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**Abstract**

In addition to the long-standing system of programme accreditation, the opportunity to conduct a so-called system accreditation (in most countries called institutional accreditation) procedure has been available for the last four years. These procedures investigate the capacity of an institution to complete their tasks in terms of both quality development and quality assurance within fields of studies and teaching. System accreditation, however, has been subject to numerous critical objections and indeed, such disagreement culminated in a statement made by the German Rectors' Conference, which proposed a quality audit as a viable alternative. In 2011 the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz became the first German university to be granted system accreditation. Building on previous experience, this article analyses critical aspects of system accreditation, and in doing so adopts comparative perspectives between programme and system accreditation. In particular, the effects which have emanated from these procedures of quality development in higher education institutions will be considered in this article. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)