

Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Usage

Initial Report - NL

National context
<p>In the Netherlands higher education institutions have first invested a lot in infrastructure. Especially Fontys university of professional education did so because their institutions are located all over the country and due to the history of different schools with all their own systems and infrastructures a lot was done in the field of standardization of infrastructure.</p> <p>Many universities developed in the beginning of the 90's their own "VLE's" based on databases accessible through the internet or intranet.</p> <p>Nowadays most universities make use of commercial VLE's like Blackboard, WebCT, Natschool, etc.</p> <p>The project environments within the VLE's are used mostly.</p>
Institution
Fontys university of professional education
School/division/faculty
PTH-Eindhoven (technical teacher training institute)
Current VLE
Natschool
Any other VLEs in use
Blackboard, WebCT and Learning Space
Selection and Implementation history
<p>In 1999-2000 Fontys searched within some ict-project for useable VLE's. Except from Blackboard, Learning Space and WebCT also an early version of Natschool was found. At different institutions of Fontys experiments were started with different VLE's.</p> <p>In 2002 a proposal was made for the Board of Fontys to assign some preferred VLE's. In this process Natschool was rewarded as a first choice. Also a proposal was made to support a second VLE because of spreading the risks. This proposal was not approved because of the costs involved for second VLE. In 2003 a contract was signed with the supplier of Natschool for the complete Fontys organization.</p>
Funding arrangements
<p>Natschool is now funded from the university's top slice, which is money paid by all schools (as percentage of the schools yearly turn-over) to support the central functions of the university. This money pays for the hardware to run the system, the software licensing and the technical support for the systems.</p> <p>The licencing costs of Natschool are € 35,- per licence. Fontys has now 15.000 licences of Natschool.</p>

Hardware
The Fontys infrastructure has seven IIS and SQL servers and two servers for Natschool. These servers are firewall protected connected to the internet and also connected to three domains: testing, development and administrative domain. A graphical schedule of this infrastructure is available.
Technical Support
Technical support for the system is provided by Computing Services who maintain the server and associated hardware. There is an additional Natschool technical support office who oversees batch uploading processes and maintains student and staff accounts.
Extent of Usage
In Natschool there are 13.000 accounts but they are not all active users. Really active with Natschool at Fontys, with reasonable numbers of staff and students, are at this moment about 12 studies. A part of these users are using mainly the project environment within Natschool for teamwork and communication and not specific for courses and modules.
Integration with student records
Fontys uses no real integration with students record at the moment however there are possibilities for import and export. For example the user accounts are made of reports (MS Excel files) from our administrative system called Peoplesoft.
User authentication
At Fontys all institutes can choose to use Natschool. They can ask for support from the VLE-team and they can choose their own implementation path. After that the institutions can make their own user accounts (within the license). All users have unique usernames and passwords. This allows the system to identify each individual using the system and tailor the workspace to their personal configuration. Once logged on, users are given a list of all courses they are enrolled on, and they can enter each course space with a single click. Announcements from any of the courses they are enrolled on are collected on the initial log in screen to save each course having to be opened in turn to collect information. Users can move from one course to another without having to undergo a reauthentication process.
Hardware and software requirements for users
Natschool uses a standard browser but for some Natschool portals users need to download or install additional software to use the system.
Uploading of content
Natschool supports the uploading of files and documents in different format like Microsoft Office Applications (Word, Excel, Powerpoint), picture and animation files, movies, etc.
Pedagogical Support
Most of the time institutions choose for their own instruction of staff, based on the knowledge and experience of colleagues from earlier pilots. Support is given on a tailor-made base by the VLE-team of Fontys. It is also possible for staff to follow a special training.

Students do not need a special training. One or two hours showing how to use Natschool is enough for them.
Usage within the faculty / school / department
Fontys PTH-Eindhoven is not one of the Natschool users yet. Because of their early involvement in the development of VLE's they are still using their own build VLE at this time.
Staff Development
Staff development is on a voluntary base of the institution. It is possible to follow courses but it is also possible that an institution organizes its own courses and staff development.
Student induction
The induction of students and training in using the system is done by a one or two hour demonstration from a teacher.
Quality control
Quality control of material on the system and the regulation of content is decided at course and school level. No university wide recommendations on quality are currently in place. Quality control is the own responsibility of an institution.
Policy
<p>This year the control and support of Natschool will be transferred from the project organization to the standing organization.</p> <p>The developments will be evaluated yearly and for Natschool Fontys will try to get some continuity in the development.</p> <p>It is hard to predict the future of e-learning for 5 years but the infrastructure of Fontys is ready to adapt.</p>
Support for assessment (formative and summative)
<p>There is a possibility for assessment in Natschool. Only a few institutions are using this. Fontys has a special project group for (electronic) assessment.</p> <p>It is possible that Fontys will choose Question Mark Perception as standard assessment software application.</p>
Summary of usage within Vocational Initial Teacher Training
As mentioned before, PTH-Eindhoven is using its own VLE at the moment and not yet Natschool.