Concept of the Thesis Advisory Committee

CEITEC PhD School

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CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the **Thesis Advisory Committee** (TAC) has been **implemented since September 2019** as a standard tool of CEITEC PhD School to provide a comprehensive system of **individual quality assessment** (IQA) of PhD candidates for the preparation of the defence. The IQA was identified as a quality gap in doctoral studies by the International Scientific Boards of CEITEC and of Masaryk University. Both boards, as well as PhD candidates, recognize it as a crucial issue, and creating TAC as an adequate step, which can help to solve the gap.

The concept was implemented in the annual trial mode, and after a year of operation, its **functionality was evaluated** based on feedback from students and supervisors through a survey. **Changes reflecting the requirements raised in the survey are incorporated in this material.**

The document aims to clearly define the whole concept of the TAC, including the 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 concept of the TAC has replaced the previously used system of quality assessment and progress reporting, represented by *PhD Progress Day*. The concept of the TAC is complemented by the organization of an annual *CEITEC PhD School Conference*, which covers the progress presentation of advanced students.

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 specialization) must be supervised and mentored during their studies by the TAC. The TAC is responsible for monitoring the student's progress and providing external advice and support to both student and supervisor.

Setting up the TAC is the responsibility of the student, but the selection of committee members is carried out in cooperation between the student and the supervisor. TAC members should be selected and appointed during the first semester of study.

The proposal of TAC members approved by PhD Candidate and the supervisor must be delivered to the *CEITEC PhD Studies Coordinator (Research and Innovation Support Department)* by the end of the first semester, and further approved by the *Doctoral Board* or by an authorized representative of the *Doctoral Board* (typically the chair of the Doctoral Board, or Doctoral Committee respectively).

* Except for the students who started their studies before 2017, who continue in the Progress Day system.

2.2. Composition of the committee members

The TAC should consist of three members, at least. There is no upper limit on the number of TAC members; however, the TAC consisting of up to five members can be considered as optimal. Three TAC members should have experience with the supervision of doctoral students**.

The TAC should include the supervisor and two members that do not come from the supervisor's research group; at least one of them should be external - from outside of the CEITEC MU (affiliated with other faculty of MU, other CEITEC institute, or other institution). The appointment of a specialist from abroad is beneficial.

In specific cases, the TAC composition may vary, but the student must explain why each member should be there, what his / her experience is, and what it will bring to the student to participate in his TAC. Such composition will be assessed individually by the chair of the *Doctoral Board* or *Doctoral Committee* respectively.

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

3. 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 necessary to register for the course *S5013 TAC Meeting* in semesters when the Meeting is planned and realized. The Meeting can be held online