DEFRA

DEFENCE-RELATED RESEARCH ACTION

DEFRA

Defence-related Research Action

Call for proposals 2026
Information document including submission and evaluation guidelines and budget rules

Important dates:

Information day: 27 & 28 January 2026 (8h30 – 16h30)
Deadline Pre-proposals: 19 February 2026 (14h00)
Deadline Full proposals: 4 May 2026(14h00)

For more information on the programme, please visit https://www.belspo.be/defra

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

1.1 CONTEXT

Scientific and technological research in the domain of security and defence is key to maintaining the Belgian Defence military and technological edge, to face current and future security challenges.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Defence (2025)[1] seeks to further develop and strengthen the links between Defence, the national research institutions and the industry by gradually increasing its R&T contribution as from 2022, with a view to reaching 2% of the total defence effort in 2030.

The setup of the Defence-related Research Action - DEFRA - fits perfectly in and contributes to the implementation of this strategic vision and general policy for Defence.

1.2 ROLE OF THE ROYAL HIGHER INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE - RHID

As a "smart hub" and "honest broker" for scientific and technological research, the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID) is responsible for the development and implementation of the Ministry of Defence's policy on scientific and technological research. Within this policy, twelve focus areas have been identified, in which research is actively supported and stimulated.

As a "smart hub", RHID aims to promote the growth of Belgian scientific and technological research in the field of defence and security, as well as to restore and strengthen the links between administrations, universities and companies at this prospect. It wishes to achieve this, among others, by promoting and facilitating the participation of Belgium and the Belgian Ministry of Defence in international, national and regional research programmes. In addition, the results of research are published annually for a wide audience and colloquia are held regularly.

As an "honest broker", RHID manages and facilitates, through the department Scientific and Technological Research of Defence (STRD), the research programme of the Ministry of Defence. Although in the past this programme was primarily reserved for Defence research institutions, collaboration with other partners, including Belgian research institutes and industry, is increasingly becoming the norm.

The Ministry of Defence wants to further develop its capabilities through collaborative research with external partners by launching annual open calls for proposals within the frame of its research programme. The current call is the sixth DEFRA call, based on nine (9) well-defined research themes and one (1) open call in which applicants can propose Defence-relevant research.

More information on the institute and its activities can be found on the website: https://www.defence-institute.be/en/accueil-english/

1.3 COLLABORATION WITH THE FEDERAL SCIENCE POLICY – BELSPO

For organising and managing the DEFRA calls for proposals, a long-term collaboration agreement has been signed on 13 December 2021 between the Ministry of Defence and the Federal Science Policy (BELSPO). BELSPO will manage these calls for proposals on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. For the selected projects, funding is granted by and contracts will be concluded with the Ministry of Defence.

[1] Strategische visie 2025 / Vision Stratégique 2025

2 DEFENCE-RELATED RESEARCH ACTION – DEFRA

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

Through the funding of research projects based on scientific excellence, the DEFRA programme allows meeting the scientific knowledge needs of the Belgian Defence.

The general objectives of the programme are the following:

- Support and strengthen scientific excellence.
- Develop and realise a critical research mass on themes considered to be a priority for Belgian Defence in order to:
    - contribute to short- and long-term capacity development, in line with the Integrated Capability Development Plan (ICDP) and the Strategic Vision for Defence.
    - contribute to the culture of innovation planned within Defence, both in terms of technology and process improvement.
    - foster employment for Defence.
    - contribute, in accordance with the Defence, Industry and Research Strategy (DIRS), to the development of a competitive and credible national industrial and technological base in the field of security and defence.
- Encourage the participation of highly qualified Belgian research institutes and industry in Defence and security related research activities.
- Promote systemic, multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary and integrative approaches.
- Strengthen transdisciplinary research in order to enable potential users to make better use of the research achievements.

This is the **sixth call** in the frame of the DEFRA programme.

2.2 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR PROJECT PARTNERS

This call is open to **Belgian** public and private non-profit research institutes and private companies.

From the **public research sector**, all Belgian universities, colleges of higher education, federal scientific institutions, defence research institutes and other public research institutes are eligible partners.

Private non-profit research centres must have operational and/or research activities in Belgium. They must have legal personality and their registered office in Belgium.

From the **private sector**, companies (including SMEs) complying with the following criteria are eligible partners:

- The company must have operational and/or research activities on the Belgian territory.
- The company must have a legal personality and its registered office in Belgium. The legal personality is required at the latest when signing the research contract.
- At the moment of signing the contract, the company must have fulfilled its obligations to pay its taxes and social security contributions.

Foreign organisations cannot participate as a funded partner nor as a subcontractor. They can only participate in the call as non-funded partner.

Non-funded partners must be registered in a country of the European Union or in a country of the European Free Trade Association or in a country that is a member of NATO. They will have to submit a cash or in-kind commitment letter at the stage of the full proposal. If the non-funded partner is a company, a(i)sbl or a foundation they will have to deliver an extract of the UBO register.

The project partnership must be in a **triple helix composition** where academia and industry work together to foster R&T for Defence. Specific partnership requirements per theme are set out in section 3.5.

NOTE: As foreseen in the law of 18 September 2017, **companies, a(i)sbl and foundations** must have submitted accurate and current information on their beneficial owners to the UBO (Ultimate Beneficial Owner) register of the FPS Finances. **The delivery of an extract of the UBO register is a formal requirement for a valid application for the call.**

For funded partners, non-funded partners and subcontractors:
You are a **company, a(i)sbl or a foundation**? You must upload an extract from the **UBO register** in the online platform! Failing to deliver an extract from the UBO register will result in exclusion of your pre-proposal.

The documents of the applicants are submitted to the General Intelligence and Security Service which will examine them in accordance with its missions and legal powers as defined in the law of November 30, 1998 governing intelligence and security services.

2.3 INFORMATION DAYS

To inform potential applicants about the context, scope and modalities of this call and to offer them network opportunities, two information days will be held on **Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 January at the Royal Military Academy.**

Registration prior to the event is required.

More details are announced through the **DEFRA-website** and the **website of the RHID** as well as through social media.

3 CALL INFORMATION

3.1 DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THIS CALL

3.1.1 DEFRA WEBSITE

The following documents are available on the **DEFRA website** (https://www.belspo.be/defra):

- Information document, including submission and evaluation guidelines and budget rules: general information on the programme and the call, overview proposal content and corresponding evaluation criteria for the applicants and the evaluators (the present document)
- Evaluators eligibility: eligibility criteria for potential remote evaluators
- Evaluation matrix for pre-proposals: overview of the evaluation ratings for the pre-proposals
- Evaluation matrix for full proposals: overview of the evaluation ratings for the full proposals
- Platform Submission guidelines: information for the applicants on the use of the submission platform
- FAQ
- Annexe II – general conditions applicable to the 2026 contracts
- Templates for PHASE 1: the submission of pre-proposals:
    - Pre-proposal template
- Templates for PHASE 2: the submission of full proposals (for projects who have been invited to submit a full proposal):
    - Full proposal template
    - Data Management Plan
    - Ethics self-assessment
    - Gantt chart
    - Budget file
    - Cash or in-kind commitment letter (for non-funded partners – non mandatory, only if applicable)
    - Visual/graphical abstract (non mandatory)

For more information on the submission procedure please see section 4.

