

# The Revolution Imperative

How universities need  
to transform for global  
readiness in 2026  
and beyond



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# Executive Summary

**UK universities are approaching a crucial period. A convergence of pressures, including rising operating costs, frozen tuition fees, declining confidence in international recruitment, and rapidly rising student expectations, is fundamentally transforming the higher education landscape.**

While demand for higher education remains strong, institutions' ability to convert that demand into sustainable growth is becoming increasingly difficult and uneven. The result is a widening gap between institutions that adapt quickly and those that struggle to keep up.

At the core of this challenge is a growing disconnect between ambition and execution. Many universities express a desire to be innovative, student-focused, and digitally enabled, yet they remain hampered by fragmented systems, siloed teams, short-term budget cycles, and legacy operating models. Too often, digital initiatives have centred on incremental modernisation, such as new websites, platforms, or campaigns, without addressing the deeper structural, cultural, and data foundations needed for meaningful transformation.

**The outcome is digital activity that lacks a competitive advantage and investment that does not generate lasting returns.**

This matters because the market has evolved. Prospective students now behave more like informed consumers in a global marketplace, comparing institutions across borders, channels, and platforms. International students, who are now vital for institutional financial sustainability, face more choices, heightened competition, and additional challenges when choosing the UK. At the same time, new generations of students are increasingly digital and AI-native, with expectations shaped by seamless, personalised, and always-on experiences in every other aspect of their lives.

**Institutions that fail to meet these expectations risk becoming invisible, irrelevant, or uncompetitive.** This white paper contends that incremental improvements are no longer enough. The scale and speed of change now required demand a different approach. One that views digital transformation not as a single project or a simple technology upgrade, but as a continuous growth capability embedded across strategy, operations, culture, and people.

**Revolution is Remarkable's response to this challenge.** Designed specifically for complex organisations like universities, Revolution is a structured, cyclical transformation framework that links strategy, experience, platforms, data, and channels, and unites them through two critical forces: Human Enablement and Agentic Orchestration.

Rather than fostering dependence on external partners or disconnected technology investments, Revolution is built to transfer capability, create ongoing value, and ensure institutions keep advancing as markets, expectations, and technologies evolve.



# The Perfect Storm

The pressures facing UK universities today

# Domestic Demand & Local Competition

**UK universities face unprecedented pressures from a unique combination of post-pandemic economics, post-Brexit immigration policies, and the emergence of a new global marketplace for tertiary education.**

## **Strong Domestic Demand but Intensified Local Competition**

The past two years have seen near-record numbers of UK students seeking university places. Driven by an increase in young people aiming to attend university, UCAS reported that by June 2025, a record high of 328,390 British 18-year-olds had applied to a UK university, reflecting a 2.2% rise compared to 2024.

UCAS currently predicts that UK universities will receive around 1 million applications annually by 2030. However, because of competitive dynamics, this rising tide of applicants is not benefiting all institutions equally.

In 2024, Russell Group universities saw their share of applicants rise from 26% to 27%, a significant increase given the small number of universities in this prestigious group.

Furthermore, within the Russell Group, some universities are winning more students than others. As The Times Higher Education Supplement noted, top Russell Group universities are 'hoovering up' more students, with the University of Birmingham, UCL, and Durham each boosting their student numbers by over 20%. This suggests that the rest are not experiencing similar growth.

Meanwhile, post-1992 universities have seen their share of UK students decrease to 47% – the smallest share since the mid-2000s. In 2023, these universities experienced their sharpest decline in enrolments in over ten years.

Finally, there is evidence that certain high-tariff universities have lowered their entry requirements or expanded capacity in recent cycles to attract more students, as perceived by the marketplace.

In summary, although domestic student numbers are rising, it is becoming clear that there will be winners and losers in the race to attract future undergraduate and postgraduate students. This means that being competitive is now a vital element of future success, and no institution can rest on its laurels and assume that applications will always keep coming.

## **Key Highlight**

***Half of UK universities predicted to be in deficit by 2027, with 24 deemed in immediate financial risk within the next 12 months.***

# International Student Recruitment

**Attracting students from abroad has been a key element of UK universities' growth strategy for the past decade, but this has become more challenging in recent years.**

After years of expansion, international enrolments have started to plateau and decline in a post-Brexit Britain, which now has more red tape, fewer immigration visa options, rampant inflation, and a strengthening British Pound. All of this makes choosing to study or work in the UK more difficult and costly than ever before.

According to research shared by the UK Parliament, international student applications fell by 4% in the 2023/24 academic year, marking the first decline in a decade.

However, a more concerning picture emerges from the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford in 2024, which reports a 14% decrease in visas issued to international students and an 85% drop in visas granted to student dependents compared to the previous year.

## Key Highlight

***International student applications are declining, with a notable reduction in the number of visas issued to student dependants.***

## What has been driving these trends?

Aside from the broader global geopolitical landscape, the UK Government must share some of the blame. Current government initiatives aimed at reducing net migration, along with changes to international students' rights to work, visa types, and options for sponsoring relatives, have made the UK more difficult to access and less attractive for international students.

However, somewhat defying these changes and protocols, the Government of the day has also set targets to boost the value of education exports to £40bn a year by 2030 and to continue increasing the number of international students from the 620,000 registered in UK universities today.

So, while making it harder to attract overseas students to the UK, the Government is at least aware of the importance of international students.

## The Value of International Students

By 2023/24, income from international students' tuition reached £12.1 billion, accounting for 23% of all university income (up from only 5% in the mid-1990s). It's no surprise, then, that international students are seen as a potential source of income, with their contribution to total university income estimated at 25% today and growing rapidly.

# Global Competition

The impact of global competition for undergraduate and post-graduate students cannot be underestimated either.

The British Council reports that the US is now attracting record numbers of international students, issuing over 20% more student visas in 2023 than in 2019.

Canada and Australia (key competitors for students from markets like India, Nigeria, and China) are also attracting large numbers; each now hosts roughly near-parity shares of the global student market (Canada ~10%, Australia ~6%) relative to the UK (~11%). This is particularly difficult news as India has recently become the largest source of international students, overtaking China in 2023/24.

