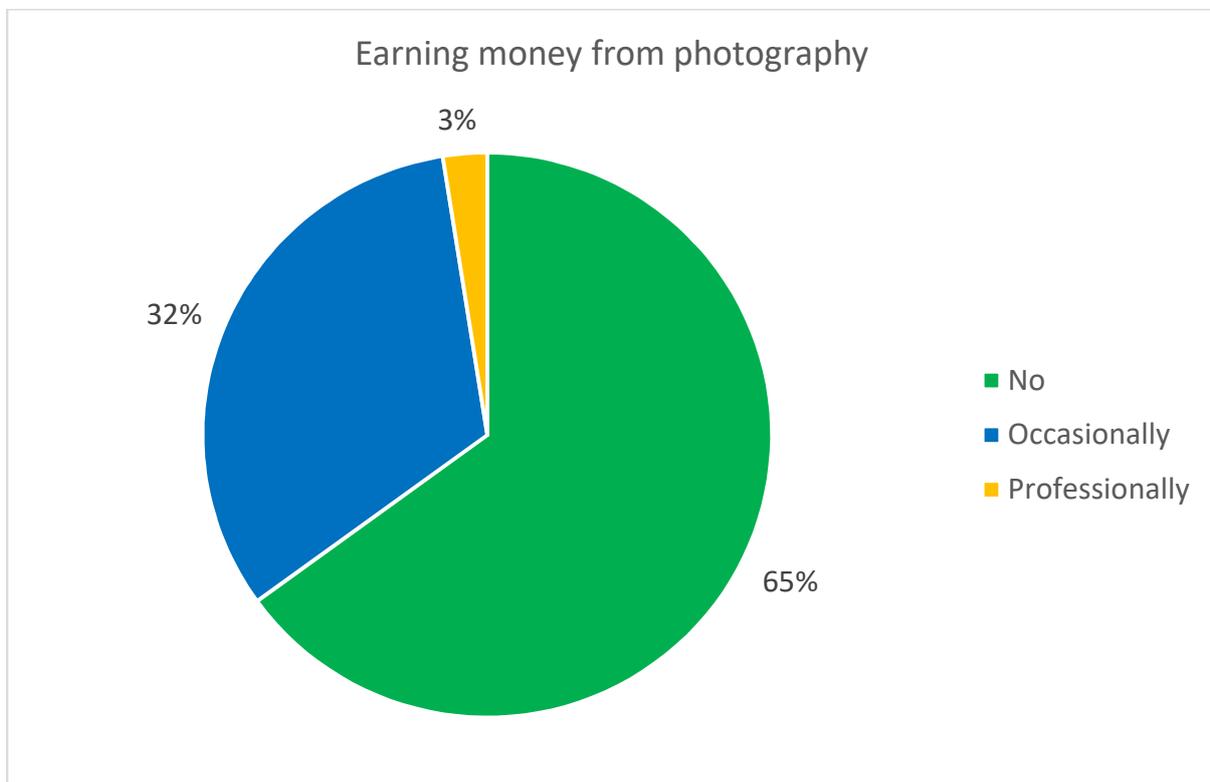
Question 8 - Could you please indicate your level of investment in photographic equipment



