

READING IN THE NEWS: 2020 IN REVIEW

Annual report of media coverage
and press office activity at the
University of Reading, Jan-Dec
2020



Summary

The University of Reading's media profile increased significantly in 2020.

This increase was driven by a new strategic focus for external communications and PR at the University of Reading. It also reflects an explosion in news media interest in science and health topics as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

This report highlights key results and innovations in media strategy during 2020.

Key results

The University received **more than twice as many** mentions in online and print media in 2020 (31,011) compared to 2019 (15,086).¹

Broadcast media coverage tripled in 2020, increasing from an average of five mentions per day to 15 per day.²

Reading's **market share increased** by 48% in online media profile among leading UK universities.³ In 2020, Reading had more online coverage than 10 Russell Group universities (2019: more coverage than only one Russell Group university).⁴

¹ Vuelio online and print media monitoring, 2019/2020

² TVEyes broadcast media monitoring, global TV and radio, 2019/20

³ SciVal benchmarking, using LexisNexis data. Increase from 1.4% (2019) to 2.1% (2020) of Russell Group total annual coverage

⁴ SciVal benchmarking; in 2020 Reading had more online coverage than QMUL, Warwick, Liverpool, Durham, Glasgow, LSE, Cardiff, Sheffield, York and Queen's University Belfast. In 2019, it had more coverage than QUB only.

Annual media coverage report

Reading's market share **far outperforms the expected media profile** of the University, based on the size and type of Reading's research profile, compared to other UK universities. In 2020, only two Russell Group universities (Oxford and Durham) had higher field-weighted online media scores than Reading.⁵

See Appendix 1 below for more detailed summary of coverage.

Covid coverage

The University of Reading uses media engagement as a key part of its institution-wide commitment to help society, and in 2020 in particular to fight the coronavirus pandemic. The majority of the increase in media coverage can be attributed to media coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic.

There have been three main components to this media engagement:

1. **Expert comment** – University of Reading experts have established a strong role as expert commentators through the news media. This has allowed the University to engage with the public, communicate important aspects of science and research, and increase public understanding of the scientific, health, educational and other responses to the pandemic.
2. **Institutional support** – the University has used media engagement to proactively highlight its own initiatives, and those of members of our community, to support efforts to tackle the pandemic, under the #WeAreTogether campaign.
3. **Reading's response** – the University has sought to show transparency and openness about its own response to the pandemic, supported with proactive media engagement, under the #UoRWay campaign. This has aimed to increase understanding and reassurance among audiences, including our students and their families, our staff, local community, government, and prospective students.



The University press office has actively sought to grow the University's media engagement through the pandemic. Innovations to support this have included:

- Establishment of a **24-hour virtual press office**, with 24/7 contact support for staff and members of the media
- Individual tailored media support and **advice for key academic experts** and University spokespeople – including training, equipment, and opportunity scanning

⁵ SciVal Benchmarking Field-Weighted Mass Media – the ratio of Mass Media mentions relative to the expected world average for the subject field, publication type and publication year, aggregated for the whole institution

Annual media coverage report

- Active **management of external media** relationships, including with journalists, media organisations and intermediaries such as the Science Media Centre
- Integrated **communications campaigns**, including support and customisation of the 'We Are Together' campaign by Universities UK, and Reading-led campaigns including #UoRWay and #LockdownClimateChange.

Strategic focus

In 2020, the University press office expanded its work beyond press and media, to offer broader communications support for the University's external profile and reputation.

While management of press and media remains a core part of work, the team now takes a broader view of external communications and PR. Individual team members take the lead at different external scales, rather than primarily by internal University divisions:

- Pete Castle, external communications and PR manager
- Carolann Grandison, press office lead for **local** and regional engagement
- Tim Mayo, press office lead for **national** and government engagement
- Pete Bryant, press office lead for **international** engagement

Other innovations in 2020 supporting greater strategic focus include:

- New access to **detailed data of media coverage** – highlighting greater detail and trends in media coverage for the first time
- Creation of more detailed reporting of media coverage: more structured **daily, weekly and annual reports**, circulated to key audiences internally and published online
- More open and inclusive planning of communications across the University, including a more widely available **communications planning grid** and weekly planning meeting, involving wider group of University colleagues.

