

Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT) Working Group

Fifteenth Session
Geneva, October 3 to 7, 2022

REPOSITORY OF E-LEARNING RESOURCES

Document prepared by the International Bureau

SUMMARY

1. This document presents a proposal for the creation of an independent repository of e-learning resources.

INTRODUCTION

2. At its fourteenth session, the PCT Working Group discussed the evaluation of surveys on the use of e-learning resources for the training of substantive patent examiners (see document PCT/WG/14/15 and Circulars C. PCT 1588 and 1620).

3. From the comments received regarding the utility of e-learning, it is apparent that many Offices consider systematic use of e-learning a very effective part of the training of entry-level examiners, as well as experienced examiners. Various Offices have engaged in the development of e-learning resources as part of their efforts to develop a training infrastructure to support learning activities. The reasons range from laying a common ground for all trainees, the advantage of taking courses at one's own pace, the opportunity to continuously improve the learning resources through feedback from trainees, and the option to conduct standardized assessments as part of e-learning activities.

4. From the comments received, it was furthermore apparent that, in particular, small and medium Offices, which have fewer or no resources to develop or maintain e-learning resources themselves, greatly appreciate support for the training of their experts by means of access to external e-learning resources. It would therefore be very beneficial if more Offices made their training resources available without any restrictions to users from other Offices. This may add

to the sharing of best practices among Offices, both to examination practices and online training practices and techniques, as some comments stated.

5. Paragraphs 20 and 21 of document PCT/WG/14/15, reproduced below, therefore proposed to consider the creation of an independent repository for e-learning resources:

“20., as the development of e-learning resources also requires considerable financial or human resources, some Offices may not wish to publicly share them but only with experts from other patent Offices. In order to mitigate the administrative burden for such Offices with managing requests for and access to such resources, one could consider the creation of an independent repository for e-learning resources, which would provide access to accredited users.

21. Such repository could as well manage the translation of selected resources in order to facilitate access and use of them. It would assure a continuing availability of such resources, which is essential for a systematic use of external resources... In order to mitigate problems with the speed and reliability of internet connections, some resources could be made available for download and integration in local learning management systems. Overall, such a repository would certainly be beneficial for promoting the use of e-learning among Offices which have not yet considered this learning method.”

6. The Working Group, at its fourteenth session, approved the proposal and invited the International Bureau to develop proposals for the creation of an independent repository of e-learning resources (see paragraph 194 of the Report of the session, document PCT/WG/14/19).

EXISTING COMPILATION OF E-LEARNING RESOURCES

7. Already at the tenth session of the Working Group, the International Bureau presented a compilation of e-learning resources suitable for substantive patent examiners which is regularly updated at least twice a year (for the latest update, see document PCT/WG/15/REFERENCE/E-LEARNING). This compilation has currently the format of a thematically structured Excel table, including links to individual e-learning resources, as well as a separate compilation of providers that offer access to several such individual e-learning resources.

8. The comments on this compilation of e-learning resources, which were received at the occasion of said surveys, reflected great appreciation for the compilation, its comprehensiveness and usefulness. Some comments refer to the long-term plans for this compilation and emphasize the importance to maintain and update it regularly.

9. The International Bureau is committed to continue the regular updating of this compilation, which includes not only updating of broken links but also researching and adding of relevant resources not yet included in the compilation. In order to facilitate this, Offices would be invited to report to the International Bureau any resources newly developed by themselves, or found when researching and exploring further such resources.

10. The majority of the resources included in the compilation offer fully free online access, sometimes requiring prior registration. For some, however, access is controlled, that is, access requiring a paid fee or admission because of bilateral agreements between Offices. The access conditions are included in column F of the table. The freely accessible resources are highlighted in green. Those accessible only for accredited users are highlighted in red.

CONVERTING EXISTING COMPILATION INTO WEB-BASED E-LEARNING PLATFORM

11. Rather than maintaining the compilation in its current format as an Excel table, one may consider converting the current compilation to a web-based platform. The most straightforward implementation could be a web page that presents the thematically ordered current list of individual e-learning including respective links. Such a page could also include a download

area where Offices, wishing to share resources to be integrated in local learning systems of other Offices, could make available such resources for download.

