

CWS/ATR/PI/2015/IE

Annual Technical Report on Patent Information Activities in 2015 submitted by Irish Patent Office

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PATENT INFORMATION ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY THE OFFICE

Outline of main policies and plans aimed at development of patent information activities and expected time frames for their realization

Available patent documents

A project to electronically archive Irish national patent documents continued throughout 2015. The aim of the current project is to scan all available patent specification documents from the 1960s to the early 2000s, and to make them available to the public via our website. It is estimated that there are approximately 58,000 documents to be scanned. This project will facilitate ease of access to the data for both the public and for staff, as well as reducing the requirement for storage space for paper files. The project continued in 2015 with over 24,000 documents scanned to date. It is estimated that the project will take another 2 years to complete. As a cost saving measure and to allow continued access to the documents, the Office decided not to outsource this work but use its own internal staff resources and equipment.

PTOLEMY Developments

In relation to improving technological efficiencies, eleven substantive enhancements to the PTOLEMY administration system were developed during the year. All of these were aimed at improving operational efficiency and ensuring the Office's core business systems remain current. The Office also migrated its servers to a new off-site infrastructure in 2015, with a more modern operating system.

E-Services

The Irish Patent Office introduced e-filing of trade mark applications in 2014, design e-filing in 2015 and is now currently developing an e-filing system for Patents and Supplementary Protection Certificates. This is hoped to have a go-live date of late 2017.

The Office actively pursues an e-communications programme by combining electronic filing, electronic file processing and electronic communications in a way that will ultimately facilitate the introduction of paperless processing in the Office. The vast majority of Office correspondence is now issued by email and customers are encouraged to correspond by email with the Office, where possible.

In line with Government policy to promote the increased use of electronic payments, the Irish Patent Office established two new commercial bank accounts which has improved the fee payment options available to its customers. 99% of the Office's statutory fees are now paid electronically compared to 96% in 2014. In November 2013, the Office introduced a credit card terminal (CCT) to further facilitate the payment of all fees via telephone. The Office is currently working on the implementation of an E-Services project which will provide for online payment of IP fees.

Federated Register

The Federated European Patent Register service provides the public with information on the legal status of both European and National patents. In the first phase of the project (already completed) the Federated Register provides a direct link to a specific application or publication number in a selection of national patent registers including Ireland. The second phase, completed in 2015, gives the opportunity for the user to consult legal status data of EP documents in the national phase in several offices; these being displayed in a single unified list.

Upgrade of website

An upgrade of the website infrastructure and web servers was carried out in order to replace out of date and unsupported operating systems. A new content management system was also put in place to facilitate refinement of web pages, thus expanding capabilities to manage graphics, photos, video, audio, etc. to provide an improved service to users.

A project has been initiated for an overall redesign of the Irish Patent Office website. This will allow easier, more logical pathways to the relevant information.

New projects launched or resumed this year in the context of the policies and plans mentioned above, short description: aims, partners, tasks

In 2015, the Office commenced a "Quality at source" project to ensure standardised patent data information exchange (for inclusion in Espacenet) in compliance with EPO XML formats and WIPO standards. This new project will allow us to firstly, establish a standardised front file delivery of patent data and secondly, collect missing back file patent data from 1973 to date in digital format covering bibliographic, image and full-text data (when the quality of the original document allows it).

The Office commenced a project to develop e-filing for Patents and Supplementary Protection Certificates (having introduced e-filing of trade mark applications in 2014 and design e-filing in 2015). This involves the development of a new structured front end system and a redesign of the current administrative software system (Ptolemy). These two sub-projects have been commenced simultaneously and are predicted to have a go-live date of late 2017.

Main areas of patent information activities and related information and communication technology (ICT) practices which were in the focus of attention last year

See entry above in relation to the development of patent information activities.

Statistics: changes in terms of application filings and grants with respect to previous year; trends or areas experiencing rapid changes

In recent years, the MedTech or medical devices sector in Ireland has been recognised as one of the key drivers for industrial growth in the future. According to Enterprise Ireland, 17 of the world's top 25 medical technology companies have invested in Ireland and 60% of Med Tech companies are indigenous SMEs. Ireland is now one of Europe's medical technology "hotspots", employing over 25,000 people in over 100 companies.

Over half of the medical technologies companies based in Ireland now have dedicated R&D facilities, developing new and innovative products and services. Evidence suggests that this change is resulting in more patent filings from Irish resident companies, with Irish inventors conducting their R&D in Ireland.

