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**Abstract**

After nearly 20 years of evaluation in Italian higher education, a new national agency for the evaluation of the university system (ANVUR) came into being in 2011. This article traces the history of evaluation in Italian universities, discussing the tasks assigned to the national evaluation bodies and their functions within the university system. In order to analyse the evolution of national evaluation systems the article discusses the contribution made by evaluation to the governance system mechanisms and the legitimacy requirements to which the universities are subject. The adoption of quantitative parameters and standards in the evaluation process is one of the elements that contributes most to interpreting the significance and consequences of the evaluation.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)