OSS Watch

Press release

Open source makes 'substantial advance' in UK education

Three quarters of all colleges and universities consider open source for IT procurements

More than three quarters of all UK colleges and universities consider open source options when engaging in IT procurement exercises, says a report published today.

The report, undertaken by the JISC-funded OSS Watch service, also found that use of Moodle, the open source course management system or virtual learning environment (VLE), has grown to 56% in less than three years. With the Open University's decision to adopt Moodle as its future VLE, open source penetration in this high-profile deployment area marks a substantial advance.

While 77% of colleges and universities report that they regularly explore open source options in procurement exercises, only 25% of institutions, however, report mention of "open source" in their institutional policies, suggesting an important discrepancy between policy and practice in this area.

Institutional engagement with open source software development remains a challenge too, the report suggests. Of those institutions deploying open source software only 14% report knowing whether or not they submit patches (i.e. make contributions) to the ongoing development of that software.

Other findings of the report include:

* 100% of institutions provide Internet Explorer on their Windows desktop PCs, yet 68% now also provide Mozilla Firefox

* there is no clear leader amongst Content Management Systems (CMS) with more than 29 different solutions being used by respondents

* cost continues to the principal driver in reasons for considering OSS

The report was undertaken as a way of establishing the levels of use of open source software in further and higher education and its place in policy and decision-making processes. With the Government placing the issue of open source software at the heart of public sector IT provision, OSS Watch is building on this profile to advise FE and HE institutions on the importance of incorporating considerations of open source software into their IT strategies. This report therefore provides vital information to the post-16 sector as a whole on its deployment and use.

Randy Metcalfe, Manager of OSS Watch, said, "This survey shows that although open source use is on the rise, institutional engagement with the open source development community remains patchy. OSS Watch will redouble its efforts over the next two years in order to help colleges and universities work through the challenges of engagement, from contribution of code to open source business models."

For a copy of the report and executive summary, please go to:
http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/studies/survey2006/

For further information contact Randy Metcalfe by email info@oss-watch.ac.uk or by phone 01865 283416

Notes for editors

1. **OSS Watch** is the national advisory service on free and open source software for UK higher and further education. It promotes awareness and understanding of the legal, social,

technical and economic issues that arise when educational institutions engage with free and open source software. OSS Watch is funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and based within the Research Technologies Service of the University of Oxford. Information about OSS Watch can be found at http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/ , or contact Randy Metcalfe on 01865 283416 or info@oss-watch.ac.uk

2. **JISC** – the Joint Information Systems Committee – is a joint committee of the UK further and higher education funding bodies and is responsible for supporting the innovative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, teaching, and research. It is best known for providing the JANET network, a range of support, content and advisory services, and a portfolio of high-quality resources. Information about JISC, its services and programmes can be found at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/, or contact Philip Pothen on 020 7848 2935 / 07887 564 006 or p.pothen@jisc.ac.uk.

3. The question set for **OSS Watch Survey 2006** was based in part upon questions used in the OSS Watch Scoping Study (2003) http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/studies/scoping/ and the FLOSSWorld study http://www.flossworld.org/ , whose project team OSS Watch would like to thank.