

Thesis Advisory Committee

CEITEC PhD School

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of implementation of the **Thesis Advisory Committee** (TAC) as a standard tool of CEITEC PhD School is to provide a comprehensive system of **individual quality assessment** (IQA) of PhD candidates for the preparation of the defense. The IQA was identified as a quality gap in doctoral studies by International Scientific Boards of CEITEC and Masaryk University. Both boards as well as PhD candidates perceive it as a crucial issue and creating TAC as an adequate step, which can help to solve the gap.

The document aims to clearly define the whole concept of the TAC, including structure and set up of the TAC, processes related to the operation of the TAC, the expectations of the TAC, and the schedule of the implementation. The ambition of this document is also to set the general rules of implementation and operation of the TAC beyond the CEITEC PhD School and participate in the improvement of PhD studies at Masaryk University.

The concept of the TAC will replace the current system of quality assessment and progress reporting, which represents *PhD Progress Day*. A *PhD conference* will also replace the aspect of the progress presentation.

The concept of Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) will be implemented since September 2019 in the annual trial mode. After a year it will be evaluated and possibly set as standard tool of CEITEC PhD School to provide a comprehensive system of individual quality assessment of PhD candidates for the preparation of the defense.

2. TAC - STRUCTURE

2.1. Establishment of the TAC

Every* PhD candidate enrolled in a PhD Programme under the CEITEC PhD School (Life Sciences and Biomedical Sciences, Molecular Medicine specialisation) must be supervised and mentored during their studies by **3 TAC members at least**. The members are selected by the PhD candidate, in consultation with their supervisor. The supervisor is a member of the TAC, but typically does not chair the committee. All Group Leaders, Core Facility Heads, and supervisors*** are eligible to become TAC members. Two members of TAC should not come from the supervisor's research group and at least one of them should be affiliated with another faculty or institution. Foreign members of the TAC are also welcome. The proposal of TAC members approved by PhD Candidate and the supervisor must be delivered to the *PhD Studies Manager (Department of Strategy and Science)* by the end of the first semester**, and further approved by the *Doctoral Committee* of the particular programme.

** Except for the students who will be in autumn 2019 in the seventh and greater semester, who will continue in the Progress day system (see the chapter 4.1).*

*** The advanced students who will be in autumn 2019 semester in the third up to the sixth semester of study deliver the proposal on TAC members by the end of autumn 2019 semester.*

**** Anyone (internal or external) who supervises or has already supervised a PhD candidate is eligible to be a member of TAC.*

2.2. TAC Meetings

The TAC should convene at least **three times** during the PhD candidate's career. All scheduled meetings are mandatory and must take place in predefined periods. It is the PhD candidate's responsibility to invite the TAC members, arrange TAC meetings, and provide the PhD Studies Manager with copies of the signed TAC Assessment Reports (see Annex).

Two weeks before every TAC meeting, the PhD candidate submits a written material, presenting the thesis proposal (for the 1st meeting) or progress he/she made from the last TAC meeting (for following meetings).

The meeting is divided into the four parts. During the first part, the PhD candidate gives a short (approximately 20 min.) presentation of his/her current research, followed by a discussion with the TAC members. After that, during the second part, there is a discussion between the PhD candidate and the TAC without the supervisor. The third part of the meeting is a discussion between the entire TAC

committee, without the PhD candidate. The Chairperson finishes the meeting (fourth part) with a summary and recommendations. A copy of the *Assessment Report*, signed by all parties, must be delivered to the PhD Studies within one month of the meeting.

The part of the meeting where the supervisor or PhD candidate is not present is **confidential**. The first time slot allows for a discussion between the TAC and the candidate about his/her satisfaction with his/her supervisor or any other sensitive topic. The second time slot should reveal the satisfaction of the supervisor with the candidate. Any potential misunderstandings should be identified and treated in time.

2.2.1. First Meeting

The first TAC meeting takes place by the end of the **second semester**. Two weeks before the TAC meeting, the PhD candidate submits a written **2 – 5 page thesis proposal**, presenting the basic outline of the project and initial results. The TAC will assess the following criteria, which the chairperson will record on the *TAC Assessment Report*:

- Scope and the milestones of the research project
- Expected impact and opportunities of the project
- Potential risks and challenges involved in the project
- The readiness of the PhD candidate on the project (methodological skills and fundamental knowledge)
- Overall assessment of the candidate's performance and approach to the project

2.2.2. Second Meeting

The second TAC meeting takes place between the **fourth** and the **fifth semester** and should be focused mainly on the progress of the candidate in meeting the set objectives based on a running report prepared by PhD candidate. An alternative project can also be considered if progress is not sufficient. Appropriate attention must be paid to any potential risks, and clear measures must be taken to prevent any failures.

This meeting should also serve as **career consultancy**. Career development should be monitored further.

The TAC *Assessment Report* monitors the following criteria:

- Status of the Project
- Progress made
- Goals for coming year
- Career plans

2.2.3. Third Meeting

The third TAC meeting takes place during the **seventh semester** and aims to evaluate the readiness of the PhD candidate to submit the paper, complete the research, and finish studies. The status of meeting all duties needed for the completion of the study should be described in the running report provided by PhD candidate to the TAC committee in advance. If more time for completion of study is needed, a detailed research plan must be submitted together with the TAC Assessment Report to specify precisely timing and activities needed for the successful defense. The candidate's funding after the eighth semester must be clarified.

