

DEFRA: Human Factors Open Call

Information document including submission and evaluation guidelines and budget rules

Important dates:

Information day: 28 January 2026 (08h30 - 15h30)

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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1 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

1.1 DEFRA - 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 launched in the frame of DEFRA. It is an open call in which applicants can propose Defence-relevant research in the human factors domain.

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 calls for proposals in the frame of the Defence-related Research Action (DEFRA), 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](#)

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE DEFRA 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 **Human Factors Open Call** in the frame of the DEFRA programme.

2 THE DEFRA HUMAN FACTORS OPEN CALL

2.1 CALL TOPIC

Context

Belgian Defence faces specific challenges in the omnipresent uncertainty and complexity of the operational context, such as budget constraints, personnel shortages, time limitations, information overload, sociocultural and operational complexity. To address these challenges, there is a need to focus on optimising organisational and decisional processes and developing advanced operational and training methods.

Research scope

The research in this area focuses on studying human behaviour, performance, and efficacy in high-technology and extreme environments, considering humans as bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings. Topics of interest include cognitive and physical capabilities, human enhancement, team functioning, recruitment, leadership, organisational culture, training and education, personnel support, human-systems integration, human-machine teaming, cognitive warfare, and ethical considerations of military behaviour and technology, especially those involving artificial intelligence.

Impact for Defence

Research in the human factors' domain is expected to enhance the performance, safety, resilience, and operational effectiveness of defence personnel and organisations. The goal of this open call is to explore new solutions towards the development of optimised functioning and integration of human beings in complex organisations such as defence, from an economical, legal, psychological, sociological, or ethical point of view.

2.2 INDICATIVE CALL BUDGET

The indicative budget for the Human Factors Open Call is 4.0 M euro.

The indicative budget for this call is 4.0 M euro

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

The number of projects that will be funded depends on the evaluation of the proposals and the requested budget per proposal. Passing the threshold of scientific quality, the best ranked proposal(s) will be funded.

2.3 DOCUMENTATION RELATED TO THIS CALL

The following documents are available on the [DEFRA website](https://www.belspo.be/defra) (<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 3](#).

2.4 INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF THE CALL

	Date	At / via
Information session	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 – 15 June 2026	RHID
Feedback to applicants in preparation of panel meeting (consensus reports and questions to applicants)	30 June 2026	Mail
Written feedback by applicants (answers)	31 July 2026	Mail
Panel evaluation, incl. interviews with the applicants	Between 10 August and 2 September 2026	RHID
Selection proposal formulated by the scientific committee of the RHID	10 September 2026	NA
Final selection of proposals by the board of directors of the RHID and allocation of projects	1 October 2026	NA
Communication of results to applicants	6 October 2026	Mail
Signature contracts	16 November 2026	Online E-sign platform

2.5 INFORMATION DAY

To inform potential applicants about the context, scope and modalities of this call and to offer them network opportunities, an information day will be held on **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](#).

1.1. PROJECT DURATION

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

2.6 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.

Although it is not mandatory to include a private company in the project partnership, a **triple helix composition**, where academia and industry work together to foster R&T for Defence, is encouraged. Specific partnership requirements per theme are set out in [section 2.7](#).

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.

2.7 PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

2.7.1 PARTNERSHIP

For this call proposals must be submitted by a **network** composed of **at least two partners of which at least one** (public or private non-profit) **research institute**. Private companies can be a partner, but it is not mandatory. All types of organisations can act as project coordinator.

Partnership:

- At least two partners
- at least one (public or private non-profit) research institute
- Optional: private 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 network². 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).

2.7.2 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 5.3](#)).

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

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 5.4.](#),
- 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 6.3](#)).

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.

2.8 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.

2.9 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	15% of Staff costs (Automatically generated)	-	10% of [Staff costs + Operation costs] (Automatically generated)	-	Max. 25% of the total budget of this partner
	Master: 8 000€/month					
	Master (engineering): 8 700€/month					
	PhD: 10 500€/month					
OTHER PROJECT PARTNERS	Technician: 5 700€/month	10% of Staff costs (Automatically generated)	-	10% of [Staff costs + Operation costs] (Automatically generated)	-	Max. 25% of the total budget of this partner
	Master: 8 000€/month					
	Master (engineering): 8 700€/month					
	PhD: 10 500€/month					

2.10 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.

3 SUBMISSION PROCEDURE

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

<https://belspo.aimsgrants.com/>

3.1 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 4.1.1.](#)).

The pre-proposals that have passed the eligibility check will be evaluated by an internal evaluation committee of the Belgian Defence (see [section 4.1.1.](#)).

On **23 March 2026**, the internal evaluation committee will select a maximum of ten (10) pre-proposals 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.

3.2 PHASE 2 – FULL PROPOSAL

A maximum of 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)

4 EVALUATION PROCEDURE AND CRITERIA

4.1 EVALUATION PROCEDURE

4.1.1 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 2.6](#)),
- Partnership composition (see [section 2.7.1](#)).

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,
- 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:

CRITERIA	WEIGHT OF THE DIFFERENT CRITERIA
Quality of the pre-proposal	50%
Quality of the partners & Adequacy of the partnership	25%
Impact	25%

According to the scores obtained, the proposals will be ranked (Pre-proposal Ranking).

As this is an open call, 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.

4.1.2 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 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.

Each of the full proposals will be evaluated by a team of 3 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](#).

Once all written evaluations have been introduced for a given proposal, the evaluation reports will be compiled into a Consensus Report for each proposal. The Consensus Report will consist of appreciations and comments for the different (sub)criteria.

The report will also include questions to which the applicants must **respond in writing** prior to the presentation to the Scientific Expert Committee (SEC) (step 2).

At this stage, the Consensus Reports are definitive. They will not be modified in the subsequent steps of the evaluation.

The individual evaluations are neither communicated to the Scientific Expert Committees, nor to the applicants.

On **30 June 2026**, applicants will get access to an anonymised version of their definitive Consensus Report, in preparation of the presentation for the SEC. They will also get the list of questions to which they must answer in writing by **31 July 2026**.

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
Scientific quality	40%
Quality and efficiency of the implementation	30%
Impact maximisation strategy	30%

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

The SEC will have access to the full proposals (and annexes), the anonymised consensus report and the proposal rankings. The consensus reports shall not be modified by the SEC.

The 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 (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.

The 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 call.
- 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 meeting, the best ranked proposal(s) will be proposed for funding to the Scientific Committee of the RHID.

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 Scenario, including its motivation
- Full proposal and Consensus Report 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.

4.2 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).

5 CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS

5.1 PROJECT STARTING AND END DATE

The projects selected within the context of the Human Factors Open 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).

5.2 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 promoters 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.

5.3 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 5.4](#).

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.

5.4 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.

6 DATA, RESULTS, INTELLECTUAL OWNERSHIP AND SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 CLASSIFIED INFORMATION/SECURITY RELATED ACTIVITIES

For this call there are no specific security requirements.

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.

7 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).

8 CONTACTS

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