3.2 INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF THE CALL

	Date	**At / via**
Information session	27 and 28 January	RMA, building I, meeting room Frank De Winne
Deadline Pre-proposals	19 February 2026 (14h00)	Online submission platform
Communication of evaluation result pre-proposals	23 March 2026	Mail
Deadline Full proposals	4 May 2026 (14h00)	Online submission platform
Remote scientific peer review evaluation	5 May – 1 June 2026	Online evaluation platform
Ethical evaluation	5 May – 5 June 2026	RHID
Feedback to applicants in preparation of panel meeting (remote scientific peer evaluation, ethical evaluation & questions to applicants)	10 June 2026	Mail
Written feedback by applicants (answers)	19 June 2026	Mail
Panel evaluation, incl. interviews with the applicants	Between 22 June and 15 July 2026	RHID

Selection proposal formulated by the scientific committee of the RHID	4 September2026	NA
Final selection of proposals by the board of directors of the RHID and allocation of projects	10 September2026	NA
Communication of results to applicants	14 September 2026	Mail

3.3 RESEARCH THEMES AND INDICATIVE BUDGET OF THIS CALL

The present call covers the following research themes, with their indicative budget:

	Indicative budget (M€)
Theme 1 – Resilient Propulsion Technologies for Strategic Autonomy	2.0
Theme 2 – Cyber: Advanced Data Management and Intelligence Concepts	3.0
Theme 3 – Innovative Solutions for Military Medical Logistics in Challenging Environments	2.0
Theme 4 – Biomanufacturing	2.0
Theme 5 – Smart energy management, energy optimisation (including optimised storage technologies)	3.0
Theme 6 – Next generation sensing	2.0
Theme 7 – Exploring and Integrating Unmanned Systems	2.0
Theme 8 – Conflict Dynamics & Warning Intelligence	2.0
Theme 9 – Communications Technology	2.0
Theme 10 - Open call: Defence relevant research	6.0
TOTAL	**26.0**

The “Open call” (theme 10) is open to any research relevant for defence across a broad spectrum. Proposals can only be introduced in the “Open call” if the subject of the proposal does not correspond with one of the other nine themes. Duplication with the Human Factors or the Space call must be avoided.

There is no set maximum budget per project. However, applicants should take into consideration the total available budget for each theme. The objective is to develop a project with the most efficient use of public resources.

The number of projects that will be funded per theme depends on the evaluation of the proposals and the requested budget per proposal. Passing the threshold of scientific quality, the best ranked proposal per theme will be funded. The remaining proposals will be put together in a common ranking list based on their final evaluation results (after the Scientific Experts Committee meetings, see section 5.1.2).

Budget transfers between the themes are possible.

3.3.1 THEME 1 – RESILIENT PROPULSION TECHNOLOGIES FOR STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Context

The global supply chain for rare earth materials, critical to the production of high-performance permanent magnets used in Brushless Direct Current (BLDC) motors, is highly dependent on suppliers outside of Europe. This

strategic vulnerability poses significant risks to the security, autonomy, and resilience of industries relying on advanced motor technologies. To mitigate this dependency, alternative solutions must be developed.
This research call seeks innovative approaches to replace rare earth magnets in the design of high-performance electromotors. Particularly those currently used for unmanned aerial systems in UAS NATO class 1, ranging from nano, micro and mini platforms up to 15 kg maximum take-off weight, based on BLDC architectures.
Proposals may explore rare earth-free magnetic materials, alternative motor topologies (e.g., switched reluctance motors, induction motors), or hybrid solutions that maintain or improve current performance standards without relying on critical materials. The proposed solutions should deliver performance levels comparable to current BLDC-based propulsion for UAS, ensuring equivalent range, endurance and mission autonomy while carrying similar payloads.

Research scope

Proposals are expected to deliver one or more of the following, not necessarily all.

- Development of novel materials or composites for magnet-free or low-dependency motor systems.
- Redesign of motor architectures to eliminate or drastically reduce the need for rare earth elements.
- Investigation into new production methods that support scalable, cost-effective manufacturing of next-generation electromotors.
- System-level analysis of performance, efficiency, manufacturability, and lifecycle impacts of proposed solutions.

Impact for Defence

With this call Defence is looking for the following three outcomes:

- Proof-of-concept prototypes demonstrating comparable or improved performance to existing BLDC motors.
- Feasibility studies or production process innovations that enable industrial adoption within a realistic timeframe.
- Contributions to strategic independence in critical technologies by reducing material dependencies.

3.3.2 THEME 2 – CYBER: ADVANCED DATA MANAGEMENT AND INTELLIGENCE CONCEPTS

Context

Coalition operations increasingly require joint analytics while respecting data sovereignty, operational security, and privacy regulation. Privacy-Preserving Federated Learning (PPFL) enables collaborative machine learning by allowing multiple partners to train and use shared AI models without exchanging raw data, combining Federated Learning (FL) with cryptographic and statistical privacy mechanisms.
The objective of this theme is to design, prototype, and validate an operational PPFL framework for coalition analytics. Particular emphasis is placed on the training of usable AI models, their secure use across organisational boundaries, and the quantification of privacy–utility trade-offs in realistic operational conditions.

Research scope

The consortium shall implement FL with secure aggregation and Differential Privacy (DP), with optional Homomorphic Encryption (HE)–based scoring or inference. The research shall demonstrate that distributed partners can train AI models and exchange information in encrypted form that can be fed to the AI, while maintaining measurable model performance.

Demonstrations shall cover representative use cases (e.g. tabular data, time-series data, or computer vision) in a secure sandbox environment. Activities shall include privacy accounting and budget enforcement, client orchestration and resilience, fairness and bias assessment, and model calibration. The programme is explicitly model-centric, requiring the delivery of trained and evaluable AI models.

The research shall deliver:

- a modular PPFL toolbox, including client SDKs, with source-code access (e.g. open-source or reviewable access) to enable verification and sustainability, while intellectual property remains with the consortium;
- a validated TRL 5 PPFL prototype, including at least one trained AI model demonstrably usable across distributed partners;
- a privacy accounting plan and artefacts defining epsilon (ε) privacy budgets, their composition over training rounds, and enforced stop conditions.

Optional features may include:

- a privacy accounting dashboard;
- comparative performance results versus centralised training baselines, explicitly linking achieved utility to consumed privacy budget;
- an evaluation and robustness test suite, including privacy attack assessments;
- operational artefacts supporting transition, such as SOPs, onboarding playbooks, and governance templates.

The research is delivery-driven, with emphasis on demonstrable functionality rather than conceptual designs.

Impact for Defence

This research enables Defence to deploy and operate AI models collaboratively across units, organisations, or nations without compromising sensitive data. It supports coalition operations by allowing shared situational awareness, predictive analytics, and decision support, while maintaining control over data exposure and privacy loss. By formalising privacy budgets as an operational parameter, the programme provides Defence with a concrete decision framework to balance intelligence value against acceptable privacy and security risks.

3.3.3 THEME 3 – INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR MILITARY MEDICAL LOGISTICS IN CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

Context

Military medical logistics form the cornerstone of operational readiness and medical support during expeditionary or even during large-scale military operations. The ability to deliver timely, continuous, and adaptable medical support directly influences casualty survival rates and the overall effectiveness of deployed forces. However, sustaining medical logistics in contested or resource-limited environments presents significant challenges, including disrupted supply chains, limited transportation capacity, and evolving threat dynamics.
Modern operations often extend e.g. across austere regions or stretched frontlines, requiring agile and resilient supply systems that can adapt to dynamic mission requirements. The integration of advanced medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and blood products further increases the complexity of logistical planning and execution.
Research efforts focusing on innovation, coordination mechanisms, and logistical resilience are essential to enhance readiness and support force health protection in future conflicts.

Research scope

We invite multidisciplinary research proposals addressing the critical challenges in military medical logistics, with a focus on innovation and technological advancement. Projects should present solutions that enhance

operational resilience and adaptability in austere environments (e.g., extreme weather conditions, hostile environments), and rapidly evolving tactical scenarios.
Proposals must target one or more of the following thematic areas:

- Quality assurance and control of medical materials and medications, including cutting-edge monitoring and traceability solutions in extreme or austere environments;
- Augmentation of shelf-life for consumables, and innovative strategies for managing stockpiling and end-of-life stock;
- Ensuring an unbroken logistic continuum (e.g., robust cold chain technologies) for all classes of medical supplies (e.g. blood), even under infrastructure-degraded or high-threat conditions;
- Deployment of autonomous vehicles (ground or aerial) for supply delivery and evacuation, including integration of AI-driven mission planning and adaptive routing to address weather, threat, and patient needs dynamically;
- Personalisation and adaptation of medical kits for frontline medics and nurses, leveraging modular design and advanced diagnostics.

