

« GSK meets Belgian universities »

Regional scientific associations bring together researchers from industry and universities

Following the success of the first edition in 2018, BioWin (the health cluster of Wallonia), flanders.bio (the organization representing Belgian life sciences companies), and Flanders Vaccine (the organisation which focuses on public-private partnerships for vaccines and immunotherapy research and business), organised the scientific event "GSK meets Belgian Universities" for the second time. The purpose of the meeting was to facilitate the exchange of ideas and deepen the dialogue on common vaccine research challenges.

These three associations play an important role in supporting biotechnology in Belgium's regions and strive to promote the collaboration between the public and private sectors. The event on Thursday 4th April allowed nearly 70 researchers from the academic world to meet more than 60 researchers from GSK.

Sylvie Ponchaut, Managing Director of Biowin: *"As a leading player in the field of health biotechnology and medical technologies in Wallonia, we are delighted, through this initiative, to create a place for scientists from our universities and GSK to meet and exchange ideas, with the aim of encouraging collaboration."*

Katrien Lorré, Program Manager at flanders.bio: *"This initiative helps stimulate research and innovation in our country, and solidifies the reputation of our ecosystem internationally."*

Fran Van Heuverswyn, Project Manager, Flanders Vaccine: *"Through this event, we encourage the development of vaccines by facilitating the exchange of innovative and complementary expertise and technologies between our universities and GSK, whose global vaccine division's headquarters is located in Belgium."*

GSK is one of the world's leading vaccine manufacturers, with a portfolio of more than 30 vaccines for infants, adolescents and adults as well as 16 other vaccines under development. More than 2 million vaccines are produced by GSK every day and are sent to populations in 158 countries. 70% of these vaccines are distributed to developing countries. In Belgium, GSK's more than 9,000 employees make it the largest pharmaceutical company. Historically, GSK is very close to the academic world. For example, GSK established 13 scientific collaborations with Belgian academies in 2018.

The event's morning session focused on opportunities to integrate new approaches and technologies to accelerate the development of new vaccines. Among the subjects treated, Professor Hilde Revets of the UAntwerpen presented when to consider developing or using controlled human infection models (CHIMs). Professor Hugues Bersini of the ULB presented the biomedical applications of artificial intelligence.

Emmanuel Hanon, GSK's Senior Vice President Research and Development, introduced the event: *"Accelerating research to discover new vaccines is crucial: it will allow us to better meet the challenges posed by many infectious diseases throughout the world and prevent them."*

In the afternoon, the agenda covered the highly anticipated theme "Immunology: new challenges/solutions in inducing and modulating the immune response", including presentations by Professor Michel Braun, on suppressing the immune system's brakes, and Prof. Patrice Cani, on the relationship between intestinal flora and immunity.

Jamila Louahed, Vice President and Head of the GSK Research and Development Centre in Belgium: "*Understanding the immune mechanisms needed to combat pathogens associated with chronic diseases is critical for the development of new vaccines. Without collaboration between the public and the private sector, innovation in this area is almost impossible. Today, 90% of our vaccines have been developed with Belgian and international partners.*"

The different group discussions allowed for interesting exchanges between the participants, all driven by the main objective of this event: to identify new, innovative opportunities for future engagement, to optimise specific sectoral/academic collaborations and to establish a coordinated network of links on several levels between GSK's historic vaccine research centre in Belgium and Belgian universities.