Values-led communications

The press office has integrated the University's strategic principles, as expressed in the University Strategy 2020-2026, as a core component of planning and evaluating communications and PR activity. Examples of these are given below.

Community

Aspiration: To be a university that is genuinely people-orientated.

As a people-focused organisation, the principle of community is critical for press and publicity. Stories focusing on people are the strongest and most effective. Examples of this work include:

- People first: building reputation by **doing the right thing by people**. Our starting point is always to support the welfare of our people and the wider community with

Annual media coverage report

professional communications advice. This can require considerable resource, and success can be difficult to measure.

- **Diversity and representation:** the press office began work with the Dean of Diversity and Inclusion on a plan to increase the University's representation in the media. The Corporate Communications team, including the press office, also supported establishment of the University's race equality and disability reviews.
- **Engagement with alumni:** the press office has worked more closely with Alumni and Supporter Engagement Office on integrating wider communications to our alumni community.

Excellence

Aspiration: To be in the top quartile in the UK sector for our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and research.

Good communication and memorable storytelling requires a focus on excellence. Communication that highlight outstanding research, teaching and other activity supports the University's priority to focus on what it does best, and further builds its reputation as a world-leading institution.

The press office is supporting this principle with a greater focus on fewer, high quality research stories aimed at national/global media. This has led to excellent research receiving more attention through multi-channel communications campaigns.

Examples in 2020 include:

- **Two national awards** for communications: runner-up in the Guardian University Awards 'marketing and communications campaign' category (for [#ShowYourStripes climate campaign](#)) and winner of an Openness Award from Understanding Animal Research (for [llama research media campaign](#)).



Laura Tobin's #ShowYourStripes on ITV1

- The first **integrated research and fundraising** campaign, for the '[Marlow Warlord](#)' [archaeology discovery](#), achieving both increased profile via multiple media channels, and raising funds through a crowdfunder.
- In national media, the University had **three front-page stories** in 2020:
 - 'Tea and apples can protect a healthy heart, study suggests' (Gunter Kuhnle, SCFP) The Times, 23 October – [UoR news story](#)
 - 'Making child's play of the virus' (Helen Dodd, SPCLS), Sunday Times, 6 December – [UoR News story](#)

Annual media coverage report

- 'The sunny side of lockdown' (Stephen Burt, SMPCS), Daily Telegraph, 22 May – [UoR news story](#)



Engaged University

Aspiration: To be a university where our community is connected to the world through our teaching, research and active engagement.

Communication is impossible without effective engagement. The press office has an important role to play in Reading's commitment to be 'an engaged university' on a range of scales: locally, nationally and internationally.

Examples of work to support this principle include:

- **Local: #UniForReading:** a campaign supporting University efforts to fulfil its role as the 'University for Reading'

Annual media coverage report

- **National: A-level results:** a series of high-profile media engagements with national broadcasters (including Sky News, ITN, BBC Newsnight) to demonstrate impacts of government U-turns on A-level results on higher education admissions and finances.
- **Global: #PlanetPartners:** a campaign to highlight Reading environment and climate research collaborations, with national UK government and global partners, such as the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF).



Sustainability

Environmental aspiration: To be recognised for our world-class research in climate change and its impact on the environment and society, and be a leader in global environmental sustainability

The University is a leading global institution on the environment, both in its commitment to making its operations carbon zero, and in environmental research. The press office has continued to find opportunities to highlight both, for example:



- **#LockdownClimateChange** – a campaign linking actions to tackle the pandemic and climate change, May 2020
- **Reading Climate Festival** – support running events and publicity, November 2020
- **#PlanetPartners** – a campaign to highlight Reading's global collaborations on environmental research, including via ECMWF.

Financial aspiration: To be financially sustainable at all levels to ensure resilience in the face of current and future national and global challenges.

The press office has created stronger links with the Commercial function and Estates in 2020, particularly in support of developments at Thames Valley Science Park, including on deals to create new **film** and **TV** studios.

Annual media coverage report

This led to significant media exposure for the University as details of the deal were announced. Support is continuing with detailed plans for communication and engagement with key internal, local and national stakeholders.



