

DEFRA: Space Call

Information document including submission and evaluation guidelines and budget rules

Important dates:

Information day: 28 January 2026 (13h00 - 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. In this call applicants can propose research in two (2) defined research themes within the Space 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 **Space Call** in the frame of the DEFRA programme.

2 THE DEFRA SPACE CALL

2.1 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 – Earth Observation (EO)	10.0
Theme 2 – Space Situation Awareness (SSA)	6.0
TOTAL	16.0

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(s) 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 4.1.2](#)).

Budget transfers between the themes are possible.

2.1.1 THEME 1 - EARTH OBSERVATION (EO)

Context

Space-based Earth Observation assets collect critical information on adversary activities, enabling informed decision-making and strategic planning. These systems support a range of missions, including monitoring compliance with international agreements, assessing battlefield conditions, and providing real-time intelligence to provide strategic insights and support tactical operations. In accordance with the [Space Defence Roadmap](#) published in October 2025, all research projects must consider low Earth orbit-based assets (LEO), assuming mini-Satellites (150 – 500kg) as a sweet spot between payload capability, launch flexibility and deployment cost as a baseline.

Research scope

As Belgian Defence is currently developing its first full-sovereign Space-Based Earth Observation infrastructure, the research projects supported through this specific call are foreseen to prepare the next-generation of systems. The main focus will be on disruptive technologies leading to new generation of payload solutions and ISR elements such as enhanced interoperability, direct-to-device, end-user tasking, and providing insights at tactical level. It seeks to advance extremely-high-resolution payloads across electro-optical, radiofrequency, synthetic aperture radar and infrared sensors, but also to support the data collection with related edge-technology data processing.

In the sensor domain, the priority is given to cooling system (passive/active/mix solution) to drastically enhance the infrared sensor performances; miniaturized optical systems with photonic-based wide-spectrum imagers; low-power and compact Synthetic Aperture Radar payload.

In data processing domain, the priority is given to on-board automated processing; space-based multi-sensor fully autonomous fusion; space weight and power (SWaP) drastic reduction by data-handling optimization.

We encourage the submission of projects targeting the TRL 6 (ground demonstrator). The qualification of systems/sub-systems by Belgian subcontractors could be done in the frame of this call.

Impact for Defence

The foreseen solutions and technologies are expected to equip Belgian/European defence with the right capabilities, the ability to achieve military objectives and perform space support to operations with decoupled efficiency. These future technology developments should provide highly accurate data collection and accelerated the processing, to allow more dynamic re-tasking of space-based infrastructures.

2.1.2 THEME 2 - SPACE SITUATION AWARENESS (SSA)

Context

By 2030, the space domain will be even more congested, contested, and competitive than it is today, with near-Earth orbits hosting tens of thousands of active satellites and an exponentially growing debris population. Current multiple space contestation will probably increase, through direct threat to space-based segment of military infrastructures. By 2030–2035, congestion and debris proliferation will greatly complicate safe military space operations and space could definitively turn in a direct conflict area. As military reliance on space-based capabilities continues to grow, the ability to protect, understand, and actively respond within the space domain has become essential for operational superiority and strategic autonomy.

Research scope

To foster the defence capabilities to monitor the space activity and to detect, identify and characterize space threats, we need to rely on faster and more accurate collection and processing of valuable information. The extension of automated and near-real time of data collection, fusion, and interpretation across multiple data sources and various sensor types into a coherent, accurate, and secure operational picture is the backbone of future Space Situation Awareness capacities. AI-enhanced data analytics should support identification, classification and permanent tracking of objects with minimal human oversight (from small debris to unknown payloads). The integration of ground-based and space-based sensors is expected, in manner to mutually enrich the awareness by convergent and complementary data.

Main focus will be innovative space-based data collection, included but not limited to Advanced Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar and Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR); integration of multiple, heterogeneous and complex dataset; fully automated on-board processing; concepts for satellite constellation for cost-effective persistent SSA.

Priority will be given to the development of sovereign systems rather commercial products and service.

We encourage the submission of projects targeting the TRL 6 (demonstrator). The qualification of systems/sub-systems by Belgian subcontractors could be done in the frame of this call.

Impact for Defence

The focus of SSA RTD is on enabling operational, real-time situational awareness in a congested environment. Technology building blocks, including adaptive optics, AI-enhanced detection, and low-power radar or optical payloads, will enable first deployments and mission-level demonstrations. On a second phase, the transition to persistent SSA in a contested environment with enhanced behavioural analysis, space-to-space tracking, and hostile intent attribution. These advanced, space-qualified systems integrated with strategic intelligence and edge autonomy support defence operations in contested space environments. The reduction of human workload in raw data handling, and first classification and characterization operations will allow to preserve limited resources to highly added-value tasks.