The proposal should/could consider:

- The impact of extreme conditions (temperature, altitude, wind, hostile environments…) on supply routes, infrastructure, and shelf stability;
- Operation in austere, resource-limited environments with minimal external support;
- The need for agile, scalable, and rapidly adaptable systems that function across all military medical roles (Role 1 to 4 = first aid station to hospitals);
- Harnessing artificial intelligence and machine learning to optimise logistics chains, predict supply needs, enable predictive maintenance, and automate manual processes;
- Integration and interoperability with existing military logistics and medical infrastructures;
- Military medical supplies are often delivered from and to mobile facilities.

Impact for Defence

The proposed research will strengthen Defence's capacity to plan, coordinate, and sustain medical logistics for future complex operational environments. By developing evidence-based, validated prototypes and field-deployable solutions for medical logistics, it will enhance the agility and resilience of medical supply chains in future operations. The research projects will also foster interoperability and integration of emerging technologies, enabling faster, data-driven responses to medical demands in the field. Ultimately, it will contribute to improved force health protection, operational readiness, and the overall effectiveness of Defence medical support operations.

3.3.4 THEME 4 – BIOMANUFACTURING

Context

Biomanufacturing and (Smart) Materials Science are rapidly advancing fields, that are at the crossroads of biotechnology, materials science, and engineering. They are recognized by NATO as strategic EDTs ("Novel Materials and Manufacturing") and hold a transformative potential for all defence capabilities. Biomanufacturing enables on-demand production of critical supplies through modular or cell-free systems, even in austere environments. Smart materials include self-healing, adaptive, and bioinspired structures capable of sensing, camouflage, or energy harvesting. These technologies have direct applications in field-deployable medical and energy systems, blast-resistant armour, smart textiles for soldier health monitoring, and predictive maintenance of military assets. When combined with AI and digital twins, these technologies enable real-time optimization of material performance. The convergence of biotechnology and materials science is poised to drive a new era of

innovation and will enhance the autonomy, survivability and readiness of Defence in complex operational theatres.

Research scope

Research should focus on one of the two following topics:

1. **Biomanufacturing**
   - Synthetic biology and metabolic engineering for on-demand production of critical supplies (e.g. therapeutics, enzymes, reagents, biosensors, etc.) in remote or austere environments, using e.g. cell-free systems or modular bioreactors for scalable, rapid, and field-deployable biomanufacturing;
   - Biofabrication of tissues, sensors, and structural components for medical, diagnostic and repair applications;
   - Bioremediation systems to detoxify hazardous environments or recycle waste into usable materials;
   - Sustainable bioprocessing and integration with AI and digital twins will be considered as an added value for any development within the scope of the above-mentioned research areas.
2. **Smart Materials Science**
   - Personal protective materials, e.g. self-healing materials for body armour or wearable smart textiles with embedded sensors for biological and chemical threat detection;
   - Stimuli-responsive camouflage that adapts to environmental conditions for stealth operations;
   - Bioinspired and multifunctional materials with integrated sensing, camouflage, or energy-harvesting capabilities;
   - Nanostructured and programmable materials for enhanced performance and protection in extreme conditions;
   - Integration with AI and digital twins for predictive material behaviour and lifecycle optimization logistics will be considered as an added value.

We encourage proposals that incorporate a multi-modal approach, leveraging advances in biotechnology, materials science, engineering, data science, and systems integration.

Impact for Defence

The primary goal is to advance and use Biomanufacturing and (Smart) Materials Science technologies that can support and protect personnel, enhance military readiness, and enhance the operational effectiveness and resilience of Belgian Defence forces. Research should demonstrate field-deployable biomanufacturing solutions promoting adaptability and interoperability, that enable rapid, secure, and responsible production of medical countermeasures, sensors, and mission-relevant biomaterials, with integrated biosafety, biosecurity, cyber-biosecurity, and supply-chain resilience considerations. Tools developed can reduce supply chain vulnerabilities and decrease strategic dependencies during operations in austere or contested environments. Advances in the development of smart materials should contribute to enhanced protection, adaptability, and sustainability of defence systems. The smart materials should also try to provide protection (e.g. detect, identify and neutralize) against chemical or biological threats to advance threat detection and response capabilities of Belgian Defence forces.

Projects are expected to reach technology readiness levels (TRL) 4-6, with an emphasis on demonstrating proof-of-concept solutions in simulated or real-world scenarios.

3.3.5 THEME 5 – SMART ENERGY MANAGEMENT, ENERGY OPTIMISATION (INCLUDING OPTIMISED STORAGE TECHNOLOGIES)

Context

Modern defence operations demand modular energy storage systems that can be rapidly scaled, integrated, and adapted across platforms such as unmanned vehicles, sensor grids, and forward operating bases.

Advanced lithium- and solid-state battery architectures provide high power density and fast recharge, while nuclear-based storage concepts—particularly beta-voltaic and radioisotope batteries—offer ultra-long endurance in environments where resupply is constrained. The integration of these technologies into modular architectures can substantially reduce operational energy burden and enhance mission resilience.

Research scope

The research scope encompasses scientific and applied research into modular micro-energy architectures, micro-nuclear energy concepts, and hybrid storage configurations.

Modular architectures ought to enable the construction of systems from separate, reusable components. The objective is to promote flexibility, scalability, and ease of maintenance, allowing future expansions or adjustments to be implemented efficiently. This should include the integration of components with minimal complexity and the optimization of reliability and operational continuity.

Proposals may include research on:

- design and modelling of modular micro-energy units with reusable components;
- development of plug-and-play interfaces enabling rapid integration across defence platforms (sensors, micro-UAVs, UGVs, CBRN systems, remote surveillance nodes,…);
- optimisation of reliability, maintainability, operational continuity, and system robustness under military conditions;
- strategies for scaling and adapting architectures to evolving mission requirements.

Research on micro-nuclear energy concepts investigate micro-nuclear power sources, such as beta-voltaic and radioisotope micro-energy systems, as autonomous long-lifetime power supplies (µW–W). This work focuses on methods for converting nuclear energy into usable electrical or thermal energy with maximum efficiency. The research is done with safety in mind and includes the development of strategies and materials to minimize radiation risks and ensure the safety of personnel and the surrounding environment.

Proposals may include research on:

- material characterization of isotopes and semiconductor converter structures;
- energy conversion mechanisms and efficiency optimization (electrical or thermal);
- (Safety-by-Design) radiological safety, shielding strategies and lifecycle considerations in accordance with FANC/IAEA requirements;
- modelling of long-duration low-power profiles under environmental and operational extremes;
- assessment of optional hybrid architectures (micro-nuclear + micro-storage) where beneficial for peak-power capability or mission adaptability.

Impact for Defence

The combination of modular design with nuclear-enhanced autonomy could significantly reduce logistical footprints, reduce reliance on vulnerable fuel supply chains, extend mission duration in austere conditions, and improve resilience of critical defence infrastructures.

Successful projects will strengthen Belgium’s scientific and technological base in autonomous, resilient energy systems for defence applications. Outcomes are expected to:

- reduce reliance on vulnerable supply chains for energy and batteries;
- extend mission endurance for unmanned and remote systems;
- enhance resilience of critical defence infrastructure;
- enable persistent, low-maintenance Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), security, CBRN monitoring capabilities,...;
- contribute to NATO and EU ambitions regarding energy resilience and operational energy optimisation.

