# Spinning Out?

**The project brief**

This project was a pilot study to investigate the feasibility of commercialising University IP for which the existing Fusion model is not appropriate.

Two projects were funded with an aim to exploring the process of taking an idea and developing it into a feasible business. The focus was not on the creation of spin outs themselves.

**Key impacts**

The feasibility projects have provided two very interesting key themes:

- There is potential for provision of additional learning opportunities which are designed to increase understanding and awareness levels of researchers regarding; product development processes, the intellectual property protection process and generic business skills

The university is currently reviewing the continuing professional development opportunities that are made available to PIs across a range of topics and this knowledge is invaluable as regards providing opportunities that are both needed and important to research.

- Two applied examples of projects assessed by the commercialisation team as not being viable for commercialisation indeed proving not to be profitable enough to recover their start up costs

Whilst this was understandably very disappointing for the academics involved, the learning for all involved during the process was broad and applied and generated to excellent case study examples.

**Outcomes observed**

Asynamics was set up in order to try and commercialise organic chemistry molecules and went on to licence the produced molecules to Farapack polymers. The Asynamics project highlighted the changes in the way the fine chemical industry now works and that the licensing of patented chemical synthesis routes is rarely going to be a successful route to commercialisation.

The second project explored the design and production of an anatomical lab-coat for teaching and learning purposes.

During the project it was proven that the market for lab-coats and teaching aids is inherently seasonal with a window of sales opportunity between late August and early October as students and teachers commence anatomy courses.

In attempting to develop the anatomical lab-coat it became apparent that the costs of production, coupled with the seasonality of purchasing did not allow enough of a margin to build further stock unless significant promotion costs were incurred.

As the project progressed it became clear that a viable lab-coat product would need to be approved as an item of personal protective equipment and the costs in generating the safety data and employing a notified body with a view to creating the necessary CE mark documents would be prohibitive. This barrier was too great to overcome and halted any possibility of selling the lab coats and thus establishing a business.

**The legacy**

The designer of Asynamics has now taken up employment with the University of Sheffield as a Business Development Manager and as such is utilising his commercial learning and understanding of intellectual property ownership to be effective in his new role.

The lab-coat visionary has learnt significantly more about the regulatory hurdles often encountered during product development and has thoroughly explored the viability of the vision, even though the results did not result in the ideal outcome.

**Enterprise & Innovation**

The designer of Asynamics certainly showed an enterprising mindset in creating extremely credible marketing and website information in order to promote the proposed chemical products.

The lab-coat visionary was very thorough in carrying out market research of high quality, using online tools and this was very informative for the project. The market research carried out with staff and students within the university was also very informative.

The engagement with relevant businesses and design specialists to source the appropriate anatomical images was also thorough and creative, requiring tenacity and flexibility.

**Quotes and personal experience**

“It is difficult to patent ideas for teaching tool or strategies in the same way as innovative technologies as they are usually fundamentally simple so alternatives such as trade marking need to be considered.”

“The experiences presented to me through the REIF award have given me a valued insight into the difficulties in commercialising university research in terms of IP and interfering with the legal status of the institution.”

**To find out more contact**

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