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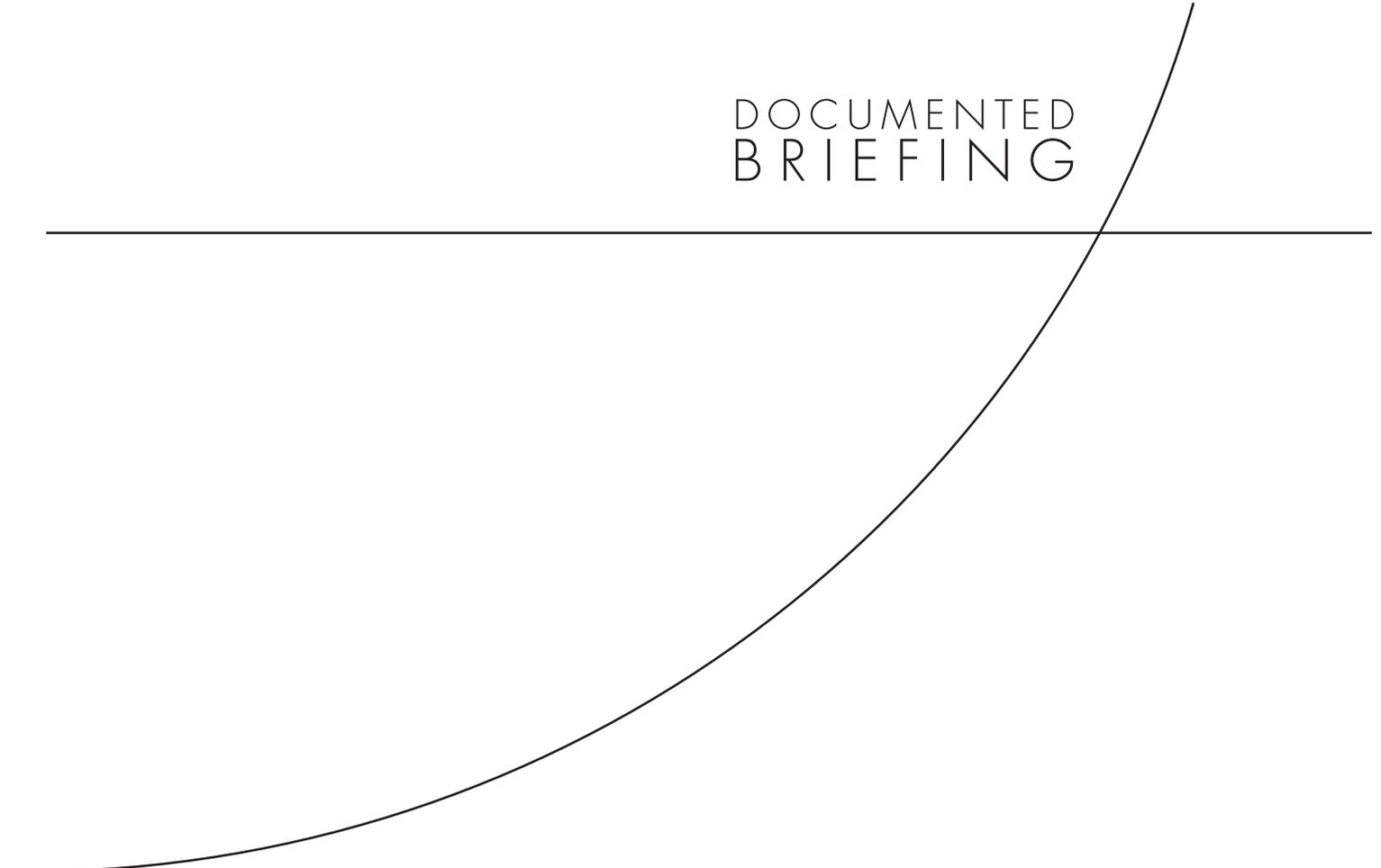
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# Health and Medical Research in the United Kingdom

Observatory on Health Research  
Systems

Sally Hargreaves

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# Summary

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## Summary: Key Points

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- Key funder of health R&D in the United Kingdom is industry
- R&D is an important part of the UK economy
- UK R&D system benefits from links with the National Health Service, the largest health service delivery organisation in the world
- Government investment has been lower than in most EU countries
- Strong tradition of funding biomedical research
- Future challenges in emerging markets and workforce issues

The main funders of health research and development (R&D) in the United Kingdom are industry, government, and research charities. Industry contributes the overwhelming majority of funds to health research, and most of this work is undertaken commercially, resulting in the high profile of health R&D in the UK economy. Universities and the National Health Service (NHS) also play a part in the production of world-class research in the United Kingdom.

Government investment has historically been lower than in most other European countries. However, in 2004, the UK government published a ten-year plan for increased investment in health R&D, and a new health research strategy was launched in 2006. This strategy calls for the ring-fencing of funds for health R&D, and the facilitation of closer alignment with industry, which should help in the prioritisation and coordination of research.

Although the United Kingdom has a strong tradition of funding biomedical research, a government-commissioned review has called for a shift from basic research towards translational and applied research to make better use of the NHS, and to increase economic and health benefits for all UK citizens.<sup>2</sup> This initiative has already involved the

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<sup>2</sup> Basic research, also referred to as ‘fundamental’ or ‘blue skies’ research, asks questions about health and disease without any primary driver for practical application. Translational research refers to the process of

Medical Research Council in setting up university-based centres to work closely with industry to bring new innovations into the marketplace.

The United Kingdom now faces numerous challenges in terms of expanding its R&D programme and maintaining its high quality outputs. India and China are becoming more attractive than the United Kingdom as investment locations, so the UK government needs to find ways to attract and retain R&D companies. The current shortfall in suitably skilled scientists and technicians in the United Kingdom makes this issue all the more pertinent.

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taking the findings from basic or clinical research and using them to produce innovation in healthcare settings. Applied research covers a wide range of research, primarily involving human volunteers. It is driven by the desire to answer a specific health-related question, need or desire to improve services or care (Cooksey, 2006).