The importance of briefing a photographer, and tips on how to do this

The briefing process is crucial to getting the results you want, and its importance should not be underestimated.

When you book a photographer, the brief you supply will serve as a guide for the style and content of the photographs, therefore the more details you can provide in your brief, the better.

You will need to complete a Photography Service Briefing Form (available from http://staff.napier.ac.uk/exchange) for all photography service requests, and where possible a pre-meeting or telephone call is recommended so that we can discuss your requirements in more detail.

It may help to talk to the photographers before embarking on your project as they can advise on the best approach for you.

The most important things your photographer will need to know are:

WHO / WHAT?

The names (and job titles, if relevant) of the people to be photographed, or details of the event you wish them to cover. If you have a press release for your event or story, this is always very useful - the more insight the photographer has on the story you want to tell, the more effective they will be in getting a suitable shot.

Please also let us know if you would like any specific shots of presentations, speeches, particular people etc. Remember that your photographer will probably not know the people to be photographed and their relative significance, so if ‘that man in a grey suit’ is an important industry spokesperson or VIP, let the photographer know in advance so they can be sure to get a picture of them.

WHY?

The purpose of the photographs, eg are they for press use, a webpage, brochures, newsletters etc? If you can’t think of how they are going to be used, question whether you really need to have the photographs taken at all. The photography service is always in high demand across the whole University, so a photographer’s time is always precious.
WHERE?

Venue address and contact telephone number. For event photography, will the photographer need a special pass?

Obtaining a pleasing portrait depends very much on choosing a suitable location. For indoor portraits, large rooms are best, and windows are also preferable (but not essential). If the room has any features such as paintings, these can sometimes be used as an interesting backdrop.

If you will not be there on the day, ensure that the photographer is allocated another liaison person to help with logistics. For example, rounding up those to be photographed, sorting out any last minute issues etc. This will ensure the photography is carried out with the maximum efficiency and that your subjects are happy!

WHEN?

Please make sure that you get advice from your photographer about how long the photography is likely to take - it can take longer than you may think. Extra time should be allowed for portrait sessions, as this may involve setting up lights or moving furniture. This is vital for obtaining good results, and usually one hour is allocated just for this.

If the photography is taking place at an event, think about how this will be planned, so that it doesn’t disrupt the flow of the proceedings. Make the arrangements in advance with your photographer, as on the day you may have lots of other things to attend to.

You should also be clear about when you need the images to be supplied to you, so that the photographer can arrange to meet your time line. They generally ask for 3-5 working days for delivery of final disk however can work to tight deadlines for press etc when required – but only if it’s arranged in advance!

HOW?

Should the photographs reflect a particular style? Different styles of photography suit different purposes, for example accompanying a news story for the press, or for use in a particular publication. It can help the photographer if you have a look through magazines or webpages and find the type of picture you would like.

Portraits can be shot in many different ways, both formal and informal. Consider what would work best for your needs and let your photographer know.

Photography of speakers at events can give you poor results, ie with eyes downcast reading a script. If you wish to get photographs of a speaker in action, consider doing a ‘dummy’ shoot (without an audience) before or after the actual speech.

If the photographs are to be used online or in print, you may need a particular format or shape. For example, a banner at the top of a webpage and a full-page magazine spread require different approaches. If you have specific size or shape requirements – or if you
will want to place more images or text over the photograph afterwards – let your photographer know in advance.

Resolution and file format are also important – will your image be used in a small format online or blown up to create a large backdrop? Depending on what you need, the photographer can supply you with the image in a suitable file size and format.

Our top tips for getting the best from your photographer are:

1. Tell the photographer what you want the picture to say.

2. Be clear about how the image will be used.

3. Don’t assume digital photography is instant - agree with your photographer when you will get the final images.

4. Make sure you can get permission from the venue and the people involved before you start the booking process.