2.2.4. Follow-up Meeting(s)

The follow-up TAC meetings after the third meeting are scheduled for every other **odd semester (i.e., 9th, 11th, etc.)**. During the meetings, the completeness of the research plan is checked and treated.

2.2.5. Ad Hoc Meetings

At any time, any involved party (TAC member, PhD candidate, supervisor) can hold personal discussions with another party or can request additional TAC meetings.

3. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

3.1. Ombudsperson

Any PhD candidates or any member of the TAC may ask the ombudsperson to be present during the TAC meeting, particularly in following cases:

- Conflict of interest
- Struggling with an ethical issue
- One party feels at a disadvantage

3.2. Revocation of the TAC committee

The revocation of the TAC committee can occur by the PhD candidate's decision and the decision of the Doctoral Board. The former TAC must be replaced by a new one as soon as possible, ideally within one month. The process of revocation should be the last instance, and a sufficient effort to exploit existing TAC must come first. It is not recommended to replace the TAC more than once during the entire study. The replacement must be approved by the Doctoral Board.

3.3. Exchange of TAC members

Any member of the TAC can be replaced by another, if necessary. The replacement must be approved by the Doctoral Board.

3.4. Online Meeting

The TAC meeting is usually held as an on-site meeting (i.e., all parties meet at one time and in one place). If there is a TAC member offsite or at a long-term foreign stay, the meeting can be held **online**. The PhD candidate is still responsible for the organisation of the meeting and the delivery of the signed *Assessment Report* to the *PhD Studies Manager* on time.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TACS

4.1. PhD Candidates of CEITEC PhD School - Life Sciences and Biomedical Sciences Doctoral Programmes

The implementation of the TAC is mandatory for all PhD candidates enrolled in Life Sciences or Biomedical Sciences (Molecular Medicine specialization) Doctoral Programmes. The schedule of the meetings differs for students enrolled in the Doctoral programme before and after 2019. For the detailed information, please see the table below.

Semester Studied in Autumn 2019	1st Meeting	2nd Meeting	3rd Meeting	Further Meetings
1 st - 2 nd	2 nd semester	4 th -5 th semester	7 th semester	9 th , 11 th , etc.
3 rd – 6 th	N/A	4 th -5 th semester	7 th semester	9 th , 11 th , etc.
7 th and greater	Progress Days (regular scheduling)			

4.2. PhD Candidates with a Supervisor from CEITEC MU (except those described in chapter 4.1)

The implementation of the TAC concept is also highly recommended for PhD candidates enrolled in faculty programmes who have a supervisor from CEITEC MU, since the concept provides a comprehensive system of individual support for the preparation of the defense. The PhD candidate, together with the supervisor, must clearly decide whether they will join the TAC concept or not. If they decide to join the TAC concept, they should fully follow the rules and schedule of the CEITEC PhD School. The PhD candidate must inform the PhD Studies Manager and propose the TAC members. Because it is not possible to promise that *Doctoral Boards* from the faculty programmes will fully support the TAC concept, the *Chairperson of the Committee* will play a crucial role in the coordination and monitoring of the progress.

4.3. Implementation at Masaryk University

The concept of the TAC will be shared across Masaryk University. The Scientific Secretary of CEITEC MU will open the issue of TAC as a part of the discussion on the common quality standards of doctoral studies at MU with *Vice-Deans for Research* or *Vice-Deans for PhD studies*. The implementation can be either approved by individual *Doctoral Boards* and will impact on all PhD candidates enrolled in the particular study programme, or it can be done on a case-by-case basis without the engagement of the *Doctoral Board*. In this situation, it is a managerial decision of the supervisor to maximise support of the PhD candidate.

5. PHD CONFERENCE

PhD Progress Day should be further organised as a PhD Conference, which helps to promote students' competencies in presentation skills, and which is mandatory for PhD candidates of CEITEC PhD School. PhD candidates have to present their results at least twice during their studies. First, the PhD candidates must present their results in the form of the poster during their 3rd year. Then, during the 4th year, PhD candidates must give a lecture. Participation in the conference auditorium is obligatory for PhD candidates in first and second year of study and the TACs are also welcome. The PhD conference also aims to provide a regular assessment of PhD candidates performance by the Doctoral boards, whose representatives also take mandatory part in the conference. The PhD conference is organised annually by students, with assistance from the *Department of Strategy and Science*.

6. TAC ASSESSMENT REPORT

1st Meeting

Date:

PhD candidate:

Year of enrolment:

PhD Programme/ Specialization:

Supervisor:

TAC Chairperson:

TAC Members:

Project Title:

Quality Assessment of the Project

The following criteria should be assessed:

Scope and the milestones of the research project

Expected impact and opportunities of the project

Potential risks and challenges involved in the project

The readiness of the PhD candidate on the project (i.e., methodological skills and fundamental knowledge):

Overall assessment of the candidate's performance and approach to the project:

Other issues, comments:

	Name	Signature
PhD Candidate
Supervisor
TAC Chairperson
TAC Member
TAC Member

Add lines if the committee has more than 3 members.

7. TAC ASSESSMENT REPORT

2nd, 3rd, and 4th Meeting

Date:

PhD candidate:

Year of enrolment:

PhD Programme/ Specialization:

Supervisor:

TAC Chairperson:

TAC Members:

Project Title:

Assessment

The following criteria should be assessed:

Status of the project

Progress made

Goals for the coming year

Career plans

Other issues, comments:

Name	Signature
PhD Candidate
Supervisor
TAC Chairperson
TAC Member
TAC Member

Add lines if the committee has more than 3 members.