The Chairman and expert introduced themselves and the expert then proceeded to present a summary of the EPO’s survey into the use of patent information in innovation.

- The survey was blind – respondents did not know it was an EPO survey (to avoid bias and referrals to patent experts)
- 70% response: patent information is important in innovation.
- Patent information is less used in early stage research than in applied research, development and prototyping, and commercialisation.
- Business use of patent information is less developed than technical or legal use

The discussion round posed two main questions:

1. How has patent information changed your innovation process?

The discussion round decided that patent information has not changed the innovation process *per se*. However the availability of patent information these days enables inventors/innovators to use it themselves. Generally inventors/innovators turn to specialists or specialist departments for mission-critical IP questions.

It was recognised that patent information applied at an early stage can shortcut lengthy innovation processes. Furthermore the group realised that innovation is globalised and collaborative these days. Appropriate use of patent information can facilitate international co-operation.

Despite the advantages, and value of using patent information to support innovation, education and awareness are still not good enough. New researchers are not sufficiently well informed about the utility of patent information.

2. What is the role of the patent searcher in innovation?

This part of the discussion opened with issues surrounding the constraints with which patent searchers have to contend.

Patent searchers have to be concerned with confidentiality. There are issues associated with open data and non-secure platforms when searching.
Searchers are confronted with an array of free search services and professional tools. The number and variety of tools available for the commercial and public sectors is continually evolving and patent searchers have to make choices – which can be difficult. Convoluted with this is the choice of when to move from free-to-use services to professional subscription services. The current constellation is being disrupted by the advent of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), deep learning (DL), natural language processing (NLP), Internet of Things (IoT), and the 4th Industrial revolution (4IR). These disruptive developments will have a significant impact on the future of patent searching as a professional activity.

**Take home messages:**

The group concluded that continued effort into increasing awareness of, and education in patent information is required, especially for early-career professionals.

Patent searchers need to market themselves and their profession more intensely.

Patent searchers need to understand and speak the language of their scientist and engineer clients. One of the participants neatly summed up the requirement for such open communication as:

"Don’t give them a list of patents, give them an answer"

**Action on many fronts**

The discussion group was agreed on a number of must-do initiatives.

In terms of education, the university sector must be targeted. There are two parallel tracks.

- the use of patent information in patenting university inventions,
- inclusion of patent information as a resource in teaching and research.

The main actors were identified as technology transfer offices and intellectual property offices.

Patent documents are difficult for laymen to understand. Efforts must be directed at clear and concise drafting. The obvious actors are the originators (inventors, applicants), patent attorneys, and IPOs, who should insist on clarity and plain drafting language.

In order to avoid the "Cinderella" syndrome, patent information should be brought into the mainstream of IPR. This could be achieved by the IPOs, conference organisers, and publishers.
The value and quality of educational and training materials for patent information should be increased. Channels such as multimedia, and MOOCs (massively open online courses) should be utilised more intensively.

Finally the evolution of patent information products and services available on the market should be continuously monitored, as well as the evolution of 4IR in the input side (inventions, content of patent applications) and on the technology of patent searching/patent analytics.

Paul Peters, Chairman, Discussion round 6

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