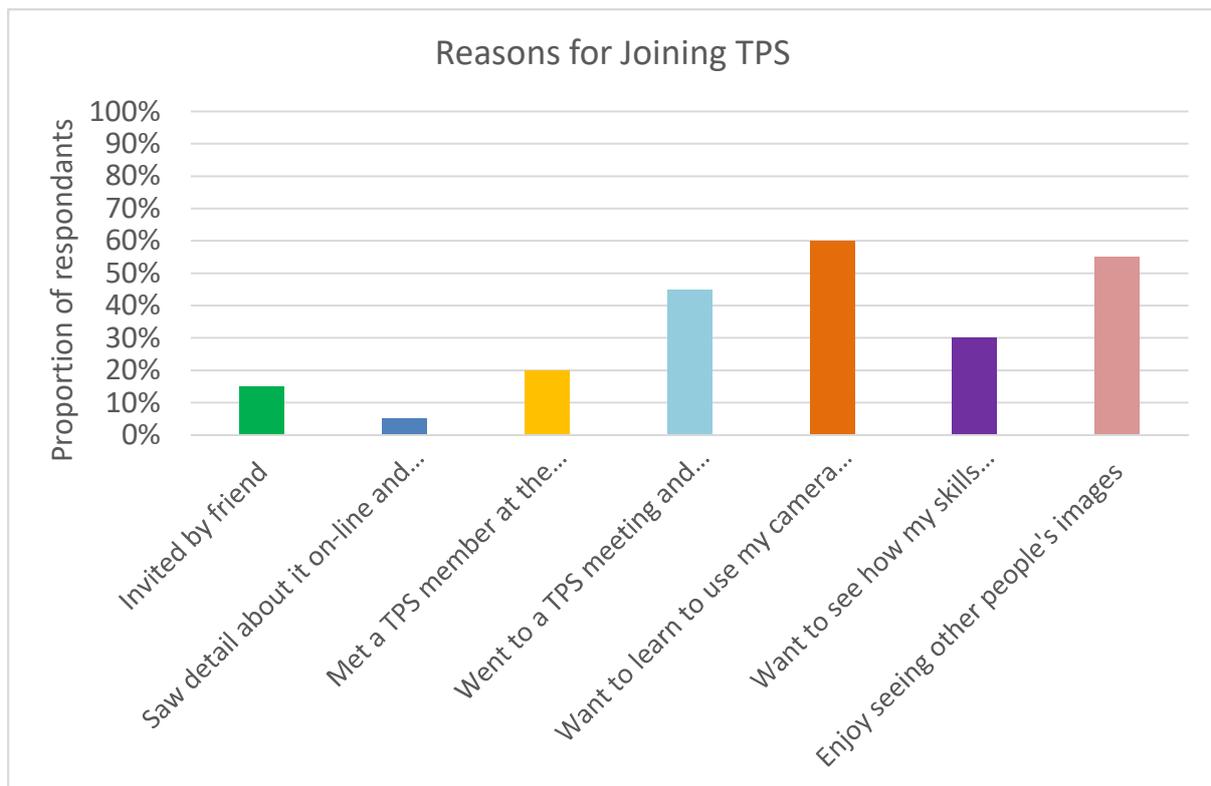
Question 9 - Have you any Photographic Honours at this time?



Question 10 - Do you earn money from your photography?



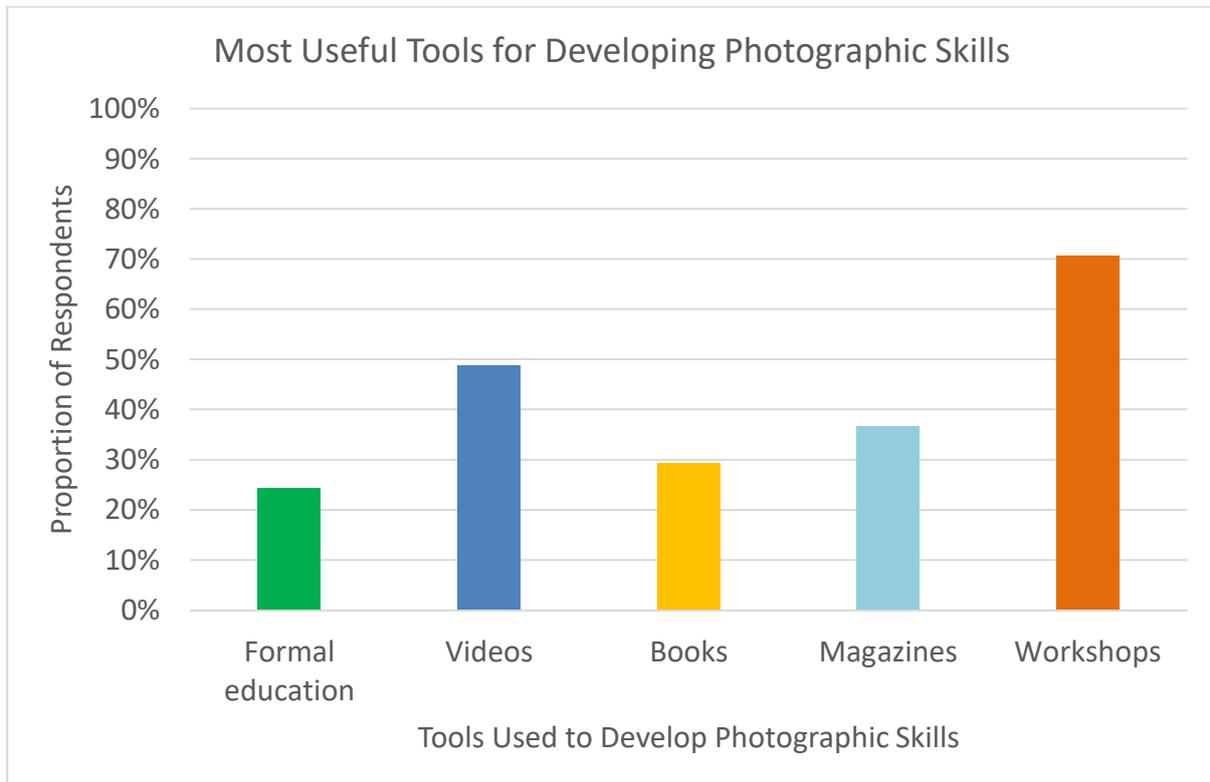
Question 11 - Please select your reasons for joining TPS (multiple choices can be selected)