12. A more elaborate implementation could be the use of a Learning Management System (LMS). The utility of LMSs for examiner training management was already presented in the context of the discussions of the Working Group related to a proposal for improving the coordination of patent examiner training (see document PCT/WG/10/9). The International Bureau explored the development and utility of such LMS based on the open source Moodle LMS, and regularly reported on the progress at each session of the Working Group (for the latest report see document PCT/WG/14/13, and the related side event).

13. The use of an LMS for accessing external e-learning resources, that is, such developed by other institutions than the Office using it for examiner training, is described in a short learning unit, which is accessible at <https://icblm.moodlecloud.com/course/view.php?id=24> (click on 'guest access') and was prepared by using the said LMS site developed by the International Bureau.

14. As described there, the benefits of using an LMS for managing access to e-learning resources, would include the following opportunities:

- (a) Providing access to e-learning resources developed by a variety of originators and in a variety of formats; by either
 - (i) linking to web-based e-learning content hosted by other institutions, that is external to the LMS; and/or
 - (ii) integrating, into the LMS, e-learning content or modules prepared by other institutions wishing to share their content or modules with a wider audience;
- (b) Controlling access to individual e-learning resources meant to be accessed only by accredited users; for example, if an office, which created some e-learning content, would not wish to share it publicly but only with certain registered users or the LMS;
- (c) Monitoring the use of integrated and linked e-learning resources;
- (d) Collecting feedback from users of an e-learning activity; and thereby enabling highlighting of content that was frequently rated as being recommended;
- (e) Assessing the success of learning of users by assessments which could be prepared separately and in addition to an existing e-learning resource that was prepared by another institution and does not include an assessment;
- (f) Tracking the learning progress of participants, for example, in the context of learning plans including several e-learning resources; e-learning resources could furthermore be linked to certain competencies to enable the use of such resources for competency based learning management;
- (g) Creation of activity reports etc. for management purposes.

15. Such an implementation via a LMS would therefore assure the envisaged functions of a repository mentioned in paragraphs 5 above. In particular, only accredited users would have access to certain resources if that were a condition of an office for sharing its e-learning content with a wider but not public audience. An LMS operating as a platform to access e-learning resources could be hosted by the International Bureau. Offices wishing to control access to their e-learning resources could be given special administrator rights. Otherwise, they could delegate that to the institution hosting the LMS.

16. For Offices that wish to operate their own LMS site, for example, for managing the training of their examiners it would be possible to share e-learning content and/or link tables through the regular export and download functionality that is usually available with any LMS. The download function could also be integrated in the LMS and access to downloadable content could be similarly controlled like the access to an e-learning activity.

17. The International Bureau will present further details on this proposal for implementing an e-learning platform by using an LMS at a side event of this session of the Working Group. At the same side event, the Intellectual Property Office of the Philippines will report on their progress towards the development of a local LMS for the management of their patent examiners.

AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

18. Although the majority of e-learning resources included in the compilation are freely accessible, several are not. This is partly due to the fact that they represent tutored e-learning activities which permit only a limited number of participants. However, even tutored activities, or parts of them, could be recorded, and such recorded training activities could nevertheless be useful for other examiners to watch at a later time. For example, all of the e-learning resources highlighted in red in the compilation (see paragraph 10 above), are certainly of interest to any examiner of any Office.

19. The utility of an e-learning platform will very much depend on a large range of accessible e-learning resources as well as their quality. The Working Group may therefore consider inviting Offices that frequently organize virtual or remote training for the benefit of their own or examiners of other Offices to systematically record such training activities and make them available to examiners of other Offices, along with related training materials, either through the proposed platform or through their own e-learning platforms.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

20. While the utility of a LMS was explored by the International Bureau using a LMS based on the open source Moodle software, many other LMS based on other software would be usable since LMS usually have similar basic functionalities directed towards e-learning. The choice of platform for any service by the International Bureau would be partly by cost and features, but also by the need for good compatibility with related services implemented by national Offices.

21. Subject to feedback during this meeting and the associated side event, the International Bureau proposes to develop a pilot LMS for this function based on Moodle, which would be administered by the International Bureau with the advice and assistance of interested national Offices. As noted in paragraph 15, above, some Offices might have administrator rights to related parts of the LMS. This approach would allow more effective evaluation of the opportunities, benefits and costs, with the option of stopping or moving to a different approach on a "fail fast" basis. If successful, it would also provide access to up-to-date information for Offices quickly.

22. The Working Group is invited to comment on the proposal for the creation of an independent repository for e-learning resources, as presented in paragraphs 20 and 21, above.

[End of document]