

Concept of Thesis Advisory Committee - Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does the updated *TAC Concept 2020* differ from the original concept implemented in 2019?

The concept basis, timing, and structure of TAC meetings remain unchanged. However, the updated concept brings more flexibility in setting up the committee; the committee chair does not have to be appointed before the first meeting; the process's structure has been streamlined, and service for arranging online meetings has been provided. Furthermore, the *Progress Report* template was prepared, and the *Assessment Report* templates were modified to be more comprehensible. Also, the process of amendments has been set up.

2. When should the TAC be set up?

TAC members should be selected and appointed during the first semester of study. The form *Proposal of Members of the TAC* should be delivered to the PhD Studies Manager at the Department of Strategy and Science by the end of the first semester of study). The PhD Studies Manager submits proposals of all students of the field to the Doctoral Committee's approval.

3. What is the role of the supervisor in the TAC construction?

Setting up the TAC is the student's responsibility, but the selection of committee members is carried out in cooperation between the student and the supervisor.

4. Must the appointment of the chairperson be decided when the TAC is set up?

No, it doesn't have to. It is sufficient to decide who will chair the TAC Meeting at the beginning of the meeting.

5. What is the role of the chairperson of the TAC?

The chairperson is the person who conducts the TAC meeting, summarizes its conclusions, and finalizes the assessment report; and also, as the person who would have the final say in potential problem situations. Closer communication between the chairperson and the Doctoral Board is not expected, except for some extremely problematic situation that would require it.

6. Should the student contact the members as first contact or rather the supervisor?

There is no prescribed procedure, although the activity is expected from the student. However, according to the experience, it is more effective when the supervisor addresses the external members first.

7. What are the requirements for the composition of the committee members?

The TAC consists of the supervisor and at least two other members from outside the supervisor's research group. In exceptional cases, a specific TAC composition may be proposed. Still, such a TAC composition must be justified and assessed on an individual basis by the chair of the Doctoral Committee. Female students are advised to have a woman on the committee.

8. Can there be two TAC members from the supervisor's research group?

Yes, but one of them is an extra member (i.e., the 4th member), as the obligation of two members from outside the group still applies.

9. Can the TAC be composed of the candidates for members of the Examination Committee?

To maintain the defense assessment's quality and credibility, it is not suitable to merge these committees. The Examination Committee must consist of independent members.

10. What number of TAC members is regarded as reasonable?

The lower limit is three members, but there is no upper limit on the number of TAC members; however, the TAC consisting of up to 4-5 members, including the supervisor and one external member, can be considered optimal. In some cases, an even higher number of members might be reasonable, but organizing meetings will be more difficult.

11. What are the requirements for the TAC members' experience with the supervision of students?

Three TAC members should have experience with the supervision of doctoral students. The member without any such experience should be either an extra member (i.e., the 4th member), or the TAC composition must be assessed individually by the Doctoral Committee's chair.

12. Who is considered as the external member of the TAC?

Any member outside CEITEC MU – he/she can be from other MU faculty, from other CEITEC institutes – CEITEC BUT, etc., or from other institutions.

13. Can the TAC have more external members?

Yes, the TAC can consist of the supervisor and two external members.

14. Are there any funds to cover the travel expenses of external members?

No funds are allocated for this purpose. The TAC meeting can be held online, or the external member can join the meeting remotely. The TAC meeting can also be scheduled on some other occasion (joint conference, planned visit of the external member in Brno, etc.)

15. Can one specialist be a TAC member for more students?

Yes, it is possible.

16. What to do if we are still in doubt regarding the composition of the committee?

Communicate the considered list of TAC members with PhD Studies Manager or the Doctoral Committee chair.

17. Can the appointed member of the TAC be replaced?

Yes, it is possible; even more members of the committee can be replaced if needed.

18. What is the purpose of TAC?

The TAC is not a controlling body, but it should help and support the student. It should consist of specialists in the field, who should help the student from the scientific point. TAC should be involved and well informed about the student's project. TAC should bring different points of view and expertise from specialists not directly connected to the project, provide a critical evaluation and practical recommendation.

19. Do the TAC Meetings replace the previously used system of progress reporting?

The TAC meetings, together with a *CEITEC PhD Conference*, replace the previously used system of quality assessment and progress reporting represented by *PhD Progress Days*. Only advanced students who started their studies before 2017, continue in the established quality assessment system (*PhD Progress Day + CEITEC PhD Conference*). However, the formal requirements of the study will still be checked annually by the doctoral committee.

20. Is a similar system used at other universities?

A similar concept of individual advisory committees (thesis committees, dissertation advisory committees, etc.) is a standard part of the study abroad. It is well established at such institutions as EMBL, Institut Pasteur, Harvard University, University of Gottingen, Max Planck Institute, IST Austria, LMU Munich, University Vienna, University of Gratz, etc.

21. What materials should be prepared for the TAC meeting?

Before the meeting, the student submits to TAC members a written material (a soft copy is sufficient). It should be the thesis proposal for the 1st meeting or the running report for the following meetings). The material format is not defined; however, it must cover the criteria specified in the TAC manual. The *Progress Report* template can be used, but it is not mandatory.

22. Are there any set terms for the meetings?

The TAC meeting's term depends on the arrangement between the student and the TAC members, only periods when the meetings should take place are predefined. It is strongly recommended not to leave scheduling the meeting at the last moment, especially when it concerns summer months.

23. Will the administrative staff be present at the TAC meetings?

The participation of administrative representatives in meetings is unnecessary, and it is not the purpose of the meeting. However, if this is desirable in certain specific cases, it will certainly be possible. However, in particular cases, the participation of ombudsperson should undoubtedly be considered in the first place.

24. If the TAC meeting's conclusion indicates the student's progress as unsatisfactory, what will be the impact (especially concerning the scholarship paid)?

The conclusion of the TAC meeting does not have a direct impact on the scholarship payment. Still, the TAC Assessment report is the basis for the Doctoral Committee, which may decide to take special measures in serious cases.

25. What is the required scope of the TAC Assessment Report?

The scope of the Assessment Report is not specified; it can be brief. Still, it should cover all criteria specified in the TAC manual. It should provide concise feedback on the study progress and the project itself. A more extensive report is useful in complicated cases where the project's status or the cooperation between the supervisor and the student requires a more detailed analysis and recommendations.

26. Can the TAC be optional?

The concept was created as systematic support for the student; three mandatory TAC meetings during eight semesters of study represent the minimum standard. It is in the student's benefit to attend the meetings and obtain independent feedback from experts. If the student does not need any specific support, the discussion can focus on career consulting.

27. My meeting was too long / did not bring the expected effect.

It is necessary to think about the meeting structure and prepare in advance what is to be addressed. The meeting should focus on the strategic plan and communication, not the solution of detailed scientific problems. The more effort students put into TAC meeting preparation, the greater value they can get out of it.