

March 14, 2022

Dear Selection Committee

The University of Porto

Sub: Position of the Rector

My multi-country experience in renowned Institutions and the latest insights and learning obtained in the leadership role as the Rector of the BlueCrest University College, Ghana has equipped me to perform well in the role of the Rector with the University of Porto. From the available limited online information, I have gathered some relevant information indicating the context, governance, present situation, and future ambitions of the University. I have taken the liberty to submit a non-tradition and innovative cover letter (innovation is a need for us in Higher Education Institutions at this juncture) having six sections, and web links (hypertexts) to provide additional supporting information and evidence. This cover letter provides rich information about my profile, initiatives, achievements, and learning which shape me.

## A. My understanding of the University of Porto: Context and Ambition

The U.Porto has a proud legacy of being the largest research University in Portugal and a prestigious University in Europe with the rank of 51-75<sup>th</sup> in European Teaching Ranking, and 401-500<sup>th</sup> in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Ranking. Being a large public University. In QS rankings, the University is ranked higher, 301<sup>st</sup> best University in the world.

The University is a large size body with 15 Faculties/Schools and multiple research and other centres. The declared ambition of the University now is to establish the U.Porto as one of the top 100 universities in the world!

Some notable achievements are in the areas of Entrepreneurship due to new ventures in the Science and Technology Park of the University of Porto (UPTEC) and the quality and quantity of research output in the University.

## B. Challenges and Agenda: The way forward 2022-26

***Please note that this section is written as a suggestion with a bold and courageous attitude and determination needed at this juncture of the Higher education landscape in the world. In case my views and suggestions appear offensive, please accept my apology as I intend to make a meaningful and sustainable positive impact – aligned with my professional goals.***

The University of Porto, as per my views, based on my multi-country experience in Asia, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa is still traditional though has some sporadic modern features like UPTEC. In the “new normal” era, it is being recognized that there is a need for HEIs to get transformed to be pro-active and sustainable suitable to the needs of a new generation of students, academics, researchers, and other stakeholders. I am presenting my 4-year agenda/plan in this document. I am calling it:

THE NEW U.PORTO – The University of the Future (tentative name)

The following timelines are tentative. Note that all regular required operational activities will be carried out in addition to the following tasks. Also note that along with what specific agendas are, a larger

emphasis is on – How it will be done/implemented as it's the implementation that makes any plan successful.

**Year 0-0.6 (first six months):** Getting familiar with the University bodies, the General Council, management and other governing bodies, senate members and other key stakeholders. The objective will be to gather their views about the University, needs, challenges and issues being faced by the University members, and also how they see U.Porto in the year 2026. This exercise will use a design thinking collaborative approach. It is expected that digitization, empowerment, social and community engagement, climate change, economic and political issues and other current and future foreseen challenges will emerge from this initiative. A report will be prepared and shared with all stakeholders. A set of strategic priorities will be designed and shared using the insights from the report.

**Year 0.6 to 1 (six months to year 1)** – Developing a change and transformation campaign, vision board, and multiple activations to promote the vision of U.Porto 2026 as developed and finalized in the first 6 months with the key stakeholders. The strategic Priorities should be at the tip of all staff members and on the walls of each faculty and centre. This will be possible due to a collaborative approach.

**Year 1 to Year 1.5:** Goals and Objectives of each Unit/Faculty/Centre aligned with the Strategic Priorities will be co-developed collaboratively, followed by co-designing KRAs and KPIs of each staff member of the University aligned with the Objectives. It will ensure that the normal tasks of the staff members will also implement the strategic priorities seamlessly planned for the University. A semi-annual review for finding gaps and adjusting the work and performance of the staff will ensure that the University members are on track. This system will also have an in-built coaching and mentoring system to aid the coaching of each employee within the University.

**Year 1.5 to 2.5 and later from 2.5 to 4:** Reviews of the progress on the strategic priorities with measures, KPIs, and University-wide analysis and discussion led by the key stakeholders will help us in mid-way corrections needed. The annual performance appraisals will be aligned with the strategic priorities.

