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UNIVERSITY OF SIERRA
LEONE

[QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY]

In addition, changing stakeholders' needs as a result of current technological advances, competition by higher education institutions, state regulations, as well as the necessity for the institution to meet its mission and vision require that our universities put modalities in place to ensure and maintain quality of its programmes.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Notion of Quality	2
1.3 Traditional Quality Assurance Mechanisms in the University of Sierra Leone	2
POLICY STATEMENT	4
2.1 Preamble to the Quality Assurance Policy	4
2.2 University of Sierra Leone Quality Vision/Mission	4
2.2.1 University of Sierra Leone Mission	5
2.2.2 University of Sierra Leone Vision	5
2.3 <i>Aims and Objectives of the Policy</i>	5
2.3.1 Policy Objectives	5
2.3.2 Scope of the Quality Assurance Policy	7
2.3.3 Expected Outcomes/Benefits of the Quality Assurance Policy	7
2.4 Guiding Principles of the Quality Assurance Policy	8
QUALITY ASSURANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE.....	9
3.1 Quality Assurance Structure.....	9
3.1.1 USL core QA Directorate.....	9
3.1.2 College Quality Assurance Implementation Unit	9
3.1.3 Faculty Quality Assurance Sub-Unit	10
3.2 Institutions affiliated to University of Sierra Leone	10
3.3 Quality Assurance Mechanisms	10
3.3.1 Internal Quality Assurance	10
3.3.2 External Quality Assurance	11
3.4 Establishment of a Quality Assurance Directorate	11
3.5 Quality Assurance Directorate.....	11
3.5.1 Functions of the Quality Assurance Directorate.....	11
ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCESSES	13
4.1 Roles and responsibilities of University Staff in the QA Process	13
4.1.1 Management & Administration	13
4.1.2 Role of the Director of QAD	14
4.1.3 Academic Staff	14
4.1.4 Students.....	15

4.1.5	Support Service.....	16
4.2	Processes	17
4.2.1	Admission of students.....	17
4.2.2	Teaching and Learning.....	17
4.2.3	Assessment of Students.....	18
4.2.4	Examination.....	18
4.2.5	Research and Graduate Studies	19
4.2.6	Staff recruitment and Development	20
4.2.7	<i>Finance</i>	20
4.2.8	Equal Opportunity & disability	21
EVALUATION STRATEGIES		22
5.1	Internal Assessment/Evaluation.....	22
5.1.1	Student Assessment/evaluation of courses & teaching.....	22
5.1.2	Lecturers Assessment of Conduct of Courses	22
5.1.3	Graduate Tracer Studies & Alumni Perception Surveys	22
5.1.4	Employer Perception Surveys	23
5.1.5	Academic Staff Opinion Surveys	23
5.2	External Assessment/Evaluation.....	23
ACCUMULATED CREDIT TRANSFER AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (ACTRPL) POLICY		24
6.1	What is the ACTRPL?	24
6.2	Purpose of the ACTRPL policy	24
6.3	Policy Statements for ACTRPL.....	25
6.4	The Department of Law	26
6.5	Transfers to University in Sierra Leone	26
6.5.1	Transfers from other universities in Sierra Leone	26
6.5.2	Transfers from MMCET and other polytechnics to USL	26
6.5.3	Transfers from outside Sierra Leone.....	26
REFERENCES		27
LIST OF ACRONYMS		27

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The University of Sierra Leone (USL) over the years has faced a series of challenges. Starting from the continuous increase in student enrolment coupled with lack of expansion of physical facilities, dwindling number of senior academic staff (a situation which was exacerbated by the rebel war years), which resulted in poor staff to student ratio amongst others, with attendant serious quality implications in the University. In addition, changing stakeholders' needs as a result of current technological advances, competition by higher education institutions, state regulations, as well as the necessity for the institution to meet its mission and vision require that our universities put modalities in place to ensure and maintain quality of its programmes.

In a bid to address the foregoing, higher education institutions have put in place quality assurance procedures in order to assess whether they meet the objectives from policy level to programme and course level. Quality assurance is not identical to quality, but it checks the quality of processes and outcomes against international benchmarks with the aim of enhancing standards . Harvey, (2004) states that *'assurance of quality in higher education is the collection of policies, procedures, systems and practices, internal or external to the organization, designed to achieve, maintain and enhance quality.'*

In 2012, the University of Sierra Leone (with other tertiary institutions in the country) was subjected to an annual Performance Management Contract by the government, an exercise that requires universities to set up annual quantifiable targets that the government would use to assess a university's achievement, and relevance to society's needs during the year under review. The University of Sierra Leone responded to these challenges by establishing a Performance Management Contract unit which comprises a Performance Contract Coordinator assisted by Focal Point officers at each of the three Campuses of the University. This unit in collaboration with other key personnel in the University has been working to put together systems that will enable the University to meet agreed targets whilst at the same time performing

tasks of monitoring and evaluation with the view to regain stakeholders confidence. The role of the Performance Management Contract committee to some extent however hinges on quality.

