

BBC North West Tonight: Statistical Research in Journalism

Julija Loginovic, BSoSc Politics and International Relations

BBC North West Tonight is a regional news programme for the North West of England. As the nature of journalism is becoming more empirical and statistical evidence is in demand by the audience, data analysis is increas-

ingly incorporated into the work of the media sector. Data journalism - supporting news by numbers and looking for stories in data patterns - is now one of the daily tasks of the BBC North West Tonight team.

Aims and Objectives

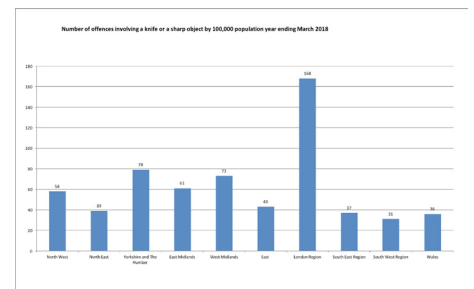
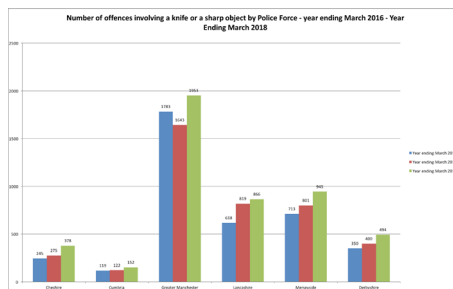
The focus of my internship at the BBC was on data journalism – an intersection between traditional journalism and empirical analysis. Throughout my time at the BBC I worked on a variety of different projects. The data I engaged with was used to support and generate various news stories. Aims of some of the highlighted projects included:

- Finding the recent changes in the level of knife crime in the North West of England and comparing the levels and varieties of knife crime across local authorities and counties.
- Exploring trends in spending on children's services by local authorities across the North West of England since 2011.

- Looking into school closures across the UK and investigating how the emergence of free schools since 2011 is linked to the increase in the number of private school closures

Other projects I worked on included research on IVF provision, crime proceeds, school funding, bin collections, and more.

A lot of the tasks I worked on required not just data analysis skills, but also working with people – collecting primary data, setting up interviews, looking for qualitative information that would support empirical data. The reporters also took me out on sites to assist in filming and showed me how the news is edited. Thus, the internship at the BBC demanded not just quantitative skills, but some work of a traditional journalist.



Methods

Throughout my internship I used Microsoft Excel to analyse the data. Most commonly used techniques included filtering, sorting, pivot tables and calculating averages and percentage changes. I also had to use graphs quite a lot to visually represent the findings. In many projects primary data was used – which had to be collected by me directly through speaking to local authorities, police forces and other people who were able to provide me with the information.

Also, submitting Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in order to get unpublished information was a crucial part of my work at the BBC. In my research I also used databases provided by ONS and NGOs and statistical reports by local authorities, Home Office and audit agencies. Due to the regional nature of the news produced at North West Tonight, some knowledge of the local landscape and geography as well as some acquaintance with local newspapers proved to be useful.

Additionally, while at the BBC I had a chance to attend a conference on data journalism organised by the Salford Shared Data Unit. The event was centred around the promising future and the importance of data journalism and it introduced us to some useful quantitative and data collection techniques which I found very relevant as a Q-step intern.

Results

The Q-step internship with the North West Tonight contributed greatly to my personal development and provided me with a range of new skills:

- Practical skills - I learned to use Microsoft Excel effectively and professionally. I also became better at representing large amounts of data in tables and graphs in a clear, engaging manner. I learned to quickly find the necessary data as well as noticing interesting patterns and stories in unfamiliar datasets. Submitting FOI requests is now also something that I will be confident doing in future.
- Communication skills – the internship was great at improving my ability to communicate ideas clearly and concisely both in written and spoken form. After being exposed to different people and constantly having to ask for information over the phone, I feel much more confident around people and not afraid to voice my questions and ideas.
- Independence and critical outlook – learning to be self-sufficient and to make independent decisions is another benefit that the internship has brought. I learned to independently solve problems in a real workplace environment while in the process learning the skills I need.
- Other benefits – I learned a lot about unspoken workplace ethics, met amazing new people and became good at time-management as the nature of work at the BBC required all the tasks to be completed within limited time. The internship also deepened my interest in statistics and even inspired me to learn a bit of Python.