



SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENT-BUSINESS COLLABORATION

Good practice collection of support services for challenge-based student-business collaboration in sustainable entrepreneurship

Good Practice Profile: Master Challenge



MASTER CHALLENGE

Master Challenge B.V.

Online matchmaking platform

Est. 2020

Netherlands

Amsterdam

Number of employees

6

Geographic scope of activities

National / International

Type of intermediary

HEI-external

HEI-internal

Hybrid

Intermediary set-up

Single organisation

Partnership of multiple organisations

Intermediation for SBC as

Primary role

Secondary role

Master Challenge is a time-saving **matching platform for educational institutes that want to bring education and practice closer together**. The platform streamlines the process of recruiting and approving challenges from external stakeholders. Next to that, it allows lecturers to carefully match those challenges to their student teams using the team formation tool and team-challenge matching tool. The platform can also be embedded on HEI websites.

Background

With an academic career that started in 2015 as professor in Entrepreneurship at the University of Amsterdam, Master Challenge founder Dr Bram Kuijken started noticing a divide between course work and real-life applications. As a result, in the year 2016 he started to integrate real-life challenges from companies from his personal network into his university courses. As more academic staff and fellow colleagues started to approach him with requests to support the sourcing of company challenges, Kuijken created a platform as a way of easing coordination and communication processes. This was the starting point of the offer that was gradually developed into the Master Challenge platform, officially launched in 2020.

Funding & Financing Model

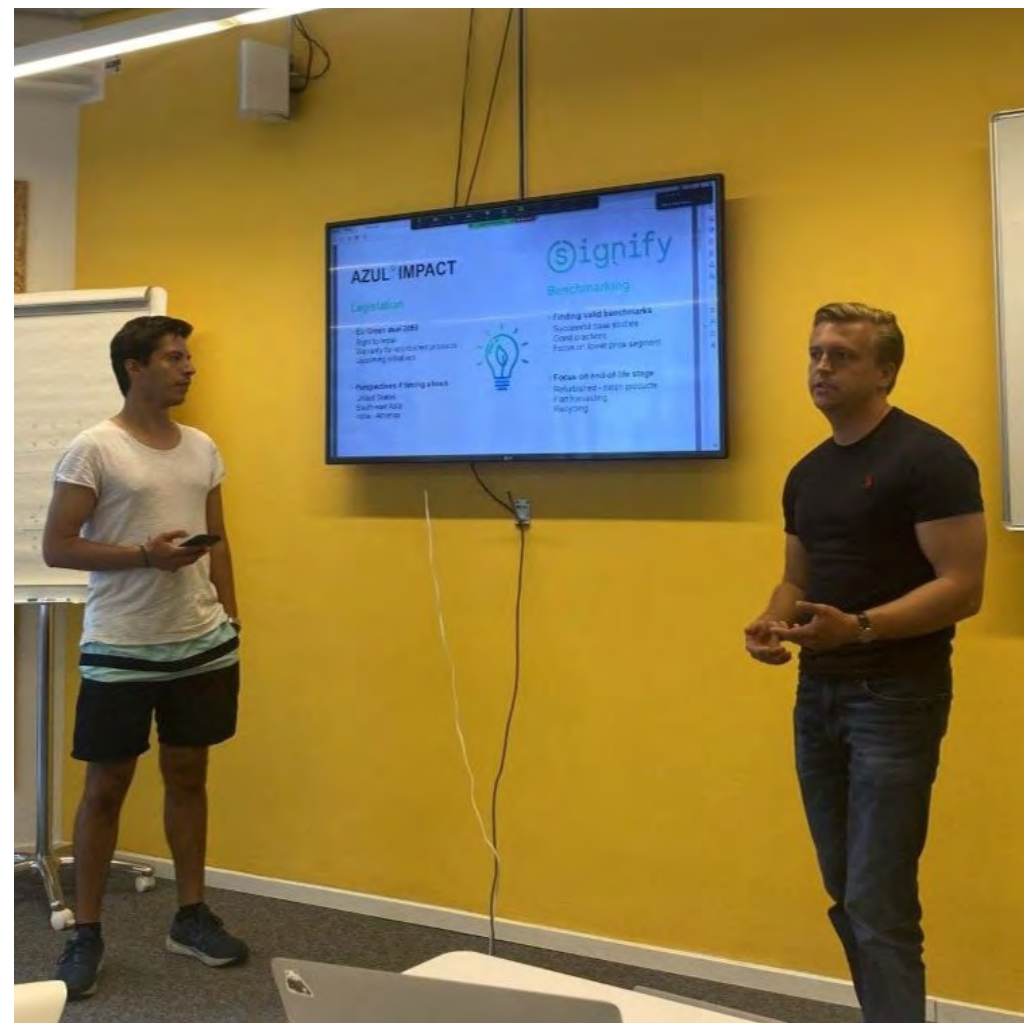
- ✖ Master Challenge was launched with a loan from the University of Amsterdam.
- ✖ Master Challenge charges a license fee to HEIs, which is determined on the basis of the type of platform services used, e.g. challenge recruitment services.
- ✖ In some cases, challenge owners are charged a fee, depending on agreements made with the respective HEI.

