



# GUIDELINES

ON THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AT THE MAX  
PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH



# Guidelines



on the Thesis Advisory Committee Meetings at the Max Planck Institute for Medical Research

The purpose of the Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) is to provide guidance for our PhD students throughout their studies. It monitors the progress and development of the PhD students and provides advice to our students as well as their supervisors. The committee members will also be available for one-to-one consultations with the student and may become an important networking partner. Moreover, our PhD students may contact the committee members for personal discussions at any time.

At our institute it is mandatory for every PhD student who is not part of a structured PhD program to be supported by a TAC. In special cases, students can seek approval of exception by putting their arguments forward to the managing director in written form (gd@mr.mpg.de).

## **Composition of the TAC**

The TAC is established by the supervisor in consultation with the student and should consist of at least three members that are experts in the field.

- All faculty members of our institute, including senior scientists and facility heads can become TAC members.
- At least one member should be a director of our institute.
- The supervisor should be a member of the TAC.
- If applicable, the co-supervisor/direct supervisor can take part as a fourth member.
- All members (with exception of the co-supervisor/direct supervisor) have to be financially and scientifically independent of each other.

After constitution, the PhD student should inform the institute's TAC coordinator about the composition of the committee.

## **Scope of TAC Meetings**

The first TAC meeting should take place within the first 6 to 8 months after the commencement of the PhD studies.

The scope of the proposed project should be assessed, covering the following topics:

- feasibility within the anticipated time frame
- re-evaluation of the topic and approach
- risk assessment and alternative strategies
- advice regarding an individualized training schedule should be given, if required

A second-year meeting should take place about 1 ½ years after the start of the project. Progress should be monitored, especially relating to the following topics:

- evaluation of the project regarding its suitability for a doctoral thesis and publication
- if necessary, assistance in identifying an alternate project
- timeline to achieve goals and complete thesis
- advice regarding an individualized training schedule, career planning and professional development, if required

A third-year meeting should take place about 2 ½ years after the start of the project. Progress should be monitored with regard to project completion and submission of the thesis, while also covering the following topics:

- detailed timeline for remaining experiments and completion of the thesis
- if necessary, a decision about an extension
- status of publications
- career planning and professional development

### **TAC Meeting Procedures**

The student is responsible for the planning of and invitation to the TAC meetings. This also comprises the timely submission of a TAC report, at the latest one week before the meeting (see more details below). The institute's TAC coordinator should be involved in the scheduling of the TAC meetings and a copy of the TAC report should also be submitted to him or her.

During the TAC meeting the PhD student will give a 20-minute oral presentation followed by about 30 minutes of questions and open discussion with the committee members. Individual confidential discussions between the TAC and the PhD student and between the TAC and the supervisor(s) follow. The TAC will intervene should problems between the student and the supervisor(s) be evident. Finally, both the student and supervisor(s) should leave the room for the other TAC members to discuss and summarize their views and to formulate recommendations in private.

As part of the TAC meeting the quality of the student's TAC report as well as his/her presentation and discussion should be assessed. Critiques should be provided and suggestions for improvements put forward, this can also include comments on the development of the student's abilities. Future plans should be evaluated and recommendations concerning priorities should be made. Specific questions in the TAC review form (see attachment) should be answered and complemented by written statements on the student's progress.

The TAC coordinator should take minutes, which are later given to the supervisor and PhD student. This meeting protocol should explicitly contain strong and weak aspects of the student's progress and comments on the student's performance.

Frequency:

- 1st TAC meeting within the first 8 months after beginning PhD studies
- 2nd TAC meeting after about 1 ½ years
- 3rd TAC Meeting after about 2 ½ years

## **TAC Report**

The PhD student hands in a written report on his/her research project at least one week in advance of a TAC meeting. The report should not exceed three pages for the first meeting, five pages for the second meeting, and eight pages for the third meeting.

The report should comprise:

- an introduction,
- objectives/hypothesis,
- a research plan with a timeline,
- results and a discussion, and
- a conclusion/outlook

# TAC review form



Assessment, comments and recommendations by the Thesis Advisory Committee

PhD student \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Group \_\_\_\_\_

Starting date of PhD \_\_\_\_\_

Primary supervisor (Chair of TAC) \_\_\_\_\_

Second TAC member \_\_\_\_\_

Third TAC member \_\_\_\_\_

Additional members (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of meeting \_\_\_\_\_

- first TAC Meeting
- second TAC Meeting
- third TAC Meeting

## 1. Quality of the progress report

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

## 2. Quality of the presentation and the scientific discussion

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

## 3. Quality of future plans

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

**4. Overall impression.** Is the student's progress adequate?\* - Recommendations, concerns etc.

- A very good
- B good
- C satisfactory
- D sufficient
- E inadequate

Comment:

\* If not, please make a plan to reconvene the TAC within the next few months, to further assess the situation.

**5. Specific recommendations by the TAC regarding prospective publications and career perspectives of the PhD student:**

**Signatures/date:**

Primary supervisor (Chair of TAC) \_\_\_\_\_

Second TAC member \_\_\_\_\_

Third TAC member \_\_\_\_\_

Additional members (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Protocol written by \_\_\_\_\_

Signature/date \_\_\_\_\_