



Public-private partnership: the best of both worlds?

Laura Creemers (Senior researcher) is clear: one partner within a public-private partnership will be more patient-orientated than another. ‘Sometimes money is a bigger incentive for participating in an innovation programme. For this reason it is wise to subject prospective parties to very close scrutiny. Who are they? Where do their interests lie?’

For the biomaterials project that Creemers was involved with, motives were clear. All parties were focused on a solution to a big medical problem: lower back pain. And each partner had a unique contribution to make towards a solution. Creemers: ‘DSM had biomaterials that could probably be made suitable for such an application. TNO and InGell supplied hydrogels that could also function as a shock absorber in the intervertebral discs. And the academic partners were able to investigate whether these materials were suitable for such purpose.’

Avoiding misunderstandings

In substance, the partnership was ideal. However, that did not alter the fact that the business world and the academic world appeared to be two different worlds, according to Creemers. ‘Businesses want to earn money: they have to earn money. The momentum of the project and the protection of intellectual property rights are very important elements. By contrast, research is the most important component for academic partners. This can lead to misunderstanding. It is therefore important to identify each party’s priorities, and their mutual expectations. I don’t know if everyone is always equally honest in this process, but it is worth the effort for the party to be honest.’

Commercial agreements

Creemers explains that right from the start commercial agreements were made concerning income generated as a result of the project. And as an academic she also immediately made it clear that the result of the project would be a proof of concept. Accordingly, it is up to businesses to develop the innovation themselves.

‘It was good that we discussed this at the beginning. One of the companies assumed that the academic partners would carry out contract research, thereby enabling the company to immediately launch the product on the market at the end of the project. But this cannot be achieved given the area of expertise of the academy.’

Senior researcher Laura Creemers (UMC Utrecht) worked within the Biomedical Materials programme with TNO, DSM, InGell, and a number of academic partners on biomedical materials for the treatment of back pain caused by degenerative disc disease.

