UK Government open source policy

Sebastian Rahtz
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Welcome

Open Source: national frameworks
Sebastian Rahtz
Our aim today:

☞ to get a better understanding of the UK Government OSS policy

☞ to get a better understanding of how the UK fits with its neighbours

☞ to get some perspective on the issue by hearing from non-educational institutions, and from suppliers

The UK government open source policy

☛ Some background

☛ The policy

☛ To start the discussion

Note: OSS Watch is not representing the e-Government unit in presenting the policy.

Why do we get involved in open source?

As either creators or consumers, we have a variety of motives for doing open source:

- ☞ to save money (*of course*)
- ☞ to share work (*enlightened self-interest*)
- ☞ because it works (*software engineering*)
- ☞ to learn (*apprentice work*)
- ☞ for fun (*someone has to find it fun*)
- ☞ for social justice (*break the capitalist system*)

but not very often because we are told to.

Can we legislate for open source?

It is not unreasonable for government to consider:

☛ ways of saving money in public procurement

☛ trying to avoid duplicate effort

☛ promoting efficient development of IT systems

☛ allowing for skill development

Whether government has an agenda for fun or social justice is less clear!

Contents

Background 1: government trials

www.ogc.gov.uk/index.asp?docid=2190#finalreport

Viability of OSS Open Source software is a viable and credible alternative to proprietary software for infrastructure implementations;

Obstacles to implementation ... for desktop applications, the current lack of complex functionality which can affect ease of migration and interoperability ... and for business applications, the lack of Open Source products to compete with large-scale proprietary enterprise-level products;

Costs and benefits ... can generate significant savings in hardware and software costs for infrastructure implementation, and reduce the licensing costs and hardware refresh requirements for desktop implementation;

Lessons learned ... requires investment in planning, training of users, development of skills for implementation and support, and detailed consideration of migration and interoperability issues.

(Material on this page verbatim from eGU report)

Background 2: Recommendations from open source trials

Public sector bodies should:

☞ examine carefully the technical and business case for implementation of Open Source software and the role which OSS could play in current and future projects, working with their outsourced IT providers where appropriate;

☞ review the potential for server consolidation, comparing the benefits of OSS with proprietary solutions;

☞ consider the potential costs and benefits of migration to an OSS desktop for transaction users, (potentially in conjunction with use of 'thin client' architecture solutions);

☞ identify the role of open standards in future IS/IT strategy and policy, in conformance with the e-Government Interoperability Framework (eGIF);

Background 3: more recommendations from trials

☛ consider requirements for the development of skills in Open Source development, deployment and operation within the organisation, and review the availability of such skills in their outsourced IT service providers;

☛ review their current infrastructure and applications — in collaboration with their outsourced IT providers where relevant — well in advance of any planned procurement or renewal, and determine whether current technologies and IT policies inhibit future choice; and if so consider what steps may be necessary to prevent future 'lock in'

☛ consider the benefits of incremental change by diversifying OSS use beyond the server platform to products like Email, LDAP, Web and internet Browser.

(Material on this page verbatim from eGU report)

Background 3: eGif (e-Government Interoperability Framework)

`http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/schemasstandards/egif.asp`

The e-GIF defines the technical policies and specifications governing information flows across government and the public sector.

They cover interconnectivity, data integration, e-services access and content management.

Version 6.0 contains the high level policy statements, management, implementation and compliance regimes, whilst technical policies and specifications are contained in the Technical Standards Catalogue(TSC).

Justification for the UK government policy

☛ There is a need to always procure a solution that gives value for money.

☛ There is a need to ensure that interoperability of systems is provided and maintained.

☛ Every effort should be made to reduce the cost and risk to government systems. Adopting this policy helps achieve that by:

  ☛ acquiring best value for money solutions

  ☛ removing the reliance on individual IT suppliers

  ☛ providing more flexibility in the development, enhancement and integration of systems

  ☛ vesting the ownership of bespoke and tailored software code with Government where this offers value for money.

☛ Security of government systems is vital.

☛ There is a need to maximise returns on and benefits from public investment in publicly funded R&D software.

What does the policy say?

http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/policydocs/
consult_subject_document.asp?docnum=905
Version 2 28 October 2004

The key decisions:

☞ UK Government will consider OSS solutions alongside proprietary ones in IT procurements. Contracts will be awarded on a value for money basis.

☞ UK Government will only use products for interoperability that support open standards and specifications in all future IT developments.

☞ UK Government will seek to avoid lock-in to proprietary IT products and services.

☞ UK Government will consider obtaining full rights to bespoke software code or customisations of COTS (Commercial Off The Shelf) software it procures wherever this achieves best value for money.

☞ Publicly funded R&D projects which aim to produce software outputs shall specify a proposed software exploitation route at the start of the project. At the completion of the project, the software shall be exploited either commercially or within an academic community or as OSS.

(Material on this page verbatim from OSS Policy)

Exceptions

'The policy on exploiting R&D software will not apply to software developed in the areas of defence, national security or law enforcement. It will also not apply to software developed by Trading Funds.'

Next Steps by eGU

☛ DTI, eGU and JISC will disseminate information on the distinct types of OSI compliant licences to support use, development and exploitation of OSS by government organisations and publicly funded R&D teams.

☛ DTI will include the R&D software exploitation policy in guidance on collaboration agreements. Research Councils will include the R&D software exploitation policy in guidance on research grants and contracts.

☛ DTI, Research Councils and JISC will explore the feasibility of providing unified access to publicly funded R&D OSS.

☛ CESG will examine the issues involved in supporting the information assurance requirements of OSS for use in government systems.

☛ OGC will disseminate the lessons learnt from OSS 'Proof of Concept' trials to the government IT community.

☛ eGU will explore with Government, industry and other stakeholders further activities to support OSS use in the public sector.

Some possible FAQs

☛ How was this policy derived?

☛ Is this a law or a nice idea?

☛ Does it affect me in UK HE/FE?

☛ What software licence *should* we use, then?

☛ What do 'open standards' and other vague terms mean?

☛ Who will judge whether the rules have been followed?

☛ Who will assist in archiving and disseminating software?

☛ What does 'exploited within an academic community' mean?

☛ Is this policy integrated with an EU directives? what are other countries doing?

☛ How is the JISC responding to the policy?

☛ How do I go about re-assessing my institution's IT policy?

or anything else which is puzzling you.