**Winners announced at the 2019 RSS Statistical Excellence Awards**

The winners of the 2019 Royal Statistical Society (RSS) Statistical Excellence Awards have been announced this evening, during a ceremony hosted by RSS President, Professor Deborah Ashby, in London.

The awards celebrate the most outstanding contributions to statistics and data over the past year. The Statistical Excellence in Journalism Awards have been presented to a range of journalists, from outlets such as Channel 4, Eastern Daily Press and The Washington Post, amongst others. Government statisticians competed for the Campion Award for Excellence in Official Statistics, whilst younger statisticians were also commended for their work, through the Award for Excellence in Early Career Writing. Homelessness was a recurrent theme this evening, as the Campion and Investigative Journalism winners both focused their work on this most important issue.

Dev Virdee, chair of the Campion judging panel, commented: “The entries for this award get better and better as standards across official statistics rise, and some that we couldn't even shortlist this year could well have won a few years ago. The winners and runners-up submitted outstanding research, projects and initiatives which made wonderful use of available data. The best statistics were produced to meet users' needs, whilst they were also presented in accessible and creative ways.”

Professor Jen Rogers, RSS’s Vice-President for External Affairs, and chair of the Journalism judging panel said: "The Journalism Awards honour the outstanding contributions of journalists who are using statistics to question, analyse and investigate issues that affect society. This year we have seen entries that tackle topics such as NHS targets, Brexit and its effect on the economy, racial diversity, homeless deaths, and child carers. Every year I am impressed with how journalists use statistics to engage audiences from all backgrounds and this year's entries have particularly exceeded my expectations."

**The full list of winners and runners-up:**

**Campion Award for Excellence in Official Statistics**

*Awarded in partnership with the* [*UK Statistics Authority*](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/)*, with* [*Civil Service World*](https://www.civilserviceworld.com/) *as media partner. This award was presented by UK Deputy National Statistician Iain Bell.*

**Winner: Health Analysis and Life Events Team, *Office for National Statistics.*** The judging panel believe that ‘[Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2013 to 2017](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2013to2017)’ is a brilliant example of tackling an issue of grave social concern, and provides real evidence on the extent and characteristics of a serious issue. It was also recognised that the entry has received a wonderful citation from users and is a fantastic example of what can be done to make sense of available data by working with relevant organisations. This entry was nominated by The Guardian and CNN journalist, Patrick Greenfield.

**1st Runner-up: Health Analysis Team, *Office for National Statistics****.* The judging panel thought this team’s [estimates of suicides among higher education students in England and Wales](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/estimatingsuicideamonghighereducationstudentsenglandandwalesexperimentalstatistics/2018-06-25) was an excellent example of demonstrating the strength of linkage between two complex data sources, of a user-led approach and tackling a sensitive topic. It has effectively informed actions and yields important new insights.

**2nd Runner-up: Scottish Household Survey Team, Scottish Government.**

The judging panel commented that the [Scottish Household Survey](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-key-findings-2017/) made great use of [data comics](https://shs.theapsgroup.scot/) to bring the findings to life in a very accessible way, delivering a better user-experience. It was also recognised as a notable example of addressing survey response decline by showing respondents how their information is used.

**Statistical Excellence in Journalism**

*Sponsored by the* [*Economic and Social Research Council*](https://esrc.ukri.org/)*, with four categories: Explaining the Facts, Data Visualisation, Investigative Journalism and Regional Journalism.*

**Explaining the Facts**

*ESRC Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Professor Paul Nightingale, presented the awards in this category.*

**Winner: Ruth Alexander and Tim Harford, *BBC Radio 4’s ‘More or Less’.*** Following a BBC questionnaire finding that 1 in 5 children are carers, [‘More or Less’ investigated further](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p06ltl7b) and found that the way ‘carer’ had been defined was responsible for this surprisingly high figure. Their ‘Child Carers’ segment discussed that examples used to illustrate a statistic are rarely representative of the statistic as a whole. Judges were very impressed by how they sensitively questioned the statistic, whilst not querying the importance of this very serious topic.

**Highly Commended: Helia Ebrahimi, *Channel 4 News***. The judges felt that Channel 4 News’ Economics Correspondent has had a crucial role in demystifying economics for the public. She has reported on the impact of Brexit on the UK’s economy, including its effects on inflation, living standards, migration, and the public finances – as well as on President Trump’s claims about his management of the US economy. Helia has also revealed striking figures about the role consumer debt can play in suicide. She picks out illuminating statistics that enable a greater understanding of complex topics within economics.

**Highly Commended: Katherine Sellgren, Hannah Richardson, Dominic Bailey, Tom Calver, Ros Anning, Lilly Huynh, Lucy Rodgers, William Dahlgreen, John Walton, Bella Hurrell and Robert Cuffe, *BBC News.*** This piece of work, focusing on [the achievement gap between England's rich and poor pupils](https://www.bbc.com/news/education-46541454), suggests that it will take 50 years to close the gap between them. They projected forward the rate of improvement seen over the last seven years to put into context the Department for Education’s positive headlines about improvement. The judges thought this article gave full explanations of statistics relating to school performance and were impressed by the inclusion of graphics to aid understanding of the issues being addressed and a heat map showing the best and worst areas in England.

