

## OSS Watch Survey 2006: Executive Summary

July 2006

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OSS Watch is pleased to announce that it has recently concluded its 2006 survey of UK Higher Education and Further Education institutions. The full report on the survey is available from OSS Watch<sup>1</sup>.

### 1 The OSS Watch 2006 Survey

During February and March 2006, OSS Watch conducted a survey<sup>2</sup> of UK Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) institutions, looking at their attitudes and policies towards open source software (OSS). This was in many ways a repeat of a similar exercise that OSS Watch performed in October 2003.

Improvements in the way in which the 2006 survey was performed resulted in two main benefits:

- By sending the survey's URL to the ICT director of the institution, the survey was more likely to have been completed by the person who is most able to provide answers about ICT for the whole institution.
- The survey was completed by more people: in 2003, responses (from those replying on behalf of their institution) were obtained from only 6% of UK HE and FE institutions; in 2006, a reply from 18% of institutions was obtained.

Whenever possible, comparisons have been made with the results of the 2003 survey. However caution has to be adopted in doing this since the roles and responsibilities of those who answered the 2003 survey are not equivalent.

### 2 Key findings

**Institutional policies** Although only 25% of institutions mention OSS in an institutional policy, in practice 77% of institutions consider OSS when procuring software.

**Contributing to OSS** 16% of institutions do not know if their staff submit patches or code to OSS projects. Of those institutions where the ICT manager does know, 86% do not submit whereas 14% do. For those that submit patches or code, the regulations concerning this were varied:

- 7 respondents said it is the working practice of staff to supply patches;
- 6 respondents said that they do not know what the regulations are in regard to supplying patches;
- 5 respondents said that staff are supplying patches in their own time;
- 1 respondent said that this is specified in the employees's contract.

**Use of the Moodle VLE** 56% of FEs use Moodle as a Virtual Learning Environment.

**Content Management Systems** There is no commonly accepted software for Content Management Systems (CMSs): the range of software being used for a CMS is wider than for other applications. In all, 69 institutions answered the CMS question giving 29 different answers.

**Software for wikis and blogs** Although recently there has been a lot of discussion about the use of wikis and blogs, of the 23 institutions that answered the question about wikis, half of them said that their institution did not use wikis. Similar figures also apply for blogs.

**Software mix on servers** Most institutions (69%) have deployed and will continue to deploy OSS on their servers. Generally, the software on servers is a mix of OSS and proprietary software (PS). The use of OSS is most common for database servers (used by 62% of institutions), web servers (59%) and operating systems (56%).

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<sup>1</sup>The full report is available from <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/studies/survey2006/>

<sup>2</sup>OSS Watch would like to thank the following for their help in making OSS Watch Survey 2006 a success: Ellen Helsper for designing the survey, analysing the data of the replies, and producing the report – the exercise ran more smoothly and successfully as a result of her experience and expertise in these areas; the EU's FLOSSWorld project, and especially its team at the Oxford Internet Institute for giving us access to their HEI survey questionnaire and allowing the questions to be adapted for the purposes of our survey; Emma Thompson for establishing a contacts list of ICT directors; UCISA for allowing us to contact its ICT Directors email list; AoC NILTA, and especially Sally-Anne Saull, Managing Director, for being our contact with its members; and, of course, the ICT directors of those UK HE and FE institutions who completed the survey. The OSS Watch Survey 2006 project was managed by Barry Cornelius with the assistance of other members of the OSS Watch team.

**Reasons for choosing software on servers** When choosing PS for servers, the responses show that there is no one reason or a combination of reasons that leads to doing this. However, the reasons for using OSS are specific: saving on total costs of ownership, lower likelihood of getting locked in to a solution from a specific vendor, and better interoperability with other products.

**Support of OSS** Most institutions that use OSS on their servers rely on in-house support for the OSS.

**Software mix on desktops** In contrast to servers, the use of OSS on desktops is far less common. 47% of institutions indicated that, on desktops, they have not used OSS in the past and will not use it in the future. However, it is increasingly common to use both OSS and PS on desktops (42% do this).

**Commonly deployed desktop software** Microsoft Office and Internet Explorer are deployed by all institutions on most desktops. Other commonly deployed applications are Microsoft Outlook (82%) and Mozilla/Firefox (68%). The latter's use is now considerably higher than in 2003.

**Reasons for choosing software on desktops** The responses indicate that, saving on the total cost of ownership is, for desktops as for servers, the most important reason to use OSS on desktops. This was also indicated as the most important reason in the 2003 survey. Being locked in was not mentioned as an issue in 2003, but in 2006 the majority (73%) indicated that they chose OSS for that reason either on their desktops or on their servers or on both. Ideology is not an important factor for respondents, although a third of them indicated that it played a role.

### 3 Conclusion

A positive picture of the use of OSS emerges in both HEs and FEs. Although there are considerable differences between the two types of institutions, in general OSS is used more often than in 2003 and institutions have higher levels of skills and experience of OSS compared to 2003. This survey shows that it is likely that, in the future, use of OSS will continue and expand alongside the use of PS.

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