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To OLAT Team, OLAT OSS Community, MELS Management

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## **Statement of the University of Zurich (UZH): OLAT and OpenOLAT**

### **Introduction**

#### *What is OLAT ?*

OLAT (Online Learning and Training) is the strategic open source Learning Management System of the University of Zurich (hereafter referred to as UZH) that is used in educational institutions throughout the world as well as in the private sector.

In 1999 under the direction of Prof H. Schauer of the Department of Informatics, improvements were made to the existing computing studies by three assistants for which OLAT was developed though the numbers of students proved at that time to be a major challenge. Since then OLAT has been continually developed to the extent that it is no longer comparable with what emerged from this pioneer phase. In the past twelve years many people have contributed to establishing and institutionalizing OLAT.

#### *How is OLAT used at the UZH ?*

OLAT is used at the UZH to support the needs of over 25,000 students per semester. Teaching, learning and assessment processes are all supported by OLAT. A dedicated team within the IT department is responsible for support, operations and development of OLAT. In addition UZH also provides hosting services for other Swiss educational institutions.

#### *What is the purpose of this statement ?*

Several months ago, the revised OLAT development strategy was communicated to the Open Source Community via its homepage, mailing lists, through personal contacts and at the CoCo Meeting of 10.06.2011. This notwithstanding various comments and rumours attributable outside of the UZH have created uncertainty within the Community arising from the dissemination of misinformation.

### **OLAT as Open Source Software**

#### *Who owns OLAT ?*

The UZH is the licensor and has either itself developed or sponsored the vast majority of the code. Since 1999, the UZH has retained all copyright on OLAT and since 2004 has made OLAT available under the terms of the Apache 2.0 license (<http://www.apache.org/licenses/LICENSE-2.0>).



*What options are available for the Open Source Community ?*

Under the terms of the Apache 2.0 license, OLAT can be freely used, modified and distributed with the provision that reference to the fact that UZH owns the license is retained.

*What contribution does UZH make to the Community ?*

Contributions, inherently valuable owing to the size and heterogeneity of the UZH, that address the needs, requirements and expectations of teaching staff and students of UZH are made available to the Community at no cost.

Although the requirements of the UZH take priority in the development of OLAT, the ideas, needs and concerns of the Community are also taken into consideration during the prioritization and coordination of development tasks.

In addition the UZH keeps the Open Source Community informed via its website and mailing lists and hosts events for the Community in cooperation with other educational institutions.

*How does OLAT relate to OpenOLAT and to other variants (forks) ?*

Towards the end of November 2011 OpenOLAT was launched. OLAT variants, such as OpenOLAT, have already existed worldwide for some time. Such variants are a common and natural occurrence in open source development. As an open source product becomes better known and gains in stature, differences of interest inevitably arise amongst its contributors. Since these differences can no longer be accommodated by OLAT, variants are created that are adapted to these special needs.

*Will OLAT become closed source ?*

No. OLAT code will remain as before accessible, downloadable and modifiable by the Community. All new development will continually be made available free of charge to the Community as soon as the quality standards of the UZH have been fulfilled and OLAT been deployed into the UZH production environment.

## **Development Strategy**

*What is the UZH development strategy for OLAT ?*

The operational experience of the UZH together with the increasing functional complexity have proven that the original OLAT codebase can no longer match future needs and requirements - a view that was also confirmed by an external audit. UZH therefore instigated organizational changes within OLAT, adapted the OLAT development strategy and took the position that critical decisions are only to be made by the UZH.

The goal of the OLAT development strategy is to establish the foundations to ensure the long term, innovative and high quality development of OLAT. In particular, quick responses to new requirements and changes to terms of reference are also to be made possible. Moreover the UZH is of the opinion that any regeneration and subsequent development effort should be focused on teaching and learning processes, their planning and administration and integration within peripheral systems.

In order to reach these goals the codebase of OLAT must first be re-engineered („Refactoring“). As a first measure, the UZH will improve the codebase and architecture bringing it into line with industry



software development best practices. The expert skills, built up over the years, within the team together with the participation of stakeholder groups within the UZH make it possible to analyze the current OLAT functionality and to considerably improve it in the light of existing teaching and learning processes.

*What will happen after the re-engineering („Refactoring“)?*

Periods of re-engineering are a natural and necessary occurrence with mature software products and ensure that they do not stagnate and become worthless in the long term. Because such re-engineering goes hand-in-hand with ongoing development neither teaching staff and students at the UZH nor the Open Source Community will be necessarily conscious of a specific end-point as the outputs are being continually deployed into UZH production environment and at the same time being made available to the Community. Moreover the cooperation with the Open Source Community will become simplified on account of the guidelines and quality measures introduced by UZH which will lead to more constructive and transparent development.

#### **Additional Information**

Please see the links on [www.olat.org](http://www.olat.org) and [www.id.uzh.ch/dl/elearning/olatunizh.html](http://www.id.uzh.ch/dl/elearning/olatunizh.html).

In the event of queries please contact

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