MASTER CHALLENGE

Intermediary Support Services & Activities

GENERAL SUPPORT

- × Automated recruiting as well as matching of companies, HEIs, and students via the digital platform, using the stable marriage algorithm based on approval of submitted company challenges by professors and ranking of students as well as ranking of student teams by the challenge owners.
- × Publishing of and communication around challenges on the platform in so-called challenge spaces for courses that are open for challenges from external stakeholders.
- × Accompanying communication activities via social media and blog channels.



A student team presenting their update during a challenge programme organised by Master Challenge.
© Bram Kuijken

TEACHER- AND STUDENT-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

- × Based on input from academic staff, sourcing of suitable real-life challenges from businesses.
- × Support with curricular integration of challenges into university courses.
- × Building of well-balanced teams, using a team formation tool with algorithm that matches students based on diversity or similarity variables.
- × Access to a network of companies to increase future possibilities for cooperation such as guest visits, expert inputs and research.
- × Offer of the Website Embed Feature, allowing academic staff and their universities and faculties to showcase courses open for collaboration with external partners by integrating the Master Challenge platform on the university website.
- × Offer of bulk mailer that allows academic staff to email (segments of) students and/or challenge representatives.
- × Provision of free input and workshops for students in the fields of business development, consulting skills, lean startup, and online marketing with the option to receive certificates.
- × Offer of the Master Challenge talent pool to receive access to further practical experiences and career opportunities, with topical focus on business, sustainability, IT and data science, and communication.

COMPANY-SPECIFIC SUPPORT

- × Offer of booking a demo call during which interested companies receive an introduction to the platform and can discuss their specific challenge.
- × Offer of efficient challenge submission process via KVK (Chamber of Commerce) integration that enables automatic and accurate instead of manual input of company information.
- × Access to challenge spaces which help companies understand the type of challenges needed and present their own challenges.
- × Possibility to submit open challenges via the open challenge feature which academic staff may react to on the platform by inviting companies to become part of their courses.
- × Offer of challenge formulation via the platform feature AI Challenge Generator which creates tailored drafts of company challenges based on brief descriptions of the respective company and challenge.
- × Connection to university course coordinators for mutual work on formulating the final challenge.
- × Access to pool of Bachelor and Master students and algorithm-based matching of students' skill sets to company challenges and needs.

MASTER CHALLENGE



Curricular Integration

As a former co-director of the Master in Entrepreneurship at University of Amsterdam, Master Challenge founder Bram Kuijken recognised the importance of curricular integration of challenges early on, as a way of allowing not just a small proportion, but all students to benefit from putting theory into practice. As a result, the Master Challenge platform specialises in enabling challenge formats integrated into the regular university curriculum that are awarded ECTS credits. Curricular integration of challenges is a key service of the Master Challenge platform, currently used by 11 HEIs in the Netherlands. It allows academic staff to save time, simplify communication, and organise challenges in a more professional and structured way.

International & Virtual Collaboration

- ✦ Participation of Dutch as well as Netherlands-based international students in the challenges.
- ✦ The SaaS-solution created by Master Challenge provides individual platform spaces for each user group (academic staff, students, companies).
- ✦ The platform is being scaled up as a SaaS solution to more universities both in the Netherlands as well as abroad.
- ✦ Next to other topic areas, challenge formats may deal with challenges related to scaling up internationally for companies.
- ✦ The set-up of the platform allows for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary education which is ideal for faculties and/or universities that aim to work together with other universities.

MASTER CHALLENGE

Impact

VISION & MISSION STATEMENT

Master Challenge envisions a future in which HEIs function as knowledge hubs and **learning communities made up of different stakeholders** interacting with each other. The mission is to **close the gap between university and industry** by facilitating the integration of relevant and real learning opportunities for mutual impact into university curricula.

