

EC SUPPORTS EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME ON FREE SOFTWARE Free Technology Academy set up as distance learning campus

A Consortium formed by three universities and led by the Free Knowledge Institute (FKI) has received the support from the EC's Lifelong Learning Programme to offer an international educational programme on Free Software. Following the Open Educational Resources movement, all learning materials will be freely available through the Internet. The use of Free Software (also referred to as Open Source software or Libre Software) is expanding rapidly in governmental and private organisations. However, still only a limited number of IT professionals, teachers and decision makers have sufficient knowledge and expertise in these new fields. In order to cover this gap, the Free Knowledge Institute and three European universities have founded the Free Technology Academy. The first course materials will be available after this summer.

Policies on Free Software

Governments worldwide stimulate the use of Free Software (such as the GNU/Linux operating system and the Firefox web browser), so that users become less dependent on one single software vendor. In contrast to proprietary software, Free Software can be used, copied, studied, modified and redistributed freely. Therefore, Free Software offers freedom to learn, freedom to teach, freedom of competition and freedom of speech. Open Standards and the ability to exchange data and to share information and knowledge have become essential for cost-effective, flexible and transparent processes in government and business.

In the Netherlands, the government has launched the action plan Netherlands in Open Connection to promote the use of open standards and Free Software in the public and semi-public sector. The Spanish government, together with several regional governments and major IT companies, set up a national reference centre for the use of ICT technologies based on Free Software. Many other European countries have launched their own initiatives in this direction.

In order to enable IT professionals, students, teachers and decision makers to further their knowledge in this area, a distance learning programme will be set up with specific learning modules. In developing and transitional countries there is a lack of knowledge as well, while its significance is evident. Through the Free Technology Academy's distance learning programme the option to enhance their knowledge will be feasible for people worldwide.

Free Technology Academy and master programmes

The Free Technology Academy (FTA), initiated by the Free Knowledge Institute and financially supported by the Life Long Learning programme (LLP) of the European Commission, is a collaboration between the FKI and three European universities: Open Universiteit Nederland, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya in Spain and the Portuguese Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa.

The Free Technology Academy consists of an advanced virtual campus with course modules that can be followed entirely on-line. The learning materials are Open Educational Resources that can be studied freely, but learners enrolled in the FTA will be guided by professional teaching staff from the participating universities. The full master programme can be concluded at one of the three universities.

Leading

Although the production and use of Open Educational Resources (OER) is expanding rapidly, few experiences of real world usage exist. The educational programme of the Free Technology Academy is a wonderful showcase of the collaborative production and exploitation of such freely licensed course materials.

The FTA Consortium partners aim to accelerate the adoption of Free Software and Free Knowledge by working on strategic projects like the FTA, the international SELF Project, and other initiatives. They collaborate with parties to set up a solid ecosystem for the production of free educational materials. With these projects, the FTA Consortium partners are among the innovators of the knowledge society.

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