

# Canvas implementation at Utrecht University

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**HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht** (HU) has been busy for years implementing the new educational vision. At the end of 2017, the university of applied sciences has started the transition from its own learning management system to Canvas LMS. Ellen Schuurink, Digital Learning Environment Manager at HU, has experienced the entire process up close and is responsible for the entire process, from tendering to adoption. Together with Drieam, partner in this trajectory at the HU, we briefly consider the process and discuss the choices, expectations and learning points.

## The selection process

During the selection process for a new LMS (Learning Management System), the educational vision of the HU was considered as very important. *“Expectations about how the LMS should facilitate the educational vision, has determined which tenders were assessed. We have taken into account the daily practice, the current interpretation of the educational vision and the expectation / development for the next 5 years ”*, says Ellen. Because the LMS is an important supporting role in the educational process, the HU decided to involve any important stakeholders in the selection of a new LMS at an early stage. “It starts with the steering committee as a customer, in which people from education as well as supporting services are represented. In addition, all end-users are represented in the project group for the selection process: students, teachers, supporters, information managers, functional managers, educationalist and education innovation manager ”- sais Ellen - “We also gathered input from various experts to get to a proper request. The selection consisted of three phases, of which the project group assessed the first two rounds. The final choice was made in the third round by means of a "proof of concept" for the LMS, made by students and teachers. ”

When asked why the final choice fell on Canvas, Ellen answers: “First of all, because it fits within our modular learning environment. Furthermore, a rich range of applications can be linked quickly and securely through LTI. Another reason is the ability to collaborate safely and easily with other professionals. ” Ellen and her team are convinced that these elements of Canvas will certainly help the HU to realize their educational ambitions. In addition, according to Ellen, there are many advantages working centrally with one system that is reliable, affordable and manageable. And one that is also very flexible. Thanks to Canvas it is possible to fulfill all wishes and ideas of the different courses within the HU

# How to get everyone on board?

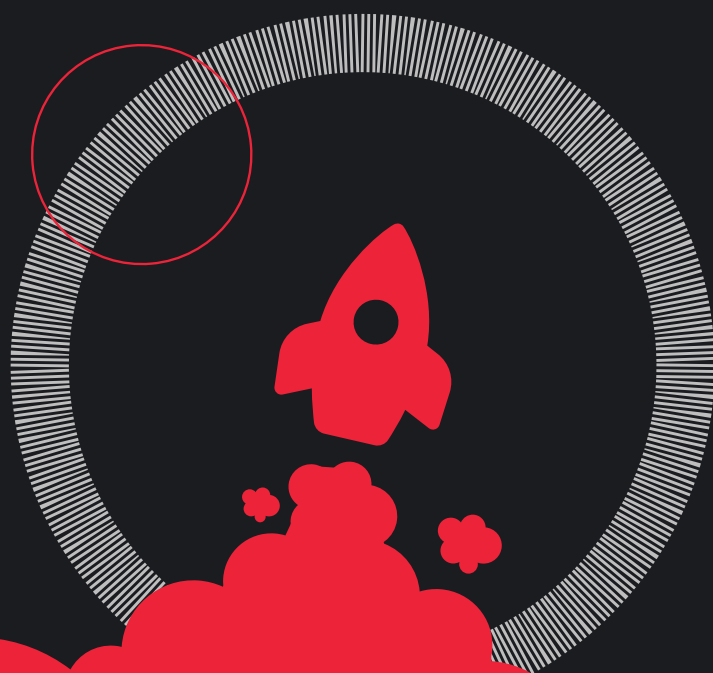
To ensure broad support for the final choice, all HU colleagues were informed at an early stage about the tender process through various internal media channels such as blogs, e-mail updates and a webinar with the training managers.

*"Clear communication has been an important element in the acceptance of the choice. The process was transparent and the outcome was determined by teachers and students," says Ellen.*

Considering the fact that the educational reformation had already been taken care of in their own (old) learning environment, it was quite easy to give the new LMS a place and roll out Canvas in a structured way. The HU has opted for a phased rollout, because a number of courses within the new curriculum were already developed in the old learning environment. The consequence is that at the first go-live not everyone could come along. To still be able to serve as educational pioneers, they created an experimental garden for them.

*"The upside is that this group got to know Canvas, and had the ability to experiment in the coming academic year," says Ellen.*

To increase adoption, the HU also consciously opted for a specialized party like Drieam to turn on.



# The adoption phase

After the tender and a tough selection process, the HU chose Canvas as their new LMS for its 40.000 students and 2.500 teachers. This was the starting point of the implementation process. Ellen and the team realized from the start of its trajectory that Canvas is a system that you can customize according to your own wishes and possibilities to a great extent. To secure a smooth adoption of Canvas, the HU chose for a partnership with Drieam, as their expert Canvas partner.

The adoption of Canvas within HU is done agile. *"Which means that we have carried out a pilot at an early stage early, after which we finalized the configuration with a small group of active users and a large group of interested parties."* explains Ellen. *"Users had access to Canvas quickly, which made it necessary to know which choices in the beginning are essential for a successful start. By making these choices in the beginning, we wouldn't have a lot of repair work afterwards. Drieam helped us with outlining the choices to be made and which would have priority. The goal was: a full acceptance of Canvas by teachers."*



## Challenges (1/2)

HU is still in the middle of the Canvas rollout at this point of writing. We asked Ellen about the current state of the process and what challenges she expects for the coming year. The implementation is divided into two parts, namely a technical part and the adoption. *"The technical part is sufficiently equipped to go live, but we can also see it as a continuous development for the agile team."* According to Ellen the team is mainly faced with the challenges for the technical part. Especially in regards to the dependency on other systems, such as the linking of Canvas to the e-depot and integration with Office365.



## Challenges (2/2)


After the first start-up phase, HU wants to look further at the many expansion possibilities that Canvas has to offer through the LTI plugins. *“Drieam has informed us about the various options with LTI and has developed a plugin for reflection for us”,* says Ellen. Various LTI plugins are on the roadmap of HU for the next academic year. The biggest challenge for next year, however, lies within the widespread adoption of Canvas according to Ellen.


*“The early adopters and innovators, they are all already involved, trained and have their own first Canvas course already made. The next group is being enthused and stimulated. But because we are phasing out our old systems and switch to Canvas, this could lead to resistance.”*

We found that what Ellen mentions is true indeed. The resistance is a common challenge when rolling out a new learning environment and was baptized by Moore (2014) as *“Crossing the chasm”,* which loosely translates as *“bridging the gap”*. In addition to the already enthusiastic *“innovators”* and *“early adopters”*, it is crucial to include the rest of the people at an early stage. A structured rollout in combination with intensive personal guidance and a clear communication strategy is the key for success.

## Recommendations (1/2)

When it comes to the implementation of Canvas, Ellen is happy to give other educational institutions a couple of tips:

 *“Go! Try, experiment and involve teachers early. Don't be too afraid that it doesn't work or isn't perfect. You learn so much from those first experiences.”*

 *And, if you are continuing to scale up the usage: “Start fresh. During the preparations for example we were thinking about a relocation service. This is a service that would transfer all the content of the old system into Canvas. We soon learned that this is technically possible, but that it is not the right choice in terms of quality. Every LMS has its own structure and possibilities. If you keep using the old LMS structure, you don't use the full possibilities of the Canvas structure. And because Canvas is not your old LMS, it works less well or it looks less beautiful. Reviewing and organizing each course is therefore my advice. ”*