1.2 Notion of Quality

Five notions of quality regarding higher education institution can be identified:

- i. Quality as exceptional or excellence
- ii. Quality as perfection or consistency (zero defects)
- iii. Quality as fitness for purpose
- iv. Quality as value for money
- v. Quality as transformative

The above indicates that there are correspondingly different quality indicators and quality assessment procedures. “In view of this, every institution must have its own operational notion of quality, which will be related to its stated vision and mission, and how these are being realised” (Ekhaguere, 2000).

For the purpose of the USL Quality Assurance Policy, quality is regarded as “fitness for purpose”. The “fitness for purpose” concept stresses that the university meets the generally accepted standards as defined by an accreditation or quality assurance body. In this notion, both the internal and external views (e.g. stakeholders) of the institution are important. Hence, the university focuses on meeting its aims and objectives as stated in its mission and vision statement.

1.3 Traditional Quality Assurance Mechanisms in the University of Sierra Leone

As at 2014, a Quality Assurance structure at University of Sierra Leone did not exist. Notwithstanding, selected quality elements have been employed in ensuring quality. The University of Sierra Leone over the years has been responsible for maintaining academic standards by carrying out the following key functions:

- i. Admission panel using precise entry requirements for freshmen as approved by its Senate
- ii. Curriculum review committee
- iii. Staff appointments and development processes

- iv. Staff appraisal
- v. Student assessment regulations and mechanisms
- vi. External moderation of examinations for final year students
- vii. Internal and External assessment for academic promotion for professorial rank
- viii. Departmental board of examiners
- ix. Faculty board of examiners

CHAPTER 2

POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 Preamble to the Quality Assurance Policy

A policy is promulgated to control the behaviour of a target population in an effort to enhance the efficient and effective functioning of the organization involved – in this case, the University of Sierra Leone. In this regard, any such policy or policies should be couched in the University’s Vision and Mission Statements. In his “Deep Change” initiative presented to a joint meeting of the University’s Senate and Court held on October 10, 2013, the Acting Vice Chancellor & Principal (VC&P) Professor Ekundayo Thompson indicated specifically that his proposal was geared toward “...realizing the vision of the University of Sierra Leone.” In a bid to adopting an inclusive and consensual policy formulation mechanism, the following task force groups were established comprising members taken across all three constituents of the University :

1. Quality Assurance
2. Accumulated Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning
3. Short Courses and Consultancies
4. Sexual Harassment
5. Distance Education and Life-long Learning
6. Students with disability
7. Anticorruption
8. International Partnerships and Links
9. Implementation of the Harmonised Grading System (HGS) and Centralisation of University Examinations
10. Research Ethics

In essence, a Quality Assurance policy should provide guidelines for the realisation of structures that address all of the above activities. While this document addresses cross-cutting issues inherent in the above components, fuller details will be provided in the QA Manual.

2.2 University of Sierra Leone Quality Vision/Mission

The University of Sierra Leone commitment to quality education is echoed in its vision/mission statements:

2.2.1 University of Sierra Leone Mission

A university that demonstrates its commitment to generating and transmitting knowledge through quality teaching and research for sustained development, and whose products are nationally and internationally competitive.

2.2.2 University of Sierra Leone Vision

A friendly world class centre of excellence responsive to the needs of society.

Furthermore, the university is committed to provide the best higher education possible that emphasizes quality academic programmes that are responsive to the critical emerging needs of Sierra Leone, paying particular attention to the tripartite mission of teaching, research and community service.

2.3 Aims and Objectives of the Policy

The aim of the Quality Assurance (QA) policy of the University of Sierra Leone is to support the university's effort to achieve its Mission and Vision through effective teaching, learning and research. Its approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement is to learn from best available practice around the globe, and benchmark against leading research universities. In so doing, it hopes to address the educational and developmental pillars in the National Development Plan cluster in the country.

The University in this QA Policy has adopted the notion of Quality as “fitness for purpose”: a concept that underscores that the university attains the generally accepted standards (e.g. external compliance) as defined by an accreditation or quality assurance body with the aim to meet the institution's objectives as stated in its mission and vision statement. .

The underpinning pillars in the ‘fitness for purpose’ model are clearly defined goals and objectives that guarantee the attainment of stakeholders’ expectations and the maintenance of international standards as well as a governance structure that provides for a transparent and accountable oversight to ensure compliance.