## Key Highlight

**Several international markets will draw more than the UK's 500,000+ international students in the next 5 years**

## Emerging Education Destinations

In addition to traditional international competitors for international students, the UK now faces stiffer competition from markets including Turkey (340,000 international students in 2024) and Malaysia (250,000 international students in 2024). Although these figures are still below the UK's half-a-million plus, these markets are maturing rapidly and growing quickly in the race for international students and the income they generate.

Alongside these fast-growing markets, there are those that are heavily investing in tertiary education institutions. Countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are all investing heavily in higher education and forming new partnerships to support development and growth.

In addition to intensified competition, the strengthening of the Great British Pound Sterling (GBP) has made moving to the UK more expensive for many overseas students, in real terms.

**Graph to show £1 GBP to \$1 USD over the past 12 months (as of Feb 2026)**



Given the current state of world politics, it might be some time before we see the British Pound fall.

# Funding Pressures & Financial Sustainability

Funding remains one of the most urgent topics and major challenges for UK universities today, influencing many other issues.

## Key pressures include:

### Stagnant tuition fee income.

In England, where most Russell Group universities are located, annual undergraduate fees have been capped at £9,250 since 2017. Frozen for eight years, this means fees have not kept pace with inflation. The sharp inflation following the pandemic suggests that, by 2025, the £9,250 fee will be worth only approximately £6,700 in 2012 terms. This represents a real decline of about 26% since the last fee increase in 2017.

The combination of stagnant fees and rising costs leaves little room for investment or major change. Scotland, which charges no tuition fees to residents, along with Wales and Northern Ireland, where effective fees for local students are lower, face similar funding gaps because block grant funding has not fully kept pace with inflation. The UK government approved a one-off 3% increase in the cap (raising it to £9,535 in 2025/26), but even this “welcome” increase does not compensate for nearly a decade of frozen fees.

### Rising Costs and Inflation

Universities’ expenditures have been growing faster than income. Salary costs have climbed due to inflation-linked pay raises and higher pension contributions. For example, the post-92 sector’s main pension scheme will require 40% higher employer contributions by 2026–27 than in 2022–23.

Energy and campus maintenance bills have also surged with inflation and the seemingly unending energy crisis.

### Insufficient Government Funding & Research Shortfalls

Direct teaching grants (such as England’s Office for Students Strategic Priorities Grant) have declined in value. On the research side, core “quality-related” (QR) research funding dropped around 15% in real terms over the past decade.

Universities have been compensating for this by increasing their own research expenditure. However, this approach is becoming increasingly unsustainable.

The Russell Group has warned that the “massive erosion” of teaching and research funding is undermining universities’ ability to meet government objectives in R&D, skills, and innovation, adding to the growing list of pressures facing the sector.

## Key Highlight

***Frozen tuition fees since 2017 represent a 26% decline in their real value.***

# The Human Capital Crisis & Student Satisfaction

## Staff Retention & the Threat to Teaching

UK universities are experiencing a human capital crisis. According to the UCU, two-thirds of university staff are currently considering leaving the sector due to increased workloads, poor management, and inadequate pay and conditions.

Amid funding pressures, stricter immigration rules and their effects on international students, along with the growth of other markets, UK university staff are under stress and questioning their career choices.

Additionally, in 2025, over 100 UK institutions announced restructuring programmes, putting more than 15,000 jobs at risk.

Since attracting and retaining top staff, researchers, and academics is essential, efforts to keep leading talent in the sector remain crucial.

### Key Highlight

***In 2025, over 100 UK institutions announced restructuring programs with the estimated number of jobs at risk in excess of 15,000.***

## Student Experience & Satisfaction

As if the growing pressure to do more with less in the fight for students and staff wasn't enough, recent trends indicate that keeping the existing student community engaged and satisfied is also a challenge.

In February 2026, student complaints to the Office of Independent Adjudication (also known as the ombudsman) exceeded 4,000. This followed nine years of rising complaints and has nearly doubled over the past decade (since 2016).

While judges only ruled in favour of students in 20% of cases, the trend is evident: students are increasingly dissatisfied and frustrated with the processes by which their universities handle complaints. These figures build on findings from the 2023 National Student Survey, which revealed that only 74% of students agreed their course was well organised, and 39% felt student feedback was not being acted upon.

**In an increasingly competitive international market, where international students pay substantial fees for their education, the UK university sector must prioritise the student experience and perceived value in its latest strategic approaches.**

# The Digital Expectation Gap

Read any popular marketing journal and the message is clear: **Generation Z (also known as Gen Z, born in the late 1990s through to the early 2010s) is the first true digital native generation. They are internet-first, build and maintain relationships online, and constitute the majority of consumers of non-linear TV and social media.**

For Gen Z, it's about purpose and accountability, and their expectations are clear:

- **Personalised Experiences:** content and experiences tailored to their interests and context (e.g. student v staff member, international v national v local)
- **Speed:** fast loading pages and immediate answers to their questions
- **Mobile First:** seamless and complete experiences for whatever device they use
- **Answer Engine Available:** core questions answered by their preferred GPT client

- **Self-service:** the ability to research and complete processes on their own
- **Omni-channel:** joined up journeys across web, mobile, at school/home, and in person

For universities, this makes the shift to consistent digital critical for future continued success, as today's students and tomorrow's academics are Gen Z.

Gen Z is primarily mobile-first, with desktop second. While they prioritise speed and convenience, they also value transparency and alignment with their personal values. In fact, a study in the US found that 45% of Gen Z adults had boycotted a brand between October 2024 and April 2025.

## How does this align to the reality of UK universities today?

It's difficult to answer without resorting to anecdotes, but of a small survey of Universities recently undertaken, most recognise that digital still falls in the gap between IT and Marketing.

Arguably, most universities responded well to Covid-enforced remote and hybrid learning models, but old habits die hard, and bums on seats in lecture halls remain a key priority, with continuing investments in bricks-and-mortar projects.

## Gen A & the Revolution Imperative

Gen A will push all organisations harder on every front to meet their expectations.