Image from the Daily Mail, 20 February 2021

Appendix 1: annual coverage data

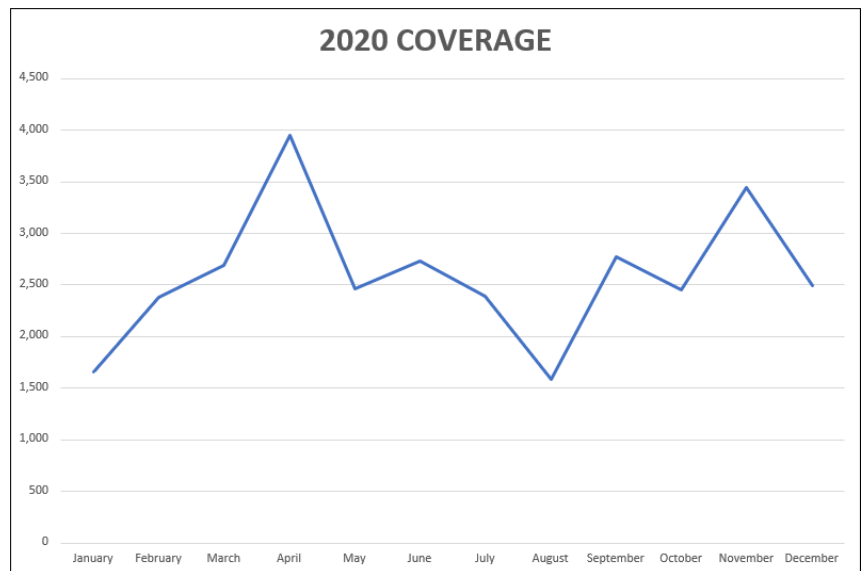
Online and print media coverage

The University's profile in UK and global media grew significantly across the past 12 months. Based on global monitoring of online and print media, the University received **more than twice as many** mentions in media in 2020 compared to 2019.

2019 = 15,086

2020 = 31,011 (+106%)

Month-by-month coverage fluctuated, with highest activity coinciding with growth in media interest of the pandemic – but also reflecting coverage of other, non-covid stories, such as the summer heatwave, film studio development, and archaeological digs.

