

TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION



Needs Assessment on Higher Education institutions in Sierra Leone

Short Form Report

July, 2021

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FOREWORD

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is a body corporate established by an Act of Parliament in 2001, among other things, to advise Government on tertiary education matters, provide institutional liaison with Government and other stakeholder organizations assisting in the sector, and to ensure parity of the products from tertiary education institutions. As a body responsible for quality assurance, it behoves the TEC to assess the statuses of accredited tertiary education institutions in fulfillment of its statutory mandates.

This document is the first in a series to be published by TEC on the statuses and needs of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone. The institutions captured in this document include both public and private universities, polytechnics and teacher training colleges accredited by the TEC.

The report is the result of a holistic painstaking collection and recording of data provided by survey participants in the various accredited Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and on-site verification visits by TEC staff under my guidance and coordination. The study is evidence-based, graphic and in some cases grim. Key indicators are good governance, financial sustainability, staff and programmes quality, relevance of academic programmes, parity of esteem, community services, and the effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery systems.

This publication assessed the availability of resources needed to support teaching, learning, research and community services in the accredited institutions. It further analyzed key constraints to skills development and technology dissemination necessary for accelerated labour market absorption and valued growth in the Sierra Leone economy. The report gives a fair appraisal of the existing situation and what is needed for the transformation of the higher education institutions in Sierra Leone. Hopefully, it will serve as a reference material for all stakeholders in the higher education sector for years to come.

The recommendations are in line with national and international benchmarks and the AU Agenda 2063: "The Africa we want". Agenda 2063 is an African blueprint and master plan for transforming the continent into a global powerhouse. It is a strategic framework that aims to deliver on set goals for inclusive and sustainable development in Africa for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, wealth creation and collective prosperity. Most importantly, it calls for effective change and development in our educational system and highlights the issues of quality and relevance.

For Sierra Leone to fit into this milieu, there is need for improvements in our educational standards and to work within the dictates of the AU road map in the development of an African Continental Quality Assurance Framework. This is a key attribute to youth employability across Africa and will promote among other things, credit transfers, quality and parity of products, institutional esteem, and comparability and compatibility of qualifications earned in different areas in the continent.

The Commission will continue to deliver on its mandates to support economic growth and development. To this end we are committed to facilitating development-oriented activities and programmes in the HEIs that will support the production of graduates that are fit for purpose and ensure institutional growth and sustainability.

Prof. Aliyageen Mohamed Alghali
Chairman, TEC.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is increasingly becoming the major determinant of wealth creation, social growth and economic emancipation. The demands of the labour market and the competitive external environment have led to continuous call for improvements in the management of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and the quality of their products. Thus, enhancing the skills levels of graduates and achieving other educational outcomes are crucial not only for increasing workforce productivity, but also for upgrading the innovative capacity of the economy.

The Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE), taking cognizance of linkages between higher education quality and economic performance, invested in this study conducted by the Tertiary Education Commission to assess the current state of affairs and determine the needs in our universities, polytechnics and teacher training colleges.

The aim of the needs assessment survey was to identify strengths, weaknesses, skills and competency gaps in public HEIs and private universities in Sierra Leone and to provide recommendations to Government [and institutions] on how to address these gaps. Specifically, the study assessed available staff and their qualifications, teaching and learning environment, and output of academic staff, among others.

A structured questionnaire was used to specifically reveal gaps in service availability and delivery in the HEIs. The questions were organized to collect information on a wide range of issues along ten (10) thematic lines, including governance, finance and financial management, staffing levels and quality, infrastructure/facilities, laboratories, equipment/appliances, admissions, examination practices and staff and students matters. The questionnaire was then administered to key stakeholders within HEIs covered in the study.

Information obtained was reported under ten (10) cross-cutting themes, which are mutually reinforcing. The themes were written and critiqued by individuals with considerable insight into the administration and management of HEIs in Sierra Leone.

On the whole, the study identified key strengths at HEIs. However, major shortcomings were unearthed in the resourcing, service delivery, governance and management of HEIs. Some of these are highlighted below, followed by relevant conclusions and recommendations:

1. The Governance architectures of the HEIs were recorded as effective, utilizing a committee system of administration with the Court/Council as the highest administrative body, the Vice-Chancellors and Principals and key support staff responsible for day-to-day administration. The Senate/Academic Council headed by the Vice-Chancellor/Principal is responsible for all academic matters.
2. The paradigm shift from teaching to learning requires adequate resources to support the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience in teaching, research and community service as stipulated in the Universities Act (2005 under amendment).

The role of ICT, laboratories and library facilities in skills and knowledge acquisitions, which cannot be underestimated, were found to be inadequate for the levels of qualifications offered by HEIs in Sierra Leone. The Libraries, ICT and laboratory facilities in most of the HEIs are in a parlous state of disrepair and/or inadequacy; and needing massive injection of funds to give them state of the art statuses necessary for 21st century universities. The shifts in teaching and research methods and the move away from traditional library systems, make the impact of computer and information technology a must for teaching, learning and research. This is made even more imperative by the rapidly increasing diversity of students and programmes in the HEIs.

3. Adequate financial provisions are critical for the proper functioning of the HEIs. The financial situation of all the HEIs is, however, not buoyant, and in a permanent state of decline on a per student basis. Government subventions to the public HEIs are grossly inadequate and usually late in coming. Notwithstanding, the student numbers and programmes are increasing, thus leading to poor learning outcomes and skills acquisition.
4. There are several infrastructural constraints affecting the capacity for teaching and research. Lecture rooms/halls, offices, recreational and WASH facilities have deteriorated drastically over the years. Combined, these have adversely affected teaching, learning outcomes and research in the HEIs.
5. Most of the curricula for courses/programmes on offer in the HEIs are out-dated and not in synchrony with modern day relevance. The majority of them have not been reviewed in the last 6 to 10 years; and some for even much longer. Thus, there is an urgent need for standardization and reviews of the curricula for the programmes/courses on offer to reflect the needs of the modern-day workplace and ensure parity of esteem of the products from the various HEIs.
6. With the advent of fiber optics in Sierra Leone, it is hoped that the HEIs will take advantage of the high-speed bandwidths for internet connectivity to greatly improve on the access to information, e-journals, books and academic networking.
7. Technical/laboratory training services are ineffective in all the HEIs, as properly trained technicians are unavailable. Training of technicians with the right calibre is an absolute necessity for delivery of quality teaching and research.
8. Physically challenged students find it very difficult to cope in the campuses as a result of the non-availability of support facilities and the right/friendly environment.
9. The academic staff are generally inadequate in terms of mix, quantity and quality. A significant proportion of them is found to be inadequately trained for teaching and research at the HEI level. Most of them lack the requisite academic qualifications. A significant number of staff assigned to teach degree level courses are either Bachelor's degree or taught Master's degree holders. These are not the quality of staff required in HEIs. Teaching is further impaired by high teaching workload allocations to junior academics without much supervision and/or any form of mentoring. Very little research is going on in the various HEIs.

Most of the staff are not engaged in research necessary for improved teaching and learning outcomes, either because of funding constraints or lack of capabilities or high teaching workload assignments. A massive training of staff is thus urgently recommended to improve on teaching and research in the HEIs.

10. Very little attention is paid to community service as enshrined in the Universities Act (2005). This needs to be addressed by making provisions for it in the annual budgets of the HEIs.
11. Admissions and examinations practices though fairly adequate, were shown not to be rigid or robust enough. Policies guiding these processes are in place, but implementation and monitoring require some attention. Thus, there is need for these practices to be reinforced. The use of external examiners, preferably at least 25% from outside of Sierra Leone, should be emphasized. This will give significant credence to the certificate awarded and enhance the profiles of the HEIs.