Gen A are the incoming wave of undergraduates who grew up with smartphones and for whom digital is just how life is, not something to adopt.

They are learning with AI at their fingertips, and the expectation is that AI will be integrated into every aspect of their university experience. They won't tolerate slow, glitchy, or manual processes, and, as they have grown up in an omni-channel, app-first world, they will expect their fees to give them access to whatever support they need for their studies and well-being.

# Student Expectations v University Reality

**While nearly all universities have modernised their touchpoints, such as websites, intranets, mobile apps, and digital signage on campus, the reality is that behind the scenes, IT and Marketing are still not connected. Content operations remain ungoverned, decentralised, and inconsistent, and there is a recognised need to invest in core digital marketing skills.**

This results in a one-size-fits-all approach to digital, with the same experience delivered to every user across each digital touchpoint. Personalisation is lacking, so international students, local partner organisations, and potential new staff members all receive the same message.

Additionally, while course management systems may be linked to the website, the most engaging and inspiring course content often reads like an academic paper or a DIY manual, rather than a compelling proposition.

Finally, once a prospective student applies, the period between receiving the generic offer and the generic acceptance email is limited, often missing a chance to establish personalised engagement.

In short, most UK universities are doing something, but few are making the leap to recognise that the tertiary education market is now a global marketplace.

With the average student debt now estimated at £53,000\* and the total cost of attending university around £70,000†, it is no surprise that some prospective students now view the process of choosing what to study as comparable to any of the largest purchases they will make in their lives.

## The Consumer Mindset in Education

Consequently, recent research suggests that students now view themselves as consumers when choosing where to study after school.

While academics might argue that it is neither healthy nor productive for students to see their education as something 'they buy,' the reality is that with the cost of university now estimated at nearly £70,000, for many, the question of return on investment becomes a significant consideration.

This is reflected in the large number of universities that students now research and apply to. According to the Times Higher Education, since the pandemic, UK students now apply to between 6 and 12 universities, up from 3 to 5 before 2020. For international students, the number can be as high as 20. While some attribute this to well-being factors related to the pressure to make the right choice, it also indicates that students are less engaged with universities and arguably less convinced by their offers.

# Digital Myopia and the Innovation Paradox

**Since DiMaggio & Powell (1983) coined the term institutional isomorphism, numerous studies and examples have emerged of sectors converging towards the norm in terms of identity, presentation, and, more recently, innovation.**

Universities are no exception, as they all aim to reach the same audiences, make similar claims, and show little personalisation in their messages. It tends to be a uniform approach at the sector level.

Although many universities recognise this, the challenge of the innovation paradox persists, and many have failed to overcome it. Universities are filled with digital natives; they produce hundreds of creatives, engineers, and statisticians, yet they often lack the right people in the right roles to drive meaningful transformation.

Unfortunately, much of this can be attributed to the theory of corporate management myopia.

While well-intentioned, rising budget pressures and limited resources perpetuate a behaviour whereby those who could influence long-term digital investments instead seek 'quick wins' and seemingly cost-effective solutions such as launching vapourware open source destination websites, to tick a box on the list of marketing assets that need to be created. Often outsourced, this also fails to develop much-needed digital skills and capabilities.

What's worse, this approach adds to the digital bloat experienced at many leading universities. There are countless examples and articles highlighting that the average university has hundreds, possibly thousands, of websites attached to its name and brand.

However, according to a recent survey by Educause.org, 57% report that their university's digital experience causes them stress 'sometimes', and 60% spend more than five minutes trying to find specific content and assets.

In the digital world, where you have less than 15 seconds to capture someone's attention online and three clicks before real abandonment occurs, the challenge for universities is quite significant.

**To succeed, institutional investment, led from the very top, must be directed towards digital transformation projects that create:**

- 1. Efficiency of content creation**
- 2. Consistency in brand experience**
- 3. Governance that supports the masses, and doesn't just penalise the few**
- 4. Connected data so that a holistic view of a future student, staff member, academic, or commercial partner can be taken**
- 5. Personalised content, relevant to the audience and their needs**

# The perfect storm occurs where pressures collide

The challenges outlined above all lead to a perfect storm, a point where pressures converge and forces clash.

Domestic demand is visibly increasing, yet funding pressures have never been more severe. While international student numbers are rising again, regulatory reform and heightened competition from abroad make this audience a complex target to secure, with stakes higher than ever.

Digital expectations continue to outpace institutional thinking and budget cycles, and the incoming Generation A will further elevate these challenges.

Those still concerned about not meeting the needs of Gen Z, the first digital natives, will be woefully unprepared for Gen A and their demands for a personalised experience, 360-degree well-being, and an AI-first approach to life.

While universities try to cope with current issues, all sectors are still dealing with the aftershock of the global pandemic. Moreover, in Europe and the West, the dust has not yet settled on a challenging economic environment caused by the first war in Europe in nearly a decade and a shift to the right in some key areas of international politics.

In short, universities need to assess who their customers are and what best meets their needs, rather than getting caught up in endless cycles of committees, internal budgets, and procurement challenges.

The bottom line is that tomorrow's students and academics won't wait for you to get it right; they will simply vote with their digital feet, and the winners will be those who move with real purpose fastest.

## The Perfect Storm

- Increased Local Competition
- Frozen Tuition Fees
- Funding Pressures
- Contradictory Government Policies
- International Student Competition
- Rising Globally Competitive Institutions
- Digital Expectations
- Digital Myopia & the Innovation Paradox

A top-down view of a collaborative workspace. Several people are seated around a light-colored table, working on laptops. The scene is filled with various office supplies: a green mug, a smartphone, a pair of white headphones, a wooden pen holder with pens, and a small black power bank. The overall atmosphere is one of focused, modern work.

# Creating lasting change

Why traditional approaches to transformation no longer work

# Incremental Improvement & The Innovators Dilemma

**Christensen's Innovator's Dilemma (1997) is a key element in many blogs and articles about the university sector, with a consensus that many universities focus on sustaining innovations, finessing products and services to make them more attractive, rather than on disruptive innovation, which aims to create wholesale change in the marketplace.**

Christensen himself later theorised how technology can transform a business, as discussed in *The Innovator's Dilemma* (2003), and, in his follow-up book in 2008, demonstrated how disruptive innovation can rapidly improve education specifically.