National full term Patent filings received during 2015 increased sharply by 72% on 2014 (from 118 to 203) while the number of short term patent applications filed also increased by 17% on 2014 (from 203 to 237). After the declines in recent years these increases are encouraging and may, in part, be indicative of the growth in the economy which patent activity tends to lag behind.

As at 31 December 2015, there were a total of 1,236 pending applications on hand. Of these, 218 applications were awaiting the submission of evidence of novelty.

The Office granted 126 national patents.

The number of applications received from applicants in the State was 289 compared with 262 in 2014.

The Office acts as a receiving office for European (EP) applications and also for applications filed under the Patent Co-operation Treaty (PCT). The number of EP applications filed in 2015 was 1. The number of PCT applications filed increased from 19 in 2014 to 21 in 2015.

The number of European patent applications filed with the EPO in 2015 and designating Ireland was 160,028, an increase on the 2014 figure of 152,400.

Other general patent statistics include:

Patents and patent applications the subject of assignments	1188
Patents revoked	0
Patents surrendered	1
Patents lapsed	55,035
Patents restored/reinstated	13
Patents renewed	42,740
Patents expired	1064
Patents in force	118,273

National applications were filed in the following technical fields in 2015, according to the classes of the International Patent Classification (IPC):

A – Human Necessities – 26.75%;

B – Performing Operations – 19.74%

G – Physics – 16.23%

E – Fixed Constructions – 14.91%

F – Mechanical Engineering, Lighting, Heating, Weapons, Blasting – 11.4%

H – Electricity – 7.46%

C – Chemistry – 2.63%

D – Textiles, Paper – 0.88%

A total of 76 requests for Supplementary Protection Certificates were received during the year under the European Communities (Supplementary Protection Certificates) Regulations, 1992 (medicinal) and 1996 (plant protection products). During the year, 33 certificates were granted (medicinal and plant protection), none were rejected and 2 requests were withdrawn. At the end of the year there were 216 requests pending.

Other matters and useful links (URLs): annual report of the Office, news page, statistics, etc.

Our website offers a current news page, and news archive, which can be found at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/News>

Statistics related to patents at the Intellectual Property Office can be accessed through the annual reports, annual reviews and facts and figures at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Publications/Annual-Reports>

Information on filing, including a patent application guide and other materials for users, is available from the following web page: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Patents/How-to-Apply>

Information regarding the patent procedure, including post examination and post grant, can be found at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Publications/Information-Booklets>

Information regarding dispute resolution, including hearings relating to patents and SPCs can be found at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Publications/Written-Grounds>

A link to the IE patent journal can be found at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Publications/Download-a-Journal>

A link to electronic searchable patent journals (from 2002 onwards) can be found at: <https://webjournal.patentsoffice.ie>

Information regarding the current patent legislation (Act and Rules) is available from: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Legislation>

Information regarding fees, payments and our online fee payments module are available at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Payments/Fees>
<https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Payments>
<https://epayment.patentsoffice.ie>

Other business practices and procedures are covered by web pages accessible from the main patents page: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Patents>

Information regarding protection of patents outside the IE jurisdiction is available at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Patents/Protection-Abroad>

The Irish national patent register may be searched by publication or application number at: <https://eregister.patentsoffice.ie/PTRegNr.aspx>

The Irish national patent register may also be searched over several fields such as: title/abstract; application, grant or priority number; application date range; grant date range; legal status; IPC; inventor name; applicant name; etc. at: <https://eregister.patentsoffice.ie/query/PTQuery.aspx>

A link to the EPO search facility Espacenet, the EP Patent Register and WIPO Patentscope database is provided from: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Patents/Patent-Searching>

II. SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO PATENT INFORMATION CARRIED OUT BY THE OFFICE

Information and support provided by the Office to applicants regarding filing on paper and/or e-filing (instructions, seminars, etc.) - URLs

Information on filing, including a step-by-step patent application guide and other materials for users, is available from the following web page: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Patents/How-to-Apply>

Information regarding the patent procedure, including post examination and post grant, can be found at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Publications/Information-Booklets>

Availability of the application dossier in electronic form

The Irish national patent register may be searched by publication or application number at: <https://eregister.patentsoffice.ie/PTRegNr.aspx>

The Irish national patent register may also be searched over several fields such as: title/abstract; application, grant or priority number; application date range; grant date range; legal status; IPC; inventor name; applicant name; etc.: <https://eregister.patentsoffice.ie/query/PTQuery.aspx>

Classification¹, preclassification² (if applicable), reclassification³ activities; classification systems used (e.g., International Patent Classification (IPC)); matters concerning indexing of patent information

All patent applications are classified according to the latest edition of the IPC 2016.01. The Office applies the latest edition of the IPC to all its published documents. No indexing schemes are used in the Office.

