

Report of the Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management, FY 2025

March 2026

**Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management,
Intellectual Property Committee,
Industrial Structure Council**

The Industrial Structure Council is an official organization established under Article 7 of the Act for Establishment of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. The council carries out investigations and deliberations of important matters concerning METI's policy, particularly with regard to improving the economic strength of the private sector and promoting smooth international economic relations, in response to consultation by the Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry. The Industrial Structure Council was established in January 2001 and its organizational framework was revised in June 2013.

< For more information, visit

https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/economy/industrial_council/index.html >

The "Japan Revitalization Strategy" (2014 revision), approved by the Cabinet on June 24, 2014, stipulates the initiative to achieve the fastest and highest quality examination in the world by introducing an objective quality management system involving external experts.

The Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management was established under the Intellectual Property Committee of the Industrial Structure Council in August 2014 to recommend improvements to the quality management of patent, design, and trademark examinations at the JPO through verifications and evaluations of the implementation system and the implementation status of quality management. The Subcommittee annually consolidates the results into a written report.

< For more information, visit <https://www.jpo.go.jp/e/introduction/hinshitu/shinsa/index.html> >

The Subcommittee's report for FY 2025 (the fiscal year ended March 2026) was first published on the JPO website in its original Japanese version on March 31, 2026.

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Introduction

Due to the globalization of the business and research activities of Japanese companies and other entities, and in order to enable their quick and easy acquisition of intellectual property rights in other countries, high-quality and internationally reliable examinations are required for the examination results of the Japan Patent Office (JPO) in acquiring intellectual property rights to be accepted in other countries. In addition, high-quality examinations by the JPO are necessary to increase the predictability of the business using the industrial property rights system and to avoid disputes. Especially in today's society, it is essential to maintain and improve the quality of JPO examinations, as globalization and the development of AI technologies have made the exploitation of intellectual property a key element of a company's competitive edge.

In 2014, JPO created and published the "JPO's Quality Policy on Examination," which outlines the fundamental principles of quality management for patent, design, and trademark examinations, including "robust, broad, and valuable establishment of rights." At the same time, the JPO established a quality management system across all its departments for patent, design, and trademark examinations to conduct examinations based on the "Quality Policy" and has been continuously improving the system. In particular, in recent years, the JPO has been emphasizing active communication with various users, including applicants and third parties, to accurately understand their needs and awareness of issues, and to promote effective measures that contribute to maintaining and improving the examination quality.

The Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management was established under the Intellectual Property Committee of the Industrial Structure Council in August 2014 to recommend improvements to the JPO's examination quality management by verifying and evaluating its implementation system and status. The JPO has incorporated the Subcommittee's objective evaluation and improvement recommendations into its measures to achieve internationally advanced quality management.

This report examines and evaluates the implementation system and status of the JPO's examination quality management in the fiscal year ended March 2026 (hereinafter "FY 2025") and summarizes discussions on what needs to be improved.

Meetings held in this fiscal year

The First Subcommittee Meeting: February 20, 2026

Agenda

1. Proposed evaluation results of the implementation system and status of the JPO's examination quality management
2. Improvement recommendations proposed by the Subcommittee members regarding the implementation system and status of the JPO's examination quality management

The Second Subcommittee Meeting: March 13-19, 2026

(deliberation by correspondence)

Agenda

1. Proposed report of the Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management, FY 2025

Members of the Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management

- Titles omitted, listed in Japanese syllabary order -

	ICHIKAWA Rumi	Patent Attorney, ATEN IP Attorneys
	INOUE Wataru	Chair of the Editorial Board, Nikkan Kogyo Shimbun, Ltd.
	SHOJI Tamotsu	Advisor Attorney, TMI Associates
Chair	TSUBAKI Michiko	Professor, Department of Management, School of Management, Tokyo University of Science
	TOKUNAGA Yayoi	Patent Attorney, Toto Momo Trade Mark Professionals
	NAKAYAMA Mariko	Patent Attorney, Nishimura & Asahi (Gaikokuho Kyodo Jigyo)
	MIZUKATA Katsuya	Deputy General Manager, Intellectual Property Center, Daicel Corporation

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I. Overview of quality management measures at the JPO

The Japan Patent Office (JPO) implements its quality management system shown in Figure 1.

The Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner are in charge of maintenance and implementation of the quality management system. For design matters, the Director-General of Patent and Design Examination Department joins them and for trademark matters, the Director-General of the Trademark and Customer Relations Department replaces the Deputy Commissioner.

The following quality management bodies work closely together and independently: bodies that conduct substantive examinations, bodies that plan initiatives, and bodies that monitor and analyze quality. They also follow the PDCA cycle to continuously improve the examination quality.

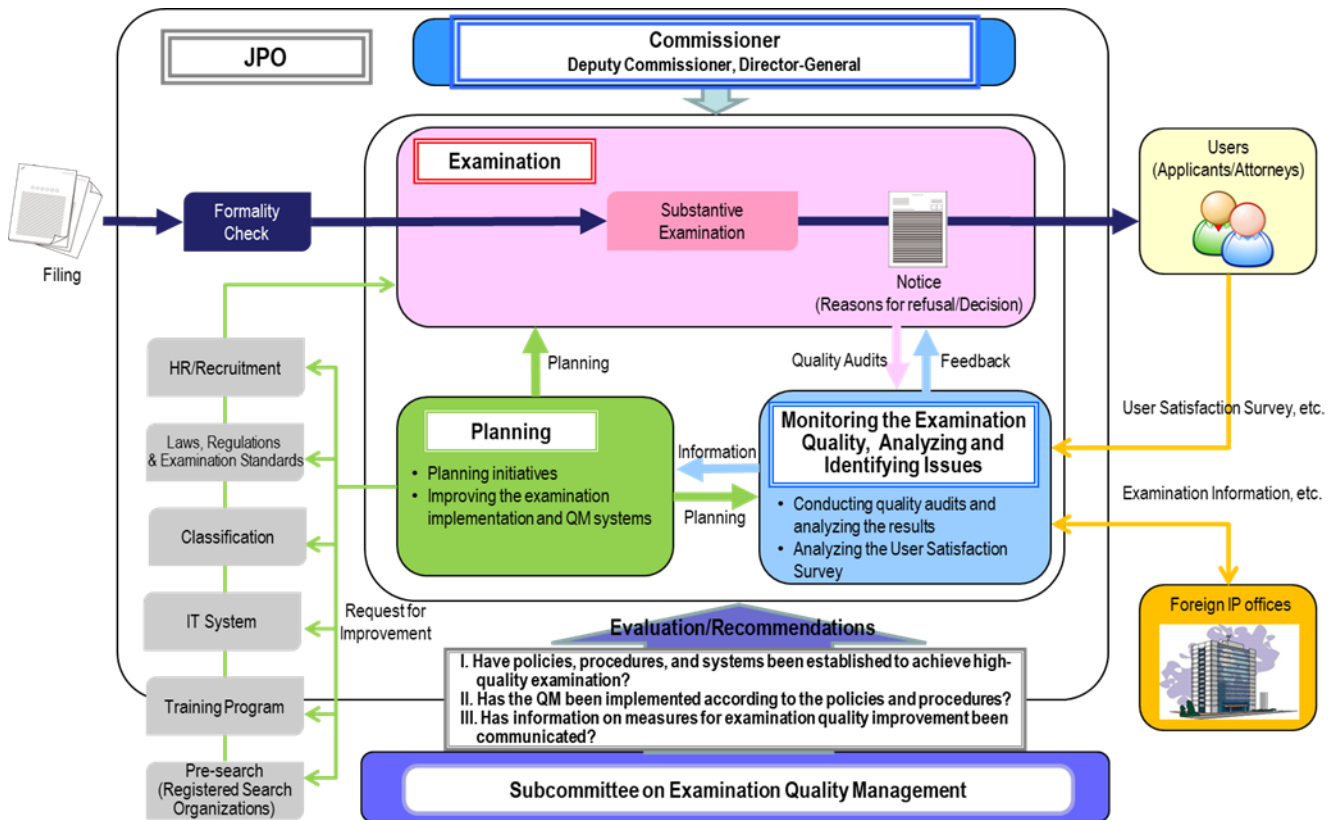


Figure 1: Overall picture of the quality management system at the JPO

I. Overview of quality management measures at the JPO

The Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management (the Subcommittee) was established under the Intellectual Property Committee of the Industrial Structure Council in August 2014 to recommend improvements to the JPO's examination quality management by evaluating its implementation system and status. The JPO has incorporated the Subcommittee's evaluation and improvement recommendations into its PDCA cycle, which contributes to maintaining and improving the examination quality (Figure 2).

