



'With the new Innovation Agenda Aviation we are exploiting the future aircraft programmes'

The development of new aircraft and aircraft engines usually takes place in the context of international partnerships.

"If Dutch companies want to carry on playing a significant role on this world stage then they must continue to invest in new technologies and products. NIVR advises the government about this. As the current Statement on Aeronautics Policy runs out in 2010, we started with the new Dutch Strategic Research Agenda Aircraft Development last year. This will be the innovation agenda for the next decade", says programme manager Aircraft Development, Ingrid Houthuysen.

New agenda

In 2010, the so-called Statement on Aeronautics Policy will expire. "Last year in cooperation with the sector we started drawing up a new agenda. As soon as it has been completed in 2008 we will also be able to steer the use of existing instruments in the current policy to 2010. This will enable us to respond well to current developments", says programme manager Houthuysen.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs wants to gain an insight into future developments but also the costs and benefits of these. "The government often plays a major role in aircraft development as this frequently involves expensive research. Costs which the industry alone cannot cover. The problem for this sector is that the time needed to earn back the investment is very long. It sometimes takes 20 years before fundamental knowledge is used in aircraft. With the contributions of the Dutch government and the EU, we can acquire a lot of knowledge as a country and the industry keeps abreast of the latest developments. NIVR coordinates such research programmes and brings together the relevant parties for the drawing up of the new innovation agenda. Apart from the relevant industrial players, we also cooperate closely with the knowledge institutes Delft University of Technology, the National Aerospace Laboratory (NLR) and TNO when drawing up the agenda."

Objectives

An important change of course at the Ministry of Economic Affairs is the switch from sector policy to innovation programmes. "The industry must indicate its ambitions in the programme and which aspects require financial support from the government. The innovation agenda for aircraft construction is put together in a similar manner. NIVR actively

approaches companies to participate in such an innovation agenda. Once they have established their objectives, they can assess how much knowledge, experience, personnel and resources they need and have available to realise their plans. Ultimately the sector owns the process and NIVR facilitates it."

It is also difficult for experts to look far into the future, admits Ingrid Houthuysen. "Therefore an innovation agenda can provide more grip on the situation for a period of say five years. Instead of developing at their own initiative, companies now use this programme to build up knowledge and expertise in a more focused manner in cooperation with other businesses and organisations. That is far more profitable. For example, the Netherlands has always held a strong position in the area of lightweight materials and components. Via the innovation agenda that can be better exploited at an international level. Take, for example, the development of the JSF and the Airbus. By bringing together parties in clusters they can adopt a stronger position and can jointly reap the benefits. We have an important role in that process." NIVR also makes a contribution in terms of knowledge and expertise. "We have a lot of in-house expertise and are well informed about international developments. Many companies, particularly SMEs, make thankful use of this." Ultimately the preparations have led to four themes in the new innovation agenda. "These are Materials, Engines, Systems and Production/Design methods. Importantly we have established concrete objectives and a clear approach for these themes. Although these themes have emerged from the Dutch industry, wherever possible we will cooperate with foreign firms. This is because aircraft development is very much an international business."