

University autonomy: Improving educational output

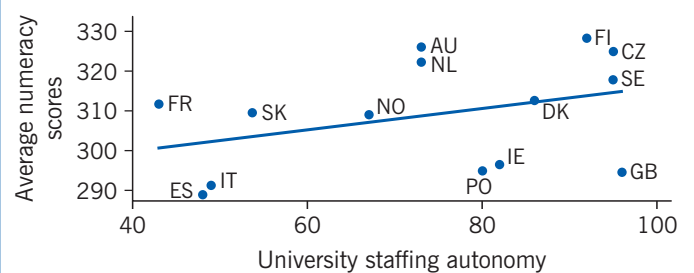
Universities deliver more competent graduates and higher quality research if they are more autonomous and well-funded

Keywords: university autonomy, university funding, university education, university research, labor productivity

ELEVATOR PITCH

University autonomy and funding is an important aspect in university-level education due to its impact on graduates' competencies, and on the quality and quantity of research produced. Political factors influence the amount of autonomy allotted to public universities in specific countries. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that an increase in autonomy for universities would provide better educational outcomes and have a direct impact on labor market productivity. However, the debate on autonomy has been overshadowed by discussions on tuition fees and student aid in political circles.

Graduate numeracy raises with university staffing autonomy, 2010



Notes: Average numeracy scores (scale 0–400) of graduates (ISCED 5–6) 25–34 years old. Numeracy is the ability to reason and to apply numerical concepts.

Source: Graduate numeracy: PIAAC data. Online at: <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/>; university staffing autonomy: EUA data [1].

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World of Labor

KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- ⊕ Increased university autonomy contributes to graduates' competencies and university research output.
- ⊕ Funding and student aid have a significant impact on graduates' competencies and university research output.
- ⊕ The competencies of graduates and university research output are closely and positively related to labor productivity.
- ⊕ Employer satisfaction with university graduates appears to be closely related to the quality of university research.

Cons

- ⊖ University autonomy is limited in many countries, primarily due to political opposition.
- ⊖ It is difficult to determine an accurate and agreeable measure of university autonomy.
- ⊖ Comparing the level of autonomy across different systems is difficult.

AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

University autonomy, specifically in reference to academic approach, staffing, internal decision-making, and financial practices, in combination with proper funding, is likely to enable universities to produce graduates with better competencies and to enhance both the quality and quantity of research output. In turn, improved graduate competencies and university research output contribute to labor productivity and economic innovation. Increasing autonomy for universities should be a high priority for policymakers.