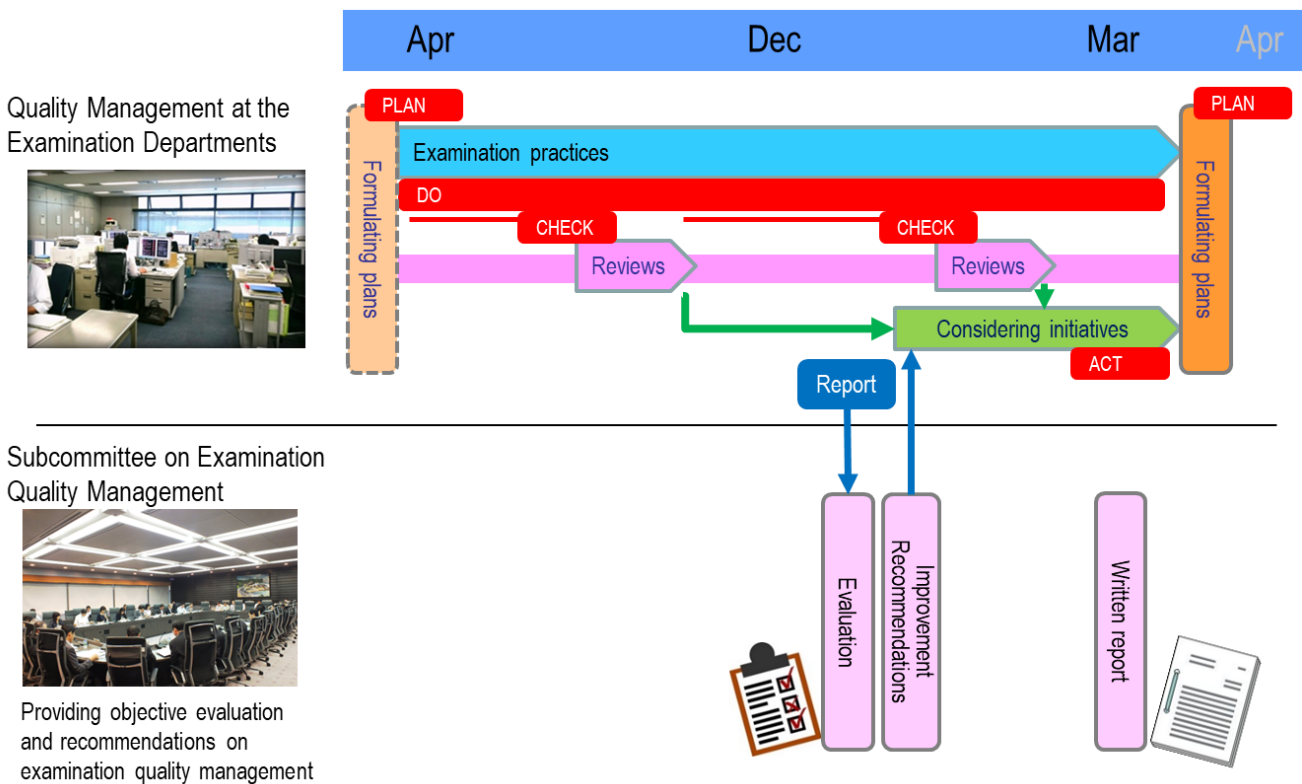


Figure 2: Relation between quality management within the JPO and the Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management

The JPO's quality management system has been documented into the Quality Management Manuals (Quality Manuals) for patent, design, and trademark examinations, which were published on the JPO website¹.

Note 1: For details of the JPO's examination quality management and the Quality Manuals, see "[Examination Quality Management of the JPO.](#)"

II. Evaluation of the implementation system and status of quality management

The Subcommittee evaluated the JPO's implementation system and status of the examination quality management based on the "Evaluation Items and Criteria Concerning Examination Quality Management" created in FY 2014 (see [Appendix 1](#) at the end of this report).

The same evaluation items and criteria apply to patent, design and trademark examinations. For each item, the evaluation's "Objectives and Perspectives" are stated, and specific criteria are established on a 4-point scale: "Very Satisfactory," "Satisfactory," "Generally Achieved," and "Needs Improvement." For example, evaluation items (6) and (7) on quality improvement and verification measures would be "Satisfactory" if "the necessary measures are planned and implemented as planned and their objectives are achieved" and would be "Very Satisfactory" if, in addition, "they also have effects that contribute to further improvement in quality."

Prior to the Subcommittee's deliberation, the JPO provided the Subcommittee members with documents (Document 1 and Document 2)² summarizing the implementation status of the FY 2024 improvement recommendations, as well as the outcomes and current status of each evaluation item. After receiving these documents, each member evaluated the JPO's implementation system and status of the quality management for patent, design, and trademark examinations based on the "Evaluation items and criteria regarding examination quality management" and deliberated to prepare the Subcommittee's official evaluation.

While the median of the members' ratings is used as the official rating of the Subcommittee, a rating that differs from the Subcommittee's rating by a minority of the members is also noted in this report.

The Subcommittee's evaluations are as follows (see [Appendix 2](#) at the end of this report for a list of the Subcommittee's evaluations).

Note 2: Visit "[Agenda and List of Documents for the First Meeting of the Subcommittee on Examination Quality Management](#)" to access the Japanese documents.

Patent

1. Evaluation of patent examination quality management

Evaluation item (1): Status of the creation of quality policies, quality manuals, and other documents

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has created and appropriately managed the "Quality Policy," the "Quality Manual," and other documents indicating specific procedures for quality management.
- The JPO has revised the "Quality Manual," the "Examination Handbook," and the "Handbook for PCT International Search and Preliminary Examination in the Japan Patent Office" where necessary.
- The JPO has published an HTML version of the "Examination Guidelines for Patent and Utility Model in Japan."

Evaluation item (2): Clarity of procedures for examination and quality management

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has established the necessary matters and specific procedures for patent examination in the "Examination Guidelines for Patent and Utility Model in Japan." The JPO has also clearly specified the people responsible for developing and implementing quality management, as well as the associated procedures, in the "Quality Manual."
- With the revision of the "Quality Manual," the details of the quality management procedures and the people responsible for them—including the PDCA cycle—have been clarified further.

Evaluation item (3): Publication of the fundamental principles and procedures of quality management to users of IP systems and dissemination of such information to staff

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory."

Patent

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has made the "Quality Policy" and "Quality Manual" publicly available so that users in Japan and abroad can easily access them: English versions are also available.
- The JPO disseminates the "Quality Policy," the "Quality Manual," and related documents to all examiners through multiple channels, including training sessions, briefings, and its intranet. Furthermore, the JPO regularly conducts training sessions and briefings tailored to the examiners' years of experience and positions. Additionally, the JPO administers an annual quality test to all examiners and updates the questions each year to ensure the content is fully understood.

Evaluation item (4): Examination implementation system

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" or "Generally Achieved."

<Evaluations>

- This fiscal year, the JPO implemented measures to improve the quality of searches. These measures included search outsourcing with "pre-search consultations," using the "Survey of Technology Trends from Patent Application Information," and employing the prior art search program, which includes foreign-language patent documents. The JPO also implemented initiatives to improve examiner skills. These initiatives included training and quality testing, participation in academic conferences and similar events, and performance evaluations. Consequently, the JPO's examiners are among the most capable in the world. Despite staffing constraints, the JPO has efficiently handled the required number of examination cases and has established an organizational structure for examinations and personnel deployment that is comparable internationally.
- While developing a patent examination system that can handle cutting-edge technologies, such as AI-related inventions, the JPO is also working to improve the efficiency of patent examination operations by using various AI services, both inside and outside the office.

