**UK Government Needs Your Input**

Last month the UK Government issued its public consultation "Open Standards: Open Opportunities". It represents a unique opportunity for all to contribute not just to the debate on what constitutes an Open Standards but the practical implications on adoption. Its not a yes/no answer, but an opportunity to participate in constructive debate. But for those who want to see increased openness and a competitive IT market it is absolutely essential that you make YOUR voice heard. Do not rely on others to do it for you. Do not assume that UKG already have a clear position. We can expect that opponents of the drafted policy will increase their lobbying and pressure – there is already clear evidence that this is happening- just look at the blog today by Glyn Moody on his first release of Microsoft lobbying documents sent to Government, and released under FOI, or the Mark Ballard article on the imbalance in representation at the first of the UKG organised workshops.

So the 'open community' – large/small companies, organisations and individuals all have a need to express their views – NOW.

OFE continues to support the UKG approach. There is clear ministerial backing and evidence of substantive progress and OFE continues to urge greater speed and adoption of the declared policy.

Much of the debate will inevitably continue on the definition of the standard. UKG have now made it abundantly clear that this is focussing on Software Interoperability, and is not addressing other areas of IT or telecommunications. Yet opponents are clearly concerned this  tight definition might either be a precedent for other areas of IT.  As ones who have been closely involved in this debate right across Europe, we support the UKG definition as well thought through and pragmatic. It has correctly understood what is needed in practice in the are of interoperability to deliver a level playing field for both proprietary and open source. It has both recognised  current practice, and the experience in the major fora and consortia, such as W3C, and balanced the need for non assert clauses, rather than just follow past thinking on a simple Royalty Free phrase – which we agree is insufficient to meet the objective.

For OFE such detail is important but the most constructive new debate now will be that around its implementation and governance. The need is to extend the policy from a pre-procurement approval process to a properly monitored compliance policy. A policy is one thing -  putting it into practice is another – it has taken too long already.

The deadline for comment is 3$^{rd}$ May but don't wait until then, get your input in now. The online questionnaire can be found at

http://consultation.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/openstandards/
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