



---

## **A COLLABORATION & LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO ENABLE TO BE A UNIVERSITY LEADER IN EDUCATION INNOVATION**

*Willem van Valkenburg, Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands*

---

### **Introduction**

Delft University of Technology was founded 176 year ago as an engineering school. It is a traditional brick-and-mortar university in engineering, science and design with 24,000 students on campus.

In 2014 the executive board embraced the online learning development and started the innovation programme on open and online education (TU Delft, 2014). The objectives of the programme are to educate the world and enhance the quality of education (for both the online and campus programmes).

This new programme combined with the changing needs in campus education required a new learning management system (LMS) that is both flexible and stable in a rapidly changing world.

### **Selecting a new LMS**

Part of enhancing the quality was selecting a new LMS for both our campus and online students. TU Delft was using Blackboard since 1999 and it was time for a change. In the preparation for the European tender process we organized pilots with some of the popular platforms in the market to use that experience in formulating our tender document. Three important lessons we learned from this:

- The implementation is much more important than the system.
- We need a system that is not only easy to use, but also very advanced in its capabilities.
- We should look for a partner that will work together with us to enhance our education.

For the tender we used a Best Value Procurement, which is a new method of tendering. Instead of listing all your requirements, you describe your vision, mission, strategy and conditions and the suppliers are asked to come up with their best possible solution.

Desire2Learn with the Brightspace Learning Platform delivered the best proposal. As Ovum (Johal, 2016) concluded Brightspace is the #1 LMS for next-generation online teaching and learning. As part of our project we decided to brand the system as Collaboration & Learning Environment (CLE) to emphasize the goal of the project. It is not about the management, it is about the collaboration between teachers and students and learning of students.

## **Implementation**

From the start the project team identified the implementation of Brightspace as an opportunity to enhance our education. We defined the implementation as an education project, not as an IT-project. The educational quality improvement for the students is leading in the strategy and decisions of this project.

To lead the implementation, we composed a team of experts from within the university and hired experts from around the world, such as instructional designer from Portugal and a learning developer from the US. The project leader is not a traditional IT project leader (using Prince II method), but an educational technology expert with project management experience.

## **Phasing of the migration**

When started to design the migration process we first decided on the priorities for the change and migration strategy. The most important premise is the educational quality improvement (relative to current use of Blackboard). After that followed the unburden of teachers during the migration process. The third premise was that teachers only have use one platform, it was less important that students have to use one platform. The fourth premise was high-quality support for teachers and students.

Next to these premises we also set some other goals and starting points:

- Focus of the new platform should be on supporting the collaboration and learning process. In the past Blackboard was also used as portal for students.
- After 17 years of Blackboard use we wanted to start with a clean slate, so no automatic migration.
- The student experience is crucial:
  - more structured way of setting up courses by teachers through a standard course structure;
  - less flexibility for teachers to change some components; and
  - importance of mobile and offline use.
- Extensive involvement of faculty and faculties. We didn't want it to be a system of the central service, but an environment that we co-created together to make it work for everyone.

Based on this premises and other goals we evaluated more than ten different scenarios. After careful consideration we decided for a two-stage migration.

### ***First Phase***

The first phase is focused on the migration of all the courses into Brightspace. This ensures that all teachers and student have one platform to use. Important part of this first phase is that all courses will use the same basic course structure.

The course structure addresses a big complaint of many students that every teacher organizes his course differently and that it is hard to find what they need.

The downside for teachers was that it limited their *academic freedom* as some would say. But when we presented the course structure the members of our change advisory committee, both teachers and students are represented, were all in favour of forcing all courses into this structure.

The actual migration is done by a rolling migration as shown in Figure 1. This means that the migration team started in May with the Q1 courses, in September with the Q2 courses and so on.

