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Abstract

Autonomisation, allowing public organisations greater freedom from central control, has been extensively debated in the public policy literature as a means of increasing their efficiency and effectiveness. The government of Vietnam has adopted autonomisation as a key policy in reforming public service delivery. This paper investigates the autonomisation of Vietnamese public universities through an institutional study of autonomy policies and empirical analysis of autonomy practices amongst selected public universities in Vietnam. It pays particular attention to the evolution of the autonomy reforms and their implications for higher education governance in Vietnam. We argue that the autonomy of Vietnamese public universities is apparently growing, but does not reflect a broad transfer of power from the central state to public universities. Instead, autonomisation has a more limited objective of reducing public universities' claims on the central budget by presenting them with both the opportunity and the incentive to generate alternative sources of revenue to fund their

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operating budgets in the face of diminishing state subsidies. Many significant central controls remain over operations, particularly human resources and curricula. The result has been a significant shift of the costs of higher education onto students, which may be a factor in declining new enrolments, and in many cases the misuse of university revenues for private purposes, but little evidence of improvement in the quality of the education provided. Although it is a study of a specific instance of autonomisation in Vietnam, the paper has policy implications for developing and transitional countries that seek to improve the quality of their higher education through reforms to its governance. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)