<Points to be improved>

- Even when using outsourced search services and AI technologies to efficiently handle the required number of examination cases, the JPO is expected to perform high-quality examinations.
- To avoid falling behind in responding to new technologies, the JPO must continue to quickly assess the situation and adapt accordingly.
- Regarding examination quality, the JPO must fully understand that the purpose of examination practices is to contribute to the development of our industry and to serve the national interest, as intended by the Patent Act. Reducing the first action (FA) pendency is not the purpose.

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Evaluation item (5): Quality management system

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has established two internal bodies: the Quality Management Office, which is responsible for planning quality-related initiatives, and the Quality Management Internal Committee, which is responsible for analysis and evaluation. The Quality Management Office employs 40 researchers and 96 Quality Management Officers (including General Quality Management Officers) who conduct quality audits, and is also exploring the potential use of generative AI in quality management operations. Thus, the JPO has established an organizational structure and personnel deployment that enable the efficient and effective planning and implementation of quality management measures at an internationally comparable level.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO may be unable to address differences in examination quality caused by variations among examiners. Additionally, some so-called "unusual parameter inventions" are currently being inadvertently granted patents, even though they fall within the scope of prior art or common general knowledge. While grasping every truth is impossible, the JPO is expected to implement multiple measures to align examination quality with the purpose of the Patent Act, which is to promote industrial development. These measures include ensuring that each examiner understands the purpose of the Patent Act, increasing examiners' commitment to the quality of patent grant decisions, and analyzing information from relevant application cases.

Evaluation item (6): Measures for quality improvement

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has established a multi-tiered review system in which approvers, officers in charge of technical information, group leaders, and Quality Management Officers conduct multiple checks on documents, such as notices of reasons for refusal, that are prepared by examiners. Furthermore, the JPO revised the approval process guidelines this fiscal year, explicitly stipulating that approvers must verify examiners' examination quality information and encourage consultations when necessary. Additionally, meticulous reviews are conducted during checks before approval to address specific issues, such as omissions in searches.
- The JPO actively encouraged the examiners to share their views. Consequently, numerous consultations took place. The JPO has also made consultations mandatory for cutting-edge

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technologies, including AI-related inventions and materials informatics. Through these consultations and knowledge sharing, the JPO continues to improve quality.

- The JPO has incorporated feedback from examiners regarding the functionality and usability of search, draft-checking, and quality-related tools.
- The JPO has successfully achieved the objectives of the measures necessary for quality improvement, which were planned and implemented as intended. These measures included expanding patent literature searches, providing drafting support tools, enhancing interactions with applicants (in-person and over the phone), and holding consultations with examiners from various overseas IP offices, including those in China and France.
- The JPO is exploring ways to use the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry's generative AI services for its examinations.
- The JPO has prepared examination materials addressing specific user concerns (disclaimer) and disseminated them to examiners.
- Regarding the Third-party Observations, the JPO revised the "Guidance" (*available only in Japanese*) in September 2025 to clarify key points and focus on topics that have generated frequent inquiries from users.
- The JPO also provides support tailored to corporate needs, including startup support measures, the Collective Examinations for IP Portfolio Supporting Business Strategy, and the utilization of INPIT-KANSAI's programs.

<Points to be improved>

- For example, there is concern that while examinations used to focus on maintaining high patent standards, today the primary goal may be to shorten examination times, such as by reducing the first action (FA) pendency. There is also concern that the quality of examinations may vary significantly depending on the examiner. Additionally, there is concern that inventions involving unusual parameters may be inadvertently granted patents, even though they fall within the scope of prior art or common general knowledge. If a patent containing reasons for invalidation is granted, third parties would be forced to expend excessive effort addressing it, which is inconsistent with the purpose of the Patent Act. Thus, the JPO is expected to conduct examination practices with a comprehension of the purpose of the Patent Act, which is to contribute to the development of industry.

Evaluation item (7): Measures for quality verification

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- These measures included monitoring the current status of examination quality by conducting Quality Management Officers' audits of examiners' dispositions, providing feedback on the audit results to Directors and Associate Managing Examiners, conducting user satisfaction surveys,

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exchanging opinions with users, and receiving user feedback through the JPO website.

- Despite staffing constraints, the Quality Management Office conducted efficient quality audits by having researchers assist with the audit procedures.
- The JPO analyzes responses to its user satisfaction surveys regarding individual cases after examination has been completed. The JPO then provides feedback to the responsible examination division and examiners. The JPO also gives examiners feedback on comments received through the JPO website, email, telephone, and other channels.

Evaluation item (8): Examination quality analysis and identification of issues

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO analyzed the results of checks before approval, check sheet results from examiners' consultations, quality audit results, and external evaluations. Through these analyses, the JPO identified issues such as search omissions, difficulties in formulating search strategies, the need to improve judgment consistency, and erroneous issuance of final notices of refusal. Thus, the JPO thoroughly analyzed the quality of the examinations and used these analyses to appropriately identify, evaluate, and link findings to the planning and implementation of initiatives.
- In the past, it was difficult to discern the connection between the analyses and the Check-Act-Plan-Do cycle in the JPO's explanation of this item. However, improvement is evident this year. This improvement demonstrates that the JPO thoroughly conducted each analysis (Check) of patent examination quality and appropriately evaluated and identified issues (Act) based on these analyses. These evaluations and identified issues then led to the planning (Plan) and implementation (Do) of measures.
- Based on the analysis (Check) of consultations in FY 2024, the JPO confirmed (Act) a fact that groups with a high number of consultations, particularly voluntary ones, exhibited less variation in patent grant rates and conducted examinations more efficiently. To encourage the active implementation of consultations, the JPO revised the guidelines for the approval process (Plan/Do).
- Analyses (check) of the implementation status of quality audits by draft type revealed (Act) many errors in judgments regarding the issuance of "final notices of reasons for refusal." Consequently, the Quality Management Office enlisted the help of researchers to enhance the checking of drafts and further clarified and disseminated the relevant judgment criteria to examiners (Plan/Do).

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Evaluation item (9): Status of improvement of the policies, procedures, and systems to achieve high-quality examination [evaluation items (1) to (5)]

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has appropriately managed documents indicating specific procedures for quality management, such as the Quality Policy and the Quality Manual, while revising or reviewing them as necessary.
- Despite the impact of staffing constraints on its examination implementation system, the JPO has systematically implemented measures to ensure high-quality examinations. These measures include deploying AI advisors, outsourcing search tasks, and using generative AI services to improve the efficiency of patent examination operations.
- In a contest focused on using generative AI to improve the efficiency of patent examination operations, the JPO conducted technical evaluations of generative AI services developed and submitted by companies and other entities.

Evaluation item (10): Status of improvement of quality management measures [evaluation items (6) to (8)]

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Generally Achieved" or "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO promotes more active consultations among examiners.
- Similar to consultations among examiners, a certain number of examinations were delegated between examination departments within the JPO to ensure timeliness. To ensure the quality of these examinations, the JPO formed information-sharing teams led by managers who oversee the technical areas of the departments that delegated the examinations. These teams share information on operational procedures, judgment criteria, classification specifics, and the latest technological trends in each technical field.
- In March 2025, the JPO compiled a document containing general examples, explanations, and model notifications. The goal was to improve the efficiency of the drafting process and ensure fairness in patent examination judgments. Examiners have been instructed to actively use the document.
- The JPO has further clarified the criteria for a "final notice of reasons for refusal," communicated these criteria to examiners via the intranet, and implemented checking drafts of "final notices" in all examination divisions to minimize errors.

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- The JPO has developed tools that provide examiners with quality-related information. These tools promote and enhance their proactive quality management efforts.

Evaluation item (11): Communication of information on measures for examination quality improvement

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has created a webpage on its website dedicated to examination quality management. Additionally, this fiscal year, the JPO released a video explaining the quality management system on the "JPO Channel" on YouTube (see [YouTube.com/watch?v=BMoTOvsqqLA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMoTOvsqqLA) for the English version).
- Information on measures for examination quality improvement has been communicated both inside and outside Japan, and cooperative relations with organizations and bodies inside and outside Japan have been built up. For example, the JPO regularly holds meetings to exchange views with users, IP-related organizations, and other stakeholders, both domestically and internationally. Additionally, the JPO strengthens its presence at various international conferences to build mutual trust.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO is expected to continue expanding its efforts to improve the quality of patent examinations through various methods. The goal is to establish JPO practices as an international standard. From a practical standpoint, it is desirable to disseminate Japan's approach to patent examination in East and South Asia, regions close to Japan, as well as in the Global South, where future growth is anticipated. This will allow Japanese applicants to benefit from the JPO's established practices in these countries.

