

Delivering a Digital Vision

The Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences introduces D2L Brightspace in support of blended learning and an evolution of the university's learning environment.

The Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) is a higher education institution in The Netherlands. With a focus on applied sciences, it has around 49,000 students studying across seven faculties, facilitated by a tutoring and administration staff of over 4,000. Beginning in 2018, the university rolled out the Brightspace platform in support of a digital transformation that would enable blended learning on- and off-campus, replacing a SharePoint-based homegrown course management system.



Hogeschool van Amsterdam

AT A GLANCE

Client: Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

Industry: Higher Education

Website: [hva.nl](https://www.hva.nl)

Platform/Features:

- D2L Brightspace platform
- Blended learning
- Third-party integration

Interviewees:

- **Pieter van Langen**, Product Owner Digital Learning Environment
- **Ivo van der Werk**, Digital Transformation Officer
- **Aart Schouten**, former Program Manager Digital Learning Environment

Highlights:

- A digital transformation to support innovation in teaching and learning
- Blended learning that switches seamlessly between in-classroom and online study
- A path towards a 'digital campus'

Challenge

Adapting for a Digital Transformation

AUAS has the ambition to deliver personal education that puts students in charge of their own study paths. The university recognises the role technology can play in helping it achieve its learning goals. As a result, in 2018, AUAS set out to invest in innovative learning models that would enable flexible, adaptable learning and support students as they studied.

At that time AUAS already had a digital learning environment which lecturers used to distribute learning materials, but each faculty used it in its own way. There was an opportunity to take a more consistent approach, one that would enable fully blended learning with students able to switch seamlessly between in-classroom and online study.

“This is a time of transformation for the educational system and we as an institution were moving towards blended learning,” explains Ivo van der Werk, Digital Transformation Officer. “We were also seeing the same kind of transformation in society around us and in business. We recognised that we need to adapt our programme curricula, in accountancy and nursing for example, to address the change. Those sectors are changing because of digital possibilities and our programmes have to change too.”

AUAS initiated a tendering exercise with a view to implementing a single learning management system (LMS) to meet all staff and student needs. A project group defined a set of requirements covering mobile access, responsive learning paths, in-line feedback, course material release conditions, and the ability to check student understanding.

To meet all needs, the LMS would need to provide a rich learning environment, integrate well into the university’s IT infrastructure, and provide flexible, rewarding learning experiences.

The university also sought to build a learning ecosystem that would support future pedagogies and assessment models. “We’re seeing a change towards more competency-based education and programmatic assessment,” says Pieter van Langen, Product Owner, Digital Learning Environment. “We need the tools to better facilitate those processes.”

“We’re also trying to break institutional boundaries by working together with other universities on micro-credentials that can be certified,” adds Ivo. “That’s a challenge for how you build programmes, but also for infrastructure as it has to be easy for students to combine building blocks to get a degree.”

“We want to **provide** all our educational programmes with the tools and the **flexibility** they need.”

Pieter van Langen
Product Owner Digital Learning Environment, AUAS

Solution

A Rich and Intuitive Platform

AUAS chose to partner with D2L and began implementing the new solution on a small scale in September 2018. The following year use of the platform was expanded institution-wide. “D2L’s Brightspace was picked because it’s rich and intuitive and integrates well with third-party educational tools,” says Aart Schouten, former Program Manager Digital Learning Environment. “With the help of D2L we managed to implement Brightspace within a period of three months.”

“The **flexibility** of D2L’s implementation support, the **knowledge** of their people and the ability to come up with **solutions** that fit the needs of the client made it possible for us to create a smooth transition for teachers and students.”

Aart Schouten
former Program Manager Digital Learning Environment, AUA

AUAS viewed the introduction of Brightspace as an organisational change, rather than a technical implementation, knowing that without acceptance of the vision and buy-in to the strategy, the implementation would struggle.

To ensure a successful shift in the way learning takes place, AUAS appointed two boards to oversee strategy, direction, and the use of the LMS. The direction of digital learning is managed centrally but, operationally, each faculty takes its own approach.

By December 2019, almost all of the university were using Brightspace. “Brightspace is where lecturers place their formal announcements, where they share the materials that need to be studied for assessments and where students hand in assignments,” says Pieter.

This meant that when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, AUAS was able to transition learning online. Adjustments were necessary, but the university learnt and adapted the way it taught to suit the conditions. This included assessing and adjusting the length and frequency of lectures to suit a fully online model and ensuring that student and tutor interaction was still supported.

“If we didn’t have **Brightspace** or an LMS, we would not have been able to continue our educational **programmes** during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Pieter van Langen
Product Owner Digital Learning Environment, AUAS

Result

Value-add Through Blended Learning

The widespread adoption of a learning platform has set AUAS on the path towards digital integration. There's also now a broader acceptance of the use of digital tools among the faculty.

The goal in the long term is still to go back to campus, but the university is preparing for a more blended situation. "We have defined a five-year plan where all programmes have to make the transition from almost 100 per cent physical to blended, to get the best out of both worlds," says Pieter. "Use the campus where it adds the most value and use online where you can and where it provides students with the most flexibility."

Part of the vision is to create the "digital campus" in which academics can work and research and students can learn. "It will feel more like an ecosystem," explains Ivo. "When you enter a physical campus, you can see where to go. We're still new to designing a digital campus, but we want to combine it with the physical campus to give an optimal mix of digital and physical activities."

With educational delivery in place, AUAS is now looking to the future and how it can get even more from the learning platform to help it realise its goals. It recognises the opportunity that learning analytics present and, while the team is not leveraging all the data possible yet, it has started a project with quite big ambitions. Dashboards will provide lecturers, study coaches and students with a better view of progress within courses and within programmes as a whole.

By adopting a digital vision and implementing Brightspace to deliver a rich, rewarding learning experience, AUAS has laid the foundations for successful blended learning for thousands of students. The solid foundation AUAS had already built helped it transition fully online when the pandemic closed campus doors. As it progresses with its blended learning plans, personal study paths, learner outcomes and the individual needs of each faculty will continue to shape the digital programme.