Other

1. Opportunity to meet other people that have the same interest and enjoy outings together.
2. Met a TPS member through work and he told me about it. I was keen to see what it was about so attended my first meeting and have really enjoyed it since
3. Enjoy the company of other like-minded people. Have made many friends through the club.
4. Did the hobby course at TAFE in early 80's run by Alwyn Kucks and Jim Hope
5. Wanted to learn to take better photos.
6. Want to increase my image processing knowledge / To challenge me to get out more with my camera / Social outings / Meet other like-minded people.
7. Initially I was new to the Toowoomba area and wanted to meet other people with the same interest.
8. As I am working with people a lot I wanted an interest that didn't require a lot of talking and that I could put as much or as little time as I wished. This has been a good balance for me.
9. Want to improve my photography skills.
10. A friend told me I should learn more to take photos from good to better and that was through a camera club.
11. Decided with a friend that we would join together to develop our interest in photography.

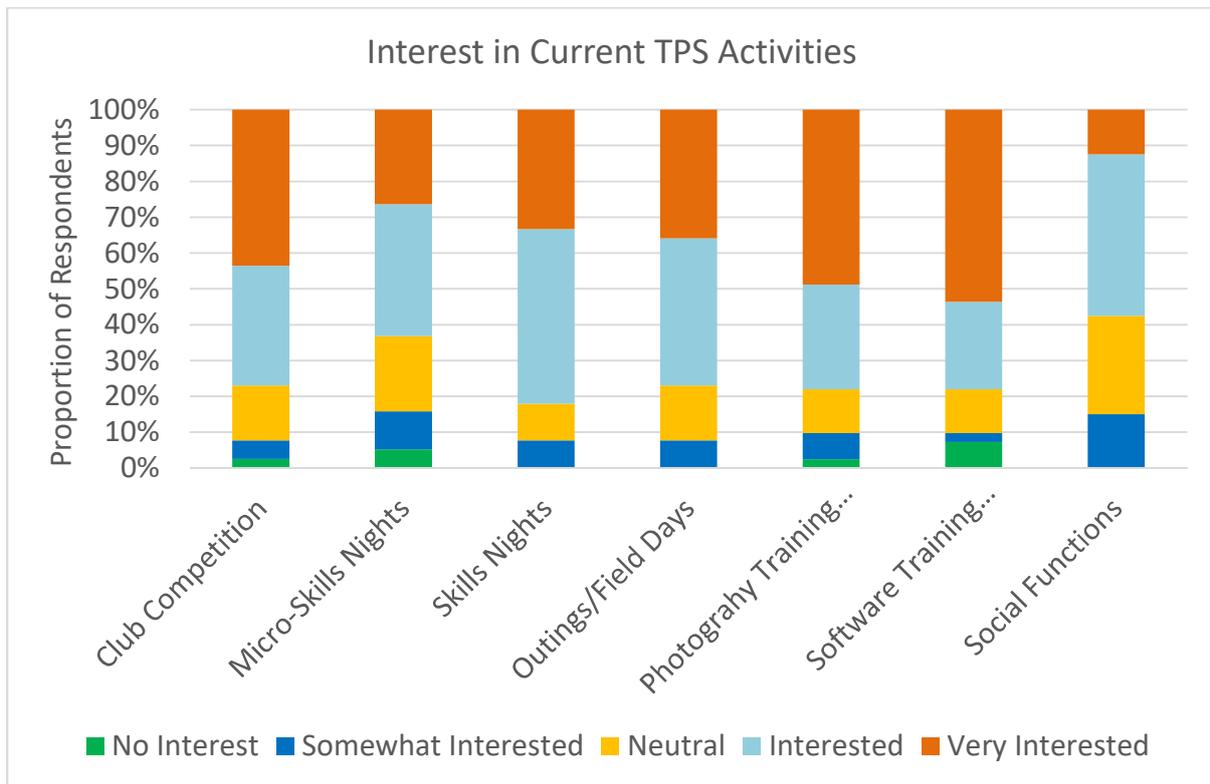
Question 12 - Which of the following have been most useful to you in developing your photographic skills (multiple choices can be selected)