Design

2. Evaluation of design examination quality management

Evaluation item (1): Status of the creation of quality policies, quality manuals, and other documents

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has appropriately created and managed the following: the "Quality Policy," the "Quality Manual," other documents indicating specific quality management procedures, the "Design Examination Guidelines," the "Design Examination Manual," and the "Interview Guidelines" (*available only in Japanese*). The JPO has also published information about the 15th edition of the Locarno Classification on its website and has managed the related documents appropriately.
- In conjunction with the launch of the accelerated design examination service for startups, the JPO updated the "Outline of Accelerated Examination/Accelerated Appeal Examination System for Design Applications" and started to release "Leaflet on Accelerated Design Examination for Startups" on its Japanese-language website.

Evaluation item (2): Clarity of procedures for examination and quality management

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO specifies what is necessary and how design examinations should be conducted in the "Design Examination Guidelines," which are updated as needed. The JPO has also established its quality management procedures in the "Quality Manual," which specifies the relevant reference materials, detailed procedures, and other information for each step within the PDCA cycle.

Evaluation item (3): Publication of the fundamental principles and procedures of quality management to users of IP systems and dissemination of such information to staff

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

Design

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has published the "Quality Policy" and the "Quality Manual" to make them easily accessible to users, including overseas users. It has presented its quality management measures, the "Quality Policy," and other documents at opinion exchange meetings with companies.
- The JPO has incorporated the contents of the "Quality Policy" and the "Quality Manual" into its training programs to familiarize its staff with them, in addition to posting them on the intranet.

Evaluation item (4): Examination implementation system

Evaluated as "Generally Achieved" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Generally Achieved" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has achieved a high level of examination by improving operational efficiency through digitization and batch examination, as well as by improving examiners' skills through training to acquire expertise and visits to exhibitions.

<Points to be improved>

- To maintain the current average time to first action notification, the JPO should further strengthen its examination system.
- The number of examinations processed per examiner at the JPO remains significantly higher than in other countries that conduct substantive examinations. The JPO's examination system and personnel deployment cannot be considered well-established, as examiners handle Hague international applications and quality improvement measures in addition to their regular workload.
- The JPO is expected to publish the results of its efforts to improve examination consistency, which include developing a method for assigning cases to individual examiners.

Evaluation item (5): Quality management system

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO can be considered to have established a mechanism that enables the efficient and effective planning and implementation of quality management measures at an internationally comparable level, despite constraints in its organizational structure.

Design

Evaluation item (6): Measures for quality improvement

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has continuously implemented measures necessary for quality improvement. These measures included consultations with approvers on individual applications; promoting consultations, exchanging opinions, and sharing knowledge among examiners; acquiring expertise; and exchanging information with foreign patent offices.
- The JPO has started using a commercial database containing design gazette data from 101 countries and organizations. The database has an AI-powered "similar image search" function.
- The JPO has consistently implemented measures to foster mutual understanding, such as communicating with applicants via interviews and phone calls. Not only has the JPO met its targets regarding user evaluations of communication, but these evaluations have also improved compared to last year.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO's search support tools for examiners using "similar image search" technology and a formality checking tool for drafting approval requests are expected to further improve efficiency and quality.

Evaluation item (7): Measures for quality verification

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- For national and Hague international applications, the JPO has accurately analyzed examination quality and identified issues by verifying the validity of searches, identifications, and judgments through planned quality audits. In addition, the JPO deployed Quality Management Officers with experience in management positions in the Trial and Appeal Department and provided opportunities for mutual consultation among Quality Management Officers, which enabled them to conduct high-quality and efficient audits.
- The JPO planned and implemented necessary measures for quality verification, such as conducting user satisfaction surveys to understand various user needs, exchanging opinions with companies and industry associations, and facilitating communication between the Design Examination Division and the Trial and Appeal Department.

Design

Evaluation item (8): Examination quality analysis and identification of issues

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has worked to understand the current situation and develop improvement measures by analyzing audit data, audit findings, consultation records on individual applications, and approver inquiries. These analyses included identifying frequent findings and typical errors.

Evaluation item (9): Status of improvement of the policies, procedures, and systems to achieve high-quality examination [evaluation items (1) to (5)]

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- In conjunction with the launch of the accelerated design examination service for startups, the JPO updated the "Outline of Accelerated Examination/Accelerated Appeal Examination System for Design Applications" and started to release "Leaflet on Accelerated Design Examination for Startups" on its Japanese-language website. In this way, the JPO ensured that users were fully informed.
- The JPO has made efforts to improve quality management by fully informing design examiners about the basics of quality management through training and other means. Additionally, the JPO has deployed Quality Management Officers with experience in management positions in the Trial and Appeal Department.

Evaluation item (10): Status of improvement of quality management measures [evaluation items (6) to (8)]

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has sufficiently improved its quality management measures to address the issues identified in last year's analysis.
- The JPO increased the number of consultations between examiners and approvers on individual applications, successfully achieving a user satisfaction rating of approximately 91% for

Design

communication, surpassing the official target of 70%.

- As part of its international efforts, the JPO exchanges information on examination practices and design systems through cooperative frameworks, such as the Industrial Design 5 Forum (ID5). The JPO also holds bilateral meetings with foreign patent offices to exchange information on design examination practices.

Evaluation item (11): Communication of information on measures for examination quality improvement

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO can be evaluated as follows: information about its measures to improve examination quality has been communicated both domestically and internationally, and cooperative relations with organizations and bodies both inside and outside Japan have been established. These efforts are exemplified by showcasing them on the JPO website, engaging in direct dialogue with companies and industry associations, exchanging information with the ID5 offices, hosting the Japan-China-Korea Design Forum, and organizing meetings of design experts from Japan and China.

Trademark

3. Evaluation of trademark examination quality management

Evaluation item (1): Status of the creation of quality policies, quality manuals, and other documents

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has created and appropriately managed the "Quality Policy," the "Quality Manual," and other documents indicating specific procedures for quality management.
- The JPO revised the "Outline of Trademark Examination Procedures" (*available only in Japanese*) to include additions resulting from the 2023 amendments to the Trademark Act, such as the introduction of the Consent System, and has published the revised document on its website.
- The JPO prepared and published the "Commentary on Classes of Goods and Services for the International Classification of Goods and Services, 13th Edition, Version 2026" (*available only in Japanese*) on its website to help users correctly specify the designated goods and services.

Evaluation item (2): Clarity of procedures for examination and quality management

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The "Examination Guidelines for Trademarks," the "Trademark Examination Manual," and the "Outline of Trademark Examination Procedures" (*available only in Japanese*) detail what is necessary and how trademark examinations should be conducted.
- The "Quality Manual" details specific procedures for quality management and the people responsible for them, as well as each step of the PDCA cycle.

Evaluation item (3): Publication of the fundamental principles and procedures of quality management to users of IP systems and dissemination of such information to staff

Evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Very Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

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<Evaluations>

- The JPO has made both the "Quality Policy" and the "Quality Manual" publicly available and easily accessible to users, including those overseas.
- The JPO has disseminated quality-related documents, including the "Quality Policy" and the "Quality Manual," to the entire Examination Department via the intranet.
- The JPO has conducted lectures on the contents and concepts of the "Quality Policy" and the "Quality Manual" in training programs for its staff members. The JPO has also conducted the "Quality Test" for all examiners to confirm their understanding of the basic principles of quality management.
- Efforts in the "Quality Test" this fiscal year are particularly commendable. The JPO doubled the number of sessions, expanded the scope of test subjects, added new questions on topics that require thoroughly informing all examiners, and issued warnings about questions with low correct answer rates.

<Points to be improved>

- It is commendable that the JPO has made the basic principles of quality management and other information publicly available on its website. However, some of the information is stored in deep layers and is not easily accessible, so there is room for further improvement in making it known to the public.
- The JPO is expected to conduct regular training sessions, similar to the "Quality Test," to assess the understanding of the basic principles of quality management and to share the results within the JPO for further improvement and maintenance of quality in the future.

