Microsoft ends support for Windows XP, Office 2003: (8th April 2014)

Microsoft has announced that they are ending support for Windows XP operating system (OS) and Office 2003 from 8th April 2014. From this date Microsoft will no longer provide security updates for these products to assist in protecting computers against malware/viruses. Though Microsoft will end its support, WinXP/Office2003 will continue to function, though they may become more vulnerable to malware/viruses. Computers running Windows 'Vista' are not affected. Anti-Virus providers are still providing support. For further info' from Microsoft refer to:

For Win XP: http://windows.microsoft.com/en-ie/windows/end-support-help
For Office 2003: http://office.microsoft.com/en-ie/help/support-is-ending-for-office-2003-HA103306332.aspx

While it is not surprising that Microsoft is promoting users to upgrade to its' own OSs, some commentators have played down the risk, while others suggest moving to non-Microsoft alternatives. In terms of options for schools we've provided a balanced set of options including some non-Microsoft alternative approaches.

Options that schools may consider:

1. **Firstly regardless of the OS used, and due to a range of other possible issues (eg., hardware failure and subsequent loss of files), users should always make regular backups of important files. A portable USB drive is a simple but practical approach, as no technical expertise is required. As even more recent OSs can be affected by malware, schools should also use up to date anti-virus software where appropriate.**

2. As there may be an increased risk from malware for computers running Windows XP, especially on those that are connected to a network or to the web, **schools should consider changing to a supported operating system, either from Microsoft or from other providers.** The options available from Microsoft include upgrading computers to Windows 7 Pro or to Windows 8.1 Pro. ('Pro' refers to the 'Professional' version, which is generally used by schools). To run Win7 Pro or Win8.1 Pro, computers need to have a minimum of 1GHz processor, 2GB memory, and require approx' 20GB of free disk space for the operating system.

3. **Computers which are used for important school information, including school administration, or teaching resources, could be impacted, and therefore may be considered a higher priority.**

4. **It is recommended that schools contact their IT support person/company, who should be able to advise on options, as they should be familiar with your school network setup.**

5. **If un-installing Win XP/Office 2003 from a computer, schools should first make a separate backup of all their administration, teaching and learning files/resources, to avoid losing their files.**

6. **Where a Win XP computer has software installed which only runs on a Microsoft OS, and where a school is upgrading, moving to a Win7 Pro or Win 8.1 may be the most appropriate option.** For example, where a Win XP teaching computer is currently using interactive whiteboard (IWB) software on a Microsoft OS.

7. **T4/DCG: SolidWorks 2009 on Win XP** will continue to function as normal after 8th April; (refer to www.t4.ie)

8. **Alternatives to Windows: A 'non-Microsoft' option for existing Win XP computers may be to remove or uninstall WinXP and then to install Linux. Linux is a free, open source operating system, ie., there are no associated software licencing costs.** However Linux may not be compatible with some existing software applications which previously ran only on Windows XP.

9. **There are a range of Linux operating systems. For simplicity, only one Linux variant is referred to here**, namely 'Linux Mint 13 Xfce', (codenamed 'Maya'), **as this version will receive security updates up to April 2017.** However schools may use their own choice of Linux. As Linux is considered to be a 'light' operating system, schools generally find that when it is used on older PCs, they often run faster. Older Linux computers could be re-used as shared computers for staff or students.

   http://www.linuxmint.com/about.php   (Description of Linux Mint)
   http://www.linuxmint.com/edition.php?id=113   (Linux Mint 13 'Maya' download site)

10. **Schools may want to consider changing from Windows XP to other platforms**, especially where the existing computers are very old, and where the level of technical support they require may be cost prohibitive. In such cases possible **options include moving to Apple operating systems such as OSX or iOS or to Google operating systems such as Android or Chrome OS.**

11. **Alternatives to Office 2003:** In addition to upgrading to **more recent Microsoft Office versions**, including Office365, some 'non-Microsoft' options include moving to **'LibreOffice',** which includes a free word-processor, spreadsheet, presentation, drawing, database and maths software, www.libreoffice.org **,** or **Google Apps for Education**, www.google.com/enterprise/apps/education which has a range of free 'office' applications for schools.