Reclassification is done on an application-by-application basis by the examiners.

Abstracting, reviewing, and translation of the information contained in patent documents

All abstracts are submitted in English by applicants and are checked and modified, if necessary, by the patent examiners.

Other activities

None to report.

III. SOURCES OF PATENT INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE OFFICE

Main types of publications of the Office (patent applications, full text, first pages, abstracts, bibliographic data, granted patents, etc.), medium (on paper, on CDs, online - URLs)

(1) Published Patent Applications and Granted Patent Documents

These are prepared in-house in a 2 week publication cycle using our PTOLEMY software system for front page bibliographic data. The PDF image is then scanned and loaded onto the office's back server (for Ptolemy) and publication server (for website) using our "Document Import Tool".

The Irish Patent Office no longer publishes applications or granted documents in paper format; the official publication means being electronic.

The PDF documents are then transferred via Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) to the EPO. This is done on a weekly basis and currently includes a separate ST.36 XML file for the bibliographical and full text abstract data.

(2) Patents Office Journal

Up until 2009 the official notices and selected bibliographic data relating to IE patent applications and granted patents were published every two weeks in hard copy. After this date the journal was placed on the website in PDF and HTML format.

From 2012 the Patents Office Journal became searchable online with full patent document retrieval, and links to Espacenet for EP designating Ireland documents. The HTML version was also modified to allow full bibliographic data access and document retrieval.

(3) ESPACENET, EPOQUE etc.

The full text, drawings and bibliographic data of all newly published Irish patent applications and granted patents is published on the EPOQUE and Espacenet system soon after the given publication date.

(4) Annual Report

A report, providing information on statistics, IP application trends, office activities, office projects, training, patent information dissemination, etc. is published on a yearly basis. It is provided both in hard copy and electronically on our website.

Official Gazettes: main types of announcements, frequency of publication, medium (on paper, on CDs, online - URL), etc.

Official notices and bibliographic data relating to IE patent applications, published patents, granted patents, withdrawn/refused patents, etc. are published every two weeks in Patents Office Journal. It also contains information regarding EP applications designating Ireland.

Mass production of paper copies of the journal ceased in 2009, but a small number of hard copies are produced, in house, for distribution to our National Library, university libraries and the British Library. The journal is now made available, at no cost, on the Patent office website. The journal is searchable and may be downloaded in PDF or HTML formats.

The journal section on the website also includes a back-file of previous journals from 27 November 2002, which are also searchable and downloadable. The Patents Office Journal and archived journals may be accessed from: <https://webjournal.patentsoffice.ie/default.aspx>

Important and current information relating to patents and other IP is made available on the news section of our website at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/News/Current-News>

Information products and patent document collections (coverage, medium, etc.) available to examiners, including external collections and databases

The examiners have access to a complete catalogue of Irish national patents reaching as far back as 1927. Full document retrieval is made possible through our Patent Database search system. External databases such as Espacenet, Epoquenet and Patentscope are accessed to retrieve relevant patent information also.

Examiners also use national patent office organisations websites for information regarding priority, family members, etc.

Information products and patent document collections (coverage, medium, etc.) available to external users, conditions of access (e.g., free of charge, subscription, etc.)

A collection of patent application and grant documents is physically located at our office, in Kilkenny, Ireland. These documents are also available on the website.

Copies of information booklets; other national office annual reports; IP legislation; previous copies of the IPC; guides to IP Law; patent case law reports; scientific journals and magazines, etc. are stored in our main information centre.

Our office is open to the public five days a week, where users can file applications, perform searches on our National Patent database, Espacenet, and/or Patentscope, peruse available booklets/journals or avail of an IP clinic with an examiner for pre-filing advice.

All of these services are provided free of charge.

Legal status information (kind of information, coverage, medium, etc.)

Legal status information is contained in the Irish national patent online bibliographic data page and may be searched in our patent database search at: <https://www.patentsoffice.ie/en/Patents/Patent-Searching>

This data is complete for all Irish national applications and granted patents in force.

Other sources

Nothing to report.

