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Abstract. This paper provides a comparative analysis of the development of the UK and Italian university research funding systems with special focus on research assessment and its costs. Much of the debate surrounding the value of research assessment and allocation systems hinges on the disadvantages of implementation versus benefits, while there is very little evidence either on its absolute cost or on the cost relative to other allocation systems. Our objective has been to put together the best possible estimates of these costs to inform the ongoing debate. As the experience of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the UK clearly shows, performance-based research funding is neither easy to develop, nor to implement and it is not readily accepted by the academic community. The Italian research assessment was inspired by the UK RAE and it has benefited from that experience. However, also in the Italian case its implementation was marred by problems and it was resisted by part of the academic community. The potential efficiency gains from research assessment-based allocation system depend on the concentration level and on the reliance on other competitive systems for research funding. The UK and Italy are in opposite situations. For the former further increase in the use of selective systems might well result in minimal benefits that do not cover the additional costs, while for the latter there are quite some margins for efficiency improvements and therefore the benefits gained through selective systems can outweigh the costs. (Fonte: Prefazione degli autori)