

Many years running after new research targets, and then what? The actual consequences of a change of promotion criteria

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Theoretical framework/Definition of concepts

The paper aims at analysing whether the introduction of a national fit-for-role evaluation (ASN) occurred in 2012 had an effect in promotion patterns in Italian universities. ASN national procedure represents the first ever research evaluation tool at individual level in Italy. It has passed through several adjustments since its inception, but it has served for a whole decade filtering out possible candidates for promotions to associate professorship or full professorship. Currently, there is a debate about whether to overcome this procedure or to keep it. The main theoretical perspective is that of policies possibly having unintended consequences.

This topic has already been widely analysed from a variety of angles, including: publication patterns, impact of composition of Committee members by sex, discriminations in acquisition of this qualification. Whilst the ASN is a typical example of relatively poor reconfiguration of powers from the Academic Estate into agencies (national Committees are still mostly ruled by academic judgement and the national thresholds are still mostly a reflection of single academic epistemic communities' opinion about what is quality and a mature profile for promotion is), the original rationale of this specific novelty was to: 1) instill a more concrete incentive in publishing; but also 2) saving the economic resources granted in promoting if a candidate is not productive enough. In other words, instead of relying on seniority only, ASN should have allowed both more steeped careers for the best, and, even more importantly, should have stopped the unproductive to have a further step in their career. This latter point is important as promoting those having adverse behaviors (research inactive or poorly performing in research) perpetrates the pattern, preventing the system to acquire new ways of working.

Methodology

In principle, this research design aims at quasi-experimental ex-post evaluation techniques, implementing econometrical ones. The paper will analyse the performances in research before and after the introduction of ASN to ascertain whether ASN had any effective and actual effect, skipping the already analysed in literature topic of ASN per se. In other words, we look at the net effect, checking which aspects of research productivity (and other confounding such as sex, institutional characteristics, epistemic community characteristic) predict promotion, and at which velocity (in how many years a person does achieve the next step).

Data analysis

Data is composed by the whole set of SCOPUS publications authored by any academic affiliated in Italian universities from 2000 year until now. List of academics and respective sex, affiliation,

and promotion by time is derived by open sources (Cineca). Some other institutional information are collected at national level to guarantee homogeneity of sources.

Conclusions

We expect to find a relevant change in publication patterns, with a widespread increase of number of publications, and also an increase of H index and/or international publications. However, what we are testing is the capacity by the system to deny promotions if a candidate is not sufficiently productive relative to national targets, as at institutional and/or meso levels may bestow promotions on other grounds, such as institutional loyalty, other citizenship or teaching awards, mere seniority.