IV. ICT SUPPORT TO SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO PATENT INFORMATION CARRIED OUT BY THE OFFICE

Specific software tools supporting business procedures within the Office: general description, characteristics, advantages, possible improvements

The Irish Patent Office, provides an integrated and extensive network of applications that are available to all staff, via Microsoft Windows 10. Word processing can be carried out using Word 2010. All other MS Office applications, including PowerPoint, Publisher and Excel are available.

EpoqueNet, Espacenet and Patentscope are available to all examiners.

Our Office administration software system (PTOLEMY) is used in conjunction with a SQL database for recording file movement, incoming and outgoing correspondence, fee payments, examination reports, etc. Production of office statistics is done with our IMPROMPTU statistics software. Patstat is also available to staff.

The Office 'workspace', hosted on Lotus Notes, contains a very large collection of essential information for staff, including: procedure manuals for particular administrative sections; PTOLEMY development and evolution requests; FAQs; etc.

All staff have access to the Internet and to the Office Intranet. They have their own e-mail (via Lotus Notes) and official e-mail address (firstname.secondname@patentsoffice.ie).

Remote access to the full range of required tools and software is possible for the staff using Citrix remote access software.

Hardware used to supporting business processes of the Office

Our office network uses TCP/IP. Staff can access this through their Windows 10 desktops. The workstations are Celtic G630 Desktop-PC Pentium running Windows 10, using Dell and Acer 20" monitors.

Ptolemy Application Server: POWEREDGE R710: 2 INTEL XEON E5506 PROCESSORS (QUAD core): 8GB of RAM

Ptolemy Database Server: POWEREDGE R710: 1 INTEL XEON E5506 PROCESSORS (QUAD core): 12GB of RAM

A daily back up is performed to a central server offsite.

Internal databases: coverage, updates, interlinks with external sources

All bibliographic data (Patent applications, SPC applications, granted patents, granted SPCs) is stored in the patent database (PTOLEMY).

All patent documents (published patent applications, granted patents) are stored both in a back server (for integration into the PTOLEMY software system) and a web publication server (for display on the patents office website). These servers are accessed by different software tools (our Document Import Tool/PTOLEMY and our Patent Database Search system).

The SPC Database Search, available on our website, provides information on all published SPC information via the bibliographic data, product type and product identity.

Establishment and maintenance of electronic search file: file building, updating, storage, documents from other offices included in the search file

Because of the small number of patent examiners, the Office does not carry out its own searches and does not maintain a search file. The searching of Irish national applications is and will be carried out by the UKIPO.

Administrative management electronic systems (register, legal status, statistics, and administrative support)

See entry in relation to internal databases.

Other matters

Nothing to report.

V. PROMOTION ACTIVITIES AIMED TO SUPPORT USERS IN ACCESS AND EFFICIENT USE OF PATENT INFORMATION

Patent library: equipment, collection management, network of patent libraries in the country, cooperation with foreign patent libraries

Our information Centre deals with the maintenance of IP relevant material and collections. Co-operation with the EPO, WIPO and other national offices is ongoing to maintain up-to-date catalogues and legislation.

The staff deal with calls and emails from members of the public regarding general IP issues. Presentations and Information days are co-ordinated by these staff on demand and through collaboration with Enterprise Ireland, Irish universities, local enterprise boards, etc.

The Information Centre has telephone access to selected examiners in the office should help be needed on specific enquiries.

IP Clinics (one-to-one sessions with a patent examiner for pre-filing advice) are managed by the Information Centre staff.

Publications related to different business procedures and patent information sources available to users, for example, books, brochures, Internet publications, etc.

A collection of patent application and grant documents is physically located at our office, in Kilkenny, Ireland. These documents are also available on the website.

Our website contains a "Student Zone" which approaches the issue of IP in an easy to understand and entertaining way. This section contains a brief history of Patents, fun facts, Irish inventors, links to IP information in comic book format, etc.

A dedicated 'IP for Business' section is available on our website. This includes links to supports for SMEs and IP advice for doing business abroad.

Copies of information booklets, other national office annual reports, IP legislation, previous copies of the IPC; guides to IP Law, scientific journals and magazines, etc. are stored in our main information centre. Selections of these are available on our website.

Patent specific publications held include: European Patent Handbooks; Copies of the EPC, PCT, Paris Convention; Case Law decisions; Law Reports; CIPA guides, IP related publications ("Irish innovators in science", "Ingenious women", "British patents of invention") etc.