2.3.1 Policy Objectives

The objective of this QA policy is to ensure the attainment of high academic standards through the provision of good quality education to students. This requires the establishment of systems and mechanisms that continually improve the quality of teaching, learning and research; and ensures the university achieves its Mission and Vision through the implementation of its QA policy. The specific objectives therefore are:

- i. To provide the framework for the development and implementation of regulations and procedures at USL that will ensure the effective roll-out of the internal and external requirements for maintaining quality assurance in all its activities.
- ii. Improve the quality of education at USL through the development and retention of strong faculty as well as increase in student learning approach
- iii. Ensure that USL graduates attained the requisite skills and knowledge that meet stakeholders requirements
- iv. Increase access to quality education by strengthening the University's distance learning programmes
- v. Ensure the development and implementation of high quality and relevant programmes (including tailor-made and short course) that respond to the needs of the national and international labour market
- vi. Encourage the establishment of management systems that provide the required ambiance for effective teaching, learning and research
- vii. Engender public trust and thereby safeguard the integrity of the University's academic awards
- viii. Ensure the establishment of enhancement and continually improved support services for students and staff
- ix. Establish and Promote quality community service to enhance the University's corporate image
- x. Develop strong QA mechanisms that apply to all programmes, processes, procedures, support services and structures across the University
- xi. Constantly review the QA processes and systems to ensure the attainment of academic excellence
- xii. Identify areas of weakness which require attention for continuous improvement to achieve academic excellence
- xiii. Provide the legal and regulatory framework that will empower the QA Directorate to enforce the policy guidelines towards the maintenance of quality of its programmes.

2.3.2 Scope of the Quality Assurance Policy

In today's world, higher education institutions strive for excellence in every sector of its operations - administration, academic (i.e. teaching and research), support services, students and others, because for academic excellence to be achieved, support services and the administration must function efficiently to assure quality. To this end, the QA policy should therefore be all embracing and cover the operations of the following:

- i. All colleges, faculties, institutes, schools, academic/administrative departments, directorates, divisions, centres, units and other sections
- ii. All categories of staff of the University, permanent or temporary, who are providing service in teaching, research, administration and support services
- iii. All registered students of the University
- iv. All infrastructure and learning resources
- v. The entire governance and institutional set up, social amenities and information dissemination structure

2.3.3 Expected Outcomes/Benefits of the Quality Assurance Policy

Successful implementation of this policy is expected to result in:

- i. Instilling a culture of positive change on all employees of the university
- ii. Improved performance of academics (teaching and research), including a shift from an instruction paradigm to a learning paradigm (student-centred) with focus on skills development, core competencies and life-long learning.
- iii. Increase commitment of senior management, administrative and supporting staff towards teaching and learning in the realization of the University's strategic goals.
- iv. Enhance public trust, society's confidence, stakeholders' satisfaction and wider partnership with the national and international community.
- v. Improved alumni support.
- vi. Improved institutional public image and university profile.

- vii. Increased capacity (institution and staff) to compete favourably with other HEI's nationally and internationally

2.4 Guiding Principles of the Quality Assurance Policy

The efforts of the University shall be directed towards realizing its vision and mission. To achieve this, the core activities of the institution shall be consistently monitored and regularly evaluated. The University shall therefore review all its existing policies, regulations and procedures in line with its vision and mission. Where such instruments are lacking, appropriate ones shall be developed to ensure total coverage of the core activities. The University shall put in place well defined performance indicators to achieve these. Furthermore, a Quality Assurance Manual will be developed in due course to guide the day to day activities of various sections of the University.

The effective implementation of the QA Policy will be guided by the following principles:

- i. **Relevance:** Appropriate QA mechanisms must be identified and agreed upon by all stakeholders for the various sections and activities of the University.
- ii. **Realism:** Application of the policy should take into consideration the capacity of the University in terms of infrastructure and other resources. Realistic measures must be instituted and geared towards improving on existing facilities and resources for quality enhancement.
- iii. **Cost-Effectiveness:** There must be use of the most cost-effective means to achieve the desired results.
- iv. **Synergy:** Application of QA mechanisms must be holistic. All sections of the University must respond positively to QA issues since the performance of each section has implications for the outcome of teaching and learning and consequently the quality of the graduates.
- v. **Partnerships:** There must be conscious efforts for collaboration internally (management, staff and students) and externally (other universities, industry and development partners).
- vi. **Dynamism:** The policy must be reviewed periodically to respond to local, national and global trends.

CHAPTER 3

QUALITY ASSURANCE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

3.1 Quality Assurance Structure

A university QA structure should serve the goal of the institution's quality model, as well as support the processes through which the institution wants to reach its quality standards and objectives.

This QA framework provides a generalized but yet achievable goals and objectives of Quality Assurance Procedures. The framework proposes that a Quality Assurance Structure be put in place to coordinate the implementation of quality assurance procedures. The policy framework shall be applicable to all three campuses including faculties, schools, institutes and units within the University of Sierra Leone. The Policy shall apply through internal quality assurance mechanisms on a continuous basis and periodic external quality assurance strategies. This will ensure that our graduates are of prescribed standard and remain relevant to the world changing needs. The existing Performance Contract body of the University of Sierra Leone shall cease to exist in its present form and will be in-cooperated as a unit within the QA structure since its scope lies within the QA Directorate.