Evaluation item (4): Examination implementation system

Evaluated as "Generally Achieved" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Generally Achieved" while a minority of the members gave "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO is working to strengthen its examination implementation system by hiring 11 permanent and two fixed-term assistant examiners, utilizing private sector search organizations, and assigning a Chief Guidance Examiner to each Examination Division, who provides consultation and coordination services to both its own team's Guidance Examiners and those in other Examination Divisions.
- The JPO conducts short-term training assignments in which examiners are sent to private companies. These assignments provide examiners with hands-on experience in corporate settings, enhancing their professional capabilities and enabling them to understand the industry's realities and needs.
- As part of its efforts to become more international, the JPO is developing its examiners by sending them on fellowships to the Madrid Operations Division of the World Intellectual

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Property Organization (WIPO).

- The JPO conducted a pilot study to assess the feasibility of using AI technology to review ambiguous "designated goods and services," particularly in the context of international trademark applications.

<Points to be improved>

- From the perspective of establishing an internationally comparable level of organizational structure for examination and personnel deployment, the evaluation remains "Generally Achieved," as the number of examinations processed per examiner at the JPO is still high compared to the United States.
- Since current generative AI technology is still in its early stages and can produce biased results, the JPO should exercise extreme caution when using it or related tools for examinations.

Evaluation item (5): Quality management system

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has established quality management bodies that are independent in reality: the management, the examiners, the initiative planners, and the quality analyzers and evaluators.
- The JPO has established an organizational structure and personnel deployment that enable the efficient and effective planning and implementation of quality management measures at an internationally comparable level. For example, there is a distinction between Expert and General Quality Management Officers as auditors for quality audits, based on the types of notices they review.
- Starting this fiscal year, the JPO has commendably strengthened its quality management framework by adding a staff member and a researcher with advanced trademark expertise to the Quality Management Team within the Trademark Division.

<Points to be improved>

- There is room for further improvement in the JPO's quality management system, for example, to achieve consistency of judgments among examiners and to improve the descriptions of the reasons for refusal.

Evaluation item (6): Measures for quality improvement

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

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<Evaluations>

- The JPO has successfully achieved the objectives of the measures necessary for quality improvement, which were continuously implemented as planned. These measures include approvals, consultations, evaluation of operational goals and examiners, collection and provision of quality-related information, and training.
- It is commendable that the JPO has conducted a pilot study to assess the feasibility of using AI technology to review ambiguous "designated goods and services," particularly in the context of Madrid Protocol applications. The study is part of the JPO's efforts to improve the efficiency of examination operations and ensure consistency among examiners' judgments by using AI technologies.
- It is commendable that, in addition to mandatory consultations, non-mandatory consultations were held with managers, including Chief Guidance Examiners, and that the JPO disclosed the number of such consultations, with year-over-year comparisons.
- The JPO increased the frequency of the "Quality Test" for all examiners from once to twice a year (in June and December). Additionally, the JPO improved the test's content by expanding the range of topics covered and adding new questions related to the classification of goods and services.
- The JPO actively promotes knowledge sharing through consultations between examiners and managers. Additionally, the JPO is working to improve the quality of interviews and telephone interactions with applicants.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO is expected to continue facilitating discussions and knowledge sharing through consultations to ensure consistent judgments among examiners. Additionally, it is desirable for the JPO to continue disclosing the number of non-mandatory consultations held with managers, including chief guidance examiners.
- Since the reasoning in the JPO's notices and decisions of refusal are sometimes perceived as forced, the JPO is expected to provide more carefully constructed reasoning to make the examination results more convincing.
- It is commendable that the JPO has diversified communication channels with users while improving communication quality. In the future, the JPO is expected to continue maintaining and enhancing appropriate communication.

Evaluation item (7): Measures for quality verification

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has successfully achieved the objectives of the measures necessary for quality verification, including quality audits to confirm the validity of ex officio examinations,

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identifications, and judgments, all of which were implemented as planned. Additionally, the measures include understanding the current status of examination quality by conducting user satisfaction surveys and exchanging opinions with users, both of which were implemented as planned.

- The JPO has published reports of the User Satisfaction Survey and has followed up with unsatisfied respondents to exchange opinions.
- It is commendable that the JPO has employed various methods of quality verification, such as quality audits, examiner surveys, user satisfaction surveys, exchanging opinions with users, and receiving user feedback through the JPO website.
- The JPO surveyed examiners' perceptions of examination quality through questionnaires. The results were used to analyze discrepancies between the User Satisfaction Survey results and examiners' perceptions or self-evaluations, identify new examination quality issues, and consider possible countermeasures.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO has planned measures necessary to improve examination quality and has implemented them in accordance with the policies and procedures. It would be preferable for the JPO to take measures to re-evaluate the adequacy of the plan itself.
- It would be preferable if the JPO could specify how it intends to explicitly address the issues of "judgments on distinctiveness" and "consistency with the appeals/trials," which were identified as priority issues based on the User Satisfaction Survey.

Evaluation item (8): Examination quality analysis and identification of issues

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- In the current quality management system, the JPO has adequately analyzed its examination quality and has identified issues through various measures.
- Based on the analysis of the User Satisfaction Survey results, the JPO has identified priority items to address: "judgments on distinctiveness," "consistency with appeals and trials," and "consistency of judgments among examiners." Additionally, the JPO is sharing information on these items within the Examination Departments to enhance common understanding, aiming to achieve effects that contribute to maintaining and improving examination quality.
- It is commendable that the JPO has identified the need to advance measures aimed at "enhancing the explanation of the grounds and rationale for notices and decisions of refusal." This was based on an analysis of feedback gathered during meetings with users and other stakeholders. The goal is to ensure that the examination process is convincing to users.
- It is commendable that the JPO has analyzed discrepancies between examinations and appeals/trials for objections concerning the distinctiveness of trademarks—particularly those related to Article 3(1)(iii) of the Trademark Act, "Prohibition of Descriptive Trademarks"—in

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its study titled "Analysis of Factors Behind Discrepancies Between Examinations and Appeals/Trials." Based on that analysis, it is also commendable that the JPO has identified specific issues underlying discrepancies in judgments between examinations and appeal trials. These issues include factual findings regarding the evidence supporting the judgment, implications arising from the claimed trademark, and consumer recognition derived from examples of the trademark's use.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO could increase the number of opportunities to solicit user feedback.
- To gain new insights, the JPO could expand its efforts to solicit feedback from not only user groups, but also individual users.
- The JPO is expected to continue analyzing the quality of its examinations, identifying issues, and implementing measures to address them.

Evaluation item (9): Status of improvement of the policies, procedures, and systems to achieve high-quality examination [evaluation items (1) to (5)]

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."

Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- Although the number of trademark applications remains high, the JPO has implemented various measures to address this. As a result, the necessary improvements are being made. These measures included utilizing private sector search organizations, reviewing the guidance system for assistant examiners based on their numbers, establishing an effective personnel deployment, improving training sessions for examiners and assistants, conducting training on telework support tools with refined and expanded content, and continuing a project to explore measures for improving the efficiency of review operations.
- The JPO is steadily implementing measures to improve the efficiency of examination operations and ensure consistency among examiners' judgments by using AI technologies. For example, the JPO conducted a pilot study to assess the feasibility of using AI technology to review ambiguous "designated goods and services," particularly in the context of Madrid Protocol applications.
- The JPO has strengthened its quality management framework by adding a staff member and a researcher with advanced trademark expertise to the Quality Management Team, which centrally plans and develops quality-related initiatives within the Trademark Division.

<Points to be improved>

- The JPO is expected to identify tasks that are suitable for AI technologies, verify them thoroughly, and implement them to improve operational efficiency. This will allow staff to devote their time and effort to tasks that require human judgment, enhancing quality.

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**Evaluation item (10): Status of improvement of quality management measures
[evaluation items (6) to (8)]**

Evaluated as "Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO has made sufficient efforts to improve its quality management measures. The JPO conducted follow-up surveys with respondents who were dissatisfied with "communication with examiners" in the User Satisfaction Survey, asking them to identify specific instances and issues behind their negative responses. The JPO also surveyed examiners to identify issues regarding communication with users from the examiners' perspective.
- The JPO has made all examiners aware of the procedure: as a rule, they should respond to email inquiries on the same day and return telephone inquiries immediately during telework.
- The JPO administered "Quality Tests" to all examiners to reinforce clarified procedures for interviews and telephone conversations, and to reaffirm communication-related documents, such as interview guidelines.