His focus in 2008 centred around several key ideas, including student-centric classroom learning and making computers available to all as a form of disruption. Fast forward nearly 20 years, and similar conversations still resonate within academic centres of excellence, although computers have been replaced by devices, and AI represents a whole new level of disruption, seeking a champion to bring it to market in the tertiary education space.

Christensen recognised, as many do in the university sector, that incremental improvement is favoured over genuine disruption and transformation, the idea of 1% improvement, repeated consistently, leading to gradual change and progress.

However, while incremental improvement involves playing the long game, sadly, as many experts acknowledge, it rarely results in true transformation.

**So, why do universities favour sustained innovation, through incremental improvement, rather than real transformation?**

The answer to that issue lies in various factors, including traditional thinking, such as 'we've always done it this way,' a lack of senior leadership buy-in for genuine transformation (not just a brand or website update), and budgeting and procurement cycles that restrict efforts to 12-month or shorter investment periods.

Additionally, frequent staff changes and restructuring often create inertia at best, and at worst, act as barriers to transformation, especially when major changes involve senior management and leadership.

**In short, the environment in which universities operate is not conducive to true transformation.**

Shared governance, a preference for incremental improvement, capped 12-month budget cycles, and a possible return to traditional teaching models do not align with the core principles of meaningful change.

As a result, it is hardly surprising that a 2023 study by KPMG and Forrester revealed that only 12% of higher education decision-makers considered their digital transformation efforts completely successful.

# Common Issues with University Digital Transformations

**When discussing the issues universities encounter with transformation, it's important to distinguish between digitisation and digital transformation. It is often cited that universities, as a whole, have little issue with digitisation, a process that was accelerated rapidly by the global Covid-19 pandemic of 2020.**

However, digitisation, i.e. the replacement or augmentation of an existing process with digital technologies, is not the same as digital transformation.

Digitisation is essentially an incremental improvement, enhancing or optimising one or two processes at a time. However, this approach is very much about process efficiency and laddering up small margin gains.

Transformation is the opposite: rather than refining the margin, it seeks to create new value and generate competitive advantage by fundamentally changing processes and tools, and sometimes skills and people.

Incremental improvement rarely impacts the cultural status quo; whereas transformation can redefine an organisation's culture and its customers' experience from the foundations up.

Many university projects fall under the scope of digitisation. They are focused on specific features, processes or functions of university life, for example, student safety, meeting room management, or even streaming lectures.

The barriers to transformation are both technological and operational, with one recent study citing 44% of transformations fail in the implementation phase<sup>1</sup>

**However, more recent studies have shown that the true barriers are more institutional. Digital transformation demands organisational change, which involves leadership, planning, and management, as well as a willingness to make necessary investments.**

Institutional silos, prolonged underinvestment in digital services, and poor data management are identified as obstacles to digital transformation, even when executive leadership is prepared to implement change.

Data presents a real challenge because it is often siloed across departments, schools, and faculties, making a full digital transformation difficult unless a significant data overhaul occurs.

Additionally, issues of focus, commitment, and time are critical. As universities, particularly in the UK, restructure and reduce budgets to cope with increasing financial pressures, many UK institutions lack the time or teams needed to drive transformation, leading them to prioritise short-term objectives over long-term goals.

***Only 12% of higher education decision-makers considered their digital transformation efforts completely successful (KPMG & Forrester, 2023)***

The background features a dark blue gradient with abstract, flowing light trails in shades of blue and purple, creating a sense of motion and energy. A white geometric shape is visible in the top right corner.

# Introducing Revolution

Remarkable's transformation road map and  
perpetual growth engine

# Revolution: A Transformation Framework

The challenges outlined in the preceding sections are not new to university leaders. Most have already heard the arguments for transformation, sat through the various presentations, and have possibly even commissioned their own transformation strategy decks.

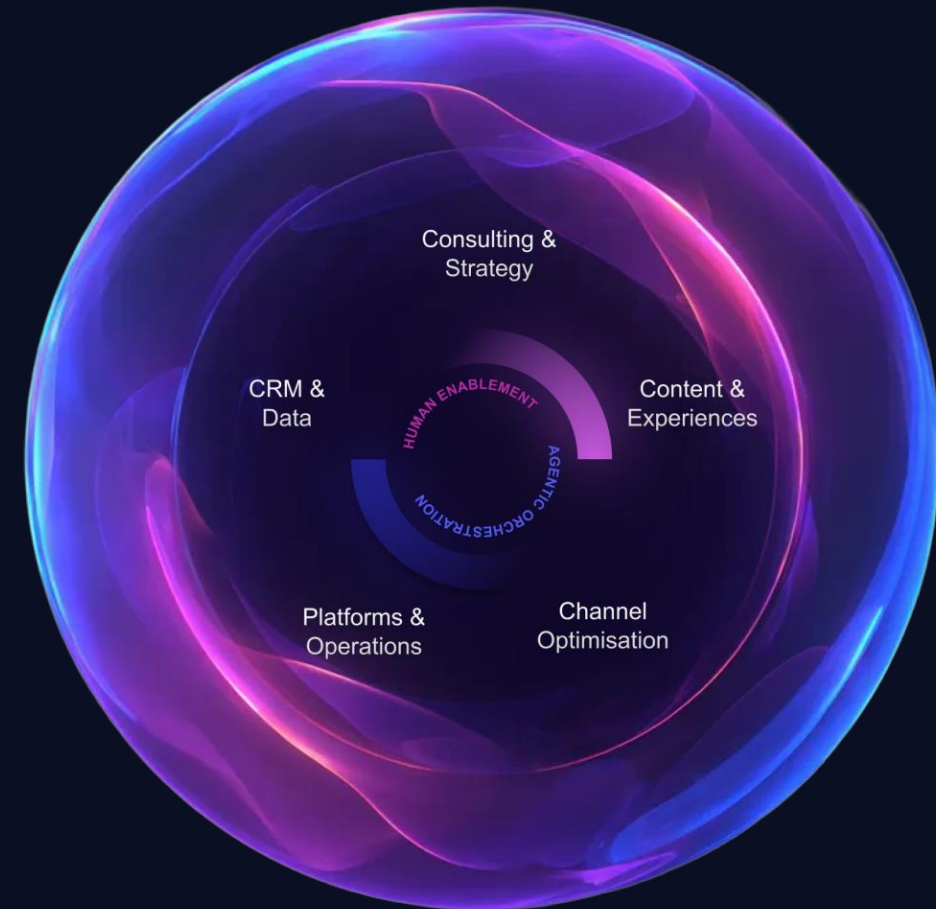
Many have tried, and some have made genuine progress. However, for the majority, the hard truth remains, change has been incremental where it needed to be transformational, and the gap between digital ambition and digital reality continues to widen.

