

The ISC Commends the Comunidad de Valencia's Support for ICT in Education

Barcelona, Spain, May 10, 2004 - Following the inaugural Congreso de Software Libre in Valencia last week, the Initiative for Software Choice (ISC) wishes to declare its support for the efforts of the Minister for Culture, Education and Sport of the Valencia region to integrate ICT into the regional education system by making available to pupils the hardware and software tools, and the Internet access, that they need for their educational development.

As Valencia moves forward with its important plans, the ISC respectfully urges the local authorities that, in order to best benefit the students, teachers and the education community of the Region, they should work to take into account all relevant economic and technical factors, such as total cost of ownership (TCO) (including the provision of adequately trained support staff), security, accessibility and usability when basing their ICT acquisition decisions.

This is of particular relevance to software, upon which most ICT infrastructure operates. Importantly, no software model, in itself, can claim to satisfy all these requirements, meaning that the correct solution needs to be chosen on a case-by-case basis. We believe that the consultation and participation of all stakeholders, including Teachers' Associations, parents, educators, software developers, and software companies based in the Valencia region is essential if the Project is to successfully meet the needs of its end users.

ISC also believes that it is essential, in the interests of public transparency, that administrations make publicly available important information relating to feasibility studies, cost analyses, project objectives, and progress in project implementation. This will not only provide useful data for the development of other similar projects, but will help administrations make procurement of technology more efficient in the future.

Additionally, policymakers should not underestimate the importance of adequate protection for IPR for the local software industry and for innovation in the Region. Failure to recognise this will hinder the development and international ambitions of the local software industry.

Across Europe, local administrations are realising that their best interests are served not by mandating a specific solution but by maintaining a free choice based on the specific needs of the project at hand. As the General Director of Telecommunications and Research of Valencia's Regional Government stressed during his intervention at the Congress, the Regional Government must follow the principle of technological neutrality and efficiency, choosing the best solution for each case.

As Valencia embarks on this major project, ISC recalls the Principles developed during the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva last year, which urged administrations to increase "awareness among all stakeholders of the possibilities offered by different software models, including proprietary, open-source and free software, in order to increase competition, access by users, diversity of choice, and to enable all users to develop solutions which best meet their requirements"

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About the ISC

The Initiative for Software Choice (ISC) is a global coalition of more than 300 large and small companies committed to advancing the concept that multiple competing software markets should be allowed to develop and flourish unimpeded by government preference or mandate. For more information, please see us on the web at www.softwarechoice.org.

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