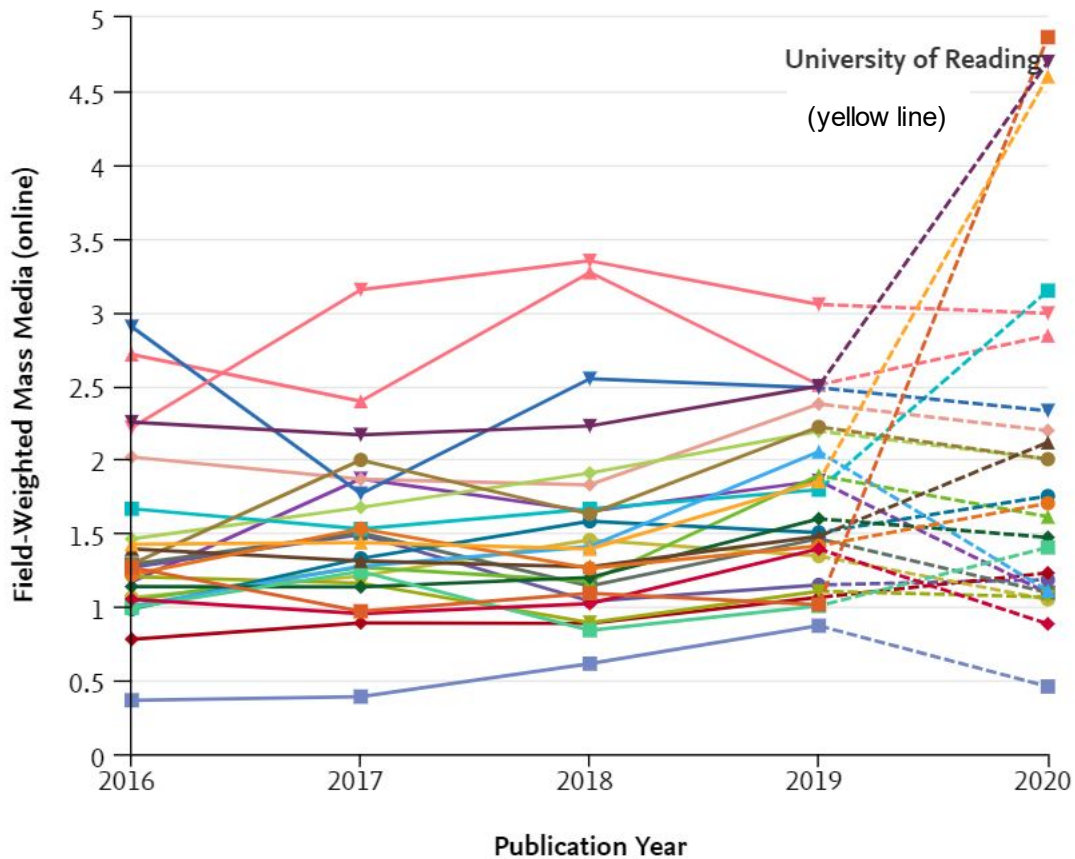


Using advertising value equivalent figures (the cost of media for an equivalent-sized paid-for advertisement), Reading's print and online media coverage alone was **£45.2 million** in 2020 (up from £29.0 in 2019). This reflects the University being featured more frequently in high-profile media with larger audience and readership figures in 2020.

Comparative performance

Indicative data from media monitoring indicates that, in terms of media mentions, Reading was **among the highest-profile research-intensive universities in the UK** in 2020. On a measure of online media mentions, as a proportion of Reading's research quantity and profile, Reading scored higher than every Russell Group university except Oxford and Durham.

Annual media coverage report



SciVal Benchmarking - all Russell Group universities, plus University of Reading

Highest-profile research divisions

Around two-thirds (71%) of all online and print coverage in 2020 is associated with an individual named staff member of the University – indicating the majority of coverage is based on the individual work or expert comment of academics and other staff.

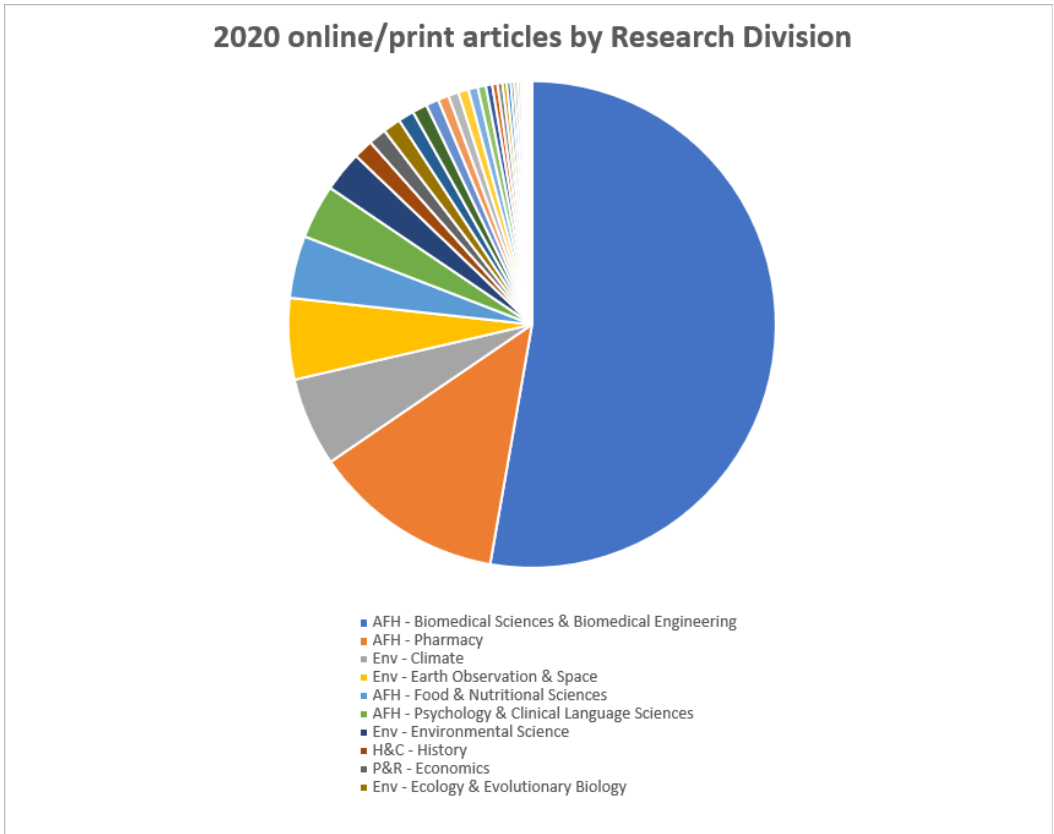
The remaining coverage (29%) may also feature research, but does not mention an individual by name, or is coverage of other aspects of the University of Reading (for example, student admissions, or reporting on internal Covid cases and testing).