<Points to be improved>

- Although the JPO is making improvements to its quality management measures, there is room for further improvement in areas such as soliciting user feedback.

**Evaluation item (11): Communication of information on measures for examination
quality improvement**

Evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."
Last year, evaluated as "Satisfactory" while a minority of the members gave "Very Satisfactory."

<Evaluations>

- The JPO continuously communicates information at home and abroad and establishes cooperative relations with domestic and foreign institutions and organizations through its official website, opinion exchanges with users, international meetings and conferences, the International Cooperation on Trademark Examination Practices, and cooperation with foreign IP offices.
- At events such as user sessions held during the International Trademark Association (INTA) Annual Meeting, the JPO has provided information to domestic and international users, as well as staff from foreign IP offices, regarding its quality management measures and other efforts.

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III. Improvement recommendations for the implementation system and status of examination quality management

The Subcommittee not only discussed the evaluations but also addressed areas for improvement in the implementation system and status of examination quality management as identified during the evaluation process.

The Subcommittee's improvement recommendations are summarized below (see [Appendix 3](#) at the end of this report):

1. For quality management of patent examination

<Recommendation 1> [Evaluation item (4)]

The JPO should continue to secure a number of examiners at an internationally comparable level and to develop an examination system for cutting-edge technologies, such as AI-related inventions. In addition, the JPO is expected to further enhance examiners' judgment capabilities and improve examination quality centered on human judgment, while increasing operational efficiency through the use of generative AI technology.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- As the JPO cannot be said to have established internationally comparable personnel deployment, the JPO needs to secure a number of examiners at an internationally comparable level.
- The JPO has once again met its targets for FY 2024: a first-action pendency averaging 10 months or less and a standard total pendency averaging 14 months or less. To continue meeting these targets, it is desirable for the JPO to maintain its current number of examiners.
- To ensure the high-quality examination of rapidly evolving technologies such as AI-related inventions, JPO examiners must continue to improve their skills through training and other means.
- To further enhance the capabilities of examiners and improve the consistency of their judgments, it is imperative for the JPO to leverage AI technologies to their fullest potential in examination operations moving forward. This requires expanding training programs and taking other measures to improve examiners' AI literacy.
- Although generative AI has the potential to improve examination efficiency, the quality of examinations can only be guaranteed when "human judgment" remains central. Therefore, the JPO should employ AI solely as a supplementary tool, and only after ensuring transparency, accountability, and staff development.
- During the first subcommittee meeting, views were expressed on the importance of having a sufficient number of examiners and utilizing AI technologies. These two aspects are complementary and both contribute to the quality of future examinations. Considering the medium- to long-term use of generative AI technology, the JPO is expected to improve

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examination quality centered on human judgment. This can be achieved by promoting human resource development and competency building with a focus on "enhancing examiners' judgment capabilities" and "defining the division of roles between AI- and human-performed tasks."

<Recommendation 2> [Evaluation items (4) and (6)]

The JPO is expected to pilot the integration of generative AI technology into quality management procedures, analyze its benefits and challenges, and pave the way for its full-scale implementation and future enhancements.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- As the JPO considers integrating generative AI into quality management processes such as quality audits and draft checking, analyzing the observed efficiency and potential side effects during a pilot will facilitate implementation and future improvements.
- Although increasing the efficiency of similarity judgments and cited literature extraction by using AI is beneficial, the JPO must ensure that generative AI does not lead to a one-size-fits-all approach when evaluating the technical essence, challenges, and effects of inventions.

<Recommendation 3> [Evaluation items (6) and (8)]

The JPO is expected to continue analyzing examination quality and identifying issues to improve consistency among examiners' judgments. The JPO is also expected to promote examiner-led quality improvements, such as voluntary consultations among examiners.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- To eliminate search omissions and judgment errors by examiners and improve consistency in their judgments, the JPO should continue analyzing examination quality and identifying issues, as well as promote examiner-led quality improvements, such as voluntary consultations among examiners.
- Consistency in judgments on "errors in issuing final notices of reasons for refusal" can be achieved more easily than consistency in judgments on "search omissions" or "identification or judgment errors."
- Given existing challenges such as inconsistency in examiner work quality, the JPO is expected to implement examination administration and practices that serve Japan's national interests and promote the "development of our industry."

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<Recommendation 4> [Evaluation items (8) and (11)]

The JPO is expected to understand user needs and provide services that are convincing to all users by consistently holding meetings to exchange views with a diverse range of users, while avoiding bias toward the opinions of specific individuals.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- Although the JPO identifies issues of particular concern to users as challenges in examination quality management, the process of identifying these challenges should be designed to avoid bias toward the opinions of specific individuals.
- To understand user needs and provide services that are convincing to all users, the JPO must continue holding meetings to exchange views with a diverse range of users.

Design

2. For quality management of design examination

<Recommendation 1> [Evaluation items (1), (4), (5), and (6)]

The JPO is expected to maintain and improve the examination quality by ensuring that the number of examiners is at an internationally comparable level, working on training them, improving the examination implementation system, and further improving the efficiency of the examination and quality management operations.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- The JPO is expected to ensure a sufficient number of examiners and enhance their training.
- The protection of shapes in virtual spaces is currently under discussion. If such objects become eligible for protection, the number of designs subject to examination is expected to increase significantly. Accordingly, the JPO is urged to consider establishing a new examination system to accommodate this change.

<Recommendation 2> [Evaluation item (6)]

The JPO is expected to promote the use of AI technologies in examination procedures, including prior design searches, as well as in quality management processes, while considering the characteristics of AI technologies and exploring the potential use of new AI technologies.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- In light of the need for an industrial property rights system suitable for the digital transformation (DX) era, it is highly commendable that the Design System Subcommittee continues to engage in ongoing discussions regarding "the appropriate framework for the design system in virtual spaces" and "appropriate responses within the design system in light of the advancement of generative AI technology." Once it has finalized its report, the subcommittee is requested to make its findings public.
- Regarding the issue of "the descriptions in decisions of refusal," the JPO is requested to consider integrating generative AI technology into quality management processes such as quality audits and draft checking, in the same manner as for patents.

<Recommendation 3> [Evaluation items (6), (7), (8), and (11)]

The JPO is expected to take effective measures to address examination quality issues, such as consistency of judgments among examiners, and to effectively communicate the results of such measures to the outside world.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

Design

- It is highly commendable that the JPO is holding discussions on examination quality with all design examiners. The JPO should continue these efforts and consider publishing the results once they have been compiled.
- It seems that examiners may have different interpretations of matters not explicitly addressed in the Examination Guidelines for Design and the relevant documents. For instance, they may disagree on how to determine the scope of similarity when the areas represented by broken lines (any other parts other than the part for which the design registration is requested) differ in drawings attached to the applications, as well as on how to determine the similarity of the usage and function in cases of graphic image designs. The JPO is expected to analyze the discrepancies in examiners' judgments that have emerged during quality management and work toward standardizing and improving the efficiency of examination judgments, such as by incorporating these findings into the Examination Guidelines for Design.
- Regarding the analysis of examination quality and the identification of issues, it is likely that some issues cannot be identified through user satisfaction surveys alone. It is suggested that the JPO include inquiries received from users in the scope of issue identification by analyzing them.
- Does the JPO review the appropriateness of the cases selected for audits? If not, the JPO should consider conducting such reviews regularly.
- The JPO is expected to improve its quality management measures, including audits tailored to examine international design applications.
- The JPO is expected to disseminate information internationally regarding its measures and gather information on the quality management measures of foreign offices.

<Recommendation 4> [Evaluation items (1), (6), (7), and (11)]

The JPO is expected to actively conduct interview examinations and exchange opinions with various users in order to further enhance communication and deepen mutual understanding between users and examiners.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- It is desirable for the JPO to enhance communication and mutual understanding with applicants, both face-to-face and online.