RESULTS

- ✦ More than 100 academic staff at 11 HEIs in the Netherlands use the Master Challenge platform to enable their students practice-oriented learning as part of the university curriculum. More than 2000 challenges have been matched with student teams.
- ✦ Companies receive solutions in the fields of data science, psychology, sustainability, communication, marketing, and HR. They also receive solutions that explore new markets and growth strategies or validate new value propositions.
- ✦ Developing long-term career opportunities: Several students have started internships or full-time jobs with the companies whose challenges they worked on.

SUCCESS FACTORS AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

- ✦ Many years of experience in consulting HEI lecturers on recruitment of real-life challenges and incorporation into courses.
- ✦ Master Challenge founder Bram Kuijken remains involved in education through a guest lectureship at the University of Amsterdam which allows him to stay on top of educational developments and follow discussions in the university context to adapt his platform offer accordingly.
- ✦ Master Challenge builds long-term relationships with educational institutions and individual lecturers who need support in recruiting challenges, forming affiliations and partnerships.
- ✦ The challenge platform and marketplace has been built in cooperation with innovative HEIs who take the lead in formulating university-wide policies and strategies to integrate experiential learning in their education offer, enabling cross-innovation.



Master Challenge founder Bram Kuijken with Suzanne Hansen, Head of Partnerships for the Bachelor's Computational Social Science at University of Amsterdam in front of the Roeterseiland Campus in Amsterdam. © UvA

MASTER CHALLENGE

☆ Exemplary Challenge Format: Summer Sustainability Challenge 2022

The Summer Sustainability Challenge is an annual extra-curricular challenge programme offered by Master Challenge in collaboration with REC Impact, the impact initiative connecting teaching with practice at Roeterseiland campus (REC) of University of Amsterdam (UvA).

The campus hosts the Economics and Business, Social and Behavioural Sciences and Law faculties at UvA. In the 2022 edition of the Summer Sustainability Challenge, six student teams from the Roeterseiland campus worked on sustainability challenges of six Dutch companies for three weeks (4-22 July 2022). Master Challenge helped REC to recruit the six challenges and using the team formation and team-challenge matching tool, six interdisciplinary student teams were formed and matched to the challenges. The teams were guided by coach and Master Challenge founder Bram Kuijken as well as representatives from the organisations.

RESULTS

- × Student team Azul Impact worked on a challenge of the lighting company Signify, developing advice on circular business practices. This included research on circular economy legislation in and outside Europe, such as the EU Green Deal 2050 and the “right to repair” clause, and established circularity practices, particularly reuse and upgrading.
- × Student team Avatar worked on a challenge of the agricultural manufacturer Lely, developing an implementation plan with a suggested timeframe for how the company can further reduce its carbon emissions, e.g., through sourcing and funding of global projects.
- × Student team Sustainability Warriors worked on a challenge of health care company Mediq, examining the company’s existing product line of medical devices and healthcare products and developing a product development cycle to suggest more sustainable alternatives for the company’s supply range.
- × Student team Sustainable Advocate worked on a challenge by BuyBay, a tech-company specialised in smart return management, quantifying their business model’s environmental impact based on company data as well as own research on electronic waste.
- × One student team worked on a challenge of the pension investment company APG, developing a measurement framework to support the company in determining its success in terms of helping one million people be more financially fit.



© Christa Romp

PUBLIC CONTACT DETAILS

Bram Kuijken
Founder & CEO, Master Challenge
info@masterchallenge.me

INFORMATION SOURCES

[Master Challenge \(2023\). Official Website.](#)
[Master Challenge \(2023\). UTeach Platform.](#)
[Learn Master Challenge \(2023\). Team Formation Tool.](#)
[Learn Master Challenge \(2023\). Summer Sustainability Challenge.](#)
[EU Startups \(2023\). Master Challenge.](#)
[Anywyse \(2023\). The Learner’s Forecast: Innovators in the Horizon. Episode 4: Founder of Master Challenge Bram Kuijken.](#)
[REC Impact \(2022\). Impact Education: Sustainability Challenge. Blog article.](#)
[Bootstrappers \(2022\). How This Academic Entrepreneur Disrupts Higher Education by Preparing Students for the Real World.](#)
[Medium \(2022\). Master Challenge Blog: More progress and sustainability in the energy sector - UvA students successfully help Windkracht 5 in achieving their mission.](#)
[EU for Innovation \(2021\). 2nd “Entrepreneurial Education” Masterclass.](#)
[KEVRI \(2021\). Bram Kuijken: Inspiring students to master real-world challenges.](#)

Expert interview carried out with company representative (8.12.2022).