3.1.1 USL core QA Directorate

The USL core QA Directorate shall consist of the following personnel:

- i. Director, Quality Assurance
- ii. QA Focal Points for the three Colleges (FBC, IPAM and COMAHS)

3.1.2 College Quality Assurance Implementation Unit

At each college, there shall be a QA unit (Implementing Unit) consisting of the campus Focal Point who shall serve as the main officer responsible for QA activities, liaising with all the faculties. Additional members include the Deans of Faculties and heads/Directors of Institutes. The office of the Deputy Registrar shall serve as the secretariat for this body. There shall be a chairman of each college QA unit to chair meetings.

3.1.3 Faculty Quality Assurance Sub-Unit

Faculties have a Departmental Structure, in which Heads of Departments have defined responsibilities that include the management and quality of the courses offered by the Department. However, to ensure that quality is maintained, a faculty quality assurance sub-unit will be charged with the responsibility to monitor quality in teaching, learning and research. Its composition shall be:

- i. Dean
- ii. One representative from each Department (preferably Senior Lecturer rank or a lecturer where a senior lecturer is not available)
- iii. One student representative of the faculty.
- iv. Faculty Administrative Assistant (to serve as Secretary)

3.2 Institutions affiliated to University of Sierra Leone

National Institutions affiliated to the University of Sierra Leone shall develop a QA policy in line with USL.

3.3 Quality Assurance Mechanisms

3.3.1 Internal Quality Assurance

The Internal Quality Assurance mechanisms shall focus on the quality of inputs, process and output dimensions i.e. programmes and courses; staff; teaching, learning and research; staff and student performance assessment; resources and facilities; and support services as outlined below:

- i. Quality in admission processes
- ii. Quality of programmes and courses
- iii. Quality of academic staff
- iv. Quality in teaching and learning
- v. Quality of research and its application to development
- vi. Quality of resources and facilities
- vii. Quality in administrative procedures
- viii. Quality in all support services that aid effective learning

3.3.2 External Quality Assurance

In order to ensure that high quality standards are maintained, USL shall cooperate with and/or make use of the following external body(ies) in its programmes:

- i. Tertiary Education Commission
- ii. External examiners
- iii. External accreditation and/or professional body(ies)
- iv. Employers and past-students through feedback surveys and tracer studies
- v. Collaboration with other national and international universities for best practice learning
- vi. Ministry of Technical and Higher Education

For successful achievement of the goals and objectives of the QA policy, each campus/college/institute shall have Quality Assurance Implementation Units (QA-IUs) with clearly defined functions/roles pertaining to the assurance of quality in the core business of their respective mandates. Activities of the IUs shall be coordinated centrally by the university-wide QA Directorate.

3.4 Establishment of a Quality Assurance Directorate

The Quality Assurance Directorate (QAD) shall be the university-wide body with the responsibility of spearheading the QA system of USL including the Implementing Units (QAIUs) at the various colleges and the various mechanisms designed to maintain high performance standards (quality). The Directorate shall be headed by a Director who shall report directly to the Vice-Chancellor & Principal (VC&P). He/She shall administer the day-to-day activities of the Directorate on behalf of the VC&P and shall be assisted by three Focal Point officers in each of the three colleges. The Directorate shall be provided with an administrative assistant who will serve as the secretariat.

3.5 Quality Assurance Directorate

3.5.1 Functions of the Quality Assurance Directorate

The Quality Assurance Directorate (QAD) shall be managed by a Director of Quality Assurance who will administer the day-to-day activities of the Unit on behalf of the Vice Chancellor. The

Directorate shall monitor and evaluate all QA operations at USL by performing the following functions:

- i. Promote the culture of quality at USL
- ii. Ensure performance standards set for all aspects of the University's activities are appropriate, relevant and achievable.
- iii. Develop and periodically update internal QA procedures
- iv. Monitor QA activities in all campuses and report to the VC&P on the overall quality status of the University.
- v. Review, evaluate and update the University quality assurance system and procedures
- vi. Provide advice and guidance to units across campuses on the execution of QA
- vii. Attend to requirements of QA
- viii. Coordinate all internal evaluation exercises within the University
- ix. Serve as access/contact point for external evaluations of USL as well as a link between USL and Tertiary Education Commission on QA issues
- x. Collate all QA reports (e.g. students' assessment of courses and lecturers, External Assessors reports, etc) and present findings to Senior Management through and VC&P
- xi. Monitor the implementation of internal and external evaluation recommendations.
- xii. Advise Senior Management on matters pertaining to quality on teaching/learning, research, consultancy and internal public and support services.
- xiii. Update the Senior Management of USL on regional and global trends in QA issues.
- xiv. Establish and maintain good relationship with QA bodies in the other sister universities as well as other relevant national, regional and global agencies for the purpose of learning and implementing best practices.

CHAPTER 4

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND PROCESSES

4.1 Roles and responsibilities of University Staff in the QA Process

The successful implementation of any QA policy requires individual and collective responsibilities of the key stakeholders, namely management, staff – academic as well as supporting, and students. This is because all members of the University – management/administration, teaching and professional staff, researchers, support staff and students contribute directly or indirectly to the quality of the teaching, learning, research and outreach services. Their positive attitudes would lead to the realisation of the policy objectives which will produce positive outcomes that would accrue benefits to all. It therefore behoves such stakeholders to exude certain attributes while performing their respective responsibilities.

