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**Abstract**

Higher education institutions worldwide invest significant resources in their quality assurance systems. Little empirical evidence exists that demonstrates the effectiveness (or otherwise) of these systems. Methodological approaches for determining effectiveness are also underdeveloped. Self-study-with-peer-review is a widely used model for ensuring the quality of the core teaching, research and engagement activities of higher education institutions. This article illustrates how an established social-programme evaluation methodology can be used to determine its effectiveness in leading to improvements in institutional performance. The concept of effectiveness and the particular challenges posed by the higher education organisational culture are considered. An example of the systematic evaluation of three self-study programmes is provided to illustrate the concept. It is concluded that social-programme evaluation has significant potential in evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance initiatives in higher education. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)