3.3.6 THEME 6 – NEXT GENERATION SENSING

Context

The next generation of military sensing demands unprecedented agility, resilience, and data analysis capabilities to operate effectively across contested domains. We are calling for multidisciplinary research proposals to drive research and innovation in sensing technologies to provide enhanced situational awareness and rapid decision-making in complex operational scenarios. Successful projects will focus on validating technologies (advancing them to TRL 5-6: system/subsystem prototype demonstrated in a relevant environment) with clear pathways toward practical deployment and scalability, ensuring future operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Research scope

This research theme focuses on the development and use of advanced sensing technologies for defence applications, with an emphasis on high-sensitivity, high-resolution detection capabilities. It includes both state-of-the-art and emerging approaches, such as hyperspectral imaging, event-based imaging, magnetic field detection or different types of quantum sensing.
Application for investigation range from electromagnetic sensing of challenging targets, over navigation in GNSS-denied environments, to military platform health diagnostics. The goal is to design and prototype sensors or applications that are passive, compact, robust, and field-deployable (up to TRL 6). The theme encourages interdisciplinary collaboration between physics, engineering, and defence to push the boundaries of next generation sensing technologies.

Impact for Defence

Challenges related to a limited sensitivity and a limited resolution of existing technologies reduce the efficiency and effectiveness with which certain tasks attributed to Belgian Defence are executed (due to late detection of threats and difficulties with navigation among others). A non-exhaustive list of potential use-cases which can benefit from (disruptive) advances in sensor technology includes:

- Maritime security (above and/or under the surface) and safety
- Mine detection (both on land and at sea), especially:
    - Buried mine detection (on land or at sea)
    - Mines drifting just below the surface (at sea)
- Drone detection
- Detection of camouflage targets
- Target detection in degraded visual environments
- Positioning and navigation in GNSS-denied environments

3.3.7 THEME 7 – EXPLORING AND INTEGRATING UNMANNED SYSTEMS

Context

Unmanned systems are becoming the backbone of the new era of armed conflict. While the use of drones is very known to the public, in reality, the threat when it comes to unmanned systems can come from not only the air, but as well from the land and sea domain.

Research scope

The research should focus on technologies and concepts enabling the integration and synchronized operation of multiple unmanned systems (UXVs) across land, air, and sea domains within a joint operational environment. Key elements include one or more of the following elements:

- Command & Control (C^2) Platforms: Develop or adapt solutions that allow seamless integration of manned, unmanned, and autonomous systems into existing Belgian Defence C^2 infrastructures, ensuring compliance with both military and civilian standards and NATO interoperability requirements, including STANAG 4817 (Multi-domain Interoperability protocol), currently in STANREQ phase;
- Multi-Domain Coordination: Enable planning and execution of missions involving heterogeneous unmanned systems (e.g., UAVs, UGVs, USVs) operating simultaneously and in a coordinated manner, while maintaining human-in-the-loop control for final decision-making;
- Cybersecurity & Resilience: Ensure robust protection against foreign hacking, jamming, or influence operations, including secure communication links and resilient architectures;
- Interoperability & Scalability: Solutions should be interoperable with NATO standards (STANAG 4586) and scalable to integrate future platforms and technologies (STANAG 4817);
- Innovative Approaches: Explore novel methods for autonomous task allocation, sensor fusion and AI-assisted decision support, while respecting operational constraints and ethical considerations;
- AI and automatisation: Decision support for the Commander. Autonomous swarm management and mission optimization.

Impact for Defence

A special focus on the integration of these systems or expansion of existing systems within Belgian Defence would be valuable.
The desired outcome is to provide Belgian Defence with:

- Technology Readiness Level (TRL) 5–6, delivering a validated demonstrator showcasing the ability to plan, command and control multiple unmanned systems in a synchronized manner across land, air and sea domains;
- A C^2 solution that integrates unmanned systems into existing Belgian Defence platforms, ensuring compliance with current standards and enabling joint operations;
- Enhanced situational awareness and mission effectiveness through improved coordination between manned and unmanned assets;
- A secure and resilient architecture capable of withstanding cyber threats and electronic warfare attempts;
- A foundation for future capability development, enabling Belgian Defence to expand and integrate unmanned systems into its operational doctrine.

3.3.8 THEME 8 – CONFLICT DYNAMICS & WARNING INTELLIGENCE

Context

In the context of a (hybrid) conflict, the ability to effectively process vast amounts of information and data, while accounting for hybrid threats and inherent uncertainty, is critical for correct decision-making. It is also essential to facilitate timely, preventive, defensive, and offensive actions. Therefore, the availability of accurate, integrated, and standardised tools to support this process is of vital importance.

Research scope

Research into an integrated software tool that should take into account:

- A framework for conflict escalation and de-escalation;
- A taxonomy based on any of the following domains: politics, military, economy, social, information, infrastructure, health or environment;
- The dynamic and complex interaction between variables;
- Methods & techniques to exploit, analyse and assess retrieved information;
- One or more ways to assess risks and their probability (ranges);
- One or more ways to deal with uncertainty (during decision making processes);
- A visually relevant and attractive early warning system (threshold values and alerts).

The research output would be in line with challenges of decision making under uncertainty. The tool should allow real-time scenarios and simulations.

Impact for Defence

- Provide a coherently structured approach for event detection;
- Provide a standardised overview of relevant elements supporting situational awareness and comprehensive preparation of the operational environment dealing with the full conflict spectrum;
- Provide a scientifically sound approach for conflict escalation & de-escalation;
- Support scenario design and effects-based operations;
- Provide a scientifically sound approach to deal with uncertainty in decision-making;
- Allow further and complementary efforts to list consolidated user requirements;
- Identify areas of future research, development and innovation;
- Allow the output of these efforts to be used for serious and wargaming purposes.

3.3.9 THEME 9 – COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Context

In modern military operations, secure and classified communications are essential for national defence and coalition effectiveness. The growing reliance on mobile connectivity and digital networks introduces vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit through interception, manipulation, or disruption. Emerging threats—including advanced cyberattacks, electronic warfare, and the proliferation of sophisticated technologies—make unprotected or partially secured communications unacceptable.

NATO SECRET-level information, such as operational orders, intelligence reports, and command-and-control data, demands a communication system that guarantees confidentiality, integrity, authenticity and availability across all operational contexts. Belgian Defence must therefore be prepared to implement a robust mobile communication architecture that withstands current and future threats, including those posed by quantum computing and contested environments.

In order to illustrate the context above a couple of practical use cases could be identified:

- A classified list of passengers that need urgent extraction from a country is to be sent to the A400M crew who is waiting engine running on the apron;
- A team protecting a high value asset needs to report the details of a drone attack;
- A representative of the government is contacted at night to decide on the actions to be taken by the Air Force for a hijacked aircraft.

Each of these highly time-sensitive cases require a national, mobile classified communication system to be able to make immediate decisions at the right level.

Research scope

The research aims to develop a NATO SECRET mobile communication system that meets stringent security and interoperability requirements. Core elements include:

- Strong Cryptography and Key Management: End-to-end encryption, hierarchical PKI (Public Key Infrastructure), and readiness for post-quantum cryptography;
- Zero-Trust Architecture: Continuous authentication and authorization of users and devices, network segmentation, and protection of data-at-rest;
- Multi-Bearer Resilience: Support for 3; 4 ; 5G and future generation, SATCOM, HF, and UHF/VHF, including anti-jamming techniques and seamless bearer switching;
- Hardware Security: Military Standards (such as MIL-STD-810H) ruggedized devices, tamper detection, zeroization functions, and removable crypto modules for secure custody.

Specific challenges to address:

- Balancing real-time versus delayed data dissemination;
- Maximizing detection probability while minimizing false alerts;
- Ensuring cyber resilience and mitigating insider threats;
- Assessing the possibilities to secure production and supply through national or NATO solutions;
- Achieving interoperability across NATO and coalition partners;
- Proposals shall not address physical protection of the environment, nor human aspects.