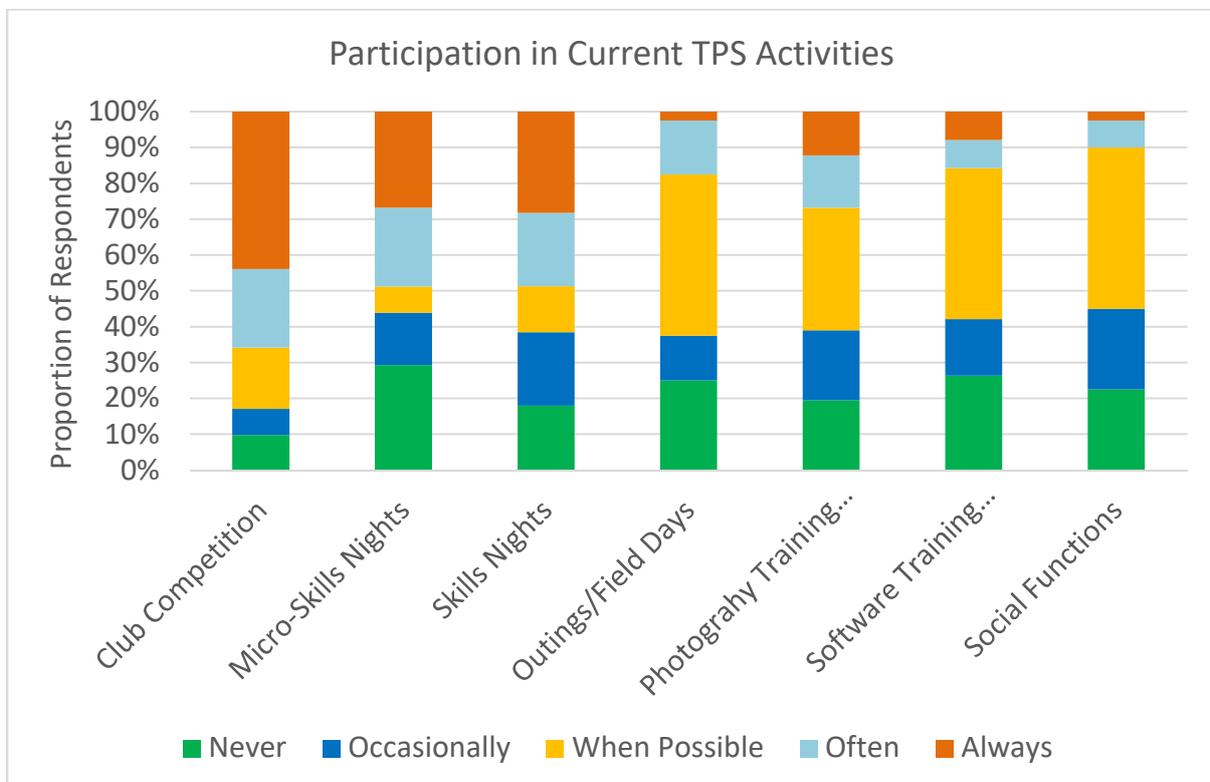
Other

1. Judges' comments.
2. Going to comp nights & Zoom meetings.
3. "Jilly's" type sessions Club night image judging.
4. TPS Competitions.
5. Comps and getting feedback.
6. Youtube.
7. Online courses and watching other photographers online.
8. TPS Skills nights / Talking to other members / Photography Image Challenges / Field trips (when attended).
9. Field Trips with other photographers.
10. Jilly's has been excellent for me. Having members input has been really valuable - thanks to all the work that is done.
11. The one on one feedback from competition and general CC has helped a great deal from the club but I think a mixture of education the club has supplied have all definitely played a part in my self-improvement as a photographer.
12. Also learning from others in conversation.
13. One-on-one with other photographers.

