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Title:

Expanding university access: Lessons from the UK experience in 1960-2004

(joint with Andrea Ichino and Giulio Zanella)

Abstract:

University access has greatly expanded during past decades and further growth figures prominently in political agendas. We study possible consequences of historical and future expansions in a stochastic, equilibrium Roy (1951) model where intelligence and cost of study effort are the relevant traits that determine higher education attainment. The enlargement of university access that took place in the UK following the Robbins (1963) Report provides an ideal case study to draw lessons for the future. We find that this expansion is associated with a decline of the average intelligence of graduates and of the college wage premium across cohorts. Model's estimates suggests that the implemented policy dominates technology in explaining these facts and was unfit to reach high-ability students as Robbins had instead advocated. Attaining that goal in the future requires expanding university access with a strongly meritocratic selection of students. This counterfactual policy turns out to be also egalitarian.