The University of Manchester Five years of Q-Step

Nora Chabach, BASS Sociology and Quantitative Methods

Objectives

The objective of this internship was to analyse where past Q-Step interns from the University of Manchester went next and in how far the internship played a role in their choices and achievements. The plan was to first find out everything there is to know about the Q-Step programme, then to analyse all the gathered data on the previous Q-Step interns from the past 5 years and then finally to get a bigger picture about the impact of the internship through interviewing 10 previous Q-Step interns. We (my supervisors and I) decided to focus mainly on BASS students as those were the initial target of Q-Step. All of this was in the end presented in a written report about Q-Step at the University of Manchester.

Methodology and Findings

The plan for this project was always to use a mixed methods approach. However, I was given a lot of freedom on how I wanted to go about it, which allowed me to try out many different approaches, such as different programmes, that were decided on in meetings with my supervisors.

I started with researching the Q-Step programme in order to have a better picture on what could be interesting when analysing the existing data on the previous interns, as well as when conducting the interviews.

In my second week I took an "Introduction to Social Network Analysis" course at the Manchester Methods Summer School, using UCINET, as we were initially considering using SNA for this project. However, I decided that this approach didn't fit our objectives.

I used Excel to analyse the data that existed on the 195 previous University of Manchester students that completed a Q-Step internship between 2014 and 2018. I organized the data, as well as completed it, where information was missing, and created tables and graphs. I had information on the interns' gender, the degree programme they were on and which sector their internship was in and analysed the relations between those variables. I found that 70% of all Manchester Q-Step interns were female. Moreover, the majority of students that had completed an internship were BASS students, with the second biggest group being Politics and IR students. The organisations that offered the Q-Step internships belonged to many different sectors, with Universities and the National Government Departments being the biggest providers. When looking at the relations between the variables I found that the distribution of gender according to degree, as well as sector, followed the distribution of gender overall. No obvious trend was visible when looking at the relationships between degree and sector.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of what impact Q-Step may have on graduate careers, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 former BASS students from the University of Manchester that completed a Q-Step internship from 2015 to 2018. The interviews lasted on average 50 minutes. Four interviews were conducted face-to-face, while the other six interviews took place over Skype. The questions followed five sections: before, during, and after the intern's internship, the intern's career path and some overall questions about the Q-Step programme.

After the interviews had been transcribed by a Transcription Service, I first used a software called Natural Language Processing (NLP) in Python to analyse the transcripts. This allowed me to pre-process the text and do exploratory analysis, which, for example, allowed me to look for specific words, find the most frequently used words, as well as to create word maps and so on.

However, I decided that this wasn't the right approach to get the most information out of the interviews, which is why I ended up doing thematic analysis using NVIVO. I presented all the findings in a report, that also includes the findings from the research of the Q-Step programme and data analysis. Overall the interviews showed that all the interviewees had very positive experiences conducting a Q-Step internship and learned many valuable quantitative as well as interpersonal skills, that have been very useful to them since. All of them have said that the internship enormously enhanced their CV, made them competitive on the job market and therefore generally played a big role in them getting their first job after university.
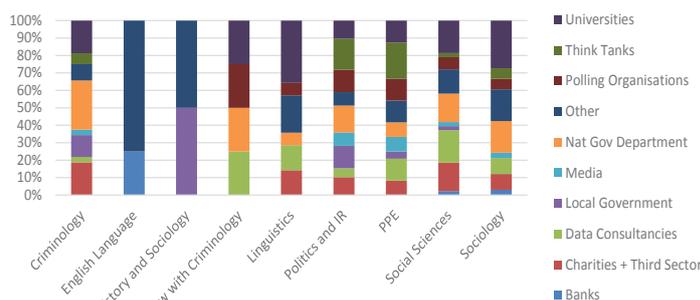
Distribution of interns' sector according to degree (overall)

Quotes from the interviews

"I think it's been really useful for me to have some quantitative experience and I think a lot of the jobs I've been applying for have been, like, "We need someone with a high numerate element in their degree," which I've been, kind of, going under with having a statistics part in my degree. I think there's a lot of interviews I wouldn't have got if I didn't have that."

Hannah Cunningham (2015)

"I think that my CV wouldn't have been nearly as good if I didn't have that internship and I don't think I would have got the job which I got without having that internship."

Jesse Coleman (2016)

"[…] skills-wise I learned a lot more than I knew before, I learned a lot more about data analysis, I learned a lot more about research in general, I just learned so much. It gave me this invaluable experience and empowered me to pursue it."

Viktoriya Trifonova (2016)

"I do think that Q-Step is the singular best thing that could have happened to me at the university."

Zvi Oduba (2018)