4.1.1 Management & Administration

Commitment from the top management is an essential pre-requisite for an effective quality assurance system. Top management officers are the bedrock and anchors of Quality Assurance. This is because, besides their core administrative function, they manage other activities such as student admission, awarding of diplomas, finances – fees, salaries and travel expenses, complaints, decision making etc that are related to academic life and education and which bear upon the quality of the institutions output. Hence, management of USL shall be firm, transparent, honest, disciplined and courteous while performing their roles. The Leadership/Management shall pursue the following:-

- i. Institute structures to enforce the regular and systematic review of key performance indicators of the university relevant to the maintenance of QA. Uphold institutional values and communicate high expectations of performance at all levels.
- ii. Establish and sustain an ambiance of academic tolerance, equity and ethical practices throughout the University system.
- iii. Encourage and provide adequate funding for research, innovations, peer-review publications towards staff upward mobility and contribution to knowledge. Ensure sound management of the institution's finances

- iv. Ensure the requisite instruments and opportunities are available to all staff in meeting the university's aspirations as contained in its Mission and Vision.
- v. Protect the institution's property
- vi. Provide enabling environments and resources to support scholarship and professional development of both staff and students
- vii. Institute reward systems that recognise academic excellence, dedication, honesty and loyalty for staff and students
- viii. Promote the welfare of staff and students

4.1.2 Role of the Director of QAD

The Quality Assurance Director shall be the Head of University QA Directorate and shall:

- i. Be accountable to the VC&P
- ii. Provide leadership, co-ordinate, support and implement Quality Assurance and Performance Contract issues across all campuses of the University
- iii. Oversee the functions and responsibilities of QA Directorate
- iv. Develop and promote the University's quality assurance protocols and mechanisms
- v. Be accountable for implementing QA matters, managing its details and bringing it successful implementation
- vi. Advise the University on QA matters
- vii. Represent USL in fora on higher education QA matters

4.1.3 Academic Staff

The success of any policy established by an institution depends to a large extent on the cooperation of its workers in a corporate setting or staff members in an educational entity. Much that the process of developing the policy may have been consensual and bidirectional the integrity and professionalism of the staff are very pivotal in ensuring that procedures and processes established are followed and data provided during review cycles are honest and genuine. Academics play multiple roles depending of course on their rank. In addition to ensuring the quality of the modules they offer, and their academic research outcomes, they often provide university administrative and public services. They are also members of a department, and Faculty where the key activities of quality assurance are implemented.

It is therefore important that academics exercise sincerity of purpose and a high sense of integrity and commitment in order to establish confidence in the public as well as in the students they serve.

Academic staff shall therefore:

- i. Undertake scholarly activities which will engender quality teaching and research
- ii. Provide excellent and current instruction to students
- iii. Strengthen staff-student consultative committee at faculty and departmental levels
- iv. Respond positively to academic quality assurance issues
- v. Pursue professional development in the subject area and contemporary pedagogic techniques which support student-centred learning.
- vi. Support and require technical staff to provide quality and reliable service to promote scholarship.
- vii. Undertake continuing professional development in their disciplines while maintaining regular association with professional bodies as well as subject associations and the wider local and international academic community

4.1.4 Students

- a) Students of USL shall be expected to be honest, courteous, loyal and disciplined. Furthermore, they shall uphold the institution's values and adhere to its policies, rules and regulations.
- b) University students should be the architect of their learning pathways and make informed choices of their actions while at the university that will promote academic excellence and future professionalism.
- c) Whenever possible they should through team activities enhance their learning skills that will provide their future lifelong learning.
- d) Uphold the good image of the University by adhering to its policies, rules and regulations.
- e) Valuable attributes that will enhance success in their academic endeavours include but not restricted to the following:-

- i. Be punctual and regular for lectures, practical, workshop and other learning sessions,
- ii. Prepare for taught sessions and workshop/laboratory sessions,
- iii. Attend seminars and public lectures
- iv. Spend the recommended time in student managed learning,
- v. Use the information and guidance provided,
- vi. Where possible, regularly consult lecturers on their programmes and engage them in class discussions. Ensure that all assignments and class tutorials are submitted on time.
- vii. Thoughtfully complete course questionnaires and other surveys and consultations aimed at reviewing or upgrading the course or program,
- viii. Engage in activities other than academic work that promote the image of the institution
- ix. Patronise staff-student consultative committees
- x. Give priority to academic work, but also engage in healthy socialisation and extra-curricular activities
- xi. Be willing to serve on committees but not at the expense of your academic work.

