

## **CONCEPT NOTE**

### **NURTURING RESILIENCE: ADOPTING TECHNOLOGY, EMBRACING HUMANISM**

#### **Prepared By**

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## 1. Introduction

Over the years, the University of Ghana has built a reputation as an academically strong institution, making it one of the preferred choices for academics, researchers, and students on the Continent. On October 26, 2021, the University of Ghana, inducted Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo into office, as its 13<sup>th</sup> and first female Vice-Chancellor. During the ceremony, she shared her vision to ‘create a culture that promotes research, teaching and learning, administrative processes and extension activities driven by technology and anchored in humanism’.<sup>1</sup> The vision of the Vice-Chancellor supports the achievement of the University’s overall vision of becoming a “world-class research-intensive university”.<sup>2</sup> The ideals contained in her vision have guided the implementation of key activities in the University till date, including the launch of the ‘Vice-Chancellor’s Programme for Enhancing the UG Student Experience through Digitalisation’.<sup>3</sup>

In 2023, the University of Ghana will be celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The year-long anniversary is aimed at celebrating the University’s achievements and perseverance through years of unprecedented change. The theme for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, ‘*Nurturing Resilience: Adopting Technology, Embracing Humanism*’ is born from the vision of the Vice-Chancellor, which also takes its direction from the University’s vision, and from the multiple and rapid changes occurring in Africa and our global world today, especially in higher education.

The planning committee has developed this concept note to guide the sub-themes and key activities of the anniversary celebrations.

## 2. 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Theme

### 2.1 *Nurturing Resilience: Adopting Technology, Embracing Humanism*

The University of Ghana can claim numerous achievements in research; teaching and learning; and community engagement and service locally and globally over the past 75 years. These are a testament to our creativity, innovation as well our ability to withstand change and thrive despite local and global challenges in the higher education sector.

Recently, the University was ranked Ghana’s highest tertiary institution by the Alper-Doger (AD) Scientific Index 2022 Version 2 with more than 270 scientists from the University appearing in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ug.edu.gh/sites/default/files/documents/VC%20Induction%20Speech%20-%20Final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ug.edu.gh/about/vision-mission-values>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ug.edu.gh/news/ug-launches-vice-chancellor’s-programme-enhancing-student-experience-through-digitalisation>

the top 1000 scientists featured<sup>4</sup>. This follows from the Webometrics ranking of the University of Ghana as first in Ghana, 11<sup>th</sup> in sub-Saharan Africa and 1,121 in the world - out of 31,000 Higher Education Institutions from more than 200 countries earlier this year<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, in its 2022 ranking, the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings which is one of the three most-widely read university rankings in the world and receives approval from the International Ranking Expert Group (IREG), classified the University of Ghana among the top 20 universities in Africa, the only West African university to be so classified<sup>6</sup>.

The sudden emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its corresponding impact on the global economy epitomize an unprecedented change for the world<sup>7</sup>; one that universities and colleges around the world, including the University of Ghana, have had to embrace. The pandemic accelerated transformation in virtually every aspect of life and brought with it new ways of teaching, carrying out research, managing student and faculty community life among others, as people all over the world have had to adapt to ‘the new normal’<sup>8</sup>. For a university in a lower middle-income country, this presented many challenges, not least the need for technological adaptations for students and faculty, cognizant of the human and fiscal costs of digital learning. Globally faculty and students have been buffeted by the effects of COVID-19 financially and psychologically as both faculty and students have had to acquire appropriate devices and spend more money on data to be able to participate in online teaching and learning with extended periods of online activities having deleterious effect on their physical and psychological health. Furthermore, at the University of Ghana, for instance, at least 1 in 7 students did not have access to good internet connection or a laptop, making online learning burdensome, stressful and less effective both for students and faculty.

If the University of Ghana is to achieve its vision of being a ‘world class research-intensive university’, it is essential for us to embrace these sudden changes as opportunities. We have to understand and be sensitive to the needs of our students, staff and faculty in this new learning space; we have to be adequately equipped to thrive humanly and humanely while building a university that is technologically fit-for-purpose.

