



# The Royal Statistical Society

## A career as a ... market research statistician

*Finding out what people want*

This document contains several hyperlinks. These should operate as "live" links when the document is viewed as a PDF file on-screen (this facility might depend on the capabilities of your computing equipment). Some of the links are merely to different places within this document. The remainder are links to other parts of the Royal Statistical Society web site or to sites provided by other organisations, and a list of all these addresses is provided at the end of the document. The addresses were correct at the time of preparation of this document but might of course change subsequently. We would appreciate being informed of any links that are found not to work; please email [webmaster@rss.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@rss.org.uk).

Below is a guide to a career as a market research statistician. The information has been compiled by people with knowledge and experience in this area. For our other guides, please see the [Careers in Statistics homepage](#).

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### **The importance of market research**

Market research is, in very general terms, a means for providers of goods and services to keep themselves in touch with the needs and wants of those who buy and use the goods and services.

It involves the systematic gathering, recording and analysing of information relating to the transfer and sale of goods and services from producer to consumer, together with systematic problem analysis, model building and fact finding for the purposes of improved decision making and control in marketing goods and services.

A huge range of companies and organisations carry out market research, answering questions (among many others) like:

- Why have the sales of my breakfast cereal decreased over the last few months?
- If I launch this new pasta sauce, will anyone buy it?
- If we build our new swimming pool here, will people be able to get to it easily enough, and will they actually use it?
- How much do people understand about our charity and how can we help them to understand more?
- I've got to change one of the ingredients in a drink I make, will my customers notice, and if so will it affect whether they buy the product?

A statistician working in market research can expect to use a multitude of different statistical techniques in order to solve the numerous challenges that are given by clients and researchers.

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## **What does this career entail?**

The proportion of time a market research statistician spends actually doing statistics depends on the company and the type of work it does, but may be anything up to about 80%. For this reason, the career is obviously very satisfying for people who want to continue really using statistics in a commercial environment.

As a market research statistician, you will be heavily involved with the research staff who run the individual projects. You will spend a lot of time working in effect as a consultant for these researchers. You will be involved in writing proposals describing how the market research will be carried out. These proposals will cover a number of areas of which the most important from the statistical point of view will be the overall research methodology and the calculation of sample sizes and related power for relevant tests. You will have to advise about the design of the investigations; for example, there might be complex rotation plans required if products are being tested or a number of different ideas are being considered in the same piece of research.

Once the data are collected and carefully checked, the statistical analysis itself can begin. The analysis may involve anything from the most simple tests to complex multivariate analyses or modelling. Part of the challenge for the statistician is firstly to explain the analysis and results to the researcher, who may well have no mathematical/statistical background, and then to work with the researcher to present the results in a way that the company itself will understand.

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## **Who employs market research statisticians?**

Some companies and organisations, particularly the larger ones, have their own market research departments, and there are openings for statisticians in these. Others use specialist market research companies and agencies to undertake the research for them; these are major employers of market research statisticians.

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## **What qualifications are typically required?**

A first degree in statistics, or at least with a substantial statistics component, is usually a minimum requirement.

Market research statistics is an extremely applied field, and the most appropriate undergraduate courses are likely to be those that involve a large amount of practical applications of statistics.

Many market research statisticians will also have an MSc in Statistics. Here again, the more applied courses are the most applicable to the industry even though such courses are unlikely to actually focus on market research data.

Please see the general information on our [prospective undergraduates page](#) in respect of first degrees, and on our [prospective postgraduates page](#) concerning MSc degrees.

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## **Continuing professional development (CPD)**

Market research statisticians need to continue their professional and personal development.

No first or postgraduate degree covers all the areas of statistics that can be applied to market research data. Therefore much of the professional development is in learning new techniques and their applications in particular sectors. This learning may be "on the job", either self taught or under the guidance of a more senior statistician, or it may take place by attending an appropriate training course.