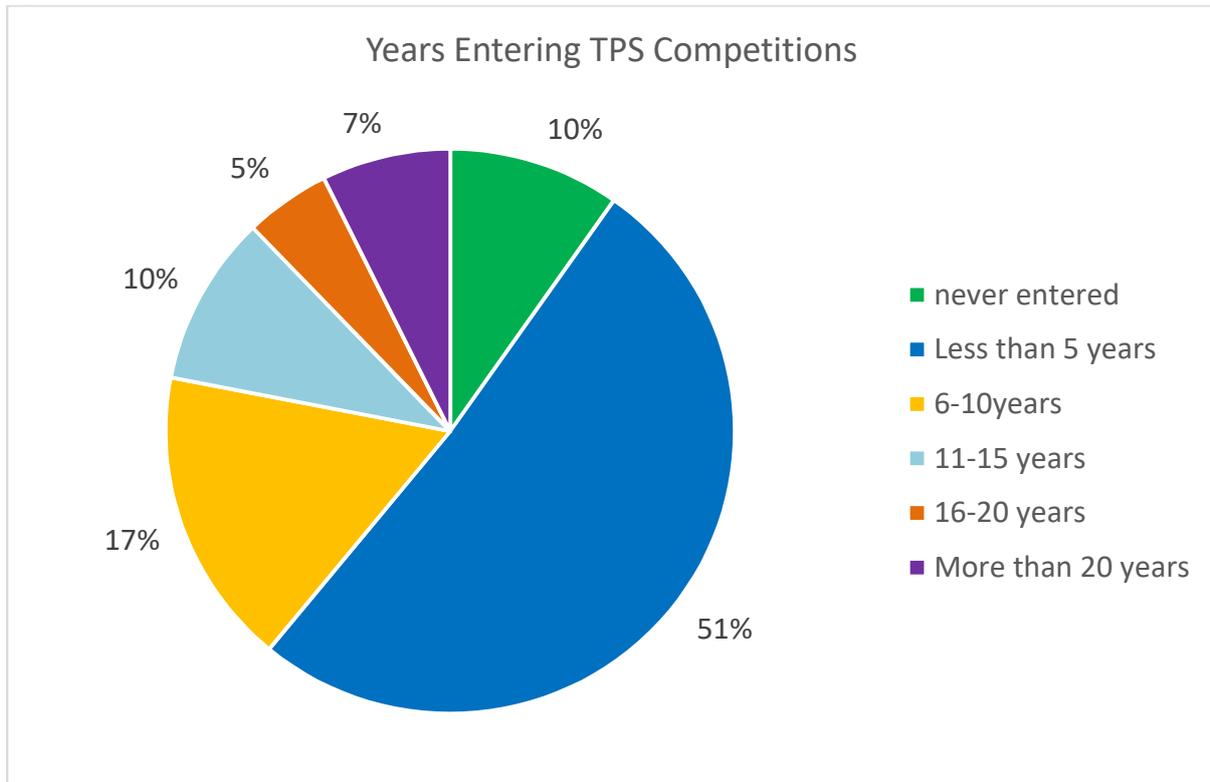
Question 13 - We would like to gauge your interest in current TPS activities