**Some major benefits from this initiative:**

- Engagement of all staff members from a multi-layered design thinking approach will bring the ownership, empowerment, and responsibility of each staff member, critical for the success of the initiative.
- The issues, challenges, needs, and ambitions of the stakeholders with the University will be promoted and that's why all stakeholders will be related to and invested in it and that's why will promote the Strategic Priorities and 2026 vision as their own.

**Some possible directives and focus areas from 2022-26:**

1. Internationalization with partnered programs at U.Porto – not just students mobility but dual/global degrees. U.Porto needs to be global soon using existing resources and developing new resources and competencies.
2. Flexible studies for students using flipped, students centred teaching, experiential learning, blended and hybrid modes – a need for the “new normal” and future.

3. Micro-credentials with skill-building short term programs integrated with the existing programs of the University to make programs modern, versatile, flexible, and innovative tech-based. Partnerships with Institutions like Coursera may help in this front.
4. Development of unique U.Porto digital assets (courses and learning material) highlighting the expertise, culture, and needs in the region in partnership with industry and other national and international collaborators and stakeholders.
5. Launch of student success office, student e-portfolio system, students advising system, students engagement office, student ambassador initiatives and other students focused bodies and organizations for multiple benefits of students like skill development, experiential learning etc.
6. Enhanced use of technology, cloud platforms to increase the transparency, engagement and sharing in operations, research, and other activities of the University.
7. Multiple campaigns, use of social media, and modern IT tools to promote the stories of transformation, achievement of students, staff, and alumni regularly in a collaborative manner. U.Porto needs a repositioning as per

The suggestions above are indicating what is needed to transform U.Porto where students and other stakeholders are also partners in shaping it as a University of the Future.

Resources and expertise needed for this can be generated mostly from within the faculties and bodies or new global recruitments, funds and grants available for transformation from bodies like IFC etc. Note that to be in the top 100 of the rankings need such a transformation as already the top 100 Universities are in an advanced stage of transformation. Without such transformations, modern practices, and engagement of stakeholders, achieving the dream of being top 100 seems elusive.

### C. What gives me the confidence to get these done?

Because it is already done by me as a Rector in my current Institute, that can be regarded as a successful pilot project. BlueCrest, my present Institute is already changed and transformed using the above suggestions. A conceptual model of a successful education institute is also drafted based on the learning from this experience. It is called Integrated Student-Centered Education Institute (ISCEI). The model can be further modified as per the need.

The next sections of this cover letter describe some initiatives, outcomes, and associated learnings from my present and previous experiences through my career journey to generate confidence about my ability to innovate and transform the U.Porto as suggested in the previous section.

### D. My Present and Past Roles

I have been working with BlueCrest University College, Ghana (BCC) as its Rector since June 2019 with a mandate to change and transform it. BCC was established and managed as a diploma-granting training institute. I led teams to review, revisit all processes, systems, MINDSETS, and offered programs to transform BCC into a reputed institute of higher education granting degree and master level programs. Now BCC is positioned as an innovative **tech-led** (in operations and teaching – integrated with [Coursera](#) to use blended and [flipped teaching](#)), [new generation institute](#) with flexible and experiential teaching and learning (hybrid teaching – some students complete the semesters fully online with the use of

digital courses/assets), partnered upcoming Master level Programs (with foreign Universities) and tech integrated skill development short programs [aligned with the industry](#), evidenced United Nations SDG impacts, and [engaged](#) with the [community](#). A notable outcome of this transformation journey includes obtaining impact funds for our group entity (Ed-tech) from a Europe based funding agency, and ongoing discussions with an Africa based investment firm to invest further in the Institute.

