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Research investment disparities in England

Are researchers in the so-called Northern Powerhouse (northwest and northeast England) getting a fair deal from government compared with those in the Golden Triangle (eastern and southeastern England, plus London)? For the first time, data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS)¹ are enabling year-on-year comparisons by region for gross expenditure on research and development.

Between 2012, and 2013, the Northern Powerhouse's share of government investment rose from 3.51% to 3.73% (up by 0.22%), while the Golden Triangle's share fell from 61.33% to 61.11% (down by 0.22%). These changes ignore inflation (2–3% per year in this period) and population differences.

To ascertain whether the Northern Powerhouse is getting a fair deal from the government, we defined fairness as being when the research investment per person reaches parity between regions. Between 2012, and 2013, investment per person rose by £1.01 in the Northern Powerhouse and by £3.08 in the Golden Triangle (table).² After we corrected for 2% inflation, the increase in per capita

investment was £0.99 for Northern Powerhouse and £3.02 for the Golden Triangle, which clearly shows increasing disparity. The Northern Powerhouse is not getting a fair deal: its deal is getting increasingly worse and other UK regions outside the Golden Triangle fare no better.

This gloomy outlook is not improved even when other sources of funding to the Northern Powerhouse are taken into account. Business investment has decreased by 0.65% and investment by the Higher Education Funding Council for England has been reduced by 0.21% compared to an increase in the Golden Triangle of 0.37%. Investment by charities has decreased across the board, but they represent only about 2% of total research investment.

The Golden Triangle is the only UK region characterised as a so-called innovation leader on the European Commission's Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2014.³ The Northern Powerhouse is an innovation follower, and the UK Government strategy has recognised the national importance of the north of England catching up to the south.⁴ If this strategy is to be successful, research investment needs to be reformed. Mazzucatto and colleagues⁵ have reported that regions

that are successful in innovation-led growth are those that have benefited from long-term mission-oriented research investment. This approach could help the UK to break out of the traditional feedback loops that reinforce this disparity.

We declare no competing interests.

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End late registration of fact-of-death in England and Wales

Agreement about the priorities for medical science¹ should include commitment to end the late registration of fact-of-death in England and Wales.

In England and Wales (also Northern Ireland), if deaths are referred for inquest, fact-of-death is not registered with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) until the inquest verdict has determined cause of death. In England and Wales: 10 000 deaths per year are not registered for at least six months.

With broad scientific support, including from Government Chief Scientists, National Statisticians and Chief Medical Officers, the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) has called for the dead in England and Wales to be



	Population (million people) ²	Government research and research councils		Business (£ million)	Higher education (£ million)	Private non-profit (£ million)	Total (£ million)	Change
		Total spending (£ million)	Spending per person (£)					
Northern Powerhouse								
2012	9.6866	75	7.74	2057	813	63	3008	..
2013	9.7138	85	8.75	2093	850	57	3085	2.56%
Golden Triangle								
2012	22.9404	1310	57.10	9013	3427	443	14193	..
2013	23.1633	1394	60.18	9583	3678	429	15084	6.28%
UK								
2012	63.7050	2136	33.53	17144	7163	545	26 988	..
2013	64.1057	2281	35.58	18 448	7628	518	28 875	6.99%

Data are from Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Gross domestic expenditure on research and development is total intramural expenditure on research and development done in the national territory during a given period. Northern Powerhouse=northwestern plus northeastern England. Golden Triangle=southeastern and eastern England, plus London.

Table: Gross expenditure on research and development in the UK by sector and region