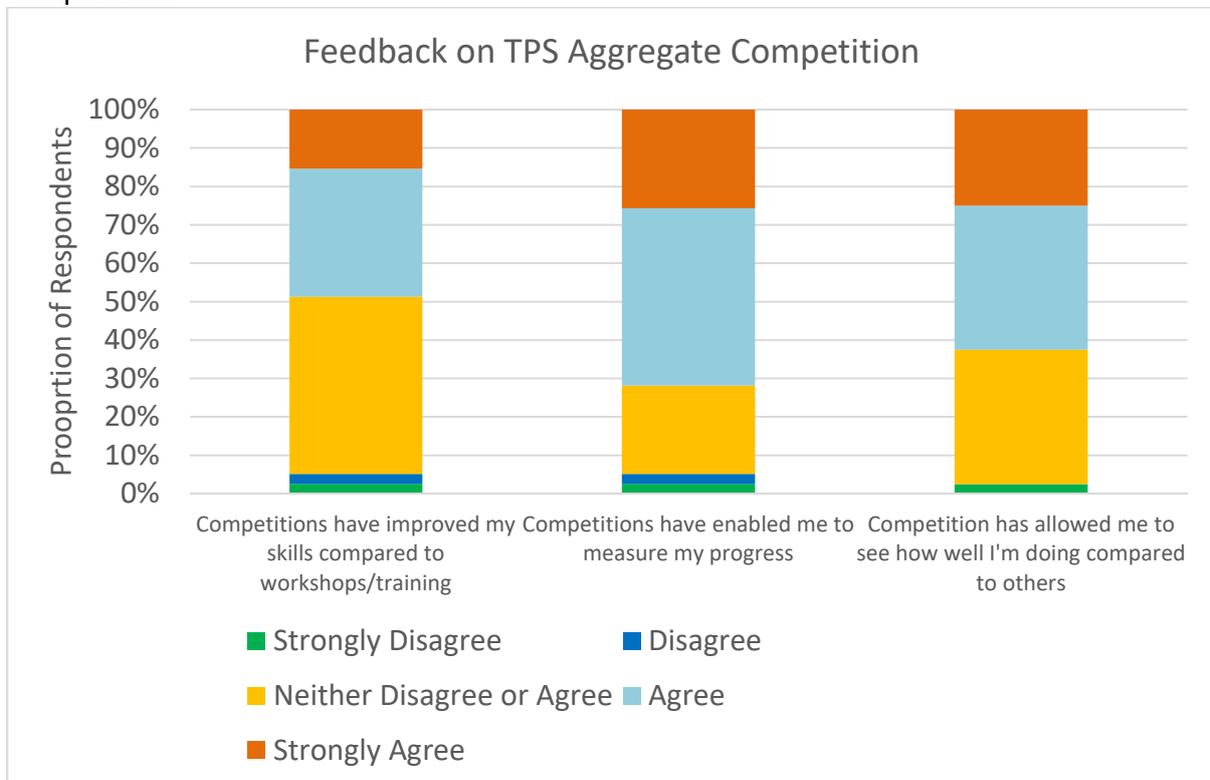
Question 14 - Can you please indicate your participation in Current TPS Activities



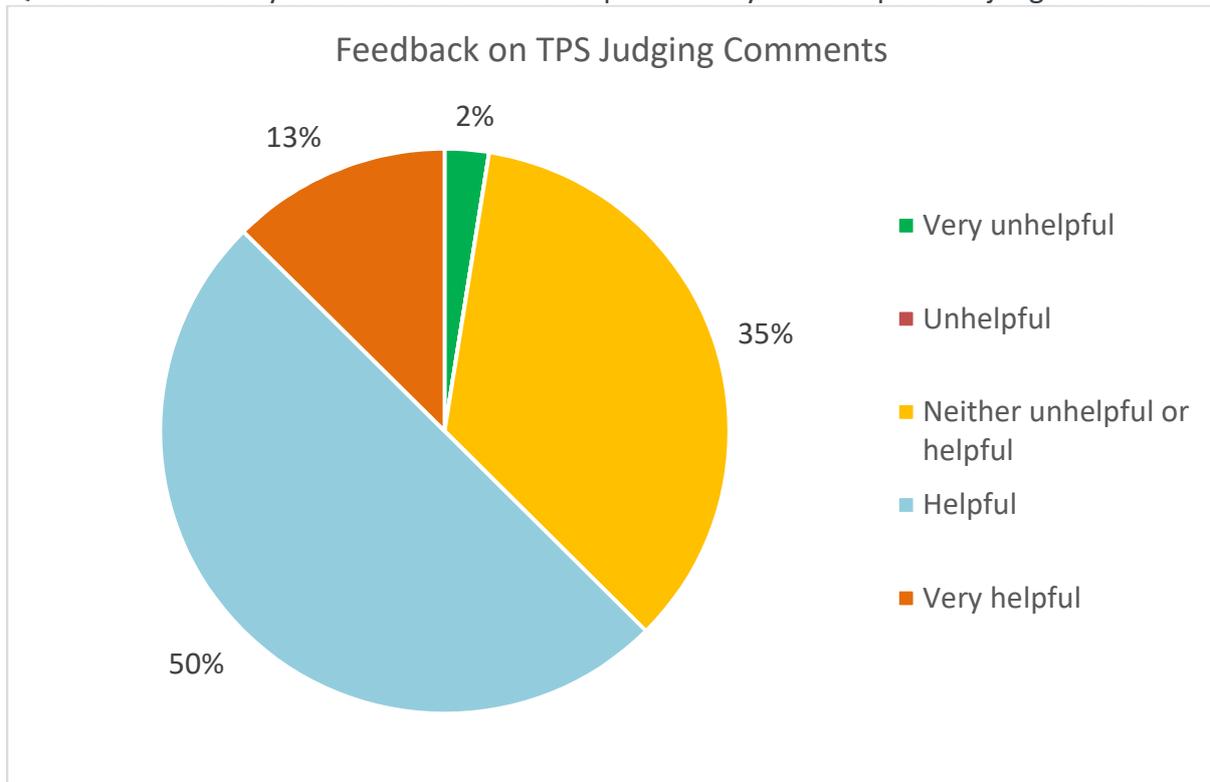
Question 15 - Can you please indicate how long you have been entering TPS competitions for?