Similarly, with a cloud of misgiving hanging over the integrity and rigidity of the current entrance examinations to HEIs, the creation of a National Joint Admissions Matriculation Board for the conduct of final admissions examination is proposed.

12. Staff and student matters were also looked at with suggestions for creating a conducive condition for peace and tranquility that ensure an optimum teaching, learning and research environment.
13. The public HEIs were shown to have incurred huge loan facilities from commercial banks with high interest burdens. This practice must be discontinued. Loans should not be seen as ready sources for financing activities in the HEIs. Rather, they should serve as short-term remedial measures during extreme cash flow difficulties. Thus, total loan portfolios should be no more than a total of 10% of the annual tuition fees receivable.
14. The poor performances of the HEIs are predicated on the lack of infrastructure and prudent financial management on a sustainable basis. The HEIs should be encouraged to do business within their available financial means and to shun reliance on loans. To this end and to improve on teaching, research, learning outcomes and skills acquisition; the following are proposed for adoption in the annual budgeting of the HEIs:
 - a. 20% of annual tuition fees collected should be allocated to provide research grants to staff members and for purchasing of research equipment and laboratory consumables.
 - b. 15% of annual tuition fees collected should be allocated to infrastructural repairs, new constructions etc.
 - c. 3% of annual tuition fees collected to be allocated to Community Service.
 - d. All fees collected under other charges for libraries and computer laboratories should be put into dedicated accounts for use solely for the purposes for which they are received.

15. To improve on teaching skills in the HEIs, a mandatory 4 to 6 weeks training programme on pedagogy is recommended for all academic staff (old as well as new ones).

Many other conclusions and recommendations are given in the report under the different themes and the general conclusions and recommendations section. It is hoped that the Government, TEC and the HEIs will find this report as an inspiration and a guide in the years to come.

THE DESIGN OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY

The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), through the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) responded to a concept note (Appendix 1) to assess the current state of affairs in our universities (both public and private), polytechnics and teacher training colleges submitted by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) for funding. The aim of the study was to draw out strengths and weaknesses in our universities and other HEIs and to proffer remedies where necessary.

The design of the questionnaire was informed by the need to probe the following criteria in the various accredited HEIs covered.

1. Governance structures, strategic and succession plans.
2. Relevance and scope of programmes/courses, frequency and scope of curricula reviews, design and introduction of new programmes.
3. Financial provisions - sources, adequacy and sustainability.
4. Provision of facilities - adequacy and their statuses in terms of modern trends.
5. Staffing - adequacy in numbers, qualifications in terms of cognitive relevance and appropriate levels, need for training/retraining, continuous professional development and pedagogical training for teaching staff.
6. Teaching and learning outcomes of programmes/courses on offer.
7. Students' attrition rates and reasons.
8. Research - scope/undertakings, funding, relevance (basic, innovative and translatability for immediate societal development/gains).
9. Job satisfaction and appreciation by staff.
10. Examination policies/practices in use.
11. Students' feedbacks on teaching and learning outcomes, the environment for learning and staff comportment.
12. Recommendations for addressing the issues by:
 - a. Government/Proprietors
 - b. The institutions
 - c. TEC
 - d. Other Stakeholders.

The draft questionnaire was validated by a Team of Experts comprising of:

No	Name	Designation	Institution
1.	Dr. Turad Senesie	Former Deputy Minister	MTHE
2.	Prof. Abdullah Mansaray	Former VC&P	EBKUST
3.	Prof. Joe Pemagbi	Former Dean	NUC
4.	Prof. Jonathan E. D. Thompson	Former VC&P	USL
5.	Prof. Rev. Fr. Joe Turay	VC&P	UNIMAK
6.	Prof. Ronnie Frazer-Williams	Former Executive Secretary	TEC
7.	Dr. Williette James	President, ASA	USL
8.	Mr. Abu Bakarr Sheriff	Secretary General, ASA	NU
9.	Mr. Joe Diawo	President, ASA	EP
10.	Mr. James S. Kanu	President, ASA	EBKUST
11.	Mr. Mohamed Shaw	President, ASA	FTC
12.	Mr. Sahr Jimissa	President, ASA	MMCET
13.	Mr. Emmanuel Thinka-Kamara	Manager, (AAIA)	TEC
14.	Ms. Nadia Parkinson	Manager, (APNIL)	TEC
15.	Mr. Josephus Sawyer	Admin. Manager	TEC
16.	Mr. Victor Allieu	Project Officer, AAIA	TEC
17.	Prof. Aliyageen M. Alghali	Chairman	TEC

Data collection was done as follows:

- a. The questionnaire (Appendix 2) was then administered by sending the document to the Registrars of the various institutions for key personnel to complete relevant sections under their coordination.
- b. Completed questionnaires were reviewed by the TEC Secretariat.
- c. Experienced enumerators were dispatched by the TEC to the institutions to further probe for additional information, cross checking of facts and fine tuning of the responses.

Institutions sampled were:

- A. Public Universities/Polytechnics and Teacher Training Colleges:
 1. University of Sierra Leone (USL).
 2. Njala University (NU).
 3. Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology (EBKUST).
 4. Sierra Leone Peace Keeping and Law Enforcement Academy (SILEA).
 5. Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (MMCET).
 6. Eastern Polytechnic (EP).
 7. Freetown Teachers College (FTC) and Government Technical Institute (GTI) constituting the proposed Freetown Polytechnic.

B. Private Universities.

1. University of Makeni (UNIMAK).
2. Limkokwing University.
3. University of Management and Technology (UNIMTECH).
4. United Methodist University (UMU).
5. University of Lunsar (UoL).

The data collected were then subjected to qualitative and quantitative analyses using SPSS. Presentations were in the forms of prose, tables, pie charts and histograms. These were done by Mr. Emmanuel Thinka-Kamara and Prof. A. M. Alghali.

The report was sub-divided into themes which were written and reviewed by a team comprising:

Theme 1: "Governance and Administrative structures/methods including strategic planning and community services."

Drafted by Prof. Abdullah Mansaray and with Prof. Thompson, Mrs. Frances P. Alghali as primary reviewers.

Theme 2: "Finance including subventions, fees and their structures, resources mobilization, debts, etc."

Drafted by Prof. Edwin Momoh and with Professors Alghali and Mansaray as primary reviewers.

Theme 3: "Teaching methods, assessments, examinations processes/practices and curricula and their reviews."

Drafted by Ing. Badamasi Savage and with Professors Redwood-Sawyer, Shiekh Umar Kamara and A. M. Alghali as primary reviewers.

Theme 4: "Library, Information Communications Technology, Internet Connectivity, Computer Facilities, Data Management and Storage."

Drafted by Prof. Miriam Conteh Morgan and with Professors Joe Pemagbi, A. M. Alghali and Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara as primary reviewers.

Theme 5: "Laboratories and other facilities for practical purposes and research."

Drafted by Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara and with Ing. Badamasi Savage and Professors M. S. Fofanah and A. M. Alghali as primary reviewers.

Theme 6: "Staffing: quality, quantity and relevance, teaching loads and professional training needs."

Drafted by Prof. Jonas Redwood-Sawyer and with Professors Conteh-Morgan, A. M. Alghali and Ing. Savage as primary reviewers.

Theme 7: "Research undertakings, issues with funding and resources mobilization, publications and attendance at conferences and other academic fora."
Drafted by Prof. Shiekh Umar Kamara and with Professors Jonas Redwood-Sawyer and A. M. Alghali as primary reviewers.