2.2 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
 - Veiligheidsverificatie toestemming – Vérification de sécurité consentement
 - Company Honourability & Vulnerability self-assessment declaration
- 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](#).

2.3 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 – 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 September 2026	NA

Final selection of proposals by the board of directors of the RHID and allocation of projects	10 September 2026	NA
Communication of results to applicants	14 September 2026	Mail

2.4 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](#).

2.5 PROJECT DURATION

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

2.6 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR (FUNDED AND NON-FUNDED) PROJECT PARTNERS AND SUBCONTRACTORS

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.

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 2.7](#).

NOTES FOR COMPANIES, A(I)SBL AND FOUNDATIONS:

The delivery of the following documents is a formal requirement for a valid application for the call:

- 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 extract of the UBO register must be uploaded in the online submission platform.**
- The consent form relating to the law of 11/12/1998 on classification and security clearances, security advice and the publicly regulated service (available in [Dutch](#) and [French](#) on the DEFRA website) must be completed by the natural persons listed on the UBO form and sent to bureau.industrie@mil.be for verification. **Proof of dispatch of this form to the “bureau industrie” must be provided by e-mail to defra@mil.be before 19 February 2026.** A negative opinion from the administrative authority for at least one of the persons listed on the UBO may result in the legal entity being refused participation in the project.
- A [company Honourability & Vulnerability self-assessment declaration](#) must be delivered to guarantee the company honourability, ethics & professional conduct. This declaration must be sent by e-mail to defra@mil.be before 19 February 2026.

For funded partners, non-funded partners and subcontractors: You are a company, a(i)sbl or a foundation?		
Document	Name and format of the file	How to deliver?
Extract(s) from the UBO register	ACRONYM_UBO_COMPANY.pdf	Upload in online submission platform
Consent form(s) for security verification	ACRONYM_CONSENT_COMPANY_PERSON.pdf	E-mail to bureau.industrie@mil.be
Proof(s) of dispatch of the consent form(s) for security verification	ACRONYM_PROOF_COMPANY_PERSON.pdf	E-mail to defra@mil.be (grouped per pre-proposal)
Company Honourability & Vulnerability self-assessment declaration	ACRONYM_DECLARATION.pdf	E-mail to defra@mil.be (grouped per pre-proposal)

Failing to deliver these documents will result in exclusion of the pre-proposal

2.7 PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

2.7.1 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 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.](#)).

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.

Eligibility criteria for subcontractors are mentioned under section 2.6.

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

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
- proof of delivery of security verification consent
- company honourability & vulnerability awareness self-assessment

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 <i>(Automatically generated)</i>	-	10% of [Staff costs + Operation costs] <i>(Automatically generated)</i>	-	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 <i>(Automatically generated)</i>	-	10% of [Staff costs + Operation costs] <i>(Automatically generated)</i>	-	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).

The proof of dispatch of the form “veiligheidsverificatie_toestemming / vérification de sécurité_consentement” and the “Company Honourability & Vulnerability self-assessment declaration” must be sent by e-mail to defra@mil.be. Please provide these documents grouped by pre-proposal.

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 for theme 1 and a maximum five (5) pre-proposals for theme 2, 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

For theme 1 a maximum of ten (10) pre-proposals will be invited to submit a full proposal. For theme 2, maximum five (5) 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 extract(s) available,
 - Proof(s) of dispatch of the consent form(s) for security verification available,
 - Company Honourability and Vulnerability self-assessment declaration 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 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:

CRITERIA	WEIGHT
Quality of the pre-proposal	40%
Quality of the partners & Adequacy of the partnership	30%
Impact	30%

According to the scores obtained, the proposals will be ranked in a list per theme (Pre-proposal Ranking). These lists will serve as the base for the selection of the applicants invited to introduce a full proposal.

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 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 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.

RHID 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 DEFRA 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 **10 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(s) 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.

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 ROYAL DECREE AND CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS

5.1 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).

5.2 ROYAL DECREE AND CONTRACTS

For the selected proposals, a Royal Decree is decided and a contract is conducted between Belgian Defence and the funded partners.

The Royal Decree determines the subsidised projects, designates the involved parties and lays down the general arrangements, in particular those relating to budgetary matters.

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 implementation modalities applicable to the project, including the project and contract duration and budget. **It 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

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, a person can 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