

Are Universities Ready for Generation Alpha?

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Generation Alpha — born between 2010 and 2024 — is the most digitally immersed cohort in history. As they begin entering higher education in 2028, universities face a critical question: are we ready?

Raised in a world of smartphones, tablets, social media, and now AI, Gen Alpha doesn't just use technology — it's part of who they are. They've grown up with constant connectivity and on-demand information, shaping expectations around learning that are radically different from previous generations.

Technology-Native Learners

Social researcher Mark McCrindle, who coined the term Generation Alpha, notes the rapid tech evolution these students have experienced. From the launch of the iPad to the rise of generative AI, their world is built on ever-changing digital foundations. The pandemic only deepened their digital habits — normalizing online learning and reinforcing expectations of autonomy, accessibility, and personalisation.

A Generation That Will Redefine Higher Education

With an estimated one in two Gen Alphas expected to pursue a university degree, their impact will be significant. But they're not approaching education the same way. A recent AppsAnywhere survey of 2,400 UK students aged 12-16 revealed key insights:

- **84%** own smartphones
- **30%** lack access to a laptop or tablet at home
- **92%** expect universities to provide or loan devices for learning
- **56%** prefer hybrid learning, and many are open to fully remote education

These findings reflect a generation that views education not as a location, but as a flexible, personalised service.

Rethinking Infrastructure and Strategy

For Gen Alpha, technology isn't optional — it's foundational. Universities must move beyond viewing IT as support and instead see it as a strategic pillar of the student experience. Key priorities include:

- **Mobile-first design:** Digital systems must work across all devices, anytime, anywhere.
- **BYOD support:** Institutions must ensure equitable access to learning for all students.
- **Smart campus environments:** Spaces that blend physical and digital learning seamlessly.
- **AI integration:** AI must become a core component of education, not just a novelty.
- **Staff training:** Faculty must be equipped to embed digital tools into teaching — not just use them as add-ons.

The AI Imperative

Generation Alpha is already deeply familiar with AI tools. But universities can't afford to treat AI adoption as piecemeal. Restricting AI in one context and selectively embracing it in another won't be enough.

To succeed, institutions must:

- Build **AI literacy** among students and staff — including understanding

bias, data privacy, and critical evaluation of AI outputs

- Embed **AI into learning platforms** to enable personalised education through intelligent feedback and adaptive pathways
- Invest in **scalable infrastructure**, such as cloud computing, to support AI-intensive tools
- Prioritise **staff upskilling** in AI — vital for both pedagogical effectiveness and institutional relevance

A Time to Lead, Not React

Despite their digital fluency, Gen Alpha still values higher education — but their trust is conditional. They expect universities to be responsive, relevant, and ready to evolve.

For institutional leaders, especially those in IT and digital transformation, this is a pivotal moment. Decisions made today about systems, policies, and investment will determine whether universities are seen as forward-thinking or out of touch.

Generation Alpha is coming — not just with expectations, but with the potential to redefine learning. Universities must seize this opportunity to lead with innovation, equity, and vision.



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