This is what led to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary’s theme; *‘Nurturing Resilience: Adopting Technology, Embracing Humanism’* to both celebrate our resilience over the years while simultaneously promoting an intellectual culture that continues to nurture resilience in a difficult world through the adoption of technological initiatives anchored in humanism.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ug.edu.gh/news/news-release-ug-has-best-scientists-ghana-ad-scientific-index-2022-version-2>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ug.edu.gh/news/news-release-ugspace-ranked-number-1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ug-ranked-highest-tertiary-institution-in-ghana/>

<sup>7</sup> Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, 2021

<sup>8</sup> PWC Ghana, 2021

## ***2.2 Why Adopt Technology?***

Despite an increase in on-line and distance learning, the higher education sector continues to rely heavily on in-person interactions. Both faculty and students benefit from and are nurtured by human contact. Yet, all over the world, universities have had to adapt quickly to ‘remote pandemic realities’ over the past two years<sup>9</sup>. This adaptation was evidenced by the adoption of new online teaching methods and new work arrangements during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including lockdowns that precluded all forms of in-person interactions. The University of Ghana was no exception. Although things are beginning to return to normal, with higher levels of in-person interactions in the last couple of months, the technology gains made over the last two years have been reinforced in many ways across the length and breadth of the University. For example, the university’s IT infrastructure and capabilities have been upscaled to accommodate the increased usage resulting from the switch to online learning since the COVID-19 lockdown<sup>10</sup>. Besides, online graduation ceremonies, many graduate student presentations, PhD viva voce, as well as departmental seminars are still held online. Similarly, the university has acquired additional assistive technology licenses for the benefit of students with special needs.

These ‘highlight the promising future of learning, and the accelerated changes in modes of delivering quality education’<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, the future of education appears to be heavily linked to more online teaching, conferencing and even research laboratory work. However, we cannot overlook the negative effects of the technology gains such as heavier workloads and its attendant impact on the health of faculty and student as well as the accentuation of existing inequalities, making clear the fact that even online learning may not be for everyone, and that people need human contact and intervention.

Therefore, to ensure that we thrive as humans in this environment and, for the University of Ghana, continue on the path to becoming a world-class university, humanizing the use of technology is a necessity. For example, ensuring that every student has access to a good laptop or handheld device irrespective of their family’s financial situation will go a long way in humanizing the deployment of technology in teaching and learning. Faculty will also have to understand that not every student will be adept at using technology and must therefore be patient in training students that may be lacking in the ability to navigate technology-driven systems and devices put in place to aid teaching and learning.

## ***2.3 Why Embrace Humanism?***

Humanism encapsulates everything that makes people truly human and capable of manifesting greatness through their participation in those things and experiences that enrich them and their societies. But, as the world marches toward what has been referred to as the abyss of modernity and the tremors of the postmodern, the idea of the human is increasingly endangered by

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<sup>9</sup> Kunes, 2021

<sup>10</sup> Amfo, 2020

<sup>11</sup> UN, 2020

destabilizing shifts. The question of the human, however, is urgent and necessary to address, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>12</sup>. A world that is fast turning to technology for survival needs more than ever to understand the idea of the human and the importance of humanism if it must survive and transcend generations.

The University community being human, makes the University uniquely positioned to preserve the idea of humanism amidst a fast-paced, technologically driven world. Considered as a citadel of knowledge, responsible for proffering solutions to the world's many challenges through scholarship, the University is expected to lead the way by catering adequately to those innate needs and desires that make its community want to commit to taking it from where it currently is, to where it should be, that world-class status.

The Vice-Chancellor's vision proposes an organisation where individuals are allowed to flourish through humanistic management principles. This theme therefore ties into this vision and attempts to leverage a community that wants to be more and do more to ensure that the University thrives for years, decades and centuries to come.

### **3. Infusing the Theme into the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**

The 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration will have all activities, communications and initiatives rooted in its theme of nurturing resilience through the adoption of technology and the embracing of humanism. The different ways this will be achieved are briefly explained below:

#### ***3.1 Communication***

All messages regarding activities, events, etc. sent out before and during the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration will be consistent with the theme of the anniversary. The logo will reflect the theme of the event and so will communication materials like brochures, banners, e-posters, etc.

#### ***3.2 Activities and Events***

The activities and events for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration will also take their bearing from the theme. Specific units will be required to organise events and activities that tie into enabling the University nurture resilience through technology adoption and the embracing of humanism. Some activities can be made to fit into the Vice-Chancellor's much larger digitalisation initiative whose implementation has already begun. Fundraising activities as well should be rooted in the ideals of humanism and technology.

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<sup>12</sup> ASAA 2022 – Africa and the Human: Old questions, new imaginaries

### ***3.3 Tools***

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration will foreground technology. Online events, online materials, online communication channels, forums, etc. will form a large part of the celebration. This is to communicate the University's commitment to adopting technology.

### ***3.4 People***

To advance the ideal of humanism, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration will also be big on inclusion and participation. Opportunities to get as many individuals involved at different levels in the planning and implementation of the different activities and events of the celebration will go a long way to set the mood for the adoption of human-centered management and processes post-75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

## **4. Financing of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Activities, Initiatives and Events**

The funding for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary will comprise a mix of donations, sponsorships and revenue from individuals, organisations, and the University itself through 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration targeted business ventures.