PROJECT OF THE ECONOMICS INSTITUTE OF THE CZECH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Differences in the Costs of Research in Higher Education across Scientific Fields: How Different Are They from „KENs" in Teaching?[2]

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Summary

- Much has been said and written recently about low wages in the social sciences and humanities. Academics have demonstrated in the streets about it, and there has even been talk of a strike. Although a solution seems to be out of sight, one positive outcome cannot be denied. Discussion has finally begun on whether the so-called „koeficienty ekonomické náročnosti" (KEN), on the base of which the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) distributes the main part of the subsidy for teaching in higher education over the past thirty years needs to be updated.

- This study compares the dispersion of KENs with the differences in costs of the academic activity closest to higher education teaching, which is undoubtedly research and development (R&D). We are not attempting to recalculate the KENs - which would be desirable, but is not feasible with the data and resources available to us - but at least to approximate the extent to which current KENs differ from the costs observed in R&D.

- We use publicly available R&D statistics from Eurostat and the Czech Statistical Office, which provide data separately for the higher education sector, broken down by scientific fields, allowing us to compare the situation in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) and other (natural, medical, technical and agricultural) sciences. We also use the data on wages at faculties and higher education institutes from the MEYS's Statistical Yearbook of Education, which we have divided among the scientific fields.

- The results show that, although in the past it was considerably less expensive to perform higher education R&D in SSH than in other science areas, in recent years this difference has narrowed considerably and now approaches the levels in advanced Western European countries, where there was never much cost difference between SSH and other fields. In fact, there is no longer any difference in wages for R&D activities in general or in the wages of researchers at higher education institutions between the SSH area and the aggregate of other scientific areas, i.e., R&D wages no longer differ on average between them.

- However, the median KEN of study programmes in the SSH area is 1.2, while in the aggregate of other science areas it comes out to 2.25. This means that SSH programmes typically receive 1.875 times lower subsidies per student. If the wage costs of teaching in both fields were the same, the non-wage (all other) costs in a typical SSH program would have to be 15 times lower to justify such a difference in KENs, given otherwise ordinary cost proportions. If the cost proportions in teaching were to match the situation in R&D, the typical KEN in the SSH area would come out only 1.33 times smaller than in the other areas.

- From this, it follows that the current dispersion of KENs seems to be significantly skewed to the disadvantage of study programmes in the SSH area, and it is high time to realign them with current economic reality. With each year that the KENs remain unchanged, higher education in the SHH area is underfunded and must either be subsidized from other sources or doomed to rub shoulders with destitution.