

# How to Balance Stakeholders' Expectations in External Quality Assurance? Estonian Case

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# Outline

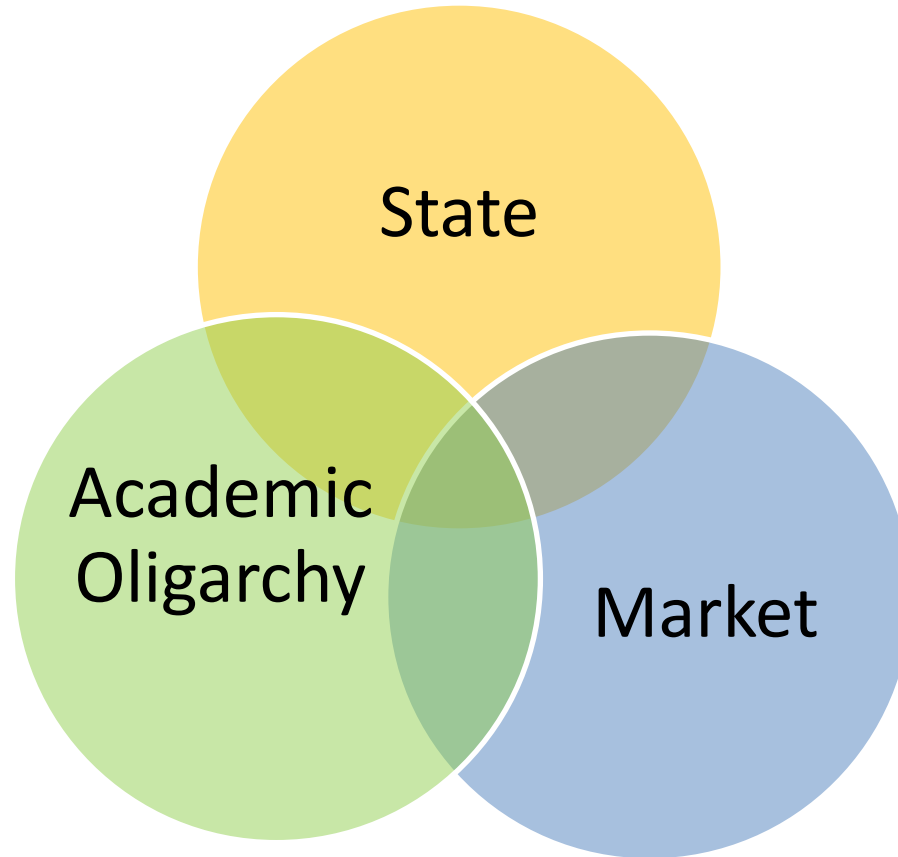
- Reason for the study
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Results
- Conclusions

# Reason for the study

- Introduction of a new QA scheme in Estonia:
  - institutional accreditation
  - quality assessment (audit) of study programme groups

*“Responding to state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces offers a challenge, not a choice, for higher education. Colleges and universities – private and public – must serve all but submit to none of these imperatives” (Burke 2005: 296)*

# Triangle of Coordination (Clark 1983)



# Research questions

- *What are the expectations of State, Market and Academia to the aims of external quality assurance of higher education?*
- *How do they understand the term 'quality'?*

# Hypotheses

1. *State's aim is to get information whether HEI-s are meeting basic standards, determined by external bodies.*
2. *For market (prospective students and employers) the main aim is to get information about the academic provision to make informed choice.*
3. *For academia, the most favored aim is 'fitness for purpose'.*



# Methodology

- Focus group interviewing conducted by two interviewers (14 interviews, 77 participants)
  - Academia: 5 interviews (1 with rectors – 9 participants, 4 with university teachers – 22 participants)
  - State: 2 interviews (9 participants)
  - Market: 3 interviews with employers (16 participants), 2 interviews with high school students (10 participants)
  - Students: 2 interviews (11 participants)
- Content analysis (NVivo)
- 16 aims



# Results: State

- to assess sustainability
- to assure that there is value for money
- to assess fitness of purpose
- to inform stakeholders about credibility of the institution

# Results: Market

- to inform stakeholders about credibility of the institution
- to compare the institution with foreign universities/colleges
- To assess whether the institution responds to the expectations of the society
- to optimize the higher education “landscape”
- to assess meeting the validated standards

# Results: Academia

- to support the internal development of an institution; to give feedback
- to optimize resources (i.e., HE „landscape“)
- to assess fitness for purpose

# Results: Students

- to compare the institution with foreign HEI-s
- to support cooperation among and inside HEI-s
- to assess whether the institution does what it has promised (fitness for purpose)
- to assess whether it responds to expectations of the society

# Commonly mentioned aims

- *to optimize resources*
- *to guarantee credibility and comparability with other (foreign) institutions*
- *to support the internal development of an institution*

# Differences: State

- to assure that there is value for money
- to assess risk management

# Differences: Market

- to assess meeting of validated standards
- to increase the level of higher education

# Differences: Academia

- to give recognition/quality label



# Conclusions

- H1 – not met
- H2 – met
- H3 – partly met



# Aim of institutional accreditation (Estonia)

*The purpose of institutional accreditation is to support the development of strategic management and culture of quality in higher education institutions, inform interest groups of outcomes of the main activities thereof, and enhance the reliability and competitiveness of Estonian higher education.*

[http://ekka.archimedes.ee/files/IA\\_tingimused\\_kord\\_01.04.11%5B1%5D\\_ENG.pdf](http://ekka.archimedes.ee/files/IA_tingimused_kord_01.04.11%5B1%5D_ENG.pdf)



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