**Ch 12 Real world data-driven stories**

When you learn any new skill, the big test comes when you try to use it. There is no substitute for getting a story by going through the process we outline in the Data Driven Investigations course: having a hypothesis, working out the questions, collecting the evidence – including data – analysing it, putting flesh on the bones and telling the story.

The more you go through the process, the easier it will get. Many, perhaps most, of today’s expert data journalists acquired their skills as they worked on real stories – working out how to overcome various obstacles as they came to them.

But, while you’re waiting for inspiration to strike, it won’t help to practise a little. The BBC’s Shared Data Unit specialises in finding and developing data-driven stories for local newspapers. Once the data has been tidied and analysed, the BBC publishes a story or stories, and also releases the data to partner newspapers for their teams to work on. A single dataset will end up being used as the basis for dozens of locally focused stories.

While you’re wanting to practise your data skills, you could use the Shared Data Unit’s webpages for inspiration and as a source of data to work with.

[The main page](https://www.bbc.com/lnp/sdu/sdu-coverage) has links to the various stories the unit has worked on, organised by year.

**Suggested exercises**

Try one of the following –

1. pick a story that interests you from its headline. But before you dive into the data – try going through these questions:

* What would the ideal data look like?
* What variables would it contain?
* Who would gather and maintain that data?

Then click on the link to the story and its associated data and see if you were right.

OR

1. pick a headline to a story that interests you – now try to work out what your story memo would be. What might the maximum story be? The minimum?

OR

1. Find a story that interests you; look at the headlines which came from the data the BBC shared (“[Vacant homes](https://www.bbc.com/lnp/sdu/sdu-coverage/vacant-homes)” is a good example – with no fewer than 36 outlets publishing their local version of the story). Choose one of the headlines linking to a partner’s story and see if you can find the data to support that headline.

OR

1. Taking a published story, and the data supporting it, see if you can develop it in some way – perhaps add to the data, work out a new maximum story, work out a new take on the original story (some of the data on these pages is 3-5 years old now – so there may well be something new to say).

Enjoy!