4.1.5 Support Service

The quality of services in an academic institution is crucial in profile building if aims and objectives are to be met. This is because no academic institution can function effectively without the necessary support service departments as their functions are directly connected with teaching and learning. In this regard, Support Services Departments shall have the responsibility to maintain professional standards appropriate to their service function, and to plan, manage and review the services they provide to ensure that those services enable the institution to fulfil its purposes and goals through quality teaching and learning and other scholarly activities. Support Services Departments which provide services directly to students have an additional responsibility to develop good customer service.

Although all services are important, certain facilities and services are needed to enhance and sustain teaching, learning and research, as well as sustain the welfare of staff and students. The following facilities shall be provided by USL and made easily accessible and effective:

- i. Efficient ICT facilities
- ii. Modern and well equipped library
- iii. Modern and well-equipped laboratories and workshops
- iv. Guidance and Counselling services for both staff and students
- v. Effective Estate service and Maintenance Unit
- vi. Efficient Health and Sanitation facilities
- vii. Efficient Security and Safety services
- viii. Adequate and spacious lecture halls
- ix. Effective Transport system for staff and students
- x. Suitable office accommodation for staff
- xi. Infrastructural development
- xii. Cost effective cafeteria, dining halls and restaurants
- xiii. Vibrant career service
- xiv. Well managed recreational facilities for staff and students.

4.2 Processes

4.2.1 Admission of students

The quality of students admitted into an institution is an important factor affecting the quality of the final products i.e. the graduates. To this end, USL shall:

- i. Implement equal opportunity admission procedures that ensure the right calibres of students with the right grades are admitted.
- ii. Put in place mechanisms for vetting entry results to guard against students using forged or fake results,
- iii. When required, additional mechanisms such as entrance examination will be used to screen students.
- iv. Ensure that the calendar of activities on the admission process and time-lines contained in the Service Delivery Charter are complied with.

Admission procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure that the university admits top quality students.

4.2.2 Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning constitute a major aspect of the core business of the University of Sierra Leone. The outcomes depend on the quality of students admitted, the quality of staff, the staff

mix, staff-students ratio, academic programmes, physical and financial resources as well as the quality of governance and management. To ensure quality teaching/learning outcomes in all its programmes, USL shall:

- i. Ensure that the principle of rational use of resources and cost effectiveness is upheld in the establishment and running of academic programmes and departments
- ii. Welcome external auditing of the academic programmes with respect to their content, delivery methods and assessment processes in a bid to improve its curriculum
- iii. Review and evaluate its academic programmes regularly to ensure that they meet the University's vision and mission, and are viable and relevant to national aspirations and the labour market.
- iv. The introduction of new programmes shall have inputs from relevant stakeholders such as professional bodies, employers/potential employers, relevant sections of the society as well as tracer studies and curriculum review workshops and compliant with the stipulations of the Universities Act 2005

4.2.3 Assessment of Students

To ensure high academic standards, USL shall have effective procedures for designing, approving, supervising and reviewing assessment strategies for its awards. The assessment practices must be rigorous and implemented consistently to ensure that appropriate academic /professional standards for each award are set and maintained for students' performance to be measured against. In this regard:

- i. There shall be approved continuous assessments during semesters
- ii. There shall be end of semester assessments
- iii. Assessment tools should enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved expected learning outcomes
- iv. Students should have confidence and belief in the assessment process.
- v. Staff should comply with the use of the Grade Book of entries of marks for continuous assessment which should be submitted prior to the commencement of examinations.
- vi. Overall assessment must involve validation by competent external examiners/or professional bodies.

4.2.4 Examination

Examination is a major tool virtually all educational institutions use to determine that students have acquired the requisite knowledge in order to proceed to a higher level or overall to obtain a

qualification. Hence, it is important that marks and grades awarded are earned. To this end, the University shall endeavour to achieve the following:

- i. All students take the examination under relaxing conditions,
- ii. Examination malpractices are eradicated or at least kept at a minimum,
- iii. No student has an advantage over his/her colleagues,
- iv. Apply modern technology (e.g. CCTV) to monitor examination during its progress
- v. Invigilators are fully au fait with the regulations and procedures governing the conduct of examinations
- vi. Constantly review examination procedures with a view to guaranteeing the integrity of results and the overall conduct of examinations.

4.2.5 Research and Graduate Studies

Research output and graduate studies have now become key hallmarks of progressive universities. This is because research is a pillar that should feed teaching and learning as well as one of the sources of funding in tertiary institutions. Furthermore, research feeds into teaching and learning programs by offering new ideas and concepts suitable for short courses and tailor-made programmes in a timely manner especially for the industrial sector. Research is also a key element in the mission of a university and a factor in gauging its status and ranking in the community of universities. Innovation must be a desired research strategy in any university.

To achieve its vision of enhancing its ranking in the world of academia, USL shall actively promote and consistently monitor and evaluate research and graduate studies with emphasis on:

- i. Provision of adequate financial and other resources to accomplish research and graduate studies
- ii. Relevance to national development needs
- iii. Meeting staff development needs
- iv. Compliance with institutional policies, procedures and ethics on research and publications
- v. Enhance teaching and learning
- vi. Effective dissemination channels and impacts of research outcomes
- vii. Promote multi-disciplinary research activities
- viii. Promote Intellectual Property Rights and copyright adherence.