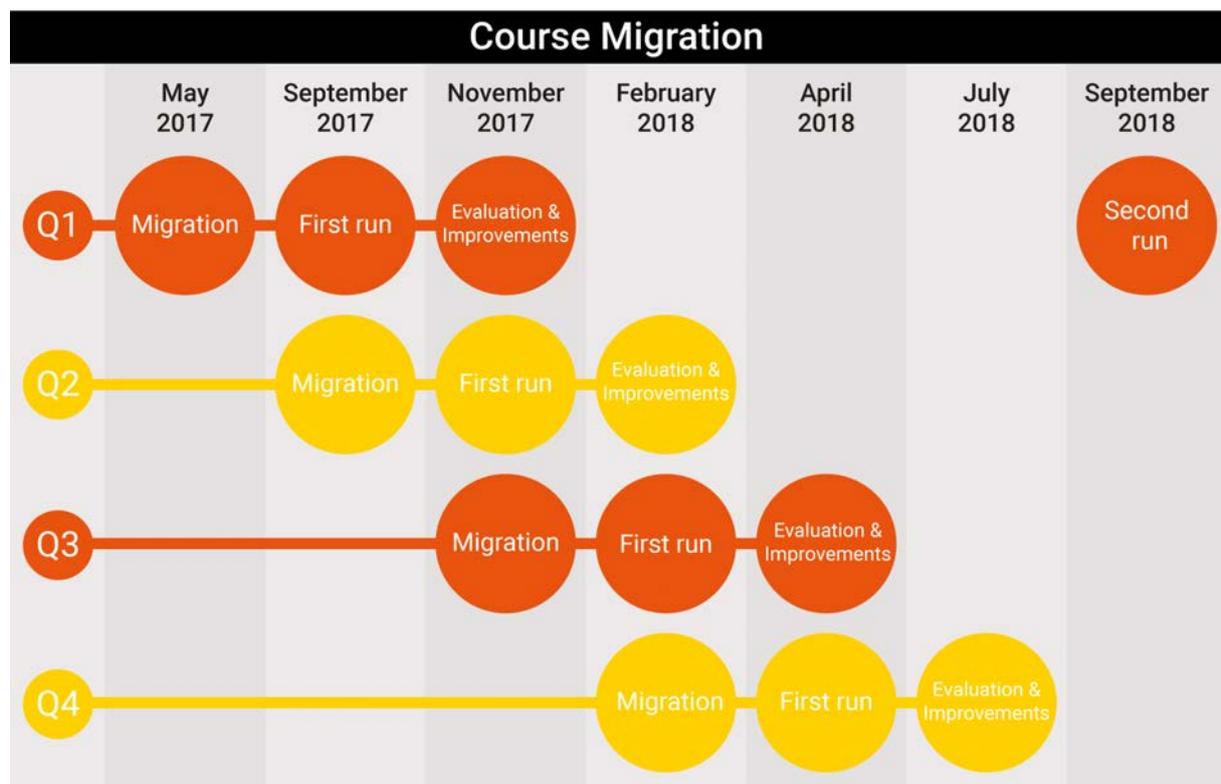


Figure 1. Course Migration process

Because the focus in the first phase is on getting all the courses in Brightspace, the need for support was more focused on many hands and less on didactical support.

The actual migration was done by a team of student assistants. Of course they were not allowed to migrate courses they would be enrolled in the upcoming year. The advantages of using students:

- they understand the courses and programmes;
- they are fast learners and are tech-savvy; and
- they know the teachers and faculties.

Currently the migration is under way and following the planned rolling migration process.

## **Second Phase**

In April the migration of courses will be completed. This means that the second phase can start. The focus of the second phase is on improving and innovating courses. Student and teachers are used to the platform and are open to advancing their courses. We also will use the learning analytics capabilities of Brightspace to improve the courses.

## **Support**

As part of our strategy we offered extensive support to faculty and teachers. They could choose what kind of support they wanted ranging from they do it themselves to will migrate their course for them. If we migrated the course for them, they still had to approve it, because they are still responsible.

We offered a wide range of workshop, training, work sessions, open office hours and an extensive support website (<https://brightspace-support.tudelft.nl/>) to facilitate their needs and prepare their courses.

## **Lessons Learned**

1. “Changing a LMS is an educational project” with a strong connection to educational leadership in the faculties and schools. It should not be seen as an IT project.
2. “It is a great opportunity to clean the house.” There will appear opportunities to change rules, regulation and policies, don’t waste those opportunities. But also, be prepared for the issues in current rules and regulations.
3. “There should be no exception in rules and regulations.” Be very strict and allow changes only for everyone or for none. Make sure to update your governance model for this and it helps to have a “Friendly Dictator”.
4. “Support is crucial.” There can’t be too much support for teachers. It is better to cancel a training or workshop because there is no interest than that teachers complain about support. Also make sure you invest in the training of your support team and keep a focus on improving your support.
5. “Be prepared.” During such a large project unexpected issues will appear, deal with it! Keep your focus on your strategy and create a flexible team to solve the issues.

## **Conclusion**

The key message is that implementing a LMS is the perfect opportunity to enhance your education, but this only works if it is an integral part of your strategy and all your decisions.

## **References**

1. Johal, N. (2016). *Ovum Decision Matrix: Selecting an Online Learning Platform for Higher Education, 2015–16*. Retrieved from <http://timeshighereducationonline.com/d2l/download/Ovum-Report-D2L-Abstract.pdf>

2. TU Delft (2014). *Next phase of Open & Online Education. Internal document on the vision, strategy & organization of the Extension School.*