Impact for Defence

Domestic development ensures full sovereign control over classified communications, operational adaptability, and alignment with national and coalition requirements. It enables Belgium to implement tailored security architectures, rigorous key management, and lifecycle controls, supporting multi-bearer interoperability and TEMPEST/EMSEC compliance while maintaining NATO standards. Together these elements provide the conditions to allow national accreditation of the system

This initiative will deliver a credible and realistic architecture for secure communication in Belgian and multinational operations. The system will integrate seamlessly into existing command structures and remain compatible with future NATO standards. By combining physical, digital, and procedural measures, the solution will strengthen Belgium's defensive posture against both current and emerging threats.

3.3.10 THEME 10 – OPEN CALL: DEFENCE RELEVANT RESEARCH

Context

Proposals are welcome to address new, upcoming, or unforeseen challenges and/or creative or disruptive solutions. Proposals can only be introduced in the "open theme" if the subject of the proposal does not correspond with one of the other eight themes.

This call is "open" to any research relevant for defence across a broad spectrum, focusing on the technology domain.

Research scope

This call is open to any research for defence across a broad spectrum within the following defence research areas:

- Space technologies;
- Communication Technologies;
- Sensor Technologies;
- Autonomous Systems and Artificial Intelligence;

- Cybersecurity;
- Smart and Advanced Materials;
- Advanced Weapon Systems and Platforms;
- Protection of Personnel, Systems, and Infrastructure;
- Sustainable Energy and Environment;
- Advanced Military Health;
- Human Systems and Behaviour;
- Security and Defence Policy.

Impact for Defence

The proposals must address innovative defence technologies and solutions, including those that can improve readiness, deployability and sustainability in all spectra of tasks and missions, for example in terms of operations, equipment, basing, energy solutions, … The goal of this open call is to achieve innovative and cost-effective solutions for defence applications, ground-breaking or novel concepts and approaches, new promising future improvements or the application of technologies or concepts previously not applied in the defence sector.

3.4 PROJECT DURATION

The projects will have a duration of **2 to maximum 4 years**.

3.5 PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

3.5.1 PARTNERSHIP

For all themes proposals must be submitted by a **network** composed of **at least one** (public or private non-profit) **research institute and one private company**. All types of organisations can act as project coordinator.

Partnership:
- at least one (public or private non-profit) research institute
- at least one company

Belgian Defence research institutes (Royal Military Academy (RMA), Military Hospital Queen Astrid (MHQA) and the Defence Laboratories (DLD)) can be a partner in the network[2]. It is, however, not mandatory to have one of these institutes as a partner; it will neither have a beneficial effect on the evaluation result (no bonus).

Except for theme 2 – CYBER, in which partnership with the RMA is preferred. In case proposals obtain an equal score, proposals including the RMA will be favoured.

[2] DLD and MHQA must inform the RMA of all proposals they are participating in.

3.5.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN THE PROJECT

Project partners jointly share obligations and responsibilities during the implementation of the project. The project should be fairly balanced, even if different partners may have different tasks and subsequently different budgets.

A **coordinator** must be appointed in each network proposal.

For each project, a **Steering Committee** shall be established at the start of the project to act as the governing body (see section 6.3.).

ROLE OF THE COORDINATOR

The coordinator is responsible for the overall project management and coordination. He/she is the contact person for the RHID to communicate with the partnership and must transfer all relevant information to the other project partners. He/she shall:

- Coordinate all activities to be carried out in the framework of the project,
- Coordinate the internal meetings between the network members,
- Coordinate the production of the required project reports intended for Belgian Defence as described in section 6.4.,
- Coordinate the synthesis and translation of the research results, with a view to applications and support for decision-making,
- Coordinate the publication and dissemination of the research results,
- Chair all meetings of the Steering Committee, unless decided otherwise in a meeting of the Steering Committee,
- Convene meetings of the Steering Committee and write the reports of these meetings. The coordinator shall give notice in writing of a meeting with the agenda to each member no later than fourteen (14) calendar days in advance,
- Inform the Steering Committee and the RHID of any problems that might hinder the implementation of the project.

SUBCONTRACTORS

The project may require specific or punctual expertise, which can be delivered in the form of **subcontracting**. It is the responsibility of the project team to ensure that the rules and practices of the subcontractor, and in particular the ownership and valorisation of research results, publications and communications, are compatible with the rules governing the call. The project team takes full responsibility for the final result of the subcontracted work.

Subcontractors must be registered in Belgium. Subcontractors that are companies, a(i)sbl and foundations must submit accurate and current information on their beneficial owners to the UBO (Ultimate Beneficial Owner) register of the FPS Finances and deliver an extract of the UBO register to the DEFRA secretariat. This document will be submitted to the General Intelligence and Security Service which will examine it in accordance with its missions and legal powers as defined in the law of November 30, 1998 governing intelligence and security services.

In case the subcontractor needs access to classified information, the subcontractor must also obtain a security clearance (see section 7.3).

Subcontractors must be registered in Belgium. If they are a company, a(i)sbl or foundation, they must provide an extract from the UBO register.

3.6 RESEARCH ETHICS

The "Code of Ethics for Scientific Research in Belgium" is a joint initiative of the Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, the Académie Royale de Médecine de Belgique, the Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten and the Koninklijke Academie voor Geneeskunde van België, with the support of BELSPO.

All projects must take this code of ethics into account in their research. If applicable, it is the responsibility of the applicants to consult the relevant Ethical Board for their organisation before submitting a proposal.

The code of ethics for scientific research in Belgium is available here: http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/publ/pub_ostc/Eth_code/ethcode_en.pdf.

It is the responsibility of the applicants to consult the relevant Ethical Board for their organisation before submitting a proposal.

Applicants will be required to complete an “ethics self-assessment” when preparing the Full proposal. The Ethical Advisory Board of the RHID will assess this information and can advise the partnership how to deal with the ethical aspects of its proposal.

3.7 BUDGET RULES

Financing by Defence: This call is subject to the European legislation on State Funding (Art 107 (1) TFEU and the General Block Exemption Regulation in particular. Therefore, financing a public research institute or a private non-profit research centre is set to a maximum of 100% of the eligible costs. Financing a private company is limited to a maximum of 65% of the eligible costs, with a potential maximum of 80%, according to the size of the company.

The total project budget must be detailed in the tables of the budget file (100% cost) of the full proposal. Additional columns are foreseen to indicate the partner contribution to the total project cost (depending on the partner type) and the subsequent RHID funding contribution. (section 6.5 of the full proposal template: Budget assessment)

The project budget is reserved exclusively for the project activities. The different categories of expenditure financed by Defence are:

Staff: Pre-tax wages associated with increases in the cost of living, employers’ social security and statutory insurance contributions, as well as any other compensation or allowance due by law and secondary to the salary itself. Defence does not allow cumulative wages for staff. Staff members bound contractually to a public institution - full time or part time - cannot apply for him/herself for Defence staff budget for that part.

The RHID prefers staff to be hired under a labour contract.

Costs related to non-employee staff, i.e. staff working in a management company, as freelancer or interim staff on behalf of the partner are also accepted.

Tax-free doctoral or post-doctoral scholarships are not accepted.

For persons to be hired for the project (so not identified by name in the proposal), the staff costs are limited to a maximum amount of:

- 5 700 €/month FTE for a technician/bachelor (regardless of years of experience)
- 8 000€/month FTE for a Master (regardless of years of experience)
- 8 700 €/month FTE for a Master in engineering (regardless of years of experience)
- 10 500€/month FTE for a PhD (regardless of years of experience)

The funding is limited to the time and period in which the (employee and non-employee) staff participates in the project.

