

WORK PLACEMENT AT ISER

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Example of Research Question

HOW DO PERCENTAGES OF INTERVIEWS PER DAY OF WEEK DIFFER ACROSS DIFFERENT (DEMOGRAPHIC) GROUPS?

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

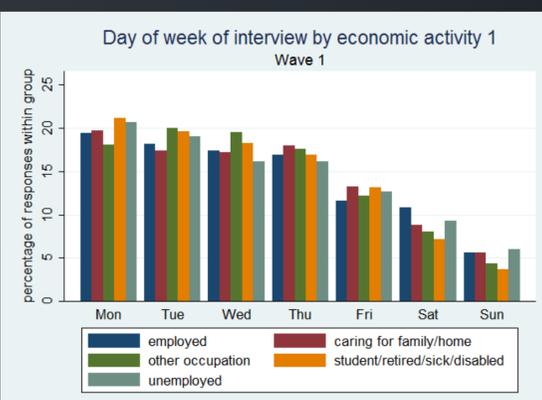
STAFF

ISER is an institute which is divided into three divisions. As a part of the Understanding Society division, I mostly came in contact with those working on the creation and analysis of this longitudinal survey. Due to staff being from various academic backgrounds, everyone had something else to contribute, which made for a very multi-faceted research environment. This was helpful for two reasons:

- (1) Whenever I had a problem with something, I could count on being able to find someone who could help me with it.
- (2) If I struggled with something, colleagues would take some of the stress off me by reminding me that we all have our strengths and weaknesses, but that those do not have to stop us from doing work.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Due to flexible work hours, I was able to choose the hours I worked. Throughout the placement, I aimed to work 7-8 hours per day. During those hours I had to manage my time with regard to taking regular breaks so as not to overwork myself, as well as to get my tasks done in time. From colleagues at the institute, I learned that for staff it can be a challenge to balance survey work and individual research; survey work needs to be finished by certain deadlines, whereas research has to be made time for in between that.



ABSTRACT

In September 2016, I absolved a work placement at the **Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER)** at the University of Essex. Supervised by Professor Peter Lynn,

I worked with Stata to analyse Understanding Society data from Waves 1-5. Main tasks included creating graphs to show the distribution of interviews across weekdays, a logistic regression of interviews on Sundays, and the summary of those in a report. Through the placement, I gained insight into the working environment at an institute, improved my data analysis skills, and was encouraged to do further study of quantitative methods at postgraduate level.

TASKS

FIRST TASK

My first and main task consisted of four parts:

- (1) Graphing individual weekday responses to Understanding Society Waves 1-5 within different sample subgroups
- (2) Presentation of preliminary findings to the Methods Research Group
- (3) Modelling Sunday responses using logistic regression
- (4) Writing up my findings in a report

SECOND TASK

In my second task, I transformed date variables in order to calculate the elapsed days between the specific sample issue and the interview date for a household.

Example of Output

```
/*using Understanding Society data Wave 1 household responses*/
. generate a_monthmv = a_month
. recode a_monthmv -9=.a -8=.a -7=.a -2=.a -1=.a
(a_monthmv: 0 changes made)
. gen a_intdate = mdy(a_intdatem, a_intdated, a_intdatey)
(1 missing value generated)
. label variable a_intdate "date interview with this household was started"
. generate a_monthm = a_monthmv
. recode a_monthm 1=111 13=111 2=222 14=222 3=333 15=333 4=444 16=444
5=555 17=555 6=666 18=666 7=777 19=777 8=888 20=888 9=999 21=999 10=1010
22=1010 11=1111 23=1111 12=1212 24=1212
(a_monthm: 30169 changes made)
. recode a_monthm 111=1 222=2 333=3 444=4 555=5 666=6 777=7 888=8 999=9
1010=10 1111=11 1212=12
(a_monthm: 30169 changes made)
. label variable a_monthm "month of sample issue spec."
. generate a_monthy = a_monthmv
. replace a_monthy = 2009 if (a_month<13)
(15,908 real changes made)
. replace a_monthy = 2010 if (a_month>12)
(14,261 real changes made)
. label variable a_monthy "year of sample issue"
. sum a_intdated if a_month=1 & a_intdatem=1

Variable | Obs Mean Std. Dev. Min Max
-----|-----
a_intdated | 972 18.08745 6.283351 8 31

. generate a_monthld = 8
. gen a_monthdate1 = mdy(a_monthm, a_monthld, a_monthy)
. label variable a_monthdate1 "date of sample 1 issue"
. /*saving modified data set*/
```

SKILLS I GAINED

DATA ANALYSIS

During my placement, I gained the following important skills regarding data analysis:

- (1) Working with sensitive data
- (2) Accessing data from the UK Data Service
- (3) Transforming and creating variables
- (4) Labelling variables and values thoroughly and consistently
- (5) Graphing and regressing
- (6) Keeping detailed do-files of my work

The above skills were of importance, as they gave others the ability to look at my analysis afterwards and recreate my steps/ check my work for mistakes.

Although time consuming at first, after a while I developed a routine for working with the data, which gave me more flexibility for analysing the data in different ways afterwards.

ORGANISING/ STRUCTURING WORK

In terms of organisation and structure of my workday, the following three challenges arose during my placement:

- (1) Rationing my workload so as not to exhaust my energy too quickly
- (2) Being persistent in the search for an answer
- (3) Balancing data analysis and write-up

REPORT WRITING

Writing a report that summarises my research findings gave me several ideas of how to also improve my academic essays:

- (1) Being selective
- (2) Writing non-technical summaries and abstracts
- (3) Writing for an audience which is not exclusively academic

Example of Research Question

WHICH ARE SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE A RESPONDENT'S LIKELIHOOD OF BEING INTERVIEWED ON A SUNDAY?

OUTLOOK

Concluding, my work placement at ISER gave me confidence for my final undergraduate year and my near future. Firstly, it helped me realise what I need to do in practice in order to produce a relevant piece of research for my undergraduate dissertation. The skills I gained in data analysis will also be helpful for a possible further degree. I now have an idea of what post-

graduate taught or research study would include, and how I would have to approach the tasks I would be faced with in its course. As a result, after the completion of my placement, my ambition to go into a career in research has become more certain.