On a more personal level, you may well have the opportunity to take one of two (or more) routes within your company. A statistics department within a company will require a senior statistician to manage it. This can offer an opportunity to move into a more managerial role whilst still maintaining a "hands on" statistics role. Alternatively, there may be the opportunity to remain in a purely technical position where you are seen as a technical resource by the other statisticians within the company as well as by the researchers. This role would probably also mean being heavily involved in development of new methodologies or applications.

The quantity and type of statistical work involved is likely to make it appropriate for you to seek

the professional qualification of [Chartered Statistician](#) (CStat), which would give you professional affiliation with the Royal Statistical Society.

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## **Salaries and opportunities for advancement**

Salaries can be very varied and will depend to a great extent on the size and nature of the company or organisation.

A new graduate could expect to start at up to around £20000 but with potential for fairly rapid advancement. Individual performance will play a large part in determining the level of reward and benefits.

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## **How to locate job vacancies for market research statisticians**

Most job vacancies for market research statisticians are advertised as they arise. Vacancies are likely to be advertised in various places including:

- Electronic mailing lists (such as [Allstat](#))
- The newsletter *RSS NEWS*, issued monthly to all [members](#) of the Royal Statistical Society
- Specialist recruitment agencies (such as Datatech)
- Possibly the Market Research Society's monthly magazine *Research*
- General recruitment websites.

Posts are not necessarily advertised as 'Statistician'. The job title might for example be 'Data Analyst', but be aware that the amount of actual statistics involved in different roles can vary widely.

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## Person profile

**Joanna Macnab (Head of Data Analysis, MMR Food and Drink Research Worldwide).** Since completing a BSc in Statistics as a mature student followed by an MSc in Biometry, I have had a varied career experiencing many different areas of statistics.



On graduating, I worked at Zeneca Seeds using a huge amount of what I had learned on my MSc in an agricultural context. Much of the work involved liaising directly with scientists in the design and analysis of field and greenhouse trials.

Following this I spent a year at the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, again spending most of my time working directly with scientists to design and analyse practical experiments and bioassays.

I then moved away from agriculture/biology into official statistics, spending a year with ONS working on the General Practice Research Database (a live database of GP records). I then moved to my current employer, MMR Food and Drink Research Worldwide.

MMR is a full service market research agency specialising in food and drink with a very strong statistical heritage. I started out as a statistician in the Data Analysis section. Within 18 months, I was heading the section.

I have now been head of Data Analysis for just over four years and as such I have an extremely varied role, ranging from analysing data through to the administrative and managerial responsibilities of the department. My main responsibilities include:

- Analysing data. Yes, I still do this! Despite my departmental responsibilities, I spend a substantial amount of time actually analysing and reporting on data
- Ensuring that our research team (our "clients") have the statistical support that they need at all times
- Coordinating, and if appropriate undertaking, development of methodologies and procedures from the statistical point of view
- Visiting clients with non statisticians to provide expertise in areas such as experimental design
- Managing the staff who make up the Data Analysis team.

In short an extremely varied role, which has kept me interested from the day I joined!

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## Useful web links

- The [Market Research Society](#)
  - The [British Market Research Association](#)
  - Market research statistician/data analyst on the [Prospects](#) site
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## List of web addresses used in this document

### External addresses (i.e. outside the Royal Statistical Society)

Allstat mailing list	<a href="http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/allstat.html">http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/allstat.html</a>
British Market Research Association	<a href="http://www.bmra.org.uk/">http://www.bmra.org.uk/</a>
Market Research Society	<a href="http://www.marketresearch.org.uk/">http://www.marketresearch.org.uk/</a>
Prospects graduate careers website	<a href="http://www.prospects.ac.uk/">http://www.prospects.ac.uk/</a>

### Other addresses on the Royal Statistical Society web site

Careers in Statistics home page	<a href="http://www.rss.org.uk/careers">http://www.rss.org.uk/careers</a>
Careers in Statistics page for prospective postgraduates	<a href="http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2251">http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2251</a>
Careers in Statistics page for prospective undergraduates	<a href="http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2250">http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2250</a>
Chartered Statistician	<a href="http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1254">http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1254</a>
Membership	<a href="http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1052">http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1052</a>

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