General operating costs: this includes daily/usual supplies and products for the laboratory, workshop and office, documentation, consignments, use of daily software and IT facilities, organisation of internal meetings, etc. The general operating budget may not exceed 15% of the overall project staff budget for the project coordinator and 10% for the other project partners. The amounts claimed must correspond to actual expenditures strictly related to the project, even if supporting documents are not requested. Although no detailed justification is required for these costs, the administration of the concerned partner must keep these invoices in its accounts in the event of an audit.

Specific operating costs: this includes a list of operating costs specific to the execution of the project tasks, such as costs for project analyses, testing, maintenance and repair of equipment purchased by the project, use of specific IT facilities and software, costs for surveys, open data publications, organisation of workshops and events, etc. These costs need to be clearly described in the proposal and each of them shall be justified by invoices during the project.

Overheads: Institutions' general overheads that cover, in one lump sum, administration, telephone, postal, maintenance, heating, lighting, electricity, rent, machine depreciation, and insurance costs. The total amount of this item is set as a fix amount of 10% of the total staff and operating costs.

Equipment: List of investment goods specific to the implementation of the project and to be purchased on the project budget. It concerns the purchase and installation of scientific and technical equipment and instruments, including computer equipment, to be entered in the inventory or assets of the institute/company. Equipment needs to be clearly described in the proposal and shall be justified by invoices.

Subcontracting: Expenses incurred by a third party to carry out project tasks or provide services that require special scientific or technical competences outside the partner's normal area of activity. The amount may not exceed 25% of the total budget allocated to the partner concerned. If the subcontractor is not yet known then only the nature, the planned duration and the estimated amount needs to be indicated in the proposal.

	STAFF COSTS (monthly costs)	GENERAL OPERATION COSTS	SPECIFIC OPERATION COSTS	OVERHEADS	EQUIPMENT	SUBCONTRACTING
PROJECT COORDINATOR	**Technician**: 5 700€/month **Master:** 8 000€/month **Master (engineering):** 8 700€/month **PhD:** 10 500€/month	15% of Staff costs *(Automatically generated)*	-	10% of [Staff costs + Operation costs] *(Automatically generated)*	-	Max. 25% of the total budget of this partner
OTHER PROJECT PARTNERS	**Technician**: 5 700€/month **Master:** 8 000€/month **Master (engineering):** 8 700€/month **PhD:** 10 500€/month	10% of Staff costs *(Automatically generated)*	-	10% of [Staff costs + Operation costs] *(Automatically generated)*	-	Max. 25% of the total budget of this partner

3.8 GENDER

The RHID strongly encourages the applicants to take into account the equality between women and men and to ensure gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the project. The project should include this both in the choice of the researchers and, where relevant, by integrating the gender dimension into their research.

4 SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

The submission of projects will be done in two phases using the online submission platform:

https://belspo.aimsgrants.com/

4.1 PHASE 1 – PRE-PROPOSAL

A **pre-proposal** must be submitted at the latest on 19 February **2026 (14h00).**
If the pre-proposal has not been submitted in time, it will be impossible to submit a full proposal.

The following information needs to be filled in directly into the online platform:

- The choice of the theme
- The title and acronym of the project
- The coordinates of the foreseen partners
- Summary of the project (1/2 page)
- Keywords (min 2; max 6).
- The name and contact details of 4 to 6 scientific experts (minimum **2 Belgian** and **2 foreign** experts) capable of assessing the proposal. The proposed experts must comply with the eligibility criteria for remote experts - see 'Evaluators eligibility'.
- Optionally, the name and contact details of 2 non-grata scientific experts to be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal under the condition of sufficient motivation.

The pre-proposal template can be downloaded from the DEFRA website and will contain:

- The title and acronym of the project.
- The choice of the theme.
- The coordinates of the foreseen partners.
- A brief description of the intended project: the scope, objectives, the innovation with respect to the state of the art, the relevance and potential impact of the project for Defence.
- Relevant references of the partners in relation to the project, incl. a short profile of the foreseen partners and a description of the added value of the partnership in addressing the research topic.

Companies, a(i)sbl and foundations must upload the extract of the Ultimate Beneficial Owner (UBO) register as an annex to the pre-proposal (in pdf format).
Besides the extracts of the Ultimate Beneficial Owner (UBO), no other annexes are allowed.

BELSPO and the RHID will perform an eligibility check on the basis of the pre-proposal documents (see section 5.1.1.).

The pre-proposals that have passed the eligibility check will be evaluated by an internal evaluation committee of the Belgian Defence (see section 5.1.1.).

On **23 March 2026**, the internal evaluation committee will select for each pre-defined theme (themes 1 to 9) maximum five (5) pre-proposals to submit a full proposal.
Only for theme 10, "Open call: Defence relevant research" a maximum of ten (10) pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal.

The pre-proposals will also be used by BELSPO and the RHID to seek experts for the evaluation of the full proposals.

4.2 PHASE 2 – FULL PROPOSAL

For the themes 1 to 9, maximum five (5) pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal. For theme 10, maximum ten (10) pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal. Applicants must submit the full proposal via the online submission platform.

The project objectives of the full proposal may vary from that of the pre-proposal to some extent. However, it cannot diverge to the point that the expertise mobilised for the evaluation of the proposal will become irrelevant.

Changes in the project partnership (changes in participating institute(s)/company(ies), including the coordination role) can only be accepted after the explicit approval of RHID. The keywords must remain the same since they are used for composing the evaluation panel.

In case other companies, a(i)sbl and foundations join the network, they must provide the extract of the Ultimate Beneficial Owner (UBO) register to the call secretariat by e-mail to defra@belspo.be.

The **full proposal** must be submitted at the latest on **4 May 2026 (14h00).**
If the full proposal does not comply with the submission rules or has not been submitted in time, it will not be taken into account for evaluation.

Content of the full proposal:

Within the full proposal template:

- The title, acronym and summary of the project.
- The name and contact details of the project partner(s).
- The proposal description:
    - scope and objectives,
    - state of the art and innovative character,
    - relevance and potential impact for Defence
    - quality of the partners/partnership of the project,
    - coherence between research objectives and methodology,
    - the work plan: work packages, the project risk assessment.

As a separate document:

- The GANTT chart (mandatory)
- Budget file (mandatory)
- Data Management Plan (mandatory)
- Research Ethics self-assessment (mandatory)
- Cash or in-kind commitment letter (not mandatory)
- Visual or graphical abstract (not mandatory)

5 EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

5.1 EVALUATION PROCEDURE

5.1.1 PHASE 1 – EVALUATION OF PRE-PROPOSALS

Only pre-proposals that are complete and submitted in time will be taken into account.

BELSPO and the RHID will perform an eligibility check on the basis of the pre-proposal documents. Following criteria are applied:

- Completeness of the pre-proposal (all fields fully completed, UBO register extracts available),
- Eligibility of each project partner (see section 2.2),
- Partnership composition (see section 3.5.1).

The pre-proposals that have passed the eligibility check will be evaluated by an internal evaluation committee of the Belgian Defence on the basis of the following criteria:

- The correspondence of the pre-proposal with the scope of the call themes,
- The quality of the pre-proposal, based on the description of the project objectives and the innovation with respect to the state of the art,
- The quality of the partners and the adequacy of the partnership,
- The relevance and potential impact for Defence.

More information about the criteria used can be found in the evaluation matrix for pre-proposals.

The RHID will translate the outcome of each pre-proposal's evaluation into numeric scores. In practice, this will be done as follows:

1. Translating the appreciations given to each sub-criterion into scores.
2. Adding the scores of the sub-criteria to obtain a total for each criterion.
3. Performing a weighted sum of the criteria in the following way:

WEIGHT OF THE DIFFERENT CRITERIA	THEMEs 1 - 9	THEME 10
Quality of the pre-proposal	40%	30%
Quality of the partners & Adequacy of the partnership	30%	30%
Impact	30%	40%

According to the scores obtained, the proposals will be ranked in a list per theme (Pre-proposal Ranking).
For the pre-proposals submitted in themes 1 to 9, these lists will serve as the base for the selection of the applicants invited to introduce a full proposal.
For the pre-proposals submitted in the open theme 10, the internal evaluation committee of the Belgian Defence can apply additional criteria based on strategic considerations and the diversity of topics of the pre-proposals.

