

The effect of the Italian ‘Department of Excellence’ policy on staff recruitment

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Excellence has been pervading science policy in recent years. Specifically, funding tends to be increasingly concentrated and the allocation increasingly based on scientific performance indicators. This work aims to investigate the effects of a policy of excellence directed towards Italian university departments. Once identified the best 350 academic departments allowed to compete for the funding, the granting process was largely based on the department’s research quality, but it ensured access to funding for a good number of departments that recorded research ratings at the low end of distribution. After investigating the average effect of the policy on new opened positions, we check if the effect differs between first and second tier departments. Our results indicate that the premium, on average, generates more hires. However these hires mostly concern career advancement. Additionally, second tier departments tend to benefit more from the award than first tier departments, and in particular they hire more tenured track researchers. This evidence raises important food for thought with respect to the dissemination of policy initiatives for financing excellence.