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) 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). 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. 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. If this strategy is to be successful, research investment needs to be reformed. Mazzucatto and colleagues 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 science 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