On **23 March 2026**, BELSPO will communicate the conclusions of the internal evaluation committee to the applicants and will invite the selected pre-proposals to submit a full proposal.

5.1.2 PHASE 2 – EVALUATION OF FULL PROPOSALS

Only full proposals that are complete and submitted in time will be taken into account.

The selection of proposals is based on a peer-review evaluation that guarantees scientific excellence and the alignment of the projects with the thematic objectives of the call. The evaluation of the full proposals runs in four steps:

Step 1 - Remote scientific peer review evaluation
Step 2 - Scientific Experts Committee (SEC) evaluation, including interviews with the applicants
Step 3 - Selection proposal formulated by the Scientific Committee of the RHID
Step 4 - Final selection of proposals by the Board of Directors of the RHID

STEP 1 - REMOTE SCIENTIFIC PEER REVIEW EVALUATION

BELSPO organises and coordinates a scientific peer review evaluation of each proposal. The principles of this evaluation are the same for all themes.

Each of the full proposals will be evaluated by a team of independent experts having an adequate combined expertise to evaluate the research proposal. Ideally, each expert team will be composed of minimum one Belgian and minimum one foreign expert.

BELSPO is responsible for composing this remote 'written evaluation team' with experts from BELSPO's and RHID's own databases and experts suggested by the applicants.

For each proposal, an individual written evaluation is performed. The written evaluation takes place remotely, via the online evaluation platform, based on an evaluation form. During this assessment, the experts will only have access to the proposals they will evaluate. They will not know who the other two reviewers are for that proposal, nor will they have access to each other's evaluations.

Each reviewer will assess the proposal and provide comments taking into account a variety of (sub)criteria, namely in the following categories:

- Scientific quality
- Quality and efficiency of the implementation
- Impact maximisation strategy

More information about the criteria used can be found in the evaluation matrix for full proposals.

On 1**0 June 2026**, applicants will receive a compilation of the remote evaluators' feedback (anonymised). They will also get the list of questions to which they must answer in writing by **19 June 2026**. This list might include questions from the Ethical Advisory Board of the RHID.

STEP 2 – SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS COMMITTEE EVALUATION, INCLUDING INTERVIEWS WITH THE APPLICANTS

Preparation of the Scientific Experts Committee (SEC) evaluation

BELSPO will translate the outcome of each proposal's evaluation into numeric scores. In practice, this will be done as follows:

1. Translating the appreciations given to each sub-criterion into scores.
2. Adding the scores of the sub-criteria to obtain a total for each criterion.
3. Performing a weighted sum of the criteria in the following way:

CRITERIA	WEIGHT (ALL THEMEs)
Scientific quality	35%
Quality and efficiency of the implementation	40%
Impact maximisation strategy	25%

According to the scores obtained, the proposals will be ranked in a list (proposal ranking). This list will serve as a base for the panel discussion.

Scientific Experts Committee (SEC) evaluation

For each theme, the Scientific Expert Committee of Defence will be composed of members that are relevant for the theme.

Each SEC will have access to the full proposals (and annexes), the anonymised evaluation reports and the proposal ranking of the theme.

Each SEC will organise interviews with the applicants of the full proposals according to the following schedule:

- Introduction (5 minutes)
- Presentation by the applicants, including an introduction of the proposal and integrating the answers to the questions of the remote experts and Ethical Advisory Board (15 minutes).
- Questions and answers (Q&A) (25 minutes).
- Deliberation (10 minutes).

The applicants will assist in the meeting for the presentation and Q&A session of their proposal only.

Each SEC will classify the full proposals into (a) Panel Funding Scenario(s) according to specific criteria:

- Budget alignment.
- Complementarities and/or overlaps between proposals.
- The coherence of the proposals with the strategic objectives (scope) of the themes.
- The cohesion of the partnership.
- Relevance and potential impact for Defence.
- General appreciation of the presentation by the applicants.

The SEC Funding Scenario(s) will classify all proposals in:

- Recommended for funding.
- Not recommended for funding.

The SEC will list the proposals that are recommended for funding by order of their final evaluation result.

STEP 3 - SELECTION PROPOSAL FORMULATED BY THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE OF THE RHID

After the Scientific Experts Committee meetings, the best ranked proposal(s) per theme will be proposed for funding to the Scientific Committee of the RHID. The remaining proposals will be put together in a common ranking list based on their final evaluation results.

The Scientific Committee of the RHID is composed of senior scientists and research directors and guarantees the quality level of Defence research. It proposes evaluation methods and research objectives, participates in the drafting of the research programme (ranking and selection of research projects) and evaluates its implementation. The composition of the Scientific Committee is currently defined in the Ministerial Decree of 11 January 2022.

The Scientific Committee will receive the following documents:

- SEC Funding Scenarios(s) per theme, including its motivation
- Common ranking list of all proposals across all themes, earmarking the best ranked proposal for each theme
- Full proposal and evaluation reports of each proposal (on demand)

Based on these documents, the Scientific Committee will perform a strategic selection of the proposals based on the criteria and rules explained hereunder, delivering the Scientific Committee Funding Scenario.

The following aspects will be taken into account when formulating the Scientific Committee Funding Scenario to the governance board of the RHID:

- Alignment of the proposal in relation to Defence priorities
- Added value of the proposal in relation to Defence priorities

The Scientific Committee will formulate the Scientific Committee Funding Scenario taking into account the following rules:

- In NO case will proposals deemed 'out of scope' be considered
- In NO case will proposals deemed 'not recommended for funding' be considered

STEP 4 - FINAL SELECTION OF PROPOSALS BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE RHID

The final selection decision of proposals to be funded is made by the Board of Directors of the RHID on the basis of the Scientific Committee Funding Scenario.

5.2 EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation criteria that are used in each step of the evaluation procedure are described in the evaluation matrices (pre- and full proposal).

6 CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS

6.1 PROJECT STARTING AND END DATE

The projects selected within the context of the current call will start in December 2026.

The project contracts will have a duration of 2 to maximum 4 years (plus 3 months to allow meeting all administrative requirements before the effective start-up of the project).

6.2 CONTRACTS

For the selected proposals, a contract is concluded between Belgian Defence and the funded partners.

The contract is composed of three parts that make up the research contract:

- Basic contract
- Annex I: Technical specifications
- Annex II: General conditions applicable to the 2026 contracts.

The basic contract designates the contracting parties (partners and Defence) and contains the general obligations applicable to the project, including the project and contract duration and budget. **The basic contract is signed by the heads of the partners involved (directors, rectors, CEOs).**

The content of Annex I "Technical specifications" is specifically related to the operational implementation of the project. It includes the detailed work description and schedule, details on funding by expenditure category etc. **Annex I "Technical specifications" is signed by the DEFRA programme manager and the promotors concerned.**

Annex II "General conditions applicable to the contract" contains all general provisions applicable to all DEFRA contracts. Annex II is the same for all DEFRA projects of a specific call. It is available on the DEFRA website and **will not be signed**.

Belgian Defence/RHID grants the selected projects the funds required for their implementation. The RHID shall reimburse at most, and up to the amount specified in the granted budget, the actual costs proven by the partners providing these costs are directly related to the implementation of the project.

In case a "Cash or in-kind commitment letter" is associated to the selected project, this commitment and contribution will be formalised by means of a bilateral contract between the non-funded partner(s) and the project partner(s). The bilateral contract shall be in conformity with all the provisions contained in the DEFRA project contract. The provisions of the bilateral contract shall always be subordinate to the provisions of the DEFRA contract. A copy of the bilateral contract must be handed over to the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID, defra@mil.be).

