SS Watch

Open source
software and
the VLE

Randy
Metcalfe

Open source software and the VLE

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OSS Watch

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These are the points to take away from this talk:

- open source software is a viable and cost-effective option
- open source software is not a panacea
- always choose the best solution for your needs

In this talk

- OSS Watch
- Open source software
- Impact points
- Key message

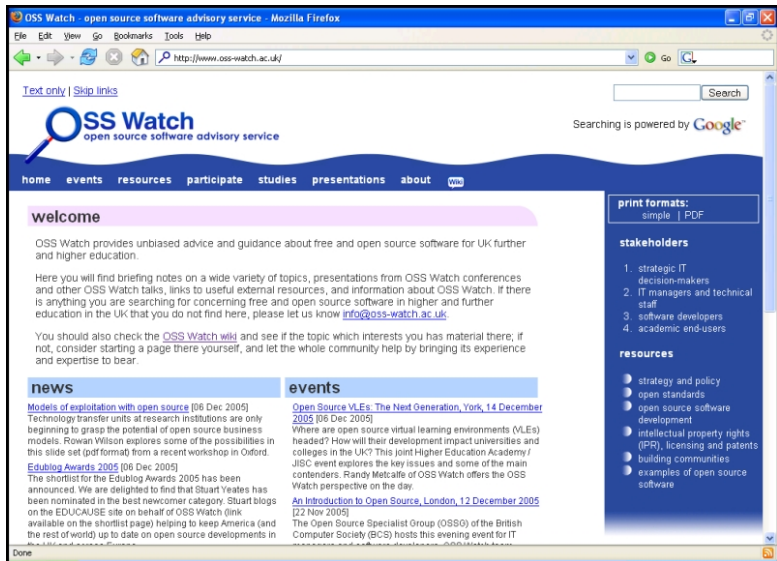# OSS Watch: the UK open source software advisory service

OSS Watch provides unbiased advice and guidance on free and open source software for UK higher and further education.

- strategic IT decision-makers
- IT managers and technical staff
- software developers
- academic end-users
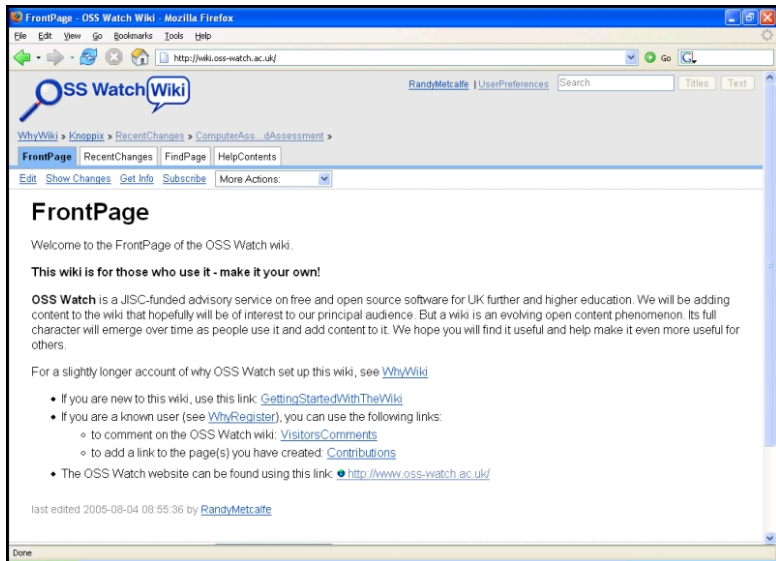
OSS Watch is funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and based within the Research Technologies Service at the University of Oxford.

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Promoting awareness and understanding

OSS Watch is *not* an advocacy group. There are many other groups across the world who fulfil the advocacy function, e.g.:

- Free Software Foundation
- Open Forum Europe
- SchoolForgeUK
- and many more

OSS Watch's role is to promote 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 wiki

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OSS Watch activities

- Website http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/
- Wiki http://wiki.oss-watch.ac.uk/
- Briefing notes and guidance materials
- Conferences and workshops
- Consultation
- Research
    - national survey on open source software use in HE and FE
    - JISC study on models for sustainability in open source projects

Open source and sustainability, Oxford, 10-12 April 2006

open source is not a self-certification scheme

Either your software is released under an Open Source Initiative (OSI) certified licence or it is not open source software.

There are, at present, 58 OSI certified licences.

The first question you should ask of any software claiming to be *open source* is, what licence is this software released under?

All certified licences meet the 10 criteria of the Open Source Definition http://www.opensource.org/docs/definition.php

Open source is also about a lot of other things than just the licence:

- freedom
- community
- software development methodologies

but remember, if it does not have an open source licence, it is not open source software.

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- Procurement
- Deployment
- Support

Have you thought through the IPR issues around how
technical staff will be able to contribute patches and small
chunks of code to the larger open source project?

Adding an open source option into the mix when selecting a future VLE is excellent. But how do you compare open source VLEs against proprietary VLEs?

- Stay focused on the technical and end-user requirements
- Get out and explore the development and user communities
- Consider the *Business Readiness Rating* (BRR) of the software
- Choose the best solution for your needs

The BRR is a proposed open standard to facilitate the assessment and adoption of open source software.
http://www.openbrr.org/

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All deployments of software demand serious planning for
their roll-out and take-up.

Open source software does not differ from proprietary
software in this. If you do not have a plan fully backed by
senior management yet, stop now and get your home team
behind you.

Most VLE deployment failures have little to do with whether
the software is open source or proprietary.

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Open source software is not *volunteer* software. Serious businesses (IBM, Sun Microsystems, Redhat, etc.) are building a substantial portion of their business model around open source software.

These businesses are not making money by selling you a licence to use their software.

They make money by selling you *support contracts*, bespoke implementations, special feature development, etc.

Open source VLEs often do not have huge marketing departments for their commercial service support businesses. But support, in a variety of forms including service contracts, is usually available.

Open source policy

- Open Source Software: Use within UK Government
  http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/policydocs/
- Policy on Open Source Software for JISC Projects and
  Services
  http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=about_policy

Key message

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Further Information

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For more information on open source software development
and deployment, visit http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/ or write
to info@oss-watch.ac.uk