

BBC Data Journalism at BBC North West

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Data Journalism is a method used by journalists to filter large sets of data in order to create or support news stories and investigations. It can help the audience understand statistics more easily, and can bring stories to life with 'hard facts'. At the BBC, this is something that is being embraced

hugely by the data team in Birmingham. However the investigative Inside Out teams do not yet have data specialists in their production or research teams. Making the q-step internship of huge benefit to them.

Objectives

During my time at the BBC I worked on several different projects for both the Inside Out North West team, and the North West tonight team. I worked with producers who had initial story ideas, and helped to uncover the data that would bring the story to life. I also had plenty of time to do my own research and present proposals of investigative TV pieces that the two teams could produce.

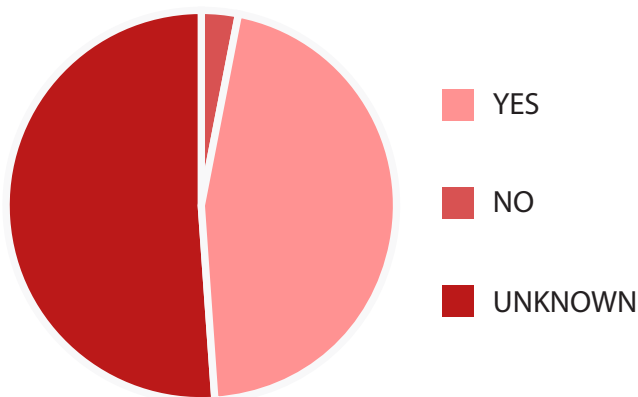
All of the stories were geographically specific – focused on the North West of England. However some stories were taken on by the national news

portals, and so I helped to collect more data, and re-analyse the data we had, to make it relevant to a national audience.

I was lucky enough to look at a range of different issues, from knife crime to asbestos in schools, and from mental health treatment waiting times to deaths in the Manchester canals.

It allowed me to not only put my data skills into practice, and see how it can be a hugely beneficial tool for journalism; but also develop my softer and journalistic skills. Making it an incredibly beneficial and enjoyable internship.

Asbestos presence in schools in the North West



Method

I mostly used Microsoft Excel for analysing the data that I collected. However, in order to present my findings to the producers for one particular project looking at waiting times for mental health treatment, I used QGIS in order to create a more visual technique.

For collecting the data, much of it was accessible via online data portals such as NHS digital and data.police. But, for much of the specific North West issues I looked at, I had to submit Freedom of Information Requests in order to get the relevant data. This was a skill that I have used again and again following my internship, and has been hugely worthwhile.

In order to present the data to my colleagues and inform their interviews and the editing of the stories and programmes, I displayed my findings in a headlines format, highlighting the key statements that would be useful for the story. But for more in-depth information, I worked with the graphics teams to create visual ways of making the data accessible for the audience. This allowed me to develop not just efficient ways of analysing data, but also effective ways of communicating it too.

Results and Conclusions

All of the stories I worked on featured in the Inside Out North West programmes which air weekly. The Asbestos story in particular was run by the Inside Out team, as well as being discuss on Radio Manchester, and being run on the BBC News webpage. From there, various print newspapers including the Daily Mirror and The Express ran the story, adapting the data that came from my Freedom of Information Requests.

As part of the online piece, we made the full list of schools across the whole of the North West and their asbestos status available for the public – so that parents could access this information and use it to hold their children's schools to account.

This, I was incredibly proud of, as it very much manifested the BBC's principles of educating and informing the public for the good of society. It may well have provided the information needed to lead to a change of events that improve the safety of children in the North West, and across the country.