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3. For quality management of trademark examination

<Recommendation 1> [Evaluation items (4) and (6)]

The JPO is expected to keep working on securing the number of examiners and training them, and to implement measures to improve the efficiency of examination operations and the consistency of judgments among examiners through the use of AI technologies and other means.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- The JPO is expected to ensure a sufficient number of examiners and enhance their training.
- The JPO is expected to continue conducting pilot studies from various perspectives to improve the efficiency of examination operations using AI technologies and other methods, and to publish the results of these studies to the extent possible.
- The JPO is expected to identify tasks that are suitable for AI technologies, verify them thoroughly, and implement them to improve operational efficiency. This will allow staff to devote their time and effort to tasks that require human judgment, enhancing quality.

<Recommendation 2> [Evaluation items (7) and (8)]

The JPO is expected to understand user concerns and needs through conducting user satisfaction surveys, exchanging opinions, and other methods; accurately analyze and identify issues based on these concerns and needs; and propose specific measures to address them.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- The following measures by the JPO are expected to contribute to maintaining and improving the quality of examinations: publicly releasing reports on the User Satisfaction Survey results; identifying and establishing priority issues based on those results; and sharing this information within the Examination Departments.
- Based on the results of the User Satisfaction Survey, priority issues have been identified, including "consistency in judgments among examiners." It would be preferable if the JPO conducted an in-depth analysis of why users were unsatisfied and specified how it intends to address these issues explicitly.
- It is suggested that the JPO broaden the range of users with whom it exchanges opinions to better identify issues related to the descriptions of the grounds and rationale for judgments in notices and decisions of refusal.

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<Recommendation 3> [Evaluation items (6) and (7)]

The JPO is expected to make its measures more convincing to users by appropriately addressing their concerns and needs, e.g., regarding the consistency of judgments among examiners, and by advancing efforts to enhance the descriptions of the grounds and rationale for judgments in notices and decisions of refusal.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- The JPO would need to continue current measures to address user concerns and needs regarding consistency of judgments among examiners, consistency with the appeals/trials, and judgments on distinctiveness. In addition, it is expected to conduct examinations that are convincing to users in accordance with the fundamental policy that examiners should conduct consistent examinations based on guidelines such as the Examination Guidelines for Trademarks.
- The JPO is still expected to provide sufficient descriptions of the grounds and rationale for judgments in notices and decisions of refusal. Users are more likely to be convinced when these are adequately explained. Therefore, the JPO should indicate which provisions of the Examination Guidelines or Examination Manual were applied and explain the logic used to reach the judgments.
- When the JPO assesses trademark distinctiveness against the provision of Article 3(1)(iii) of the Trademark Act, inconsistencies arise in identifying consumers, selecting appropriate evidence, and determining facts based on that evidence. In particular, the factual findings underlying the distinctiveness determination are often inadequate. Therefore, the JPO should strengthen its training programs for examiners on methods for determining facts.

<Recommendation 4> [Evaluation items (10) and (11)]

The JPO is expected to continue its measures for further facilitating communication with users and to further disseminate information on quality management measures.

The following are the major comments from the Subcommittee members on which the above recommendations were based:

- The JPO is expected to continue measures to further facilitate communication with users, including online communications.
- The JPO is expected to make its quality management measures known to users in an easily understandable and visible manner.

IV. Conclusion

By evaluating the implementation system and status of quality management in FY 2025, the Subcommittee confirmed that the evaluations and improvement recommendations made by the Subcommittee in FY 2024 were reflected in the measures taken by the JPO.

In light of the above, the Subcommittee expects that the JPO will continue its efforts to improve examination quality by incorporating the evaluations and improvement recommendations for the implementation system and status of quality management as outlined in this report into the measures to be taken by the JPO. This would further improve the implementation of the examination quality management system and promote better cooperation with user applicants and their representative patent attorneys.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Table of evaluation items and criteria concerning examination quality management

Items	Objectives and perspectives	Examples for evaluation materials	Examples of evaluation methods and evaluation criteria			
			Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Generally Achieved	Requiring Improvements
I. Have policies, procedures, and systems been established to achieve high-quality examination?						
1. Have policies and procedures been established to achieve high-quality examination?						
(1) Status of the creation of quality policies, quality manuals, and other documents	To evaluate whether quality policies stipulating the fundamental principles of quality management, quality manuals describing measures for improvement of examination quality management along with the roles of departments, divisions, and personnel, and other documents indicating specific procedures for the purpose of quality management have been appropriately created, and to confirm whether the code of conduct for the improvement of examination quality has been documented.	Quality policies and quality manuals, sample documents for specific procedures, etc.	Quality Policies, quality manuals, and documents indicating specific procedures have been created and have been appropriately managed.	Quality policies and quality manuals have been created, and documents indicating specific procedures have also been created.	Quality policies and quality manuals have been created.	Either quality policies or quality manuals have been created.
(2) Clarity of procedures for examination and quality management	To evaluate whether it is clearly stipulated who is to do what and when regarding examination and quality management, and to confirm whether specific procedures for the improvement of examination quality have been defined.	The procedural methods, workflows, etc., for examination and quality management	The procedures and responsible persons for examination and quality management have been made sufficiently clear.	The procedures and responsible persons for examination and quality management have been made clear.	The procedures and responsible persons for examination and quality management have been generally made clear.	The procedures and responsible persons for examination and quality management have not been made clear.
(3) Publication of the fundamental principles and procedures of quality management to users of IP systems and dissemination of such information to staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To evaluate whether the JPO's fundamental principles of examination quality management that the JPO has formulated as a goal, and other relevant measures have been clearly shown to users of IP systems, including overseas users, and to confirm whether examination quality is allowed to be evaluated in relation to such fundamental principles. To evaluate whether the fundamental principles of examination quality management that the JPO has formulated as a goal have been sufficiently disseminated to and understood by staff, and to confirm whether staff is allowed to conduct their work in accordance with them. 	The status of publication, the methods of access, the status of dissemination to staff and their understanding, etc.	The quality management policies and procedures have been published to the extent that they are easily accessible to users, including those overseas, and have been disseminated through various methods to all staff involved in the examination. In addition, staff receive regular training and have a good understanding of the training content.	The quality management policies and procedures have been published to the extent that they are easily accessible to national users and have been disseminated through various methods to all staff involved in the examination.	The quality management policies and procedures have been published and disseminated to all staff involved in the examination.	The quality management policies and procedures have not been published or disseminated to staff.

Appendix 1: Table of evaluation items and criteria concerning examination quality management

Items	Objectives and perspectives	Examples for evaluation materials	Examples of evaluation methods and evaluation criteria				
			Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Generally Achieved	Requiring Improvements	
I. Have policies, procedures, and systems been established to achieve high-quality examination?							
2. Have systems been established to achieve high-quality examination?							
(4)	Examination implementation system	To evaluate the organizational structure responsible for examinations, including the number of examiners, and to confirm whether to establish the world's highest level of examination implementation system that can efficiently handle the required number of cases.	The examination implementation system, the examination implementation status, a comparison with other countries, etc.	While efficiently conducting the required number of examination cases, the JPO has established the world's highest level of organizational structure for examination and personnel deployment.	While efficiently conducting the required number of examination cases, the JPO has established an internationally comparable level of organizational structure for examination and personnel deployment.	While efficiently conducting the required number of examination cases, the JPO has generally established an internationally comparable level of organizational structure for examination and personnel deployment.	The JPO has not established an internationally comparable level of organizational structure for examination and personnel deployment.
(5)	Quality management system	To evaluate the organizational structure responsible for quality management, including the number of staff in charge of quality management, and to confirm whether to establish the world's highest level of quality management system with efficiency and effectiveness.	The quality management system, a comparison with other countries, etc.	At the world's highest level, measures for the quality management system have been planned efficiently and effectively, and the organizational structure and personnel deployment to implement such measures have been established.	At the internationally comparable level, measures for the quality management system have been planned efficiently and effectively, and the organizational structure and personnel deployment to implement such measures have been established.	At the internationally comparable level, measures for the quality management system have been planned efficiently and effectively, and the organizational structure and personnel deployment to implement such measures have been generally established.	At the internationally comparable level, measures for the quality management system have neither been planned efficiently and effectively, nor have the organizational structure and personnel deployment to implement such measures been established.

