Above: There weren't many opportunities for photos, but this was taken from a behind-scenes tour.

House of Commons Library
Local elections 2021: data collection and analysis

Sam Pilling
Third Year Politics and Modern History Student, The University of Manchester.

I undertook my data fellowship internship with the House of Commons Library, specifically in the Social and General Statistics section. This internship filled a much needed quantitative gap in my resume and opened my eyes to the world of statistical research as well as behind the scenes of Westminster.

The overarching project I worked on was 'Local elections data collection and analysis'. Alongside this, my manager wanted me to benefit as much as possible form this experience and after my first day in the Westminster office I was given a handful of projects to begin progressing on.

The Commons Library is the House of Commons impartial research department that provides unbiased research for parliament, MPs, and the public.

I was initially quite apprehensive about what my role would entail, almost expecting the world on my shoulders due to the importance of the centrality of any Westminster role. However, meeting my supervisor and the team quelled my fears.

I spent the first week getting to grips with the role, physically in Westminster one day a week and the rest was spent virtually at my family home. This worked out well as the cost of commuting to central London was quite expensive, even with the work experience bursary from the University helped to cover the costs of train fare! I was given a parliamentary pass and was able to get into areas closed off to the public, such as Portcullis House, Parliament (including the roof!), and the Commons Library office on Tothill Street. It was really an experience to be working in the political heart of the country, I hope it is a glimpse of the future!

By Sam Pilling, Richard Cracknell

18 August 2021

UK Election Statistics: 1918-2021: A Century of Elections

From the get go my supervisors (Richard & Elise) were incredibly supportive and invested plenty of time into me, in order to catch me up to Commons library standards. My skills in Excel developed dramatically, and I was given training in how to write and design publications, charts, graphics and tables to Commons library standards. This has translated to good practice outside of the internship as well.

I managed to meet a few other members of the team, mostly on Microsoft Teams which became the norm during these 8 weeks, but a few in person as well who offered great advice and guidance.

From the beginning I really enjoyed working with data, something I had very limited previous practical experience in. Undertaking this political research and data analysis under the backdrop of the House of Commons was particularly interesting and exciting. My quantitative and professional skills were developing by the day.

The work I did was quite varied, making it difficult to cover all the areas I got involved in. Therefore, I will focus on the projects that I am most proud of and felt were most beneficial to my quantitative development.

Firstly, publishing the Commons Briefing Paper (CBP9282) on the 'Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament elections 2021'. This was a significant test of my resolve, handling data, quantitative ability and researching skills (not forgetting patience with Excel!). Publishing this felt like crossing an important boundary. This project involved creating a new CBP to cover the Welsh elections that had been recently held, an update to the previous 2016 CBP.

The second project was similar but more advanced now that I had basic skills under my belt. This involved updating the 'UK Election Statistics: 1918-2019: A Century of Elections' research briefing paper (CBP7529) to include up to 2021. This took until my final week and was a real moment of satisfaction printing this off in office in its finished state. Being able to work on this project forced me to increase my knowledge and analytical ability surrounding electoral data, which I accomplished. This project even attracted some attention from previously retired academics!

Finally, was the overarching 'Local Elections 2021: data collection and analysis' project. This sadly was not finished in time due to local councils unable to send the necessary electoral data by the end of my internship. However, this was a project of significant time investment that saw me, and several others, collect, organise (and even begin analysing through R program) local elections 2021 data.

This local elections data included quantitative data on each candidate of every ward, of every district, in every county, in England. This was a momentous task and saw interaction with psephological academics. This project, alongside the others, helped to greatly improve my Excel, writing and analysing ability, as well as my work professionalism from having to contact hosts of local councils.

Finally, throughout the internship I was able to assist with (and even answer myself on occasion) MPs enquiries, which were often urgent. These varied wildly in their topic, a notable one was on the trucking haulage shortages, another was on the usage of 3G pitches. This required me to research and compile relevant data to help advise advise the MP who could then further use that information.

There were difficulties during this internship. Interacting virtually and experiencing working from home was a motivational challenge at times. Thankfully the team and my supervisors were brilliant and very supportive. In hindsight I wish I had more interaction with the team, however coronavirus really put a stop to this and is something I couldn't possibly change!

I really developed on this internship, completing so many different tasks and improving myself quantitatively and professionally. I plan to apply for a full-time role after University, having felt at home in the Westminster offices performing this role.

Most memorable moments:
- Publishing the Welsh Elections briefing paper halfway into the internship. Represented crossing many hurdles in my quantitative and qualitative analysis/researching ability.
- Answering an MPs enquiry on trucking haulage numbers under time constraints. This required a new approach compared to what I was used to.
- Building relationships with those few Commons staff I was able to meet. Social connections are always the highlights!
- Succesfully getting the internship! I was elated to find out and it made my summer. Initially I thought I wouldn't have any success (as my course was didn't meet the specific requirements). Therefore, I feel I am very lucky to have been accepted despite this.

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