From this data, it is clear that coronavirus coverage has heavily skewed the academic areas of the University receiving online and print coverage, with one research division: Biomedical Sciences and Biomedical Engineering, accounting for **more than half of all coverage** in which an individual is named.

Annual media coverage report

Research division	Number of news articles	%
AFH - Biomedical Sciences & Biomedical Engineering	11,670	52.75%
AFH - Pharmacy	2,812	12.71%
Env - Climate	1,304	5.89%
Env - Earth Observation & Space	1,193	5.39%
AFH - Food & Nutritional Sciences	916	4.14%
AFH - Psychology & Clinical Language Sciences	795	3.59%
Env - Environmental Science	594	2.68%
H&C - History	287	1.30%
P&R - Economics	263	1.19%
Env - Ecology & Evolutionary Biology	260	1.18%
H&C - Archaeology	234	1.06%
P&R - Law	217	0.98%
Env/H&C/P&R - Built Environment	188	0.85%
Env - Weather	159	0.72%
AFH - Sustainable Agricultural & Food Systems	151	0.68%
P&R - Global Development	151	0.68%
P&R - International Business & Strategy	137	0.62%
AFH/Env/P&R - Agri-Food Economics & Social Science	120	0.54%
Env - Chemical Sciences	93	0.42%
P&R - Marketing & Reputation	77	0.35%
H&C - English Literature & Language	74	0.33%
P&R - Education Language Learning	61	0.28%
H&C - Modern Languages & Linguistics	59	0.27%
P&R - Leadership Organisations & Behaviour	50	0.23%
P&R - Politics & International Relations	49	0.22%
P&R - ICMA	45	0.20%
H&C - Classics	33	0.15%
P&R - Real Estate & Planning	33	0.15%
Env - Computer Sciences	23	0.10%
Env - Mathematics & Statistics	19	0.09%
H&C - Typography & Graphic Communication	18	0.08%
H&C - Film Theatre & Television	16	0.07%
P&R - Business Informatics Systems & Accounting	13	0.06%
H&C - Art	6	0.03%
H&C - Philosophy	3	0.01%