- ix. Develop a Research Code that will provide clear guidelines to monitor and effect proper protection of intellectual rights of researchers at the student as well as staff levels.

4.2.6 Staff recruitment and Development

The quality of staff in a university is a major QA component which directly impacts on students' performance. USL shall therefore put in place policies and apply them to consistently ensure bringing on board high quality staff and support their subsequent professional development. Attention shall be paid to the following:

- i. Clear, fair, transparent and publicised guidelines for appointment and promotion
- ii. Transparent and expeditious processing for application for appointment/promotions
- iii. Ensuring confidentiality where necessary
- iv. Engaging competent personnel to undertake appointment/promotion exercise
- v. Ensuring that qualifications of appointed/promoted staff to various levels conform to relevant national and international norms
- vi. Staff development through mentoring and opportunities for further training including in pedagogy.
- vii. Staff motivation
- viii. Compliance of staff/student ratio
- ix. Staff discipline

4.2.7 Finance

In order for the University to realise its vision and mission, it needs to thrive on a sound financial base with prudent fiscal management. In this regard, USL shall operate stringent financial control mechanisms as follows:

- i. Appoint competent staff to manage its finances
- ii. Follow prudent mechanisms for income generation and expenditures to support the institution's activities
- iii. Utilize up-to-date mechanism in accounting businesses
- iv. Financial planning that addresses the institution's strategic plan
- v. Zero tolerance to financial malpractices
- vi. Efficient modalities to prevent financial wastage in purchases
- vii. Strict adherence to procurement regulations and responsible budgeting.

4.2.8 Equal Opportunity & disability

In its pursuit of quality in academic excellence, The University of Sierra Leone is committed to equality of opportunity by supporting all persons irrespective of age, gender, status, religion, physical ability and ethnic origin. In this regard, the university will ensure the following:

- i. fairness and equal opportunity for all irrespective of one's religion and physical ability
- ii. gender equality in all activities
- iii. zero tolerance on harassment (including sexual harassment)
- iv. zero tolerance to marginalization,

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION STRATEGIES

The QA Directorate shall coordinate all evaluation survey. Questionnaires shall be periodically revised to meet the demands of emerging QA issues. The QA Directorate shall coordinate discussions and strategies emanated from evaluation surveys for implementation and make recommendations to the VC&P.

5.1 Internal Assessment/Evaluation

5.1.1 Student Assessment/evaluation of courses & teaching

The Directorate of Quality Assurance shall regularly organise student assessment of courses and teaching at about week ten (10) of every semester. This will give students the opportunity to inform management feedback on the various courses and teaching programmes. Questionnaires and/or other appropriate tools/methods shall be employed to capture student experiences, opinions and other data for analysis. Result of such assessments shall be communicated to the teaching units concerned; and the Directorate shall coordinate the implementation of strategies to improve on shortfalls revealed by the assessments.

5.1.2 Lecturers Assessment of Conduct of Courses

At the end of every semester, lecturers shall evaluate the courses taught with regard to students' attendance, comportment, performance and institutional facilities as well as other relevant details.

5.1.3 Graduate Tracer Studies & Alumni Perception Surveys

USL through the QA Directorate shall seek to conduct tracer studies (survey) at least every 4 years. Tracer studies surveys shall target employers and graduates/alumni with the aim of determining the relevance of academic programmes offered at the University and how the university prepares them for the job market. The outcomes of such studies shall be vital in curricula reviews and in improving teaching methodologies. Older alumni may also be surveyed for specific purposes. Support Services Departments may also undertake such alumni satisfaction surveys, results of which shall be incorporated into management decisions for performance improvement strategies.

5.1.4 Employer Perception Surveys

Faculties/institutes/department with respect to their academic programmes shall be subjected to employer perception surveys. Employers of USL alumni shall be targeted. The questionnaire will be designed to provide information on the relevance of academic programmes on offer and on ways in which they can be made more responsive to the needs of the job market.

5.1.5 Academic Staff Opinion Surveys

Survey of academic staff opinions may also be carried with the aim of ascertaining the level of satisfaction and confidence of academic staff with the current state of facilities and teaching environment, and the commitment of management/administration in supporting the teaching staff in meeting the University's core values. Suggestions on interventions and possible improvement measures shall be collected. The outcomes of such surveys with recommendations shall be communicated to the University Management and other relevant bodies.

5.2 External Assessment/Evaluation

All academic programmes and courses on offer at USL shall be subjected to approval by Faculty Boards, Accreditation etc as appropriate. USL shall arrange and coordinate external institutional audits and programme on request. The Directorate shall serve as a link between the university and any external Accreditation or Academic/Faculty Boards.

CHAPTER 6

ACCUMULATED CREDIT TRANSFER AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (ACTRPL) POLICY

The development of this policy is in recognition of and responsive to the global demand for student mobility across borders and national tertiary institutions, in pursuit of education and skills development.