Our office is open to the public five days a week, where users can file applications, perform searches on our patents database, Espacenet, and/or Patentscope, peruse available booklets/journals or avail of an IP clinic with an examiner for pre-filing advice.

All of these services are provided free of charge.

Office's initiatives on providing foreign patent information in the local language(s) (e.g., machine translation tools, translation of abstracts)

Nothing to report.

Cooperation with universities, research centers, technology and innovation support centers, etc.

During 2015, the Office participated in some 63 events speaking on IP at "Start your own business" courses run by the County Enterprise Boards (now Local Enterprise Offices) and either had a presence or provided a talk at various business advice and enterprise exhibitions and shows throughout the country.

Talks are provided, upon request, to universities and colleges, usually in conjunction with their Technology Transfer Offices.

Education and training: training courses, e-learning modules (URLs), seminars, exhibitions, etc.

The Patents Office held 131 awareness raising activities in 2015, covering a range of IP rights. Of these 68 were IP clinics. These clinics give an opportunity to members of the public, inventors, entrepreneurs and business people to discuss with Patents Office staff, on a one to one basis, their ideas and matters concerning IP applications they intend to make or have already made to the Office.

This particular approach has been found to be very helpful in providing basic guidance on procedures and forms required for the registration of IP rights, the processes of obtaining IP protection in Ireland or abroad and the time frames involved. Assistance in constructing a do-it-yourself search strategy for patents and using online patent databases is also provided.

A significant part of the Office's IP awareness raising efforts is directed at second level students through involvement with the annual BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition and the annual Student Enterprise Awards.

The Student Enterprise Awards run by the Local Enterprise Boards is the biggest enterprise competition for second level students in Ireland with some 16,000 potential participants. The National Finals took place in April 2015. The competition provides an excellent vehicle for the Office to engage with second level student entrepreneurs to reflect an awareness of IP when developing a business idea and establishing and running a successful enterprise. The SEA workbook has now incorporated a new chapter specifically relating to Intellectual Property, thus reinforcing awareness of IP amongst second level students.

Other activities

Nothing to report

VI. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF PATENT INFORMATION

International exchange and sharing of patent information in machine-readable form, e.g., priority documents, bibliographic data, abstracts, search reports, full text information

The Office supplies national bibliographic data and full pdf specifications in electronic format to the EPO for loading onto their EPOQUE database and for Espacenet.

The Office also provides and receives electronic renewal fee and legal status information for EP granted patents designating Ireland from the EPO.

Copies of all published Irish patent applications are sent to the United Kingdom Patents Office which maintains a comprehensive collection of Irish documents for search purposes.

Participation in international or regional activities and projects related to patent information

Patents Office staff represent Ireland on the Administrative Council of the EPO, its various Committees, and several of its technical and liaison committees which deal with various issues concerning intellectual property. Specific meetings attended in relation to patent information were Patlib 2015 (Munich) and the Patent Information Conference (Copenhagen). In addition, staff participate in meetings of governing and technical bodies of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). Examples of such meetings include: Standing Committee on the Law of Patents, Committee of Experts of the IPC Union and the IPC Revision Working Group.

The EPO/WIPO offer alternative routes to obtaining IP protection and the Office's involvement with these organisations is aimed at ensuring that Irish interests are appropriately represented. We aim to keep abreast of best practice at an international level and to facilitate collaboration with other national and international industrial property offices.

The Office partakes in cooperation programmes with the EPO under which it receives assistance towards participation in various IP awareness raising events, specialist IP training and ICT projects to facilitate IP data exchange. Our participation also facilitates dialogue on the content and structure of cooperation programmes between those organisations and other national IP Offices. This, in turn, enables the Office to further enhance and develop its customer services in line with best international practice.

Assistance to developing countries

The Irish Office continues to have an informal programme of cooperation with various countries, including a number of developing countries.

Other activities

Nothing further to report.

VII. OTHER RELATED MATTERS

Nothing further to report.

1. Classification is allotting one or more classification symbols (e.g., IPC symbols) to a patent application, either before or during search and examination, which symbols are then published with the patent application.

2. Preclassification is allotting an initial broad classification symbol (e.g., IPC class or subclass, or administrative unit) to a patent application, using human or automated means for internal administrative purposes (e.g., routing an application to the appropriate examiner). Usually preclassification is applied by the administration of an office.

3. Reclassification is the reconsideration and usually the replacement of one or more previously allotted classification symbols to a patent document, following a revision and the entry into force of a new version of the Classification system (e.g., the IPC). The new symbols are available on patent databases.