The partnership is encouraged to conclude a Consortium Agreement to define internal regulations regarding intellectual property (access to foreground and background, valorisation rights and modalities, and any other theme deemed necessary). A copy of the signed Consortium Agreement must be handed over to the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID, defra@mil.be). A template for the Consortium Agreement is available on the website.

6.3 COMPOSITION AND ROLE OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Each project will be accompanied by a **Steering Committee**, to be set up at the start of the project. The Steering Committee is composed of the project managers of the partners, the programme manager, the research manager of Defence and the intended end user of Belgian Defence.

The Steering Committee acts as a governance body, to ensure that the project remains in line with the research objectives and adapt the project plan accordingly whenever necessary. It ensures that the project reporting is done in accordance with section 6.4.

The Steering Committee should meet at least once a year to discuss the project's progress. The organisation of such meeting must be included in the project work plan and the project budget. Ideally, this(these) meeting(s) should take place in the same period as the delivery of the progress report(s).

The following actions and decisions will be taken by the Steering Committee:

- Examine information collected by the coordinator on the progress of the Project, to assess the compliance of the Project with the Proposal and, if necessary, propose modification of the Proposal.
- Determine the policy for press releases, joint publications and other public disclosures regarding the Project.
- Keep a register of Foreground generated within the Project and patents filed thereon, which is concluded at the end of the Project.
- Examine and approve proposed changes to the work programme. In case of actions with a budgetary impact, the Steering Committee will make proposals to the funding authority but cannot decide without the approval of this funding authority.
- If necessary, propose the termination of all or part of the Project.

6.4 REPORTS

The contract foresees the following reports to be submitted to the RHID:

- Project file: with a short project description and contact information (to be published on the DEFRA website)
- Initial report: to be submitted within three months after the start of the project.
- Progress report(s) and financial report(s): to be submitted according to the specifications in the contract (annex 1, technical specifications).
- Final report: to be submitted three months after the end of the project.
- If deemed useful by the RHID, an additional report may be requested for an external evaluation of the project.
- The RHID can ask for a report or other input at any time during the course of the project in order to provide scientific support to valorisation and service actions related to the programme.

These reports are to be included in the project work plan and the cost of preparing them (including possible translations) must be covered by the project budget.

They should contain all necessary information to assess the progress of the project in relation to the work packages, deliverables and budget. Problems must be identified, including possible solutions.

To evaluate the impact of the DEFRA programme, the RHID can ask input from the partnership until 3 years after the end of the project.

7 DATA, RESULTS, INTELLECTUAL OWNERSHIP AND SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

7.1 GENERAL CONDITIONS

The Data Management Plan (DMP), to be submitted as part of the proposal, describes how the project partners deal with the collected data before, during and after the project. It is a key element of good data management.

For all aspects regarding the use of data, intellectual ownership and valorisation of the project results and the confidentiality or security requirements, the conditions of the General Conditions (Annex II of the contract and the articles 12, 13 and 14 in particular) apply.

Ownership of existing information and data (the individual background) remains with the original owner.

As a principle, the Foreground - the results (including information) produced by the project - shall be the property of the partner carrying out the work generating this foreground.

The principles for the use of joint foreground will have to be determined by the project partners, with respect for these General Conditions. These principles can be included in a Consortium Agreement to be concluded between the partners.

7.2 SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

For social and humanities data, a copy of the data and/or metadata can be transferred to SODHA (Social Sciences and Digital Humanities Archive) (https://www.sodha.be) after explicit approval of RHID.

7.3 CLASSIFIED INFORMATION/SECURITY RELATED ACTIVITIES

Certain activities undertaken in the frame of the projects may use or generate classified information. This paragraph solely concerns protective measures to be taken to preserve the confidentiality of security-sensitive information regarding these research projects.

A classification is given to documents to prevent their improper use which could damage, among other things, the fulfilment of the tasks of Defence, the external security and international relations of the State and the scientific and economic potential of the country (for the complete list see “Wet van 11 Dec 1998 Art 3/Loi du 11 Déc 1998 Art 3”).

According to the same law this identification should be based on the following classification levels:

- The "**TRES SECRET/ZEER GEHEIM**" level is assigned to information if its improper use could cause EXTREMELY SERIOUS damage to the main Belgian interests listed in the law. Topics that qualify under this category cannot be part of the project.
- The "**SECRET/GEHEIM**" level is assigned to information if its improper use could cause SERIOUS damage to the interests listed in the law.

- The "**CONFIDENTIEL/VERTROUWELIJK**" level is assigned to information if its improper use could harm any of the interests listed in the law.
- The **"RESTREINT/BEPERKT"** level is assigned to information when improper use could be detrimental to one of the interests listed in the law.

Information of which the originator wants to limit the distribution to persons who are authorized to use them on a need-to-know basis, without however attaching legal consequences to this limitation, are marked with the indication "**SENSIBLE NON CLASSIFIE" (AR 20.12.2004) / "GEVOELIG NIET-GECLASSIFICEERD" (KB 20.12.2024)**.

These classification levels should be applied taking into account both the need to protect information and the need to avoid unnecessary obstruction to the use of research information and results.

Applicants should identify in the Full-Proposal the classification needs for the work packages of the project that involve threat and /or vulnerability assessments and the information on specifications or capabilities of the tool(s) used.

- threat assessments (i.e. estimation of the likelihood of a malicious act against an asset, with particular reference to factors such as intention, capacity and potential impact)
- vulnerability assessments (i.e. description of gaps or weaknesses which can be exploited during malicious acts, and often contain suggestions to eliminate or diminish these weaknesses)
- specifications (i.e. exact guidelines on the design, composition, manufacture, maintenance or operation of threat substances or countermeasure substances, technologies and procedures)
- capability assessments (i.e. description of the ability of an asset, system, network, service or authority to fulfil its intended role — and in particular the capacity of units, installations, systems, technologies, substances and personnel that have security-related functions to carry these out successfully)

Based on the assessment of the provided input a security screening by Belgian Defence might be imposed in the contract on ALL partners of the selected project(s). In that case, these beneficiaries should obtain a security clearance before starting work on classified parts of the project.

The applicable security framework for the action must be in place at the latest before the signature of the contract and will be considered as an annex to the contract.

More information can be found on the website of the National Security Authority (Nationale Veiligheidsoverheid – Autorité Nationale de Sécurité) https://www.nvoans.be/

This security analysis will not be part of the evaluation process but is essential to be able to start the project.

Persons that are involved in a project must be nationals of a country of the European Union or nationals of a country of the European Free Trade Association or nationals of a country that is a member of NATO.
Persons involved in a project may be subject to a verification. Only after a positive verification, can a person be recruited to the project.

8 COMPLAINTS

Both BELSPO and RHID place great importance on the quality of their service and on improving the way they operate. A complaint about the administrative handling of this call for proposals will be handled by BELSPO, RHID will handle complaints about the content of the call and the contracts that are concluded as a result of the call.

A special form to handle complaints has been created.

The complaint form is available at the following address:
http://www.belspo.be/belspo/organisation/complaints_en.stm

Complaints submitted anonymously or which are offensive or not related to our organisation will not be processed.

A complaint is handled as follows:

- Once your complaint has been filed, a notification of receipt will be sent.
- The complaint will be forwarded to the relevant departments and individuals and will be processed within one month.
- An answer will be sent by e-mail or letter.
- The complaint will be treated with strict confidentiality.

If you are dissatisfied by the initial response to a complaint, you can always contact the Médiateur Fédéral / Federal Ombudsman, rue de Louvain 48 bte 6 / Leuvenseweg 48 bus 6, 1000 Brussels (email: contact@mediateurfederal.be / contact@federaalombudsman.be).

9 CONTACTS

Further information can be obtained by contacting the **secretariat**: defra@belspo.be