**Regional Journalism**

**Winner: Geraldine Scott, *Eastern Daily Press***. The judges thought that ‘[Ambulance targets missed in first four months of new system](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/health/eeast-arp-new-figures-1-5457765)’ was an excellent piece of work which demonstrated how ambulance targets were being missed in the East of England following the introduction of new measures. Using interactive graphics, information was communicated effectively and showed changes over time. The data was also fully explained with context, providing great accessibility to the reader.

**Highly Commended: Abbie Jones, *BBC North West Tonight***. This work sourced new data to allow residents in the North West to fully understand how much green belt land they were losing to new housing developments. Judges were impressed as Abbie Jones questioned councils when she felt that the data they had provided was inaccurate and armed the audience with information that had previously been withheld from them.

**Data Visualisation**

**Winner:** **Aaron Williams and​ Armand Emamdjomeh, *Washington Post***. The judges were impressed that ‘[America is more diverse than ever - but still segregated](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/segregation-us-cities/?utm_term=.f034c12f8d10)’ managed to communicate a lot of complex ethnicity and diversity data in a very powerful way. The article also offered explanations alongside each of the detailed maps, exploring the reasons behind racial distribution in different parts of the USA. Readers were also offered the opportunity to explore racial integration in their own city.

**Highly Commended:** **Alan Smith, Nic Fildes, David Blood, Max Harlow,​Caroline Nevitt and Ændrew Rininsland​, *Financial Times.*** ‘[Broadband speed map reveals Britain’s new digital divide](https://app.ft.com/cms/s/0c140ac4-6d64-11e8-92d3-6c13e5c92914.html)’ produced some excellent graphics exploring UK broadband provision. The judges commended the analysis as it showed that, in general, urban areas enjoy faster broadband than rural, but that metropolitan centres often have even worse broadband speeds than many rural areas. Outer areas of cities generally enjoy the best speeds. A fully interactive map allows readers to assess broadband speeds in their own areas and see how they compare to the rest of the UK.

**Investigative Journalism**

**Winner: Maeve McClenaghan, Charles Boutaud and the​ Bureau Local network, ​ *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.*** The judges thought ‘[Dying Homeless](https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2018-04-23/dying-homeless)’ was a truly outstanding piece of investigative journalism. After learning that no official body counted the number of homeless people who had died, the Bureau compiled a first-of-its-kind database which lists the names of the deceased and tells their stories. A network of more than 30 journalists across the country investigated homeless deaths in their areas, attending funerals and inquests, interviewing family members, collecting coroners’ reports and shadowing homeless outreach teams. They started a call for an official body to log these deaths and, thanks to #makethemcount, the ONS produced their first official data of homeless deaths in December.

**Highly Commended: Niamh McIntyre and Diane Taylor, *The Guardian***. This work, focused on the [treatment of immigrants in Britain](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/10/revealed-sick-tortured-immigrants-locked-up-for-months-in-britain), investigated life inside immigration detention centres; prison-like spaces often run by private companies. Collaborating with 15 separate organisations, a ‘snapshot day’ database was built, receiving information on 188 individuals. This data showed that children were being held in adult detention centres and more than half were defined as an adult at risk, meaning they should have been detained only in extreme cases. Despite detention supposedly only being for short periods before an individual is deported, 84% had not yet been given removal directions and detainees were held for a median of four months.

**Highly Commended: Dr Faye Kirkland, *BBC News***. ‘[A and E stats may have to be recalculated](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-42775218)’ highlighted how changes to the way NHS trusts were reporting their A&E performance figures gave the impression that they were performing better than they were and showing artificial improvements when making comparisons to earlier figures. Through involving the UK Statistics Authority, the judges commended Faye as she was successful in forcing NHS England to recalculate their figures, resulting in greater transparency for the public.

**Award for Excellence in Early Career Writing**

*Awarded by* [*Significance*](https://www.significancemagazine.com/) *magazine and the RSS Young Statisticians Section.*

**Winner: Liam Shaw (*University of Oxford*) and Luke Shaw (*Office for National Statistics*).** The judges were bowled over by Shaw and Shaw’s article. It tells the story of the analysis by the actuary R.D. Clarke who studied the apparent clustering of V-1 missile strikes on London during World War Two. His findings showed the pattern of hits to be consistent with what would be expected if the V-1s fell randomly, following a Poisson distribution – rather than being precision-guided. The story then shifts to the modern day, to describe Shaw and Shaw’s attempt to repeat and extend Clarke’s analysis using current tools like Google Maps and bootstrap sampling.

The judges found the story to be gripping and well-told – at times almost like a mystery novel in its approach. It wraps a history lesson around an introduction to probability, while showcasing the tools available to the modern data scientist and data analyst. As an added bonus, the authors have made their Google Map bomb maps publicly accessible, so others can investigate and interrogate. Their article will be published in October’s issue of *Significance*.

**-ends-**

**Notes to editors**

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS), founded in 1834, is one of the world's most distinguished and renowned statistical societies. It is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. It has approximately 10,000 members worldwide.

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