Theme 8: "Facilities for teaching, research and other activities."

Drafted by Prof. Mohamed S. Fofanah and with Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara, Ing. B. Savage, Professors E. J. D. Thompson and E. J. J. Momoh as primary reviewers.

Theme 9: "Students and Academic Staff Associations Matters, including perspectives on welfare, conditions of service and learning/teaching environment."

Drafted by Prof. Jonathan Ekundayo Thompson with inputs by Prof. Alghali. The primary reviewers were Prof. M. S. Fofanah and Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara.

Theme 10: "Admissions into programmes/courses, credit transfers etc."

Drafted by Prof. Joe Pemagbi and with Professors Miriam Conteh-Morgan, A. M. Alghali and Abdullah Mansaray as primary reviewers.

The themes received second tier reviews as detailed below:

No	Description	Reviewed by
1.	Themes 3, 7 and 8	Professor Miriam Conteh-Morgan
2.	Themes 6, 8 and 2	Professor Joe Pemagbi
3.	Themes 10, 4 and 1	Ing. Badamasi Savage
4.	Themes 1, 2 and 4	Professor Jonas Redwood Sawyer
5.	Themes 3, 6 and 9	Professor Abdullah Mansaray
6.	Themes 1, 2 and 4	Professor Sheikh Umarr Kamarah
7.	Themes 4, 7 and 10	Professor Edwin Momoh
8.	Themes 1, 6 and 7	Professor Mohamed Fofanah
9.	Themes 3, 6 and 10	Professor Ekundayo Thompson
10	Themes 3, 7 and 10	Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara

After the second tier reviews, all the themes were reviewed by Professor A. M. Alghali for consistency and harmony.

Validation of the study report was done by:

No.	Name	Designation
1.	Mrs. Frances P. Alghali	Retired Registrar of Njala University and Former Executive Secretary, Human Rights Commission.
2.	Mr. Edward Ngandi	Retired Registrar of USL and EBKUST.
3.	Mr. Donald Hamilton	Retired International Civil Servant and Senior Citizen of Sierra Leone.
4.	Prof. Adlyn Johnson	Dean, Faculty of Education, Njala University.
5.	Dr. Stanella Beckley	Retired International Educationist and Former Chairperson of TSC.
6.	Mrs. Alimatu Abdullah	Retired Accountant and Current President 50/50 Group Sierra Leone.
7.	Prof. Fr. Joe Turay	Vice-Chancellor, UNIMAK.
8.	Prof. Sahr Foday	Vice-Chancellor & Principal USL.
9.	Prof. Cecil Magbailey Fyle	Late, Retired History Professor & Former Commissioner TEC.
10.	Mrs. Yvonne Gibril	Former Deputy Bank Governor, BSL & Current Commissioner of TEC.
11.	Dr. Roland Buck	Former Director of Planning, USL & Current Commissioner of TEC.
12.	Mrs. Jeanne Kamara	Country Director Christian Aid-Sierra Leone (an INGO).

All the validation comments were discussed in a virtual forum moderated by Professor Sheikh Umarr Kamarah and Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara. The final editing and layout for printing was done by Professors Joe Pemagbi, Miriam Conteh-Morgan, Sheikh Umarr Kamarah, Professor Aliyageen M. Alghali and Dr. Joseph Sherman-Kamara.

GENERAL FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the report presents a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Needs Assessment Study conducted by the Tertiary Education Commission for the Higher Education Institutions in Sierra Leone. It serves as the composite summary of the separate summaries written for the 10 themes addressed by the assessment, with overlapping conclusions and recommendations collapsed, while conserving the core meaning and essence of the conclusions. This section of the report excludes details of the design and methodology used in the assessment and focuses exclusively on the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The summary has been condensed and presented under four main headings; viz:

1. Corporate Governance and Financial Stewardship,
2. Academic Activities and Services,
3. Institutional Infrastructure and Services, and
4. Staff and student matters.

Specific details or additional information on the study could be discerned from the main body of the report or contacts with the Tertiary Education Commission.

5.1 GENERAL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

CLUSTER 1: CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

5.1.1 Legal, Regulatory and Policy Environment

- (a) The legal, regulatory and policy environment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sierra Leone operate on the basis of established laws, regulations and policies guiding academic and administrative processes (Universities Act, 2005 (under review)). The study, however, shows that the current laws, regulations and policies do not quite make for the efficient operational and regulatory needs of the institutions. This is contingent on the emerging paradigms for higher education service delivery systems in the Twenty First Century. The Universities Act 2005, which has been amended a couple of times to provide for the establishment of new HEIs, is currently undergoing revisions that hopefully will create more room for institutional autonomy. Most institutions lack cogent policies in areas like ICT usage, distance learning and inclusive education, thus resulting in ad hoc provisions for such important components of their mandatory services.
- (b) The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) established through an Act of Parliament in 2001 to advise Government on Tertiary Education matters and to ensure parity of esteem of products of tertiary education institutions" (TEC Act, 2001: Section 7(1)) has regulatory, supervisory and coordination functions over HEIs in areas of governance, financial management, academic services delivery as well as staff and student matters. The TEC Regulations (2006) and other operational guidelines underpin the setting up of minimum standards for implementing related policies. For example, the recently

approved TEC Guidelines on Distance Education, Conduct of Examinations, Admissions to Programmes and Postgraduate Research Degrees supervision prescribed for domestication and use in the operations of the HEIs are reference cases cited.

5.1.2 Governance, Management Structures and Processes.

- (a) The core business of the respective Courts or Councils and Senates or Academic Boards of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is to ensure good governance and effective management of the institutions. The governance architecture of HEIs includes statutory committees and sub-committees of Court or Council and Senate or Academic Boards to support decision-making and ensure transparency and accountability. The study suggests that these committees, including the all-important University Coordinating Committee, do not meet regularly, as required. Ad-hoc committees constituted to deal with specific matters of urgency do not always comprise the most competent and committed persons. This affects the quality of the performance of the committees, and by extension limits, to a considerable extent, the effective contribution of such committees to governance and administration of the institutions.
- (b) While the heads of HEIs in the study generally consider the governance of their institutions to be "very effective," data from the stakeholders suggest otherwise. The findings suggest that there is some degree of 'external interference' in the governance and management of public institutions, and that such interference has often sparked off friction and crises in the institutions.
- (c) The regulatory role of the Tertiary Education Commission and the oversight role of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on Higher Education were not given prominence in the corporate governance structure of the HEIs, especially when dealing with financing. The major flaw detected by the study is that budgets passed through the Finance and General Purpose Committees of HEIs are not submitted to the TEC for scrutiny and onward submission to the Ministry of Finance through the MTHE, as required by law (TEC Act, 2001: 7(2)a).
- (d) The findings also suggest that there is a lack of understanding of the importance of critical legal requirements as evidenced by the fact that not all the institutions have had their seals registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission.
- (e) Compliance with External Quality Assurance demands appears weak in a number of the institutions.
- (f) While all the institutions indicated that they engage in community service as part of their mandate, it is not clear whether these "services" are predicated on a needs assessment of what communities need most to improve their conditions, neither is it clear whether they form part of the strategic plans of institutions and are budgeted for.

5.1.3 Funding

- (a) There are serious challenges relating to funding public universities in Sierra Leone. Although they receive third-stream incomes, all public institutions are highly dependent on fees paid by students. The inability of the GOSL to adequately provide timely subsidies/subventions to the HEIs in the form of block grants or grants-in-aid to students exacerbates the financial challenges faced by public universities.
- (b) From the data collected, it is observed that the public HEIs are using activity-based budgeting for financial planning and control. This means all costs for a financial year are related to specific activities in the budget. Thus, a budget cut would result in some activities not being implemented or severely compromised in their delivery and quality.

