



The UK Intellectual Property Office

2010 saw the arrival of a new Chief Executive and Comptroller-General of the UK Intellectual Property Office, John Alty, who took office early in the year. John Alty has a background in business, regulation and markets, having been most recently the Director General in Fair Markets in the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills, and before that Director Business Relations and Director Europe in the DTI.

Under John Alty, the IPO has the aim to assess how IP rights influence economic growth to help determine a reliable basis on which to develop IP policy for the UK and beyond. With the demise of the Strategic Advisory Board for Intellectual Property Policy (SABIP), research into topics such as the impact of IP on business behaviour and performance, will now be undertaken by the IPO's Economics, Research and Evidence unit under Tony Clayton. A comprehensive research programme was launched on 24 August 2010.

The IPO is also aiming to align its patenting activities with the perceived needs of business to have speedy examination and grant of IP rights. It therefore continues to provide fast track or expedited handling of patent applications through the Green Channel system - allowing accelerated processing of patent applications directed to so-called green, or environmentally friendly, technology; through the PCT (UK) Fast Track system; and through various PPH (Patent Prosecution Highway) arrangements - currently with Japan, South Korea and the USA. The IP Federation has maintained the view that acceleration of the patenting process whether in the UK, Europe or beyond, must not be at the sacrifice of quality of search and examination.

The IP Federation has long been concerned at the lack of consistent consultation of user groups since the demise some years ago of both SACIP (the Standing Advisory Committee on Industrial Property) and its successor, IPAC (Intellectual Property Advisory Committee). We are pleased to see the gradual reinstatement of user consultation by the IPO and welcome the opportunity in the future to put forward industry's viewpoint. The IP Federation continues participation in the PPWG group (the Patent Practice Working Group), as well as the Marks and Design Forum (MDF).

One area on which the IP Federation has consistently lobbied the IPO is the provision of an online file inspection facility. The archaic approach of the IPO that file inspection must be via hard copy review because of potential copyright and data protection concerns is at odds with the development of user friendly online facilities from other major patent offices: Register Plus from the European Patent Office and PAIR from the US Patent and Trademark Office. The IP Federation is

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pleased to find that the IPO is now intending to bring online file inspection into being during 2011. This must enhance the standing of the IPO in the international community and lays the way for the very real prospect of work sharing between patent offices in the future.

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