After obtaining a PhD in Marketing management, my experience in multiple countries in academic and corporate organizations equipped me to be a reflective and progressive practitioner able to work in multi-cultural settings easily. Please note my work experience in different parts of the world before my current work in Ghana:

- **United Arab Emirates** – Faculty member and MBA Program Director, Institute of Management Technology ([IMT](#)); and faculty member, American University in the Emirates ([AUE](#)).
- **Philippines** – Faculty member and Program Director, Executive MBA, Asian Institute of Management ([AIM](#)), Manila (accredited by AACSB). Travelled across ASEAN and contributed to the research related to ASEAN integration.
- **Malaysia** - Senior Lecturer, Associate Dean - Curriculum Enhancement and Accreditation, and later, Associate Dean of the Faculty of Business and Design, [Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak](#) ([SUTS](#)).
- **India** – Marketing Research Associate Director, Tayler Nelson Sofres ([TNS](#), a UK based MNC); Research Director, Audience Measurement and Analytics Private Limited ([AMAP](#)); faculty member and doctoral researcher, ICAI Business School; and Marketing Department Head, Institute of Integrated Learning in Management ([IILM](#)).

## E. How I use learning from my career journey as a Rector with BCC

Working with SUTS made me innovative where I launched new programs, engaged industry, initiated consulting projects for students, led accreditations, and launched [research projects on teaching and learning at SUTS](#). I transformed myself into a student-centred education professional. I have used this learning at BCC to develop and review policies for teaching and learning BCC is now successfully transformed into a modern high-tech institute with the use of innovative technology for teaching and learning (and for other operations too), adoption of LMS (Moodle), use of micro-credentials (in partnership with Coursera), and teaching using flipped methods, student-centred style, focusing on skill building for students while using hybrid and blended modes. The quality of teaching is not only monitored but regular mandatory workshops and learning sessions for faculty members on effective teaching using modern methods, digital assets, and new modes (hybrid and blended) ensure high-quality teaching at BCC. An advanced peer review method of teaching ensures that faculty members learn from each other with guidance from the experts in the Teaching and Learning Centre of BCC (TLS launched in 2020). This centre is designing programs to offer teaching training to secondary school teachers in the region. A culture of teaching and learning excellence is built by giving awards for best teachers, initiatives of [students ambassadors](#), [student e-portfolio](#), and actions based on the regular survey results of teaching and learning and the overall experience of students and staff.

Multiple programs of the BCC are converted to flexible modules, and new vocational courses and pre-degree programs are launched in 2021 and 2022. This initiative at BCC is a result of co-operation from all departments as one of the objectives was to design innovative interdisciplinary programs. Courses like Digital Journalism, and Computer-Aided Fashion Design, are blended vocational short-term pre-degree programs integrated with Technology. Other pre-degree programs are Fashion and Entrepreneurship, and Event Management which is at the intersection of a specific discipline and entrepreneurship with a component of incubation and possible funding for selected students after their successful pitching to a panel of investors too.

The existing degree programs of BCC are successfully integrated with [Coursera courses \(with credits\)](#) and the use of tools like Moodle, and Zoom is now enabling students to study the programs online from anywhere in the world. There are students in our newly launched [MSc IT program](#) who are studying 100% online while more than 30 students in the program are enjoying the blended learning, thus making it a successful hybrid program. BCC now boasts of its flexible offering and flipped teaching using IT tools.

My experience in AIM (Philippines) and IMT (Dubai) also equipped me to teach using outcome-based education and Assurance of Learning to demonstrate the student learning outcomes, graduate attributes, while providing measurements/metrics for these. My engagement with quality accreditation teams (AACSB, SACS, EQUIS (EMFD), and Australia Quality Framework (AQF) also prepared me to document evidence, measure, and scientifically demonstrate learning outcomes of students in the programs. I have led workshops for outcome-based education in many institutes.

Recently at BCC, we segregated the terms & practices of 'Student service' from 'Student Engagement' and '[Student Success](#)' to achieve a distinct set of outcomes of meaningful and high-quality student experiences. It is done after realizing that innovative ways are a must to enhance the student experience and we are successful in achieving it.