5.1.4 Financial Management Practices

- (a) Generally, it was observed from the data collected that both public and private HEIs do not have updated Financial Management or Accounting Manuals. This manual provides detailed descriptions of all the financial policies and procedures binding on the financial conduct of the institution. This document therefore needs to be reviewed in all the HEIs with the intent of incorporating strengthened new financial guidelines for relevance and alignment with the Financial Act 2016. In the absence of such a document, there is a high risk of financial discrepancies and non-compliance.
- (b) According to the data, most of the public and private HEIs have an Internal Audit Department. The problem is that recommendations from Internal Audit Departments are hardly implemented, especially at the public HEIs. This is an indication of weakness on the part of those charged with governance responsibilities.

CLUSTER 2: ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

5.2.1 Academic Policies and Curriculum Development

Periodic review of curricula is an important component of any education programme. In the case of public HEIs in Sierra Leone, not more than two institutions have complied with this important requirement in recent years. Only few HEIs have had their programmes revised recently.

5.2.2 Admissions to Programmes/Courses

- (a) Regarding admission requirements, there are similarities in the institutions, but these exist mainly at the general level. There are many elastic variations in the details that undermine efforts to set and maintain standards in the institutions, to the extent that there is need to harmonize, strengthen and standardize admission requirements.
- (b) Although without evidence to substantiate their claims, the institutions asserted that their admission requirements comply with the TEC guidelines

for minimum admission requirements. The challenge about the guidelines themselves is that though they are comprehensive, there seems to be no effective monitoring and/or compliance mechanism that ensure their implementation.

- (c) Generally, there are mismatches between the numbers of students admitted and the number of qualified academic staff needed to teach them, resulting in under-delivery of services. Far more students are admitted than available facilities, such as classroom space, furniture and teaching and learning materials.
- (d) There is no national standard, reference or course equivalences framework to guide credit transfer among institutions. To fill this vacuum, a few institutions have produced their own policies to inform admission of transferred students. Thus, most of the institutions admit transferred students on the basis of ad hoc criteria.

5.2.3 Academic Quality Assurance

- (a) Quality Assurance (QA) is a significant part of the operation of any university system. Unfortunately, QA Units are not yet widely established at the HEIs, but their formation, which started in 2017, is in progress. Of the ten institutions sampled only one has not yet established a Quality Assurance (QA) Unit. As at the time of the survey the established QA Units in three (3) of the institutions had no dedicated QA staff, while the rest are only partially staffed. Given that the QA Units are new and not yet fully staffed, only 30% of the institutions have developed Quality Assurance Policies and 50% have a defined QA governance structure. It can be concluded that QA Units are expected to serve as a mechanism for systematic efforts towards quality assurance and quality improvement, through monitoring and conducting activities related to improving and assuring quality of academic programmes.
- (b) Compliance with the quality assurance principles of the TEC designed in line with international best practices is inadequate. These guidelines must be enforced by the TEC.
- (c) There is a lack of diversity in the teaching strategies used at HEIs; different strategies are more effective under different circumstances and for different courses to ensure effective learning. This lack of diversity in teaching methods for effective teaching were due to a combination of poor competencies of staff in pedagogy , poor mastery of the subject matter by staff and inadequate teaching resources and facilities.

5.2.4 Assessment Systems

- (a) Assessments and feedbacks are integral to the student learning experience. Programme level assessment focuses on what and how an academic programme is contributing to the learning and development of the students.
- (b) It was not clear whether all HEIs have assessment policies that set out the principles that govern the approach and management of formal assessments of students' performance. Most institutions have adopted the practice of

conference marking. However, few of them still continue to use sole marking of examination scripts. Sole marking should be discouraged in the interest of fair-play and objective assessments of the students.

- (c) All HEIs use continuous assessment (formative assessments) in their grading/marking criteria with some using formative assessment to summative assessment ratio of 30:70 whilst others are using 20:80 and 40:60. Clearly, there is no consistency across HEIs in the weighting of formative assessment to summative assessment. This should be unified in order to optimize parity of esteem among degrees, certificates and diplomas awarded, and the products from the different institutions.
- (d) Responses to questions related to grading systems show lack of consistency across HEIs in the allocation of percentage ranges for letter grades A to F. Other responses further suggest lack of consistency for degree classifications in terms of Final Grade Point Average (FGPA). These should be harmonized in the interest of promoting parity of esteem among qualifications awarded by different institutions.
- (e) Regarding security arrangements for examination materials, it can be concluded that there are reasonably robust arrangements across campuses. Out of 10 Institutions sampled, 70% have in place a team that is responsible for monitoring examinations to ensure that irregularities do not occur. Also, all institutions have a custodian for all examination materials whose responsibility is to ensure the safety and security of the materials. 90% of all institutions have a system of "account and control", which is a system for returning examination scripts and following up on controls and reporting. Almost all of the institutions (90-100%) have procedures in place for due process to address issues of examination malpractices, including opportunities for fair and independent investigation of suspected cases of examination malpractice. Additionally, 90-100 percent of the institutions have CCTV systems installed in examination halls to minimize examination malpractices.
- (f) On the role external examiners play in independently assuring the quality of assessments done by institutions, over 90% of institutions sampled stated that their final examination of programmes had been subjected to external reviews in the last three years. This is quite commendable. External examiners are normally highly qualified and experienced senior academics in their discipline invited from comparable or higher institutions to lend support to assessment as well as providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the academic programmes assessed. Recommendations from external examiners should inform improvement planning for academic programmes and departments.

5.2.5 Research

- (a) The study revealed evidence of research work being undertaken by some universities in Sierra Leone. Clearly, the lack of institutional and state support, the heavy teaching loads allocated to academic staff and the recurring financial challenges these institutions face, among other things, hamper the scope of research undertakings in the HEIs.

- (b) The paucity of research in the universities has enormous implications for teaching, learning, and student success. The absence of robust research means the lecturer will not be au-fait with the new thinking in his/her field and will not be able to produce and disseminate new knowledge. This may have adverse effect on the lecturer's ability to inspire the students and improve their learning outcomes.
- (c) Laboratories are absolutely indispensable to research and in the teaching, learning and application of science and technology. They are the instruments that higher education institutions use (in STEM) to generate the knowledge and skills required for participation in the highly competitive world of science and technology. Unfortunately, this critical component of the work of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone has been hampered by the poor condition of their laboratories, to the extent that their overhauling is an urgent necessity.

CLUSTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

5.3 Physical Infrastructure

- (a) Public tertiary education institutions in Sierra Leone are faced with myriad of problems leading to the extremely poor academic performance of students. One of these key problems is the poor physical infrastructure, particularly buildings, rudimentary laboratories and poorly equipped workshops, computers, poor electricity, poor water supply and poor sanitation facilities. Almost all the institutions studied require an entire overhaul of the physical infrastructure if quality education, which is the flagship program of Government, is to be achieved in earnest. Both students and lecturers complain about the lack of adequate physical and recreational facilities.

The study revealed that the laboratory facilities of most higher education institutions are in such poor condition that these laboratories cannot possibly attract much respect from their regional and global counterpart academic communities. This reflects poorly on the preparedness of higher education institutions to deliver their mandate, especially in the very critical areas of STEM. Teaching and research laboratories at the institutions lack the basic resources such as appropriate infrastructure, consumables and personnel needed to support thriving laboratory-based training of all categories of students. Power and water supply facilities are poor, furniture and fittings are in various states of disrepair, ICT resources are very scanty, laboratory rooms are ill-prepared and poorly ventilated, a number of laboratories do not have technicians, there are no laboratory safety equipment, and basic equipment are either lacking, obsolete or dysfunctional. This calls for immediate action aimed at improving the quality of the laboratories; especially against the backdrops of rising student numbers and increasing public pressure for graduates with appropriate practical skills.