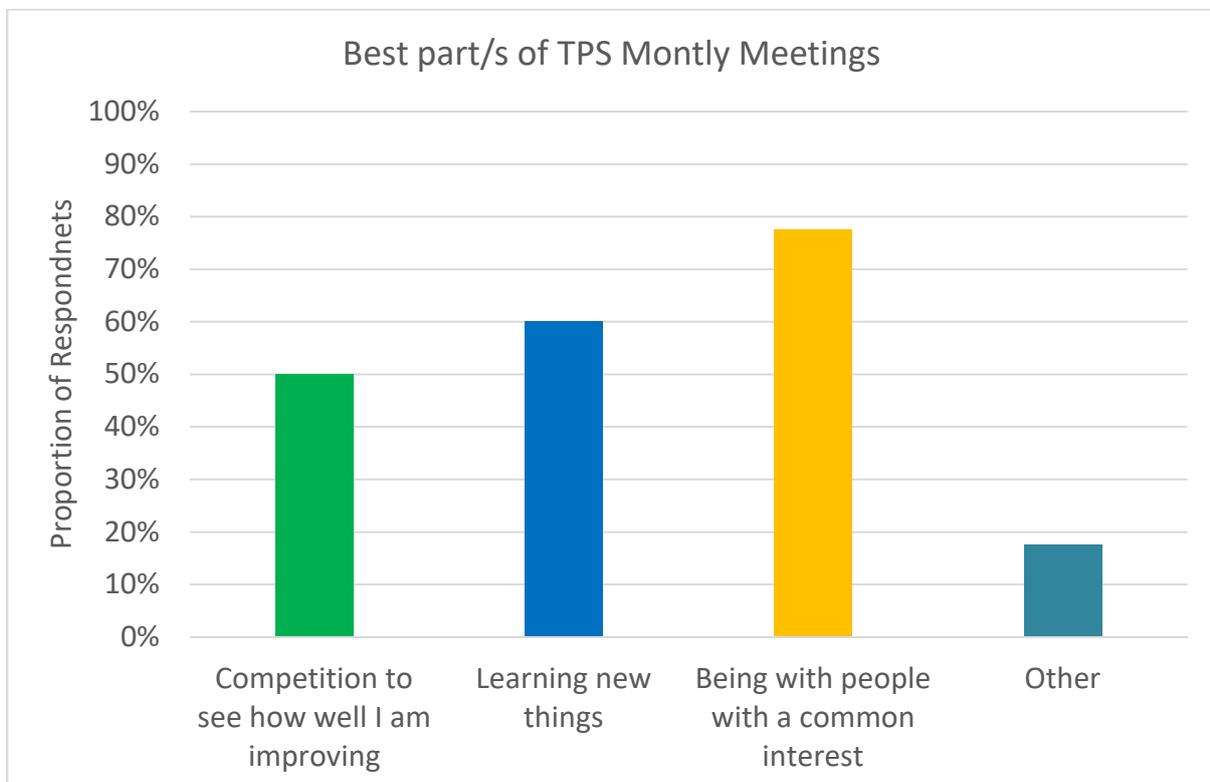
Question 16 - Please answer the following questions in relation to the monthly TPS competition.