Student service now refers to common traditional support to students in a transactional manner. Student Engagement and Student Success Office are now two new innovative offices at BCC. Student Engagement works closely with the Student Success Office and both work with Heads of Department, Student Career Office, Alumni Office, and Partnerships and Collaborations Manager. Student Success Office has major KRAs of building up student skills while managing their clubs, campus events led by students, ensuring a high-quality student e-portfolio developed by students, organizing regular workshops and hands-on skill development sessions for students, supporting [Student Career Office](#) for availing internships and placements, advising and counselling students about all non-academic matters, finding and connecting students with mentors from alumni or industry partners, supporting students in participating in external competitions and events and tracking their progress...etc. In all these KRAs, the student engagement office supports Student Success Office through the elected Student Representative Council (SRC) and volunteering Student Ambassadors who also conduct regular student surveys and meet students regularly as link pin between management and students.

In essence, the culture to focus on the students' experience to provide a high-quality student service is co-built and embedded in the work of all staff members of the Institute, and innovation, creativity, empowerment, and engagement are keys to succeed in this.

I work with the heads of all departments, units and centres of BCC closely. A combination of professional method, servant and coaching style of leadership and strive to create a trusting, respectful, supportive and inclusive environment is helpful in impactful leadership and management. An example of

empowered staff at BCC: For operational tasks, all heads of the units are empowered, and they actively contribute to the college and post their work, and achievements regularly by posting on an online sharing platform accessible to them: <https://intranet.bluecrest.edu.gh/>

After co-designing the Strategic Priorities of BCC, aligned annual goals are designed which led to the development of aligned objectives for each unit of the Institute. In the next stage, the KRAs for each staff member, aligned with the unit objectives, are co-designed by the supervisors in one-on-one meetings. The staff members agree to the measures (KPIs) and reporting frequency (monthly/quarterly) depending on the projects and nature of the unit. Regular meetings and feedback provide reviews by finding gaps and thus improving performance and ensuring meeting the unit objectives. Also, each staff member identifies a mentor (internal staff) for her/himself in the first meeting, and thus a mentoring system for the staff is in-built into this system. The final review (after 10 months to one year) is used as the Annual Performance Appraisal for all staff members. Senior managers also write a reflective report in addition as a part of their performance appraisal. This System is called as Developmental Performance System, (DPS) at BCC. It has resulted in a transformation in the work culture and performance of the staff. Regular collaborative retreats, workshops and open-door office discussions also contributed to this success.

The leadership style required with DPS can be termed as a combination of servant & coaching styles. My leadership philosophy and practice style is documented in [a self-published article on LinkedIn](#).

- Cooperation appreciation by one Head of the Department:  
[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal\\_journey-and-learning-at-bluecrest-as-educator-activity-6897511685641641985-hreG/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal_journey-and-learning-at-bluecrest-as-educator-activity-6897511685641641985-hreG/)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hleuxuMvUts> – My appreciation for staff members of BlueCrest College for managing lockdown situation well with full cooperation (even with overloading of faculty members teaching online and with 30% salary reductions due to financial issues during Pandemic). The operational continuity was maintained online during the lockdown due to the support and environment and no delay in completion of semesters was observed from March to Dec 2020 because of our proactive adoption of [LMS Moodle](#) in Nov 2019.

## F. Additional Information

Note that I have a PhD in Marketing Management and have obtained a Professorship. My publications' list and impact is in my Google Scholar Profile and my CV:

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=KKfd7ZsAAAAJ&hl=en>

I get engaged with the community, ([research projects with communities](#)), and also teach regular programs. I contribute actively and directly to programs for executive and business persons' development, final year consulting projects for students, faculty-led consulting for local businesses etc.

### Excellent interpersonal and communication skills.

- I create new relationships with multiple industry bodies, associations, professionals, NGOs, and other organizations in the regions I work. At present, I regularly communicate with multiple stakeholders in Ghana and neighbouring countries. Internal communication is also critical and therefore I communicate with the internal staff members often in various modes (one-on-one, small

teams, and large town hall meetings, virtual too). At the time of lockdown, regular zoom meetings were also held online.