- (b) An academic institution cannot function effectively without an adequately stocked, equipped and competently managed library. As the repository of information for both staff and students, the assessment has revealed that

most of the libraries of the HEIs do not meet the standards that support academic work, resulting in adverse repercussions on the quality of research, teaching and learning. The majority of the libraries do not have the books and journals they really need, and they have not bought new books or subscribed to journals in the last five years before the assessment. Most of the academic libraries do not have enough seating facilities and computers to match their number of students. Two had no computers whatsoever. Majority of the library staff do not have the necessary professional qualifications, the consequence of which is poor service delivery.

- (c) Regarding computers and computer laboratories, most institutions have equipment in their computer laboratories. However, none of them has enough laboratory capacity to support their student numbers. Internet connectivity is a major challenge which seems to negate the whole idea of having a computer lab as it is expected that users will need to access online resources.

CLUSTER 4: STAFF AND STUDENT MATTERS

5.4 Staff and Student Welfare

- (a) Regarding academic staff matters, the assessment has clearly shown that the ratio of Professors to Senior Lecturers to Lecturers in the HEIs studied does not meet the benchmark ratio of 20:35:45. The paucity of Professors and Senior Lecturers in institutions does not augur well for mentorship, quality research, and spread of work load and the profile of the institutions.
- (b) All of the institutions studied require continuous professional development programmes for their staff albeit to various extent, with the majority pre-preferring inputs in areas such as pedagogical skills, preparation of instructional materials, global innovative teaching methods and ICT in education.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

CLUSTER 1: CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

5.5.1 Governance, Management Structures and Processes

- (a) The findings of the assessment on the governance of HEIs suggest that there is need for the University Courts and Polytechnic Councils members to be given orientation on their assumption of duty to help them fully understand and effectively discharge their supervisory functions in the governance of their institutions.
- (b) University Courts and Polytechnic Councils should strengthen their monitoring mechanisms to ensure the compliance of HEIs with legal and other requirements, including the registration of seals with the Corporate Affairs Commission, renewal of registration with TEC, and implementation of decisions taken by the Courts or Councils.
- (c) Performance management systems for all HEIs should be reinstated with a more robust role for the TEC.

- (d) Technical support to heads of HEIs to leverage their income-generating capacities as one of their core functions should be provided by the TEC, in collaboration with the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE).
- (e) To ensure the effective governance and management of HEIs, all stakeholders should adhere to laid down procedures as specified in the respective Acts and Statutes. Direct interference in the governance and management of HEIs, especially by MTHE, the supervisory Ministry, should be avoided. It should be the role of TEC to mediate and ensure that the necessary governance structures as prescribed by law are allowed to operate unhindered.
- (f) Community services engaged in by the HEIs should be planned, predicated on community needs, and budgeted for. It is recommended that at least 3% of total tuition fees be allocated to this important function of the HEIs as mandated by the University Act 2005. Institutions should, as best as possible, design community service programmes around their areas of recognized strength.
- (g) Those charged with governance of the HEIs should devise monitoring and coordination mechanisms through which the finance departments will be able to collaborate with all relevant departments to obtain and facilitate the processing and eventual reporting of their financial performances and positions accurately.
- (h) Existing policies in the institutions require revisions, and there are emerging issues for which new ones would need to be developed to effectively address them. These include issues of the use of ICT, distance learning and inclusive education. In this regard, the recent TEC Guidelines on Distance Education, Conduct of Examinations, Admissions to Programmes and Postgraduate Research Degrees Supervision should be domesticated for use in the operations of the HEIs.
- (i) A policy to use programme and course information templates that include programme learning outcomes (PLOs) and Course Learning Objectives (CLOs) for dissemination of information on programmes and course specifications/descriptions to students, should be established at all HEIs.
- (j) The repercussions of disparities in admission requirements and processes are far reaching, and in particular, inimical to efforts of setting and maintaining standards. The TEC should, therefore, design policies for harmonizing, strengthening, and standardizing admission requirements and processes binding on all higher education institutions, with a robust enforcement strategy. The TEC already has the appropriate material in the form of "guidelines on minimum admission requirements", that it can develop into such a policy document.
- (k) It is recommended that a national credit transfer policy/framework/reference, binding on all higher education institutions, be established by the TEC.

5.5.2. Financial Management

- (a) Financial planning needs to be integrated with institutional policies.
- (b) A move towards formula-based budgeting in the allocation of block grants to HEIs as a way of improving transparency and accountability in the financing of HEIs should be adopted. Financial allocation to public higher education institutions should be evidence-based and supported with data on student enrolment, programmes on offer, graduation rates, and types of degree awards granted.
- (c) The loan burden on the HEIs has been stifling because loans have been seen as a regular funding source rather than as a short-term cash flow stop gap measure. To reduce the debt burden on institutions, a one-off debt-relief repayment subvention is recommended. Where unavoidable, debt taking by the HEIs should be put on stringent approval dictates involving TEC, MTHE and MoF and should be no more than 10% of the total tuition fees receivable on an annual basis.

5.5.3 Funding

- (a) Other efforts to generate income internally should include commercialization of findings from research and innovations, the Vice Chancellors and Principals to vigorously pursue their responsibility of internal and external fund raising, endowment and reserve creation and management, creation of meaningful Public/Private Partnerships and short-term loan financing of no more than 10% of total projected annual tuition fees.
- (b) There should be improvement in the efficiency of spending of the resources of the HEIs, and efforts should be made to diversify the sources of funding in response to the growing resource needs of the institutions (i.e efficiency of spending should be increased and the sources of funding for the HEIs be diversified). Public institutions already raise significant income through fees and other sources, but these should be improved upon. Fees should be allowed to increase and government should provide targeted grants to the most disadvantaged HEIs. Internal income generation activities from sources other than government subventions to HEIs need to be increased. It is therefore recommended that Government allow student fees to be increased in the HEIs, more so since they were last increased five or more years ago.
- (c) The important regulatory role of the Tertiary Education Commission has been undermined by inadequate funding. A ten-percent additional charge on the combined other charges should be instituted by all HEIs and levied on each student. The funds should be collected by the institutions on behalf of TEC. The TEC shall then use the levies to support the creation of an endowment fund for research chairs in the HEIs and aid in developing robust monitoring mechanisms by the Commission.
- (d) Encourage public-private partnerships in ways that are mutually profitable and at the same time retain public interests trust and confidence, which must be initiated and actively supported.

- (e) A Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) should be established to provide financial support to HEIs through an Act of Parliament drawn from an agreed percentage of tax levied on industries from profits posted by companies/ industries registered in Sierra Leone. The fund should be used towards infrastructure and other developments such as equipping laboratory and workshop facilities and the creation of "Research Professorial Chairs in the HEIs". (Lessons can be learned from the Ghana GET Fund and Nigeria TET Fund models). The establishment in HEIs of endowments and chairs sponsored by industries, wealthy alumni and other interested persons and groups must be explored.
- (f) Since a considerable number of students drop out because of financial reasons, a loan scheme for deserving students should be instituted. A strong monitoring and recovery mechanism to protect the scheme against "leakage" and other abuses should be built into the scheme.
- (g) Introduction of extramural systems for evening classes, online and distance learning in all the HEIs, especially so for oversubscribed programmes and to accommodate the working population. This will serve as an income generation initiative involving more students, and thus mobilizing more income through fees and other charges. Part of the additional revenue generated should go towards the recruitment of additional staff, maintenance of infrastructure and devices, and the procurement of equipment. The TEC Policy on 'Distance Education and E-Learning' should provide guidance in this undertaking.
- (h) The GoSL should study best practices for HEIs funding from institutions in the sub-region and beyond and craft a model best suited for the Sierra Leone context.
- (i) Introduce university-wide investments and joint ventures with interested partners/organizations.

