

## PROGRAMME COMMITTEE - TERMS OF REFERENCE

### **INTRODUCTION**

On 9 February 2024, the Council of Ministers approved the implementation of Policy for Science (P4Science) research programme.

This P4Science programme is carried out under the responsibility of the Federal Science Policy (BELSPO), assisted by a Programme Committee.

This document concerns the Terms of Reference (ToR), defining the working arrangements of the Programme Committee.

### **COMPOSITION**

The composition and operation of the Programme Committee are of great importance. The members are delegates from the departments mandated by their chair and appointed for the duration of the programme. The delegates must have the appropriate knowledge and expertise to contribute to a better science-policy interface, to create synergies with other departments and to ensure that research proposals are anchored at federal level.

The Programme Committee will also include 4 independent members of the Federal Science Policy Council and a Belgian expert with a cross-disciplinary view of research and policy, who will be able to provide additional advice on the priority of the research and the correct translation of the policy question into a research question.

In case a delegate can no longer fulfil its assignment, he/she will immediately inform BELSPO and ensure that a new delegate is suggested by the president of the concerned federal department or by the chairperson of the Federal Council for Science Policy.

### **MANDATE**

#### **Mandate of the delegates from federal departments**

The Note to the Council of Ministers identifies the following roles for the delegates of the federal departments, which shall be further detailed.

#### **A science to policy interface function within and beyond the federal department**

It is expected from the delegate in the Programme Committee to develop 1) an extensive knowledge of the research that is developed in his/her department, via either internal analytical capacities or via commissioned research outside the department and 2) develop an extensive and far-reaching knowledge of the political priorities assigned to the department and their translation into research priorities and plans.

The delegate will also seek information on scientific evidence outside the department. BELSPO can provide information on past BELSPO-funded research. At European and international level,

BELSPO can also provide information on BELSPO-granted research projects and on forthcoming transnational calls of possible interest to the departments.

Based on this knowledge, the delegates will:

- ⇒ collect the research needs for policy driven projects in his/her department (including the participation in transnational calls), wherever possible in collaboration with other federal departments;
- ⇒ Suggest policy oriented research themes that shall be flagged to the political level to obtain additional research funding.

Delegates shall oversee the embeddedness of the results of the financed policy driven projects within the functioning of the department(s). For the funded policy oriented projects, the delegate shall ensure the presence of members of the department in the stakeholder committees of the projects and shall advise on how the scientific results can best inform policymaking.

### A science to policy interface at the level of the Programme Committee

At the level of the Programme Committee, the delegates shall promote synergies for the policy driven projects, aligning them and avoiding overlaps, mutualising them when possible and broadening their scope, in order to have the largest possible impact.

Also for the policy oriented projects, synergies will be sought between the department's individual strategic research topics, to jointly develop a long-term research agenda containing critical strategic topics that should be flagged to the government for future funding.

At the level of the programme itself, delegates shall contribute to determine the monitoring process that will enable to measure the impact of the programme as a whole in the federal evidence-informed policymaking ecosystem.

### The Programme Committee as an institutional memory

The Programme Committee is the best place to mutualise the funded research from every department and create a repository of research reports that can easily be accessible. This institutional memory function complies with the Open access and Open data Regulations that apply to Belgium and that are poorly implemented. As foreseen in the Note to the Council of Ministers, BOSA and BELSPO will join forces to provide a repository infrastructure embedded in [Data.gov](https://data.gov).

### **Mandate of the members of the Federal Council for Science Policy and of the transversal expert**

The members of the Federal Council for Science Policy and the transversal expert play an important role in the Programme Committee and in the cycle of the programme. Their role is, in the preparation phase of a call, to provide additional advice on the policy driven project priorities set by the federal departments, advice on the (potential additional) policy oriented strategic priorities and ensure the correct translation of the policy questions into research questions.

They will also advise on the other aspects of the functioning of the programme, e.g. monitoring process of the programme, KPIs on the impact of projects, repository of funded research at federal level and any other subject arising in the discussion in the Programme Committee.

## **Mandate of all delegates**

The proposal of projects to be funded, based on and taking into account the peer review evaluation by foreign experts organised by BELSPO.

The evaluation runs in two phases:

### *Phase 1 - peer review organised and coordinated by BELSPO*

BELSPO organises and coordinates a scientific evaluation of the proposals by a number of foreign peers. The evaluation takes place in two steps: an individual written evaluation followed by a panel meeting.

### *Phase 2 - selection proposal formulated by the Programme Committee*

Transparency of the evaluation process is guaranteed by submitting the peer review results to the Programme Committee. This also guarantees a stronger substantiation of the choices made.

The Programme Committees will dispose of the following elements, provided by BELSPO:

- the proposals
- the evaluation criteria provided by BELSPO and used by the foreign peers
- the outputs of the peer review: the consensus report per project and the funding proposal.

Based on the consensus report and the funding proposal prepared by the peer review panel, the Programme Committee will formulate a definitive selection proposal.

To ensure a neutral outcome and to avoid any conflict of interest, the members of the Programme Committee belonging to the same institution as the proposers or having a direct or indirect personal interest with respect to the proposal, shall not participate in the Committees' discussions and deliberation of the proposal in question.

## **FUNCTIONING**

The Programme Committee will meet in function of the needs and the call calendar. Meetings may be held either in-person or via a simultaneous conference call. BELSPO shall determine the manner in which a meeting will be held in close consultation with the Committees' members.

In-person meetings will be held at BELSPO and chaired by the BELSPO-coördinator of the Programme or by her/his delegate. The chairman of the meeting shall appoint a rapporteur who draws up the minutes.

The Programme Committee can only take valid decisions in a meeting in which at least half of the members are present. The temporary absence of a member shall be notified to BELSPO as soon as possible. These temporary absent members shall not be replaced.

Decisions may also be taken outside of the meeting, for example via a mailing consulting, provided at least half of the members have provided feedback.

Whenever possible, decisions will be taken by consensus. If a consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be taken by simple majority, each member having one vote. In case of a tie, BELSPO has a voting right.

Meeting documents and information will be provided by BELSPO to the members 7 working days in advance of a meeting. As a general rule and unless requested specifically otherwise, members have a minimum of 7 working days to respond to a query by BELSPO.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND PUBLICITY OF INFORMATION**

Information received by the Programme Committee (call texts, proposals....) shall be strictly treated as confidential for the full term of the Programme Committee. No part of this information can be disclosed to third parties, nor reproduced and/or distributed in any possible way. This obligation of confidentiality is alleviated when information enters the public domain (e.g. a call text when published on the BELSPO website).

Information received by BELSPO from the Programme Committee shall be used within the strict public service obligations.

The website of BELSPO will mention the composition of the Programme Committee upon explicit consent of the members, in conformity with the GDPR regulation.

## **NOTE TO THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

In the annex the note to the council of ministers is available in French and Dutch.