



'Over the last two-and-a-half years, SURF has achieved an incredible amount in the fields of cloud computing and Open Education. Now it is time for the next stage. We need to stop merely talking about the great opportunities these developments can offer to students and staff, and actually start making use of the possibilities on a large scale. Only that way can we maintain our service levels and retain customers. As part of this new phase, we are faced with all kinds of choices. What

will we aim for as institutions? And will we seek to work together – as we have in the past – or will we each set to work at our own pace? Whatever we decide, let us all agree to base our activities on the SURF standards and facilities that we have developed together, such as the SURFconext collaboration infrastructure.'

Kees van Ast Vice-President of the Executive Board at the University of Twente

Third Management Consultation on cloud computing

ON 12 NOVEMBER, SURF HELD THE THIRD MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION ON CLOUD COMPUTING, WHERE MANAGEMENT STAFF RECEIVED UPDATES ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS, AND DISCUSSED JOINT ASPIRATIONS AND HOW TO REMOVE OBSTACLES.

The gathering at RAI in Amsterdam was attended by executive staff from research universities and universities of applied sciences, as well as by the chairpersons of the CIO Council, COMIT and the Coordination Meeting of Directors of University Computing Centres (CVDUR), and representatives of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and SURF. 'In early 2011 we decided to take a pro-active approach, and start guiding developments in cloud computing ourselves', explains Wouter de Haan (SURF). A legal framework for cloud services was drawn up, and the 'Coordination in the Cloud' project was designed and executed. Just under thirty different commercially available cloud services also became connected to SURFconext. 'Unfortunately, use of these services is still lagging', he continues. 'One of our focus areas in 2014 will therefore be to encourage the use of cloud services among institutions. We also wish to implement several other services relevant to all forms of higher education, as well as activate the community cloud for those institutions. We also hope to finalise the decision-making process and start implementing the joint i-Strategy for research and education.'

Online education

Anka Mulder (Delft University of Technology) presented a report on the Open Education management trip to the US. In October, a group of management staff visited a number of universities, the U.S. Department of Education, the American Council on Education, the OpenCourseWare Consortium, Coursera and edX. 'It is not only the Ivy League universities

working on online education – the State University of New York and Tufts University are doing the same', she explains. 'One of the side-effects of online education is that you get to know so much about the students and how they learn. The lessons learned in this way can also help benefit on-campus education.' She notes that the hype surrounding online education is already over in the US, while the Netherlands is still waiting to see what happens. 'If we don't make up for lost time, we will end up like Kodak, who were too late to make the switch to digital photography.' Anka Mulder is urging institutions to simply make a start. She also says the government should be encouraging online education, and trying to resist the reflex to introduce new legislation.

Objectives

Lastly, Paul Rullman from the Coordination in the Cloud Steering Committee took the floor. 'Although cloud computing is being fully embraced by consumers, institutions are still very limited in their use', he notes. 'That thought disturbs me: we are missing out on the benefits.' The Coordination in the Cloud project analysed the opportunities offered by the cloud in response to the strategic challenges being faced by higher education. The resulting i-Strategy outlines 12 objectives. 'One of these states that institutions must be well-equipped to offer open online education by 2018. Others express the aim to realise a state-of-the-art infrastructure for research data, or to remove barriers that obstruct collaboration between staff and students.' Institutions can take part in the initiatives outlined in the i-Strategy in various ways, via groups called 'coalitions of the willing'. Institutions will be examining and finalising their objectives and preferences over the next few weeks.

Make a move

The discussions during the Management Consultation clearly revealed a number of obstacles that must still be overcome. These include the consequences of online education for lecturers, the risk of smaller institutions losing interest, and the new challenges presented by the cloud itself, such as privacy and the possibility of switching suppliers. Although some of these problems can be solved from within the SURF network, the attendees agreed that it is the institutions themselves who must now take action.

- [Video report of the Management Consultation](#)
- [Animation on the 'Coordination in the Cloud' project](#)

New cloud services

Recent months have seen a number of new commercial cloud services join SURFconext. New suppliers of education support include [PresentersWall](#), [Centuri](#) (a work-placement information system) and the [Projectcamp.us](#) interactive learning environment. New collaboration and data storage services include [FileSender](#) and the [Box](#) online working environment. Other additions include [BioOne](#), a publisher of peer-reviewed journals in the fields of biology, ecology and environmental studies, and the cloud services of [PeopleXS](#) for e-recruitment, PhD management and course administration. DANS (Data Archiving and Networked Services), an institute affiliated with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), has also linked its EASY online archiving system to SURFconext, representing an important addition to the eResearch services available via SURFconext. Linking with the SURFconext collaborative infrastructure allows users to log in securely and easily using their own institutional account, based on a single sign-on. Institutions can also link their own services to SURFconext.

A list of all services available via SURFconext can be found [here](#).