Annual media coverage report



Highest-profile individuals

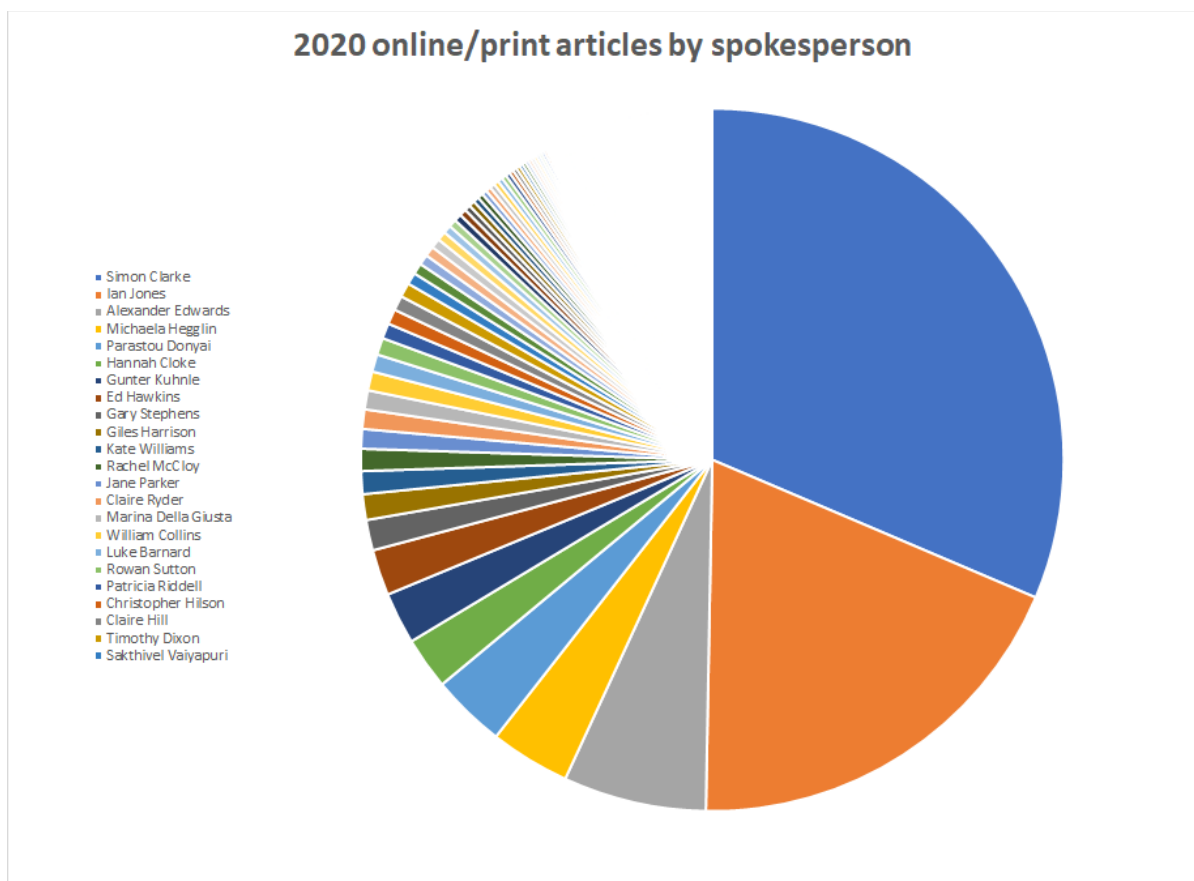
Among the same set of data (coverage with a named individual), it is possible to see that more than half of the University’s coverage was secured by just three individual academics – all of whom are scientists with experience in microbiology, virology or health technology, and have been prolific media commentators during the pandemic: Dr Simon Clarke, Professor Ian Jones, and Dr Al Edwards.



Academic	Number of online news articles	% of total UoR coverage
Simon Clarke	7,302	31.41%
Ian Jones	4,390	18.88%
Alexander Edwards	1,531	6.59%
Michaela Hegglin	856	3.68%
Parastou Donyai	792	3.41%
Hannah Cloke	557	2.40%
Gunter Kuhnle	553	2.38%

Annual media coverage report

Ed Hawkins	491	2.11%
Gary Stephens	326	1.40%
Giles Harrison	275	1.18%
Kate Williams	244	1.05%
Rachel McCloy	236	1.02%
Jane Parker	210	0.90%
Claire Ryder	208	0.90%
Marina Della Giusta	203	0.87%
William Collins	203	0.87%
Luke Barnard	187	0.80%
Rowan Sutton	180	0.77%
Patricia Riddell	165	0.71%
Christopher Hilson	161	0.69%
Claire Hill	157	0.68%
Timothy Dixon	153	0.66%
Sakthivel Vaiyapuri	126	0.54%
Dyan Sellayah	117	0.50%
Uma Kambhampati	110	0.47%



Annual media coverage report

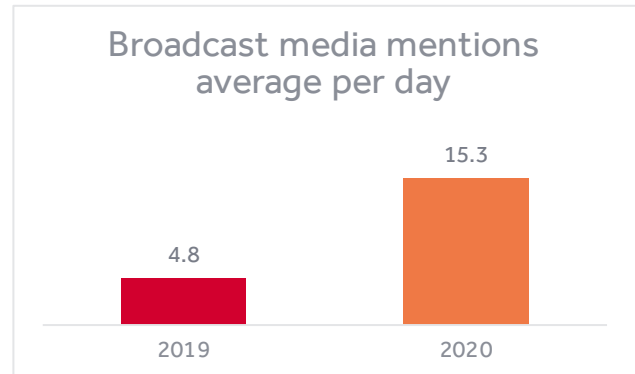
Broadcast media

The increase in broadcast (radio and TV) coverage was even greater – with **three times** as much broadcast coverage featuring the University in 2020 compared to 2019.