Question 17 - Have you found the comments provided by TPS competition judges to be:



Question 18 - The best part/s about the monthly TPS meetings is



Other

1. Judges can be a 'mixed bag', particularly recently, I think. Whilst I may be disappointed with a judge's comment, if the comment relates more to a judge's personal preference, rather than a technical issue, I am now less likely to get too stressed about it, even if it may affect annual competition results.
1. I really enjoy the idea of developing sister relationships with other clubs overseas.
2. Seeing other members images and how these compare to my own images and asking lots of questions.
3. As a new member am unable to complete this question, however I look forward to "Learning New Things".
4. The judge's comments on all photographs of members are what has helped me most.
5. I would like to say 'learning new things'.
6. Judging is sometimes discouraging, but overall beneficial.

Question 19 - Do you have any suggestions on activities you would like TPS to organise to assist you in your photographic journey?

1. Need time to think about this one.
2. Drag Racing, Landscape & Flash.
3. Probably more workshops/training days even if it is with an outside person. Plus field days. I think it is a very good club and I enjoy being part of it. My skills have definitely improved. I am not always able to attend field days/training but think these are fantastic and hope they don't stop.
4. Would be good if field days could be held on weekends when I'm not working. Only joking but that's why I've hardly been attending any field days over the last 18 months and a good reason why I should retire. Since Tryg became President and started up Jilly's night and has been holding workshops there really isn't any reason to complain about there not being enough activities to help people with their photography. There's only so much that can be done in a society run by volunteers.
5. Would like to see some basic discussion about my photos, would need to be a separate night to the judging night. Often comments are limited to crop here or there or the degree of exposure. Overall I have done quite well but I still do not know very much. In addition to comments above I would like to see more discussion about composition and the emotional makeup of the photo. Probably two thirds of the club are very competent but I think that the other third struggle a little. New members would benefit from this. On certain nights I would be happy to retire to the back room with a beginners group. My interest is in good everyday photography with the emphasis on landscapes and people.
6. I am not great on ideas - but can critique what works for me and what doesn't! I have appreciated the quantity and quality of education by the club in recent years, and those initiatives. I have really appreciated Tryg's willingness to share his wealth of knowledge, but also acknowledge the hard work of all the committee. Thank you all very much.
7. Look at some workshops, guest speakers that could focus more on the artistic and philosophical aspects of photography. Opportunities perhaps to use the 'TPS brand'

and reputation to assist with members getting together to establish joint/group exhibitions. Perhaps after travel bans are lifted using the TPS influence to organise a deal with local travel companies to package up photo tours i.e. Kakadu, NZ. We have suitable members in the club and within the Facebook community to act as guides/advisors and essentially cut the middle man out that make organise photo tours very expensive.

8. Question 17 should have had a spot for " very helpful except when the judge is an airhead " e.g. telling me to remove the shed when so called shed is the blast wall at end of the runway.
9. More workshops on anything and everything.
10. Mentoring for honours.
11. Image processing is my weakness as there are so many too choose from so more workshops / skills nights / one on one training would greatly increase the standard of image processing. This would be welcomed by many of the TPS members.
12. Workshops on non-mainstream software and equipment, Luminar 4 and Gimp, Pentax and Olympus products. Some of us work on tight budgets and cannot always afford top of the range equipment.
13. How to workshops on other products, not necessarily mainstream. Luminar or Gimp for example, Olympus or Pentax.
14. Not at this stage.
15. As I have moved away from Toowoomba now, I am still a member. I like the people and the level of quality advice and teaching that is given. I have enjoyed the time during lockdown when the Club did teaching online. If this could become a permanent thing I would use it all the time.
16. I would like to see more outings or 'field days' and it would be helpful if someone actually took an interest and asked if I was right or need help with settings, etc. One on ones would be great at times too.
17. Having to be online has been wonderful. Would love to see 1-2 sessions per month continue.
18. Would love a presentation on preparing to print from the editing side of things such as format saving JPG or TIFF. Functions of choices when getting a photo ready to print. What type of finish would look best for what type of photos etc.
19. More practical or hands-on activities, more outings.
20. More workshops for post processing, Lightroom and Photoshop.
21. I joined the club to LEARN & currently it is doing that. Can this be done in a structured way as at times I feel we jump from one subject to another. Having mentors and mentees is a good idea. Photography is a personal journey and sometimes I'd like to understand what are my strengths and weaknesses and to build on the former to make the art form better as each of us has a genre which speaks to us more personally than another.