CLUSTER 2: ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

5.5.4. Research

- (a) Given the dearth of research as highlighted in Themes 5,6,7 and 8 of this document and its importance for teaching and learning and raising the profiles of the HEIs and teaching staff, the following are strongly recommended:
 - i. Government makes a budget line provision in its annual block grant subventions to each HEI to be used solely for research in the institutions.
 - ii. Each institution should allocate 20% of the total tuition fees projected and collected from students to research undertakings and procurement of equipment, consumables etc.
- (b) Framework linking research activities to teaching loads must be established to encourage active research in HEIs. It is recommended that the minimum teaching load for staff be 9 credit hours or 3 modules per semester and

the maximum be 15 credit hours or 5 modules per academic year. Heads of departments and Deans of faculties should have a maximum of 6 credit hours per semester. Associate lecturers must also not have more than 6 credit hours per semester. These caps on teaching should be used to foster the culture of research, mentoring and postgraduate supervision in HEIs.

- (c) To improve the research climate in the universities in Sierra Leone, there should be a policy in place for experienced and seasoned staff to mentor junior staff, and research grants should be made available to lecturers. It would help a great deal if ad-hoc courses in research capacity building, collaboration, and networking opportunities were to be provided to staff, as well as establishing research grants proposal writing, monitoring, and disbursement unit in each university. It is also recommended that a compulsory policy mandating that 20% of tuition fees be allocated to the grants unit to be given out as research grants to staff, and for the procurement of equipment and other materials needed for research.
- (d) A policy should be created that makes lack of research progress five years from date of employment a cause for termination; and reintroducing the Research Council for public universities will help greatly. Online journal publications should be encouraged especially peer-reviewed open access journals. To further enhance the effort to improve the research climate in the universities, research units should be encouraged to keep a regularly updated database of research funding opportunities meant for Africa/African universities. For lecturers to have enough time to carry out research, universities should introduce a policy that provides specified release time from teaching for faculty working on publications. (See appendix C for a list of research funding opportunities.)
- (e) For the promotion of research, the TEC, HEIs and MTHE should make concerted effort to devise strategies for reversing the situation of under-resourced research activities and faculties to make the HEIs more academically productive and competitive in the larger community of academia.
- (f) The TEC should initiate strategies for the promotion of research through formation of a National Research Council, introduction of Research Chairs in the universities, and establishment of a quality control mechanism to monitor the state and functionality of HEI laboratories.

5.5.5 Curricula Review

- (a) All institutions must develop and produce policy and framework for curriculum development for new programmes, as well as for review of existing programmes in order to remain relevant and meet the requirements of stakeholders. The policy must stipulate the time cycle for curriculum reviews of all programmes. A time cycle of 5 to 6 years is recommended.
- (b) HEIs must adhere to the process of curriculum design and review starting from stakeholder engagement, collecting and analyzing data from stakeholders to produce evidence-based reviews of programmes, implementing the curriculum, evaluating the curriculum and using results of analysis of curriculum mapping to inform the next cycle of reviews.

- (c) The TEC must enforce compliance for producing the policy document for curriculum design and review.
- (d) The curriculum review process document and curriculum mapping templates developed can serve as an important resource document.
- (e) The curriculum review documents should be widely circulated by the TEC to all HEIs for their use as reference materials to undertake curricula reviews; any institution requiring further training on the use of the documents and templates must contact the TEC to arrange for appropriate training workshops.
- (f) The TEC must be more vigilant in monitoring for timeliness and conformity to its guidelines for curricula reviews. This could entail some level of participation in the reviews by TEC staff or paid consultants so as to ensure that procedures are followed from the outset.
- (g) All institutions must be directed to commence review of curricula of all outdated programmes, using the AQHEd-SL SPHEIR model currently being used to review the Electrical and Electronic Engineering programme at FBC and the Agriculture programme at NU respectively as a guide; these programmes which represent the STEM and Agriculture Clusters are pilot programmes reviewed under the SPHEIR project. The curriculum review process of the SPHEIR model is also being used to review programmes at UNIMAK and EP.

5.5.6 Academic Quality Assurance

- (a) A Quality Assurance Unit is responsible for a host of activities that are designed to improve the quality of inputs, processes and outputs of a university system. Therefore, It is recommended that all HEIs that have not already established such units be prevailed upon by the TEC to establish them with clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the governance structure of their institutions. Institutional QA Units must be headed by a Director with support staff to undertake the monitoring and evaluation responsibilities of this Unit.
- (b) Key policies, procedures, activities and guidelines relating to the administration of quality assurance evaluations and reviews must be included in all QA framework documents of HEIs. Through its policy instruments, QA Units must take positive and proactive steps to ensure that quality of teaching and learning, research and stakeholder outreach are achieved.
- (c) The specific areas of internal quality assurance which should be monitored and assessed continuously are:
 - * Quality of Programmes and Courses
 - * Quality of academic and support staff
 - * Quality of teaching and learning
 - * Quality of student assessment

- * Quality of support services
 - * Quality of resources, facilities and infrastructure
 - * Quality of research
 - * Quality of human resources
 - * Quality of finance and Administrative Services
- (d) Full compliance with guidelines for quality assurance must be enforced by the TEC as part of an External Quality Assurance mechanism. Guidelines should be developed for all the areas of QA mentioned above, and both academic and administrative staff must be thoroughly educated on their essence and implementation.
- (e) The competence of faculty members (especially newly employed lecturers below the rank of Senior lecturer) in delivering academic programmes should be periodically monitored and assessed by means of classroom observations by the QA Units; this will serve the purpose of verifying that instructors are teaching effectively and of identifying areas for professional development. Self-Assessment Reports of the QA Unit should be used to identify the deficiencies for the information of the Head of the institution to provide feedback to the affected staff and take appropriate steps to provide necessary support.

5.5.7 Assessment

- (a) All HEIs must be required to develop an Assessment Policy which should comprise assessment standards and governance of assessment standards
- (b) Institutions must have a grade appeal policy to allow students to appeal or contest their grades; for this to be effective, lecturers must publish assessment rubrics and marking schemes aligned with the learning outcomes for each assessment.
- (c) For continuous assessments, students must be informed about each course, what constitutes their continuous assessments in terms of: assignments, group work, presentations, laboratory practicals, class tests/quizzes and the like. The weighting of each component should be stated for the information of students. Instructors should publish/provide feedback of continuous assessments to students before final exams (summative assessment).
- (d) It is recommended that allocation of percentage ranges from letter grades A-F, as well as classification of degrees for Honours and Graduate courses and degrees, be made uniform across HEIs in Sierra Leone and disaggregated as is done by USL; only COMAHS should be allowed to use their system because of the unique nature of the programmes and assessment methods used.

- (e) The implementation of the proposed Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) will require implementation of the above recommendation to facilitate credit transfer; further use of National Credit Hours for completion of academic programmes will also facilitate placement of qualifications at appropriate levels in a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) soon to be developed for HEIs.
- (f) External reviews of final year examinations are essential ingredients of higher education delivery, particularly as quality assurance measures, and therefore must continue. It can also be suggested that for external moderation or vetting not be done for its own sake, reports of external examiners (at least samples) should be shared with the TEC whose responsibility as a regulatory body shall be to ensure action to correct weaknesses identified by external examiners for the benefit of all higher education institutions.

CLUSTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT

5.5.8 Infrastructural Development

- (a) Given the dearth of facilities and infrastructural repairs highlighted in Themes 4,5 and 9 and the importance of a conducive teaching and learning environment in the HEIs, the following are strongly recommended:
 - i. Government makes a budget line provision in its block grant subventions to each HEIs to be used solely for facilities and infrastructural improvements.
 - ii. Each institution should allocate 15% of the total tuition fees projected and collected annually to facilities and infrastructural improvements.
- (b) Regarding facilities and resources for teaching, the physical resources for educational activities including equipment, materials and information technology must be sufficient; equipment must be up-to-date, readily available and effectively deployed. Facilities and resources should be in line with the formulated goals and aims and with the designed programme. Facilities and resources must be connected to the relevant teaching/learning strategies.
- (c) The findings of this survey clearly show that there is need to increase the number of building structures for the expansion of lecture rooms, laboratories, and workshops for all public and private higher education institutions in Sierra Leone. But the expansion of the physical infrastructure must be accompanied by the provision of adequate and modern laboratory and workshop equipment.
- (d) To fulfill their purpose of providing quality education, particularly science and technology-based training and skills required for national development and capable of competing in the global human resource market, HEIs need, as a matter of urgency, huge injection of resources to transform their teaching and research laboratories from their mostly derelict state to a state-of-the-art level. Investment in laboratory facilities should concentrate specifically on providing laboratories that are well equipped, housed in dedicated buildings with regular supply of water and power; efficiently managed

by enough appropriately trained and qualified technicians; spacious enough to accommodate the number of users in the institution; regularly provided with adequate amount of the consumables required; enough dedicated furniture and protective and safety equipment.

- (e) The institutions should explore the possibility of introducing virtual and remote laboratory work to reduce the pressure on the limited physical laboratory space available to them. They should also maximize the use of the little laboratory resources available to them through collaboration.
- (f) Internet connectivity is so vital for any lab to serve its intended purpose that institutions must make it a top priority when setting up and maintaining computer labs; otherwise, having a lab that only partly addresses users' needs is counter intuitive.
- (g) Institutions should be made to admit only the number of students they have qualified staff and facilities for.
- (h) The TEC must develop a policy or a set of guidelines that govern the provision of computing services by institutions. i.e. setting up and maintaining computer labs. The guidelines must specifically indicate what is required in a Computer labs to ensure effective service delivery.
- (i) Regarding academic staff matters, HEIs must make deliberate efforts to achieve the benchmarks for academic standards internationally recognized in the proportions of Professors, Senior Lecturers and Lecturers; also, the TEC must establish BMAS for academic ranks and use it for accreditation of programmes offered by HEIs.
- (j) Institutions must recognize the value of ICT in education; therefore, hardware, software and internet access must be deployed more robustly in libraries and in labs. This will help to socialize users in the electronic information environment necessary for enhancing learning and research and prepare them with soft skills employers expect of HEIs graduates.
- (k) It is recommended that priority be given to improving WASH facilities for the health of both students and staff.
- (l) Because thermal energy poses a serious economic burden on the institutions, it is strongly recommended that they consider solar energy as a viable alternative source of their energy needs.

5.5.9 Independent Learning/Study

- (a) To ensure that library books, equipment and other resources are current enough to support researchers, lecturers and students, the institutions should have budget allocations for their libraries. Moreover, students' library fees should be dedicated exclusively and used to ensuring that the facilities are adequate and current. Also, academic librarians need to capitalize on the availability of free online resources and develop online research libraries either as the primary source for online materials or as supplementary to subscription journals.

- (b) Libraries cannot provide quality service if they have staff members that are not credentialed professionals. To professionalize libraries and ensure that staff can adequately support the research and teaching missions of their host institutions, TEC should mandate minimum qualifications and key competencies for librarians.
- (c) The institutions recognize the value of ICT in education; therefore, hardware, software and internet access must be deployed more robustly in libraries and in laboratories.
- (d) All institutions should upgrade their existing computer laboratories so as to provide computers that are in good condition. To ensure that library book and serial collections are current enough to support campus researchers and learners, every institution must have a budget allocation for libraries from central funding. Student library fees must be ring-fenced so that libraries can invest in equipment, software and user education programmes.

CLUSTER 4: STAFF AND STUDENTS ISSUES

- (a) Institutions must have appropriate policies and guidelines for staff promotion and support including access to professional development facilities. All teaching staff must have access to continuous professional development activities including seminars and conferences. Academic departments should make appropriate arrangements for the induction, supervision, mentoring and development of associate or junior lecturers. Teaching staff should have relevant knowledge of, and maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in subject-related scholarship that informs curriculum design and directly enhances their teaching.
- (b) There must be Student Faculty Evaluation Surveys for lecturers to be anonymously assessed by students they teach and for each course they teach. Students should be requested to complete an evaluation of their lecturer, preferably on-line, anonymously for each course they take.
- (c) The reports on teaching observations and the results of the survey should be taken into account by supervisors when appraising instructors and planning professional development activities. The attendance and punctuality of lecturers will also be monitored by this exercise.
- (d) For professional development of lecturers, there must be yearly pedagogy and assessment workshops and discipline specific training to ensure that lecturers are current with developments in their field and maintain/update their technical proficiency.
- (e) Provision of Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs), Course Goals and Objectives, Course Outline and Structure should be mandatory for all HEIs when applying for acceptance/accreditation of programmes and courses.
- (f) There should be a policy of the QA Unit to support internal assessment of PLOs to monitor the effectiveness of the curriculum and to guide quality improvements in programmes.

- (g) Lecturers must be required to be regular for classes in order to complete course syllabi. Confidential student evaluation of performance of lecturers should be done every semester and must include the element of attendance and punctuality.
- (h) To improve on the quality of the academic staff, a staff development programme should be established to support current serving staff to meet the requirements of the PhD for appointment as lecturer, and all new appointments must be based on a PhD or MPhil as the entry qualification, in addition to pedagogical, biometric and character profiling requirements such as integrity.
- (i) All academic staff in HEIs should have mandatory background in pedagogical skills and should be certified as a requirement for permanent appointment. A special Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme in pedagogy should be designed for lecturers already in the service. Implementation of this recommendation should start with compilation of the CPD needs of staff of all HEIs, prioritized and pursued by the combined effort of HEIs, with the support of MTHE and coordination of the TEC.
- (j) On the paucity of women career academics in the HEIs, it is recommended that, with the active support of the leadership of the Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the TEC take the coordinating responsibility to design a framework for promoting gender inclusion and empowerment in academia.
- (k) With most of the leaders in HEIs without training in leadership, and with many of them without experience in institutional management, CPD programmes for leadership should be designed for all HEI leaders, including VCs, Principals, DVCs, Deans, HODs, Heads of Schools and Registrars.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings presented in the needs assessment study provide further insight into the basis of perceived progressive decline in the quality of products and services of higher education institutions in Sierra Leone. It is easy to see how the fabric of the strong academic culture, for which Sierra Leone is still held in high esteem across the region, could have eroded under poor resourcing, untenable conditions of overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, inadequate equipment and limited access to instructional materials. When the problem of poor teaching and learning environment meets the bigger problem of ill-prepared students, due to various reasons outside the scope of the study, the result on quality of graduates becomes self-evident. In the absence of effective governance, administrative and academic systems, taking advantage of the values of systematic performance reviews and strengthening, these challenges can only escalate further.