Appendix 1: Table of evaluation items and criteria concerning examination quality management

Items	Objectives and perspectives	Examples for evaluation materials	Examples of evaluation methods and evaluation criteria				
			Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Generally Achieved	Requiring Improvements	
II. Has the quality management been implemented according to the policies and procedures?							
1. Has the quality management been appropriately implemented?							
(6)	Measures for quality improvement	To evaluate whether measures necessary to improve examination quality have been planned, specifically how and to what extent such measures have been implemented according to the policies and procedures, and to confirm whether the objectives of the measures have been achieved.	The status of quality assurance checks on notices of reasons for refusal and the like, the status of examiner consultations, and quantitative data such as the number of interviews	Measures necessary for quality improvement have been planned and implemented as planned, and the objectives of the measures have been achieved, with effects that contribute to further quality improvement.	Measures necessary for quality improvement have been planned and implemented as planned, and the objectives of the measures have been achieved.	Measures necessary for quality improvement have been planned and implemented mostly as planned.	Measures necessary for quality improvement have not been planned or, if planned, have not been implemented as planned.
(7)	Measures for quality verification	To evaluate whether measures necessary to verify examination quality have been planned, specifically how and to what extent such measures have been implemented according to the policies and procedures, and to confirm whether the objectives of the measures have been achieved.	The status of measures, including quality audits (sampling checks), user satisfaction surveys, confirmation of discrepancies in judgments between the examination decision and the appeal/trial decision, quantitative data obtained from the results of such measures, etc.	Measures necessary to verify examination quality have been planned and implemented as planned, and the objectives of the measures have been achieved, with effects that contribute to further quality improvement.	Measures necessary to verify examination quality have been planned and implemented as planned, and the objectives of the measures have been achieved.	Measures necessary to verify examination quality have been planned and implemented mostly as planned.	Measures necessary to verify examination quality have not been planned or, if planned, have not been implemented as planned.
(8)	Examination quality analysis and identification of issues	To evaluate specifically how the quality of the examination has been analyzed and the issues that have been identified based on the results of the analysis, and to confirm whether the methods of analysis and the identification of issues have been appropriate.	The analysis methods and results, identified issues, etc., concerning the quality of searches, that of judgments in examinations, and that of descriptive content in notices of reasons for refusal and the like	Analysis of examination quality and identification of issues have been conducted sufficiently and from a comprehensive perspective.	Analysis of examination quality and identification of issues have been conducted sufficiently.	Analysis of examination quality and identification of issues have been generally conducted.	Analysis of examination quality and identification of issues have not been conducted.

Appendix 1: Table of evaluation items and criteria concerning examination quality management

Items	Objectives and perspectives	Examples for evaluation materials	Examples of evaluation methods and evaluation criteria				
			Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Generally Achieved	Requiring Improvements	
II. Has the quality management been implemented according to the policies and procedures?							
2. Has continuous improvement been appropriately implemented?							
(9)	Status of improvement of the policies, procedures, and systems to achieve high-quality examination [evaluation items (1) to (5)]	To evaluate whether improvements have been made specifically to evaluation items (1) to (5) and to confirm that the status of the improvements has been appropriate.	The status of revising the Quality Manuals, the implementation system of examination, the quality management system, etc.	Sufficient improvements have been made to the policies, procedures, and systems at an excellent level.	Sufficient improvements have been made to the policies, procedures, and systems.	Improvements have been generally made to the policies, procedures, and systems.	No improvement has been made to the policies, procedures, and systems.
(10)	Status of improvement of quality management measures [evaluation items (6) to (8)]	To evaluate whether improvements have been made to evaluation items (6) to (8) and to confirm that the status of the improvements has been appropriate.	The correlative relationship between the analysis of examination quality or the identification of issues, the status of improvement in quality management measures, etc.	The improvement in quality management measures has been sufficiently made at an excellent level.	The improvement in quality management measures has been sufficiently made.	The improvement in quality management measures has been generally made.	No improvement in quality management measures has been made.
III. Has information on measures for examination quality improvement been communicated?							
(11)	Communication of information on measures for examination quality improvement	To evaluate whether information on measures for examination quality improvement has been appropriately communicated and to confirm whether the JPO's quality management has been well understood both inside and outside Japan, and efforts have been made to increase the JPO's presence in the field of examination quality management, and as a result, trust has been gained.	The status of communication of information on measures for examination quality improvement, the status of meetings with foreign IP offices and the like, as well as the dispatch and acceptance of examiners, the status of PPH usage, etc.	Information on measures for examination quality improvement has been ambitiously communicated both inside and outside Japan, and continuous cooperative relations with organizations and bodies inside and outside Japan have been built up.	Information on measures for examination quality improvement has been communicated both inside and outside Japan, and cooperative relations with organizations and bodies inside and outside Japan have been built up.	Information on measures for examination quality improvement has been communicated both inside and outside Japan.	No information on measures for examination quality improvement has been communicated outside Japan.

Appendix 2: Table of evaluation results in FY 2025

*Each item is evaluated on a 4-point scale: "Very Satisfactory," "Satisfactory," "Generally Achieved," and "Requiring Improvements."

Evaluation item		Patent	Design	Trademark
(1)	Status of the creation of quality policies, quality manuals, and other documents	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory
(2)	Clarity of procedures for examination and quality management	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory
(3)	Publication of the fundamental principles and procedures of quality management to users of IP systems and dissemination of such information to staff	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory
(4)	Examination implementation system	Satisfactory	Generally Achieved	Generally Achieved
(5)	Quality management system	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
(6)	Measures for quality improvement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
(7)	Measures for quality verification	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
(8)	Examination quality analysis and identification of issues	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
(9)	Status of improvement of the policies, procedures, and systems to achieve high-quality examination [evaluation items (1) to (5)]	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
(10)	Status of improvement of quality management measures [evaluation items (6) to (8)]	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
(11)	Communication of information on initiatives for examination quality improvement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Appendix 3: Table of recommendations made in FY 2025

	Patent	Design	Trademark
Recommendation 1	The JPO should continue to secure a number of examiners at an internationally comparable level and to develop an examination system for cutting-edge technologies, such as AI-related inventions. In addition, the JPO is expected to further enhance examiners' judgment capabilities and improve examination quality centered on human judgment, while increasing operational efficiency through the use of generative AI technology.	The JPO is expected to maintain and improve the examination quality by ensuring that the number of examiners is at an internationally comparable level, working on training them, improving the examination implementation system, and further improving the efficiency of the examination and quality management operations.	The JPO is expected to keep working on securing the number of examiners and training them, and to implement measures to improve the efficiency of examination operations and the consistency of judgments among examiners through the use of AI technologies and other means.
Recommendation 2	The JPO is expected to pilot the integration of generative AI technology into quality management procedures, analyze its benefits and challenges, and pave the way for its full-scale implementation and future enhancements.	The JPO is expected to promote the use of AI technologies in examination procedures, including prior design searches, as well as in quality management processes, while considering the characteristics of AI technologies and exploring the potential use of new AI technologies.	The JPO is expected to understand user concerns and needs through conducting user satisfaction surveys, exchanging opinions, and other methods; accurately analyze and identify issues based on these concerns and needs; and propose specific measures to address them.
Recommendation 3	The JPO is expected to continue analyzing examination quality and identifying issues to improve consistency among examiners' judgments. The JPO is also expected to promote examiner-led quality improvements, such as voluntary consultations among examiners.	The JPO is expected to take effective measures to address examination quality issues, such as consistency of judgments among examiners, and to effectively communicate the results of such measures to the outside world.	The JPO is expected to make its measures more convincing to users by appropriately addressing their concerns and needs, e.g., regarding the consistency of judgments among examiners, and by advancing efforts to enhance the descriptions of the grounds and rationale for judgments in notices and decisions of refusal.
Recommendation 4	The JPO is expected to understand user needs and provide services that are convincing to all users by consistently holding meetings to exchange views with a diverse range of users, while avoiding bias toward the opinions of specific individuals.	The JPO is expected to actively conduct interview examinations and exchange opinions with various users in order to further enhance communication and deepen mutual understanding between users and examiners.	The JPO is expected to continue its measures for further facilitating communication with users and to further disseminate information on quality management measures.