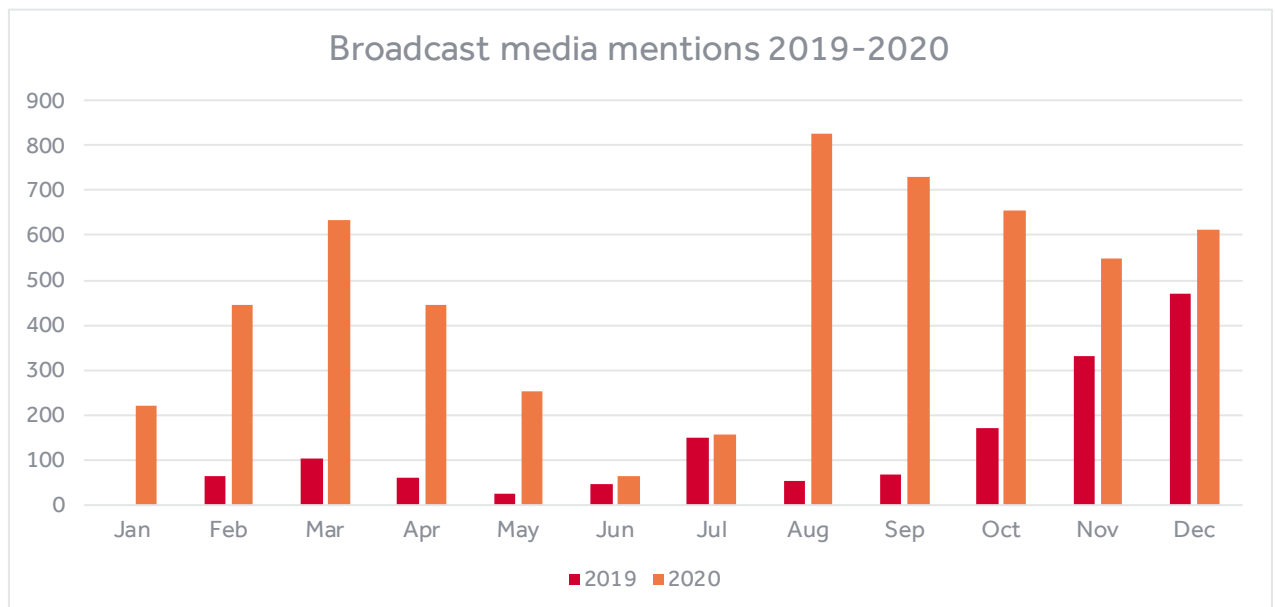
2019 = 1,546

2020 = 5,594 (+262%)

This represents an increase from an average of 5 to 15 recorded mentions in broadcast media per day.

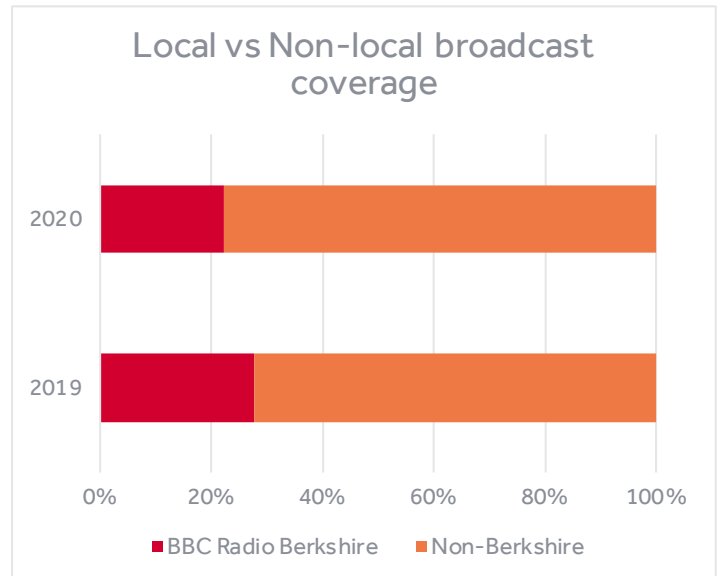


Comparison of month-by-month broadcast coverage between 2019 and 2020 shows growth during late 2019, before coronavirus, followed by spikes matching significant developments in the pandemic and its impact on the University (such as the spring 'first wave' and August Government U-turn on A-level results).