6.1 What is the ACTRPL?

- A student-centred system based on the students' work load required for achieving the objective(s) of a course of study in any educational institution.
- The Objectives are specified in terms of learning outcomes and competencies to be required.

6.2 Purpose of the ACTRPL policy

- a) To raise awareness of lecturers in the USL of international benchmarks of quality teaching and depth of knowledge and competencies required by students.
- b) To ensure that the performances of our products are competitive in the local and international job markets.
- c) To enable lecturers in the USL to be aligned with international best practices and standards.
- d) To provide a structure that will enhance and guarantee students mobility either to complete their studies or participate in exchange programmes.

Benefits:

- a) Attract more students (especially international students) to the USL;
- b) Forge a stronger link between USL and other Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs);
- c) Through the credit transfer system, employers will be better informed of the previous learning experiences of our graduates for recruitment purposes;
- d) Provides for a more flexible learning platform.
- e) Improve opportunities for developing short courses targeting students with certain academic deficiencies
- f) Provides benchmarks for quality assurance and transparency within the educational cycle.

6.3 Policy Statements for ACTRPL

Transfers within the USL system:

- a) Where applicable and necessary, students wishing to transfer from IPAM to FBC (e.g. Economics and Accounting disciplines) and vice versa should be allowed to do so.
- (b) Students who have completed Undergraduate Diploma programmes and wish to pursue degree courses.
 - a) A student who gains a 3.0 FGPA or better should be placed in Year 2 if at least 50% of the contents of the subjects studied at the diploma level are related to his/her proposed course of study. If the previous learning is unrelated to the new course of study, the student should be placed in Year 1
 - b) A student who gains less than 3.0 FGPA should be placed in Year1
 - (c) Students who have completed postgraduate diploma courses and wish to pursue higher degree courses in the relevant and related discipline:
Credits gained in the PG diploma courses must be weighted and the student exempted from certain courses in the Higher Degree programme (if it is a taught programme).
 - (d) Post Graduate supervision – No supervisor should supervise more than five (5) candidates within an academic year

All postgraduate students are required to offer a Mandatory course in Research.

- (e) Students who have taken certain science modules at FBC and wish to transfer to COMAHS
Due to the different grading system followed by the two institutions, a committee from COMAHS could examine the student's academic transcript and determine placement, subject to the approval of the DVC of COMAHS.
- (f) Candidates who have professional qualifications, e.g. Nursing, Pharmacy and desire to enrol for advanced programmes at COMAHS
COMAHS must establish a Committee to examine the qualifications of such applicants and determine the level of placement, taking into consideration the residency requirements.

- (g) Students with first degrees and wish to pursue MPhil degrees in related disciplines.
- (i) Honours degree holders are expected to be more knowledgeable in their subject areas than general degree holders
- (ii) General degree holders (Division 2 or better) must take certain prerequisite subjects (possibly with the Honours students) while studying for the Masters degree.

6.4 The Department of Law

The current situation in the Law department must be reviewed and preference given to applicants with good first degrees for enrolment into the Law programme.

6.5 Transfers to University in Sierra Leone

6.5.1 Transfers from other universities in Sierra Leone

- Need to examine the entry requirements of these institutions to gauge parity of standards with the USL for the purposes of the ACTRPL scheme.
- Students must satisfy the Residency requirement of at least two years in a USL constituent college to be qualified for a USL undergraduate qualification.

6.5.2 Transfers from MMCET and other polytechnics to USL

- HTC with at least a Division II in the relevant disciplines: Such students must have also meet the minimum entry requirements at MMCET, e.g. 4 WASSCE credits, including English Language. These applicants are generally placed in Year 2.
- Eastern Polytechnic has arrangements with Engineering Faculty, FBC. The criteria set for graduates of EP Kenema to be enrolled into the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, FBC, USL must be adhered to. This practice should be followed by other faculties within the University.

In general students who have the ND can only be admitted into Year I, provided they meet the minimum entry requirements for Diploma courses in the USL. These conditions equally apply to students from all other polytechnics, colleges and institutes in Sierra Leone.

6.5.3 Transfers from outside Sierra Leone

- (a) Partner Institution, e.g. Kalamazoo College, USA.

These institutions have arrangements with USL and the criteria set for Exchange programmes and transfers must be adhered to.

- (b) Other Universities and Colleges

These may be determined on a case-by-case basis, but with the following consideration:

- i. Only Grade C or better will be accepted in the relevant subjects
- ii. Students must meet a 2-year residency requirement before they can be eligible for the award of a USL (first) degree.

REFERENCES

Makerere University, Quality Assurance Policy Framework, April 2007, 93pp

University of Cape Coast Quality Assurance Policy, July 2010, 33pp

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACTRPL	Accumulated Credit Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IU	Implementation Unit
QA	Quality Assurance
QAD	Quality Assurance Directorate
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
USL	University of Sierra Leone
VC&P	Vice-Chancellor & Principal