

ECIS Press Statement:

New Complaint Alleges Microsoft Business Practices Damage Education Initiatives in UK

Brussels – 13 May 2008 – Yesterday, the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta), confirmed¹ that it has referred its interoperability complaint against Microsoft, together with supporting evidence, to the European Commission. Becta is the UK Government's lead agency for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education, and in January 2008 published a report on Vista and Office 2007 with recommendations on adoption, deployment and interoperability.²

In October 2007 Becta complained to the UK competition regulator – the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) – alleging anti-competitive licensing practices by Microsoft in the schools software marketplace and the existence of impediments to effective interoperability in relation to Microsoft's Office 2007 product. BECTA claims that impediments to interoperability “have a negative impact on wider policy initiatives, including improving educational outcomes, facilitating home school links and addressing the digital divide.”

“As Becta makes clear, Microsoft's abusive business practices harm schools, pupils, teachers, parents and affordable access to ICT in our educational institutions,” said ECIS legal counsel and spokesman Thomas Vinje. “And keep in mind that this is not just the case in the UK, but in schools throughout Europe.”

“Microsoft's licensing and interoperability practices are deliberately designed to make it difficult, if not impossible, for educational institutions, students and families to opt for open source software alternatives such as Linux,” continued Vinje. “That in itself is the source of much of the harm Becta identifies.”

“ECIS particularly shares Becta's concern that Microsoft intends to undermine support for the ISO-approved ODF open document standard by favouring implementation of its own OOXML document standard with its serious interoperability difficulties. If Microsoft were serious about promoting interoperability, choice and access to IT in schools, it would provide native support for the truly open ODF document standard as BECTA suggests, and modify its licensing practices,” concluded Vinje. “We support Becta's call for action by European and UK competition authorities.”

About ECIS

ECIS is an international non-profit association founded in 1989 that strives to promote market conditions in the ICT sector allowing vigorous competition on the merits and a diversity of consumer choice. ECIS has actively represented its members on many issues related to interoperability and competition before European, national and international bodies, including the EU institutions and WIPO. ECIS' members include large and smaller information and communications technology hardware and software providers Adobe, Corel, IBM, Nokia, Opera, Oracle, RealNetworks, Red Hat, and Sun Microsystems.

¹ BECTA press release Becta refers its interoperability complaint to the European Commission
<http://news.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=36594&page=1657&catID=1632>

² Full report available at <http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=35275>

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