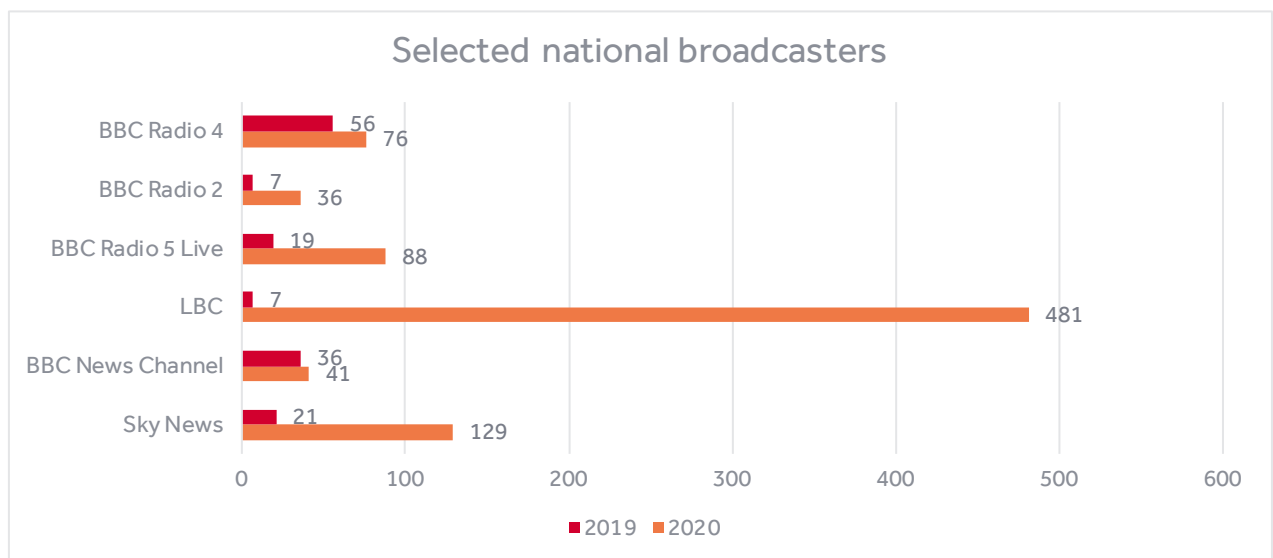


Annual media coverage report

Quality of coverage significantly increased. For example, while the broadcast outlet with the highest number of University of Reading mentions in both 2019 and 2020 was BBC Radio Berkshire, the proportion of BBC Berkshire coverage as a total decreased in 2020, reflecting increased coverage from other broadcasters.



The number of mentions on key UK national broadcast media went up – for example, there were more mentions on BBC Radio 4, Sky News and LBC radio in 2020.



Proactive news stories

In 2020, the University press office published **621 individual news stories** on the University website – the highest ever.

This represents a **49% increase** on 2019, and 71% above the previous five-year average.

Appendix 2:

Diversity and representation

Media coverage is seen as a public window on the people who work and study at the University – therefore it is critical that media coverage represents the diverse range of people at the University.

In 2020 the press office began collaborative work with the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion on changes to encourage greater diversity among the University’s media spokespeople. This will include individual reports on diversity delivered to all Heads of Schools, with tailored recommendations on how to improve representation among their School’s media commentators.

Across the University, it is clear there is much work to do to make the media profile of the University more representative of those that work here.

With a large proportion of coverage featuring a small number of individuals – every year, but increasingly so in 2020 – it is important that the press office finds opportunities and works collaboratively with individuals and Heads of School to grow the diversity of the University’s highest-profile media commentators.

The press office will continue to work alongside the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion on a Diversity and Representation in Media plan and will report on progress.





CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Global death toll from the virus nears 4,000

Simon Clarke | University of Reading



Coronavirus impact

The incubation period after infection and before symptoms show - lasts up to between 14 and 24 days



BBC NEWS

Coronavirus: The global picture

South Korea and Italy each have more than 7,000 cases

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