

Statistical excellence in journalism awards: 2018 winners

The annual prize ceremony for the RSS statistical excellence in journalism awards was established in 2007 to celebrate journalists who use statistics to question, analyse and investigate the issues that affect society. For 2018, thanks to sponsorship from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the awards comprised four categories: Explaining the facts, Data visualisation, Investigative journalism and Regional journalism.

Explaining the facts

This category is for stories which take a current issue or statistic already published and enable greater public understanding through effective explanation. ESRC executive chair, Professor Jennifer Rubin, presented the awards in this category.

Winner: Tom Chivers for BuzzFeed - 'There's Yet Another Study Out About Drinking and Health – Here's What You Need To Know'

The judges thought this was an excellent article which tried to make sense of extremely confusing guidelines surrounding alcohol consumption, examining the J-curve and topics such as causality and risk. Tom's article helped the general public navigate their way through all the complicated questions they should be asking when presented with such guidelines.

Highly Commended: Wesley Stephenson and the More or Less team at BBC Radio 4 - 'Who Pays Tax?'

This piece carefully examined how different party policies on tax would directly affect individuals. Trying to communicate such involved numbers over the radio is no easy task, but More or Less managed to do this brilliantly and made these policies digestible.

Highly Commended: Aleksandra Wisniewska, Billy Ehrenberg-Shannon and Sarah Gordon at the Financial Times - 'UK Gender Pay Gap reporting' (paywall)

The gender pay gap is a topic that has attracted huge attention over the last 12 months or so and this collection of articles effectively explained differences in using the mean or median when considering such outcomes. In addition to explaining statistical properties of different measures, these articles also highlighted dubious results and identified companies which may have been providing false information.

Data Visualisation

This is for stories which include data visualisation to aid explanation of the statistics being presented.

Winner: Matt Daniels for The Pudding – 'The words that are most "Hip Hop"'

This was a really fun visualisation examining the popularity of certain words in the hip hop genre, which had some very sophisticated analyses going on behind it. It used a number of visualisations to explain thoroughly the advanced statistical ideas that were considered.

Highly Commended: Samuel Dodge, Jeremy Scott Diamond, Andre Tartar at Bloomberg - 'Pain or Promise: Where Brexit Matters Most'

This article presented a range of different visualisations addressing various topics surrounding Brexit, examining which parts of the country and industries may be most affected by 'leave'. This article took a lot of complicated information and used graphics to communicate it effectively.

Investigative Journalism

This category celebrates stories which include previously unpublished statistics, either through unpublished data that have been sourced and analysed by the journalist or new analysis of existing data.

Winner: The investigations team (Cahal Milmo, Aasma Day, Don Mort, Chris Burn, Ruby Kitchen, Paul Lynch, Ben Fishwick, Philip Bradfield and Deborah Punshon) at i/Johnston Press for 'Where Next for the NHS/The Great NHS Gamble'

This collection of articles was the result of a huge amount of data collection and statistical analysis. The articles examined which NHS hospitals were facing closure, identified funding gaps, looked at cancelled operations, A&E closures and maternity units, amongst a whole host of other topics. The sheer amount of work that went into this collection of articles is to be seriously commended.

Highly Commended: Leo Hickman and Rosamund Pearce for The Carbon Brief – 'Mapped: How UK foreign aid is spent on climate change'

Using Freedom of Information requests, these journalists were able to identify how foreign aid is spent on climate change related projects and in particular, the countries in which the UK has spent most of its foreign aid. This was a really in-depth examination which allowed taxpayers to see exactly how and where their contributions are being spent.

Regional Journalism

This fourth category rewards excellent stories from local or regional journalists which include statistics relating to a local matter, or champion the role of statistics in society.

Winner: BBC Yorkshire Impact Team with the BBC data team and the Open Data Institute (Phil Bodmer, Thomas Forth, Ruth Green, Charles Heslett, Nicola Hudson, Nassos Stylianou), 'House prices: Have they actually gone up where you live?'

This piece of work questioned the common narrative that house prices are rising without exception throughout the entirety of the UK. An extensive data collection exercise and analysis showed that there are, in fact, many parts of the UK that have seen a reduction in house prices over the last 10 years. An interactive postcode searcher also allowed the public to examine house prices in their own area.

Highly Commended: Jonathan Brown for ITV Calendar 'Blue light mental health investigation' (also [here](#))

Through Freedom of Information requests, Jonathan was able to uncover the real impact of mental health issues within the emergency services. These articles raised awareness of mental health and examined mental health absences, as well as the support currently and historically offered to staff working within such crucial services.