Given the conversation has moved on from whether transformation is needed, the challenge today is how to make it happen and stick.

Revolution, by Remarkable, is a perpetual growth framework built specifically to give organisations a comprehensive strategy and set of playbooks to achieve true digital transformation and drive long-term customer value.

Revolution is not a project. Revolution is not a platform. Revolution is not a consulting engagement with a glossy report at the end. Revolution is a structured, repeatable framework for connecting strategy, technology, data, content, and, most critically, people and culture, into a single, measurable engine for growth.

**At its core, Revolution is built on a simple yet powerful premise: digital transformation creates value only when it is treated as a growth enabler, not simply an incremental modernisation exercise.**



# Revolution: A Transformation Framework

**Evidence suggests that too many university digital programmes have been conceived as infrastructure projects, all necessary and worthy, but ultimately inward-facing.**

Revolution turns this logic on its head, beginning always with the student, the market, and the competitive landscape, and working backwards to the people, processes and tools needed to serve them.

Revolution has been designed with the specific complexities of today's enterprises and large organisations in mind. Universities are not like retail businesses or financial services firms. Marketing functions are often centralised but must co-exist within a distributed ecosystem of faculty, school, and departmental teams, each with its own priorities, audiences, and content. Stakeholders are many and varied, and, according to some sources, somewhat resistant to centralised direction.

Student audiences span undergraduate home students, postgraduate researchers, and international applicants from all around the world. Then there are those looking to continue their professional development, as well as future academic and administrative staff. In short, there are many and varied audiences, each requiring fundamentally different strategies and experiences in order to meet their needs and ambitions.

Revolution accommodates this complexity without being defeated by it.

**Revolution delivers measurable impact across student experience, operational efficiency, and institutional growth:**

- Up to **50% faster time-to-market** for campaigns, content, and new digital experiences through integrated, cloud-first platforms and agile operations.
- **+30% increase in engagement** and retention through personalised, consistent student journeys across all touchpoints.
- **10–25% increase in revenue growth** rate for institutions adopting integrated customer experience and data-driven operations.
- **25–35% reduction in operating costs** through automation, platform consolidation, and improved content governance.

These are not aspirational projections. They are the outcomes that organisations achieve when they commit to transformation in a structured, evidence-led way.

***"I think that sense of having a holistic view of digital transformation is very helpful. It's culturally centred rather than technologically centred, which I think helps it to form a better approach."***

***Professor Sir Anthony Finkelstein, University of London***

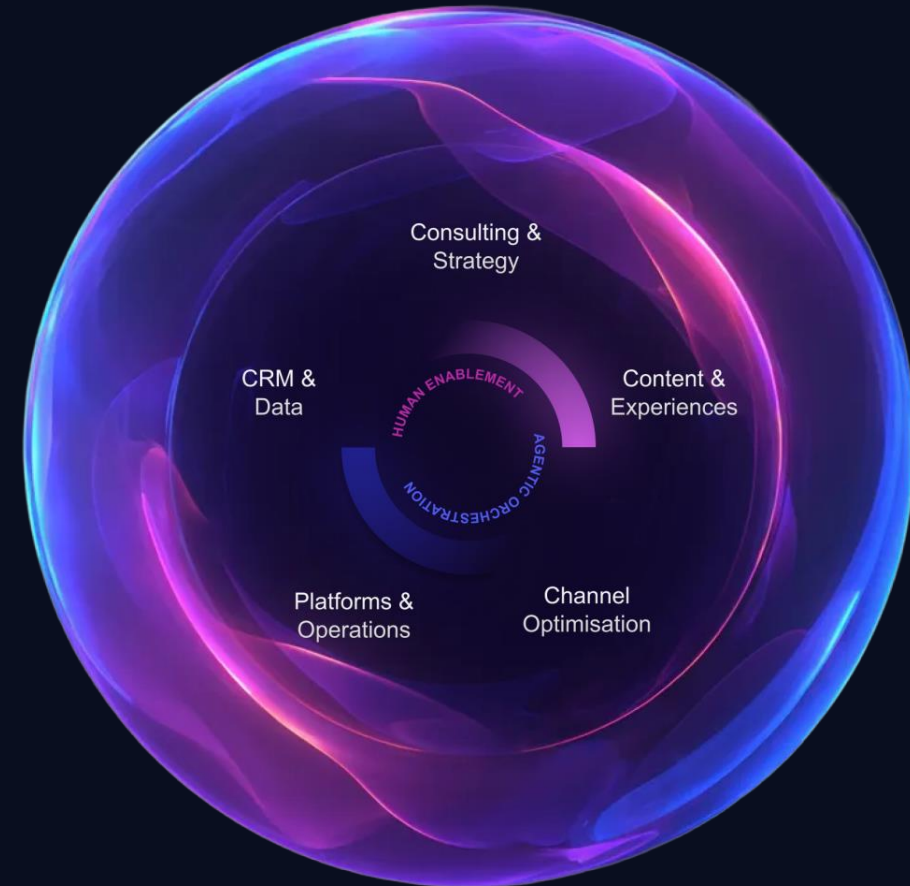
# The Forces of Revolution

Revolution is structured around seven forces of change, organised in two distinct but interdependent layers. Five **Growth Forces** form the outer ring of the framework, each one a discrete domain of capability that directly drives the student and stakeholder experience, institutional performance, and competitive positioning.

