

Statistical excellence in journalism – 2012 winners

The 2012 awards recognise work first published or broadcast in the period 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011.

Work published in print

First prize – Chris Giles

'£12bn hole threatens plans to cut the deficit', and the accompanying analysis article, 'Growth picture clouded by spare capacity doubts' – Financial Times, 19 September 2011

The judges praised the use of statistical methods to challenge prevailing thinking on fiscal policy, obtaining the methodology used by the Office for Budget Responsibility and redoing the calculations with new data. The article set out its argument in a readily understandable way. In particular, with a discussion of methodologically complicated issues that had not omitted important aspects, including making clear the inevitable uncertainties of such analyses.

Chris Giles also won an award for statistical excellence in journalism in 2008.

Special commendation – Chris Cook

'White Plight' – Financial Times, 26 April 2011

The judges commended this article for adopting a statistical approach, which included a bespoke methodology, to examine a politically charged topic – how geography and ethnicity are linked to educational advantage and thereby impact social mobility. This statistics-based journalism had gone on to prompt both subsequent media interest and had led, among its impacts, to an invitation to attend a seminar with the Deputy Prime Minister.

Work published online

First prize – Simon Rogers

The Guardian's Datablog of which he is the editor, with particular reference to entries on the riots in UK towns and cities in August 2011, the US Occupy movement and the Nato and UK operations in Libya.

The judges felt that these entries, and Datablog generally, not only used statistics to address questions of political importance but challenged assertions and behaviours of policy makers in a well-argued way. The site makes full use of the web-based format including interactive maps, animations and videos, and both makes the data behind the stories readily accessible to users of the site and engages with them.

Broadcast

First prize – a collaboration of Fergus Walsh (correspondent), David Gordon (graphic designer) Tony Dolce (lead camera), and Anna-Marie Lever (producer)

'Population – the world at 7 billion' – BBC, 26 October 2011

The judges were impressed at how the piece, at just under three minutes, had met the challenge of effective reporting within the time constraints television news broadcasting. A strong presentation had been made of the nature and context of the issues involved in population measurement and prediction, including important explanations of uncertainty. The graphics had been used well both to engage the viewer and, particularly, to explain statistical issues such as higher and lower estimates.

Special commendation – BBC Radio 4's More or Less team

Broadcast investigating media reporting of the number of women becoming pregnant while using the contraceptive implant, Implanon.

The judges praised the way in which the programme had set out its message both clearly and simply, alerting the public to problems that arise when numbers are not reported sufficiently in context. The programme had had impact, highlighting deficiencies in other media reporting and showing that statistical concepts can be explained effectively for a general audience. The judges commended the way in which this had been achieved within the constraints of radio broadcasting.

The More or Less team also won the award in the broadcast category in 2010 and commended in 2011.