



# **OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE Use within UK Government**

**Version 2**

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# Introduction

Open Source Software (OSS) is software where the source code (the language in which the program is written) is freely distributed with the right to modify the code, and on the condition that redistribution is not restricted, and indeed is obtainable for no more than the reasonable cost of reproduction.<sup>1</sup> It has leapt to prominence by starting to take a significant share in some specific parts of the software infrastructure market.

The software industry is very fast moving and frequently throws up new developments that initially promise to make great changes in the marketplace, and which ultimately fail to live up to their initial press hype. OSS is indeed the start of a fundamental change in the software infrastructure marketplace and UK Government must take cognisance of that fact.

The Action Plan (June 2002) for the European Commission's initiative *eEurope 2005: An Information Society for all* builds on the previous Action Plan (June 2000) which set the target "to promote the use of open source software in the public sector and e-Government best practice through exchange of experiences across the Union". The new plan requires the development of an agreed interoperability framework to support the delivery of pan-European e-Government, based on open standards and encouraging the use of open source software.

The UK Government has supported this EC initiative by mandating open standards and specifications in its e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) and through the publication and updating of this OSS Policy.

The OSS Policy should be read in conjunction with current advice and guidance on procurement matters from the Office of Government Commerce (OGC).

UK Government in this context includes all publicly funded organisations, i.e. central government departments and their agencies, local government, the devolved administrations as voluntary partners and the wider public sector, e.g. non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), the National Health Service (NHS) and the education sector.

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<sup>1</sup> A fuller definition of OSS by the Open Source Initiative (OSI) is available at <http://www.opensource.org/docs/definition.php>

# The Policy

The key decisions of this policy are as follows:

- 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

# Justification

The justification for adopting this policy is as follows:

- There is a need to always procure a solution that gives value for money. This may be an OSS solution, or a proprietary one, or a mixture of both. Decisions should be made on a case by case basis.
- There is a need to ensure that interoperability of systems is provided and maintained. The e-GIF is mandated across the public sector and compliance with that is essential to the provision of e-services and joined-up Government.
- 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. Properly configured OSS can be at least as secure as proprietary systems and OSS is currently subject to fewer Internet attacks. A balance needs to be struck between the availability of security administration skills and the advantages of many diverse systems.
- There is a need to maximise returns on and benefits from public investment in publicly funded R&D software. The policy helps achieve this through the focus on and requirement for the exploitation of software outputs.

## Next Steps

The following actions will be taken to implement this updated policy:

- 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.

## References

- The eEurope 2005 Action Plan is available at:  
[http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/eeurope/2005/all\\_about/action\\_plan/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/2005/all_about/action_plan/index_en.htm)
- The e-Government Interoperability Framework (e-GIF) is available at:  
<http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/interoperability/egif.asp?order=title>
- QinetiQ Report “Analysis of the Impact of Open Source Software” is available at:  
[http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/policydocs/consult\\_subject\\_document.asp?docnum=781](http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/policydocs/consult_subject_document.asp?docnum=781)
- Further information on OSS is available at: <http://www.opensource.org/>

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