At the centre of the framework sit two **Connecting Forces**, Human Enablement and Agentic Orchestration. These two do not operate as standalone workstreams but as the connective tissue that runs through every Growth Force simultaneously, amplifying their impact and binding the whole programme into a coherent, self-reinforcing system.

This architecture matters, and it is worth understanding why before exploring each force in detail.

Most digital transformation programmes treat people and technology as two separate tracks, i.e. a technical implementation running in parallel with a "change management programme" that is typically under-resourced and under-prioritised. The result is capability without adoption: platforms that are technically excellent but culturally ignored, and AI tools that sit unused because teams lack the confidence or the mandate to integrate them into their daily work.

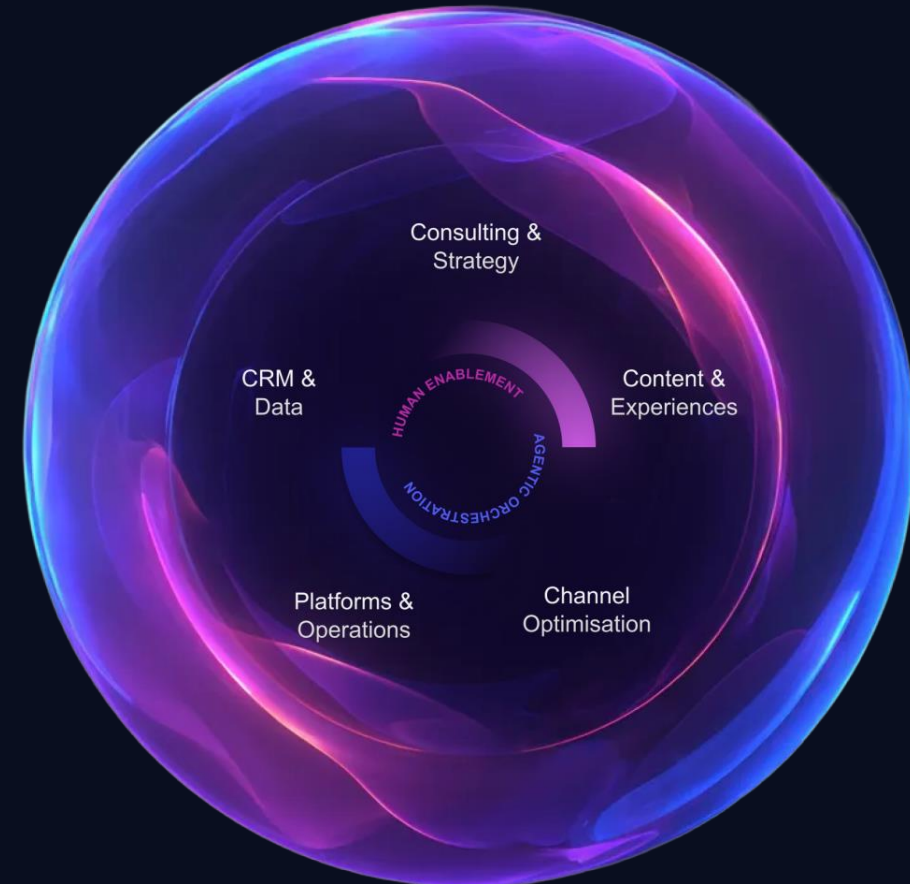


# The Forces of Revolution

**Revolution is designed differently.** Human Enablement and Agentic Orchestration are not afterthoughts, and they are not separate tracks. They are woven into every phase of every Growth Force, from the first strategic workshop to the final optimisation cycle. A data strategy is shaped by what your teams can realistically own and operate. A content experience is designed around what AI can help your people produce at scale. A platform is selected partly on how well it supports your teams' ways of working. This is what it means for a framework to be truly connective, and it is what distinguishes Revolution from the fragmented, siloed programmes that have left too many universities with a patchwork of different technologies and underwhelming results.

Unlike a linear implementation roadmap, which treats transformation as a project with a beginning and an end, the Revolution model is cyclical. Each force feeds into the next. Each cycle of the programme creates the conditions for the next cycle to go further. This is what makes Revolution a growth programme, not a one-time initiative.

In the university context, this matters enormously. Transformation cannot be declared complete after a website relaunch or a CRM implementation. The student market shifts. New competitors emerge. Expectations evolve. Revenue pressures change the strategic focus. Revolution is designed to keep institutions moving forward; continuously improving, continuously learning, and continuously growing.



A photograph of two people sitting on a set of wide, light-colored wooden steps in a modern office environment. On the left, a woman with curly hair and glasses, wearing a yellow cardigan and blue jeans, sits on a higher step, looking down at her smartphone. To her right, a man in a purple and white striped polo shirt and dark pants sits on a lower step, also looking at his phone. A laptop is open on the step in front of him. A coffee cup sits on a small table to the left of the woman. Large windows are visible on the left side of the frame, and the ceiling features exposed pipes and ductwork. The overall lighting is soft and natural.

Where the five **Growth Forces** define the what... the  
two **Connecting Forces** define the how.



**Delivering Revolution**

# Delivering Revolution: The 5D Methodology

Understanding the *what* of Revolution is one thing. Understanding *how* is equally important, especially for digital and IT leaders who need confidence that the programme will be delivered with rigour, and for marketing leaders who need to know that early wins will be achieved without waiting years for benefits to materialise.

Revolution is achieved through Remarkable's 5D Methodology: a repeatable programme framework that structures each cycle of the transformation journey. Whether the focus of a particular cycle is a CRM implementation, a new market content strategy, a platform migration, or a channel optimisation sprint, the 5D framework offers the consistent discipline that keeps delivery on track and outcomes measurable.

