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**Abstract**

Since 1994, the South African higher education system, fragmented and divided along racial lines during the years of apartheid, has been subject to a wide range of initiatives directed at bringing about the 'transformation' necessary for a more equitable dispensation and, ultimately, a new social order. One of the 'levers' being used in transformation processes is quality assurance. The paper uses a case study of an institutional audit at one historically white, lite South African university to provide a social realist account of an audit process and to analyse the likelihood of the audit contributing to institutional transformation. A conclusion is that the South African audit methodology per se is unlikely to bring about the change necessary because of its tendency to focus on the mechanistic implementation of recommendations. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)