- Industry, Community and Governments: I led to the formation of an industry advisory board for BCC with top-level executives of selected companies and government executives in the country. The Office of the President of Ghana has an initiative of Head of State Awards (HOSA) with UK cooperation. BlueCrest is under discussion to collaborate to start a chapter/centre of HOSA activities for youth on our campus. Many other similar initiatives are ongoing with the community, industry, and governments on many fronts e.g. At BlueCrest, launching partnered programs (MBA with Monroe, USA and Masters in Practical Artificial Intelligence, URAL Federal University, Russia), and Summer Program for Fashion and Design with Inscape South Africa. Multiple additional evidence can be found below:
  - On the [BlueCrest Blog](#) under the sections of Spotlight, Articles, Announcements, and General:
    - [Industry Advisory Board](#)
    - [Engagement with Asian Africa Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) leading to Collaborating with Ghana Tourism Industry Association to develop hospitality programs in the region.
    - Formation of CEO advocacy group to engage CEOs of the region with existing regional realities and mentoring our students and staff members.
    - Various regular engagement activities with [High Schools, their Principals and Counsellors](#).
    - Presented various keynote speeches, invited sessions in conferences, seminars, events etc. (List limits to the recent past 3 months only for brevity):
      - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6885527246715543552/>
      - [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/texilaconference\\_twcs-publichealth-management-activity-6884464421951946752-dlxV](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/texilaconference_twcs-publichealth-management-activity-6884464421951946752-dlxV)
      - [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal\\_rajalakshmi-school-of-business-is-organizing-activity-6864565379197370368-9XYo](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal_rajalakshmi-school-of-business-is-organizing-activity-6864565379197370368-9XYo)
  - Managing LinkedIn Group of 'Transforming Higher Education' actively and active on social media and other groups for purposeful impact related to higher education teaching and learning, research, and other related activities: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9032401/> and <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6896426764185538560>
  - Engagement with Asian Africa Chamber of Commerce and Industry: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal\\_appreciation-letter-by-accii-activity-6876492167607582721-eODV](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal_appreciation-letter-by-accii-activity-6876492167607582721-eODV)
  - Formation of an industry advisory board with top-level executives of selected companies and government executives in the country. <https://www.ghanamma.com/2022/02/18/bluecrest-university-college-ghana-inaugurates-industry-advisory-board/>
  - Engagement with Media Capacity Building Initiative with the Embassy of America, Young Africa Leadership Initiative, and Arizona State University: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal\\_journalism-ghana-accra-activity-6874368727463337984-Fu\\_s](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal_journalism-ghana-accra-activity-6874368727463337984-Fu_s)
  - Cooperation appreciation by one Head of the Department: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal\\_journey-and-learning-at-bluecrest-as-educator-activity-6897511685641641985-hreG/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/dranandagrwal_journey-and-learning-at-bluecrest-as-educator-activity-6897511685641641985-hreG/)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hleuxuMvUts> – Appreciation by me for staff members of BlueCrest College for managing lockdown situation well with full cooperation (even with overloading of faculty members teaching online and with 30% salary reductions due to financial issues during Pandemic). The business continuity was maintained during the lockdown due to the support and environment.

Apart from the details mentioned above, I am sure that my career goal of building and enhancing educational institutions (to serve society and communities) is aligned with the role of the Rector. Due to my reflective practice, I have learned extensively in my current and previous engagements. I offer innovative and fresh thinking, out-of-the-box futuristic methods, and proven effective practices due to my multi-country experiences of managing and leading educational institutes along with my transformational and servant style, coaching approach of leadership.

In case U.Porto understands the need for transformation, ready to engage with a young (45 year old) innovative Asian with multi-country experience across continents, who takes calculated risks, believes in collaborative and design thinking approach and has committed himself to the institution building, I am eager to talk to the General Council/Selection Committee whenever needed.

Warm Regards,

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