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YOUTH OUTREACH THROUGH ADVANCED TEACHER TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this contribution is to provide an overview of the activities of the German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA) in the area of educational cooperation, under Section 26a of the German Patent Act. The goal of those activities is to highlight the relevance of intellectual property (IP) in the German education system and to promote future collaboration with educational institutions with a view to enhancing awareness and understanding of IP among students and pupils.

* The views expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Secretariat or of the Member States of WIPO.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The German Patent and Trade Mark Office (DPMA), founded in 1877, is the fifth-largest patent and trademark office in the world. It employs more than 2,700 staff and operates under the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV). The Office's main tasks include granting and managing intellectual property rights (IPRs), providing information about IPRs, and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in identifying and enforcing their IPRs internationally. Since 2022, Section 26a of the German Patent Act has provided the statutory framework for DPMA to work with IP offices in other countries and regions, the European Patent Organisation (EPO), the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). Such cooperation also covers matters relating to copyright. Section 65a of the German Trademark Act, on cooperation with other national and international offices in the field of trademark protection within the European Union (EU) also remains in effect.

2. Teaching students about IP is key to equipping them with essential skills for the knowledge economy, protecting creations and incentivizing innovation. It helps students to understand their rights and how to safeguard their work, and to leverage ideas for their future careers and participation in the economy. It also assists in achieving sustainable development goals by promoting a deeper understanding of and respect for innovation across society.

3. The benefits of IP education for students and innovators are widely recognized, and include:

- Protecting creations: Students learn how to legally protect their IP
- Incentivizing innovation: IP education encourages individuals and companies to take risks and invest in creating new products and services
- Developing future-ready skills: An understanding of IP is a valuable asset in today's knowledge-based economy, equipping students with skills for a variety of careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), business and other fields
- Fostering creativity: IP education helps students to appreciate the value of their own creative output and respect the creativity of others
- Supporting economic growth: A society that understands and values IP is better positioned to foster innovation, which drives economic growth

4. Cooperation with the education sector is crucial, as it targets students and pupils – the future drivers of SMEs – and raises awareness of IP in an increasingly digital world.

II. ACTIVITIES IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

5. DPMA is guided in its work with the education sector by two key strategic documents: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Education 2030 framework¹ and the European Commission's *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*.²

¹ OECD. Future of Education and Skills 2030/2040. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/projects/future-of-education-and-skills-2030.html>.

² European Union (2019). Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

6. The OECD guidelines focus on developing the capacity to set goals and act rather than passively consume information. This requires a shift towards cultivating a growth mindset and social-emotional skills, alongside digital literacy and fusion skills that combine creative, entrepreneurial and technical abilities. The goal is not just to equip learners for work, but to help them to become adaptable, creative and engaged citizens capable of navigating a complex, uncertain world.

7. In *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*, the European Commission identifies eight key competencies essential for personal fulfilment, employability and active citizenship in the 21st century. They are: literacy; multilingualism; mathematical and science/technology competences; digital competence; personal, social and learning to learn competence, citizenship competence; entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression. In its Recommendation of May 2018, the European Council encouraged Member States to promote those competencies through innovative learning, improved education and training, and lifelong learning opportunities. Both documents emphasize the importance of “entrepreneurship competence” and “digital competence”.

8. By addressing those areas, those documents suggest that education should incorporate an understanding of IP to prepare students for future challenges in a complex and interconnected world. Understanding the IP system is a key enabler for aspiring entrepreneurs, as it helps them to protect their innovative ideas and business models. The need for digital skills, including the responsible use of digital technologies, encompasses knowledge about copyright and IPRs, which is essential in an age where content creation is rampant.

9. DPMA is focusing its activities in this sector on entrepreneurship competencies, as they are key to creating value and responsibly engaging with IP. Identifying suitable partners in the education sector in Germany proved challenging, given that education policy is the responsibility of 16 federal states. Fifteen selected institutions in upper secondary and tertiary education were initially approached, resulting in a potential audience of about 1.5 million students.

10. Fruitful collaboration has been established in particular with the states’ media authorities, which serve as central training institutions for teachers. Teachers serve as key advocates and, in light of the DPMA’s expanded responsibilities under Section 26a of the Patent Act, represent a significant target group for raising awareness of IP. Division 2.1.3.c has therefore specifically approached various state teacher training institutes to identify suitable forms of cooperation, particularly in general education schools. The State Pedagogical Institute (LISUM) for the states of Berlin and Brandenburg was the first partner to join the initiative. LISUM serves as the point of contact for instructional and school development and creates curricula, training programs, guides and materials for more than 500,000 students in Berlin and Brandenburg. The first joint symposium, on “Intellectual property in education”, was held on June 26, 2024, as part of the continuing education program for upper-level and vocational schoolteachers at LISUM (near Berlin) and was well attended.

11. Over the past two years, DPMA has continued to focus on raising awareness of IP among similar institutions and on educating teachers about important topics such as the protection of IP and the identification of counterfeit products. Particular attention has been paid to the responsible handling of third-party IP and the risks associated with purchasing counterfeits. Extensive information on product piracy has also been made available on the DPMA website.³

³ See https://www.dpma.de/english/services/ip_rights_briefly_explained/product_piracy/index.html.

12. The aim of the website's product piracy pages is to provide a well-structured and practical overview of counterfeit goods and IP protection. Instead of presenting only legal theory, the website combines consumer awareness, economic impact, criminal aspects and practical enforcement measures in one integrated information architecture. Its modular structure brings major added value: users are guided step by step from basic explanations ("What are fakes and how can they be identified?") to an examination of broader societal consequences, organized crime and specific action for rights holders to take, such as customs applications and enforcement strategies. This helps to make the content accessible for the general public and companies seeking practical guidance. Another strength is its interdisciplinary approach. The website connects IP protection with consumer safety, environmental risks, labor exploitation and economic damage. Real-world examples, statistics and references to European and international studies help to illustrate why product piracy is not only a legal issue, but also a social and economic challenge. Overall, the website is an attempt to transform a complex legal topic into an informative and user-friendly platform with practical knowledge for consumers, businesses and educators.

III. CONCLUSION

13. Cooperation with media authorities in the federal states appears to be a promising avenue for raising awareness of IP among as many teachers and students as possible.

14. Approaches that have worked well with teacher training institutes highlight, in particular, entrepreneurial competence and the distinction between it and media competence:

- Training available to all interested teachers (no exclusion for any type or level of school)
- Provision of teaching material for substitute lessons
- Integration of hands-on examples and real case studies
- Cross-curricular (interdisciplinary) approaches, through which learners experience contexts that combine various subject areas
- Use of open educational resources (OER)
- Collaboration with STEM organizations.

15. Feedback from teachers thus far has been positive, and materials have been developed to offer them additional support. DPMA plans to further focus on integrating IP topics, including on product piracy, into the federal states' curricula and to expand cooperation with relevant STEM organizations.

[End of contribution]