Many strong recommendations have been made with a view to bringing HEIs back on track. These would require substantial investments to improve and strengthen infrastructure, equipment and facilities, human resource capacity, institutional support systems, and legal and regulatory systems. Fortunately, the TEC has been working closely with HEIs and building strategic alliances with other stakeholders, taking advantage of emerging opportunities in the development of quality assurance systems, qualifications frameworks, development and review of policies to strengthen academic processes and review of curricula across HEIs and to ensure alignment of academic and professional curricula to job market needs. At a time when the demand for higher education is increasing as the direct effect of the national Free Quality Education policy at the basic and senior secondary levels, the role of the TEC will become more prominent in generating and implementing preventatives to mitigate quality deterioration in the higher education system and ensuring quality and parity of products from HEIs.

SUMMARY OF VALIDATION COMMENTS

The validation exercise involved in-depth assessments by twelve (12) individuals of diverse socio-economic, administrative and educational backgrounds ranging from current Vice-Chancellors, senior personnel of Non-Governmental Organizations, retired registrars, professors (current and retired) and retired international educationists. They worked independently and in plenary with the authors and critically reviewing the various themes of the report. The list of validators together with their backgrounds is contained in the section on the design of the study. An innovative validation technique was adopted, using a closed WhatsApp forum exclusively created for the study. Individual feedback reports from the validators were presented and discussed by the validators, authors, reviewers and the study team over a period of two weeks.

The validation raised several thought provoking questions on facilities to support teaching and learning, research and community services in the HEIs.

The themes were found to be cross cutting and thus grouped into four categories; viz: A, B, C and D.

Group A: Governance and Finance, included:

Theme 1: Governance and administrative structures including strategic planning and community services

Theme 2: Finance including subventions, fees and their structures, resources mobilization, debt burdens and management

Group B: Academic Activities and Services

Theme 3: Teaching methods, assessments, examination processes/practices and curricular development

Theme 4: Library, Information Communications Technology, Internet Connectivity, Computer Facilities, Data Management and Storage

Theme 7: Research undertakings, issues with funding and resources mobilization, publications and attendance at conferences and other academic fora

Theme 10: Admissions into programs/courses, credit transfers

Group C: Infrastructure and facilities

Theme 5: Laboratories and other facilities for practical purposes and research

Theme 8: Facilities for teaching, research and other activities

Group D: Staffing, students and internal stakeholders

Theme 6: Staffing quality, quantity and relevance, teaching loads and professional training needs

Theme 9: Students and academic staff associations matters including perspectives on welfare, conditions of service and learning/teaching environment

During the validation exercise, 3 of the 12 validators queried the accuracy/validity of some of the data on which the drafted themes were written. It was made clear that the data used were the responses provided to questions in the survey tools by key officers in the HEIs and that these were verified by on-site field visits undertaken by trained TEC staff.

The validators questioning the accuracy of the data were requested to provide alternative evidence for their claims, to which there were no responses in spite of availing them a number of days to respond.

In general, the following were agreed upon:

1. Community services and Corporate Social Responsibilities are not interchangeable in the context of service delivery by HEIs. Utility services in HEIs can only be extended to communities after the institutions have been able to meet primary demands. The study suggests otherwise (i.e., there is a general belief in the communities close to the HEIs that the Institutions should take responsibility for providing municipal services). It was agreed that communities can however leverage the support and influence of institutions through collaboration with competent state actors to ameliorate those problems in the communities.
2. A further in-depth study of the governance and management structures of the HEIs in future will be rewarding.
3. The roles of Court/Council and Finance and General Purpose Committee (F&GPC) must be given more prominence in the approval of budgets, enforcement of internal and external financial regulations. In this regard:
 - a. the independence of the Internal Audit department is critical and should be emphasized.
 - b. The use of a standardized Financial Manual is strategic, thus the current manuals mostly dating 2005 need revision.
4. HEIs should position themselves as leaders in entrepreneurship (by their own good examples), if they are to stimulate and impact innovation-led growth in the economy. If not for anything, the business models of institutions must be developed and presented in a form that is clear to all stakeholders.
5. One point that was reiterated by almost all the validators is the provision of a robust ICT infrastructure in order to facilitate technology absorption, dissemination and improvement in the service delivery of the HEIs.

Items 1 to 5 above have been included into the final write-ups of the themes.

Also suggested and agreed upon were:

- a. The emphasis for further thematic in-depth studies involving wider participation, especially staff and students, to guide the implementation stages of the recommendations.

- b. Pathways to be considered alongside others not mentioned in the implementation of the recommendations.
- c. Segregate the recommendations into short term, medium term and long term with responsibilities assigned to the HEIs, TEC and Government to lead in the implementation processes.

On the whole the study was considered timely and valuable for the foreseeable future. It was agreed that the outcomes would guide the processes for strengthening and improving on service delivery in the HEIs going forward.

APPENDIX 1

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

Sierra Leone, once an educational icon, produced highly educated and skilled national, regional and international graduates. It is now a shadow of its former glory. This is because the outputs of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Sierra Leone have been on the decline for the past 4 decades. This was further exacerbated by the recent civil war during which time infrastructure were severely destroyed leading to an exodus of competent staff, some of which were never replaced. This also resulted in poor financing of higher education in the years that followed. Today, stakeholders complain about weak curricula, incompetent graduates that lack the requisite competencies and skills and some courses not properly aligned with the needs of the labour market. HEIs continue to operate in overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities coupled with limited and obsolete library resources, inadequate equipment and instructional materials, disparity in curricula, poorly prepared high school students and an absence of academic rigor and systematic evaluation of performance.

In a bid to address this growing problem in the country and to foster development through education, the Government has planned a series of restructuring and development measures.

In June 2019, the Government signed a memorandum of Understanding with heads of public TEIs and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), to take over the wage bill of these institutions. This was to provide increased and timely funds for HEIs which can be used to address some of its priority needs.

Presently, through the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), the Government intends to assess all public HEIs with a view to ascertain their current level of achievements, needs and constraints.

In light of the above, the TEC intends to conduct a needs assessment survey (NAS) designed specifically to determine gaps in staffing, service availability and delivery in the HEIs in the following specific areas:

- a. Staff capacity
- b. Teaching environment/facilities
- c. Faculty Establishment
- d. Conditions of Service

1.2. Aim/Purpose

The aim of the needs assessment is to identify strengths, weaknesses, skills and competency gaps in Sierra Leone HEIs and to provide recommendations to Government on how to address these gaps.

1.2.1 The specific objectives of the Needs Assessment is to determine:

- a. The numbers of available staff as against the optimum established position in a Department/Institutions/Directorate/Faculty; Qualifications of Current Staff as against optimum requirements;
- b. The prevailing teaching environment and facilities which include lecture rooms and theatres, libraries/laboratories, workshop, equipment, and other resources;
- c. Staff outputs e.g, research undertaken and publications;
- d. Teaching loads.

1.2.2 Specific Activities

The following specific activities will be undertaken at different stages during the exercise:

- (a) Standardization of evaluation documents
- (b) Desktop review of source documents
- (c) Carry out interview and conduct surveys with personnel in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- (d) Physical site inspection of facilities
- (e) Receive and inspect curricula
- (f) Draft report write up
- (g) Validation workshop for draft report
- (h) Finalization of report
- (i) Reproduction of report (10) copies
- (j) Submission of report

1.2.3 Tools for the assessment

Prior to the exercise, the TEC will develop assessment guide, survey document, work plan etc for team of experts who will conduct the assessment. Staff of the Commission will service the teams before, during and after the exercise.

1.2.4 Duration

The exercise is expected to be completed within two (2) months.