## The 5Ds are as follows:

- 1. Discover:** Understand objectives, challenges, and opportunities through stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and market research. Identify the quick wins that can build momentum, and the foundational investments that will enable long-term growth.
- 2. Define:** Architect and specify the right workflows, platforms, and deliverables to create the business impact identified in the Discovery phase. Build the business case, establish governance, and create the detailed blueprint for implementation.
- 3. Design:** Create the experiences, assets, and technical specifications that will bring the strategy to life. This is where student journeys become actual interfaces, where content strategies become editorial frameworks, and where data architectures become real integration patterns.

**4. Deliver:** Implement, test, and go live. Revolution's delivery approach is agile and phased, designed to deliver value to the institution quickly, rather than waiting for a "big bang" launch that carries maximum risk and minimal early learning.

**5. Drive:** Optimise, measure, and grow. Every Revolution cycle ends with rigorous performance analysis that feeds directly into the next cycle. This is the mechanism by which Revolution compounds value over time, each cycle leaving the institution more capable, more data-rich, and more competitive than the last.

This cyclical approach is what distinguishes Revolution from a conventional digital transformation programme. **It is not a project that ends. It is a capability that grows.**





**Why the Revolution imperative for  
Universities works.**

# What makes Revolution Different

The technology market is full of vendors, agencies, and system integrators ready to enhance your university's digital presence. Senior leaders in this field are rightly sceptical of grand promises. Therefore, it's important to be clear about what makes Revolution truly different.

## **It is holistic, not just technical.**

Many transformation programmes fail because they focus on technology and don't consider the wider impact on their teams, people, processes, data, customers, or culture. Revolution addresses all of these areas, and more, simultaneously by using our 8-pillar framework. We do this because we know that without addressing all these areas, your transformation will fail. Enterprise content management is now a foundational piece of technology; get it right, and you make the jobs of hundreds of people in your organisation easier, get it wrong, and you can sour the culture and see people leave.

## **It is built for growth, not just modernisation.**

Every element of Revolution aims to increase enrolment, boost revenue, and strengthen competitive position. This isn't about making your university's digital estate look more modern. It's about making it work harder by attracting more of the students you want, converting more of the students who find you, and retaining more of the students who enrol.

*"We all know of technology projects or programmes that have gone wrong just because people forget that behind every tool, behind every bit of technology are people who are expected to deliver that technology and that new way of working. Unless we think holistically and broadly about how people approach different tasks and different roles, a technology programme will fail."*

**Professor Liz Mossop, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University**

## **It is evidence-based, not opinion-led.**

Every recommendation Remarkable makes is grounded in data, including your own data, data from your sector, and our own curated international competitive intelligence.

The Revolution framework is not a rigid solution. It is a structured approach to identifying and acting on the specific opportunities available to your organisation in your key markets.

## **It is designed for university complexity.**

Remarkable recognises that higher education is unlike any other sector. The governance structures, stakeholder dynamics, distributed content models, regulatory environment, and the tension between academic culture and commercial imperatives are not obstacles to overcome but the context in which transformation must be conceived and implemented. Revolution has been developed with this understanding at its core.

## **It transfers capability rather than creating dependency.**

The goal of every Revolution engagement is for the organisation to be more capable at the end than it was at the beginning. If your transformations simply trade one form of dependency (legacy systems and fragmented operations) for another (ongoing external management), then they have not fundamentally progressed your organisation and have therefore failed.

**Remarkable's approach is to help you build long-term capability by modernising your culture, not just your technology.**

A photograph of three young adults, two women and one man, walking together outdoors. They are all smiling and looking towards each other. The woman on the left has long brown hair in a ponytail, wearing a black leather jacket and blue jeans, holding a blue folder and a coffee cup. The woman in the middle has long brown hair, wearing a grey coat over a light-colored shirt, holding a stack of papers and a coffee cup. The man on the right has a beard and is wearing a red and blue plaid shirt over a white t-shirt, holding a coffee cup and a stack of books. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with stone steps. A white geometric shape is in the top right corner.

**The Choice Facing UK Universities  
today.**

# The Choice Facing UK Universities

This white paper started with an evaluation. UK universities are facing the most complex combination of pressures the sector has seen in a generation: increasing domestic competition, declining international applications, frozen fees, rising costs, higher student expectations, and a digital landscape that is evolving faster than most institutional governance structures can adapt.

None of this is new information to senior leaders facing these challenges. You have experienced these pressures firsthand. You have felt their weight in budget discussions, restructuring efforts, and the quiet anxiety of watching application data cycle after cycle, wondering whether the results will be positive.

What this white paper asserts, and what the evidence shows, is that responding to these pressures cannot be more of the same. Not another website. Not another campaign. Not another incremental investment in a system that is already fragmented and underperforming. The UK universities that will emerge from this period of disruption with genuine strength will be those that choose, at this moment, to do something fundamentally different.

They opted for transformation over digitisation. Connection over silos. Growth over mere survival.

## Why the Timing of This Decision Matters

There is a version of this argument that suggests: transformation is difficult, the conditions are rarely perfect, and waiting until the pressure becomes intense enough will eventually force change. This form of reasoning is comfortable. However, at this particular moment in the UK higher education market, it is incorrect.

The Office for Students predicts that 114 universities could face deficits by 2027 if current trends persist. The institutions most vulnerable to this outcome are not the ones that started transforming in 2026, but those that did not.

Generation Alpha, whose first cohort will begin applying to university within the next two years, will arrive with expectations for AI-native, personalised digital experiences that most UK universities are not currently prepared to provide. Moreover, competitors from Australia, Canada, the UAE, and across Europe are investing in digital capabilities now and show no signs of slowing down.

**The window for proactive transformation, for developing capability from a position of choice rather than crisis, is finite.** Institutions that commence their revolution in 2026 will enter the 2028/29 recruitment cycle with integrated platforms, mature data infrastructure, AI-enabled content operations, and teams that have completed two full cycles of learning and improvement. Those who delay will find themselves starting that journey when their competitors have already reaped the benefits twice over.

**The question confronting every senior marketing and digital leader in the UK university sector is not whether transformation is required. It is whether your institution will take the lead or be led by it.**

# What Revolution Offers

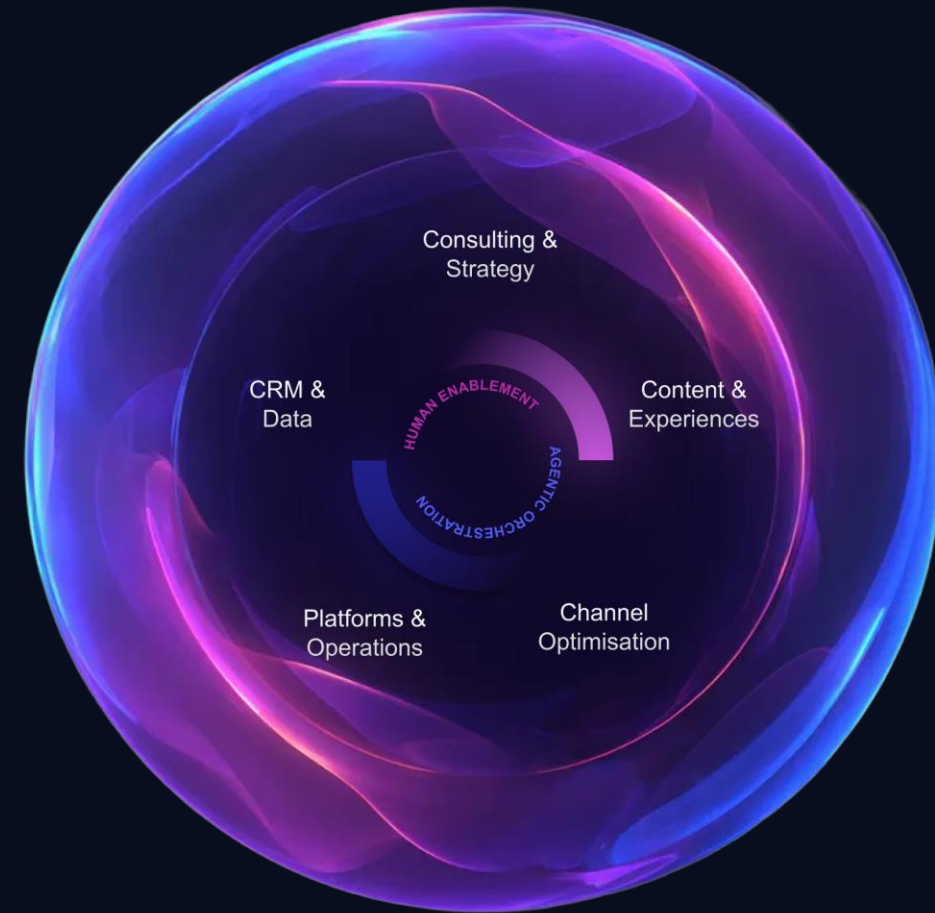
Revolution is not a promise of easy transformation. Genuine change that shifts an organisation's competitive path is never simple. It demands leadership courage, cross-departmental alignment, ongoing investment, and the willingness to accept that some established ways must now change.

What Revolution offers is a framework that makes transformation achievable, structured enough to minimise risk, flexible enough to suit your institution's specific context, and cyclical enough to continue delivering value well beyond the initial programme. It's a proven methodology in higher education that starts with your strategy rather than a technology vendor's preference.

It's a partnership model that builds your capability instead of creating dependency, with a team that possesses sector knowledge, technical expertise, and commercial rigour to guide you from where you are to where you need to be.

Universities have always prepared people for futures that do not yet fully exist. It's now time to apply that same ambition to the institutions themselves.

**The Revolution has begun. The only question is, have you?**



# Start Your Revolution

Three ways to take the next step, each designed to meet you where you are:

## Revolution Starter Call Complimentary - 90 minutes

A structured senior-level conversation with Remarkable's higher education specialists.

We will map your current position across the Revolution framework, identify your most significant opportunities and constraints, and give you an honest view of where to focus first.

No commitment. No obligation. Just clarity.

Book your Revolution Start Call today, email Kier Humphreys on email [kier.humphreys@remarkable.global](mailto:kier.humphreys@remarkable.global) or call +44 (0) 208 070 2820

## Revolution Deep Dive Two-day Workshop

Designed for leadership teams who have identified transformation as a priority and want to explore what it looks like in their specific institutional context. We map the Revolution framework directly against your situation, drawing on your own data and our sector intelligence, to produce a high-level picture of what your Revolution roadmap could look like, and what it could return.

Suitable for Vice-Chancellors, PVCs, Registrars, and senior marketing and digital directors preparing a case for institutional investment.

Book your Revolution Deep Dive today, email Kier Humphreys on email [kier.humphreys@remarkable.global](mailto:kier.humphreys@remarkable.global) or call +44 (0) 208 070 2820

## Revolution Phase 0 Paid - 4 to 6 weeks

The formal entry point into the Revolution programme. A full diagnostic engagement, CX and Data Maturity Assessment, stakeholder interviews, market analysis, technology audit, and quick-win identification, resulting in a prioritised strategic roadmap with investment phasing and a bespoke ROI model built on your institution's own data.

For institutions that are ready to move, and want the evidence to move with confidence.

Book your Revolution Phase 0 today, email Kier Humphreys on email [kier.humphreys@remarkable.global](mailto:kier.humphreys@remarkable.global) or call +44 (0) 208 070 2820

**To take the first step contact Remarkable's higher education team: Kier Humphreys, VP Strategy. Email: [kier.humphreys@remarkable.global](mailto:kier.humphreys@remarkable.global). Phone: +44 (0) 208 070 2820**

*Please note, whilst all three entry points are available to universities, availability is limited as Remarkable only works with a select number of university partners at any one time to ensure the depth of engagement that Revolution requires.*

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## About us

Remarkable is a customer experience consultancy, specialising in delivering long term customer loyalty and value through experiences that convert. Revolution, by Remarkable, is a perpetual growth framework that enables organisations to transform by setting the vision, road map and organisational change programme to allow for real transformation.

## Get in touch

To learn more about Remarkable, Revolution, or Remarkable's long and distinguished history in helping Universities transform, then please contact Kier Humphreys, at [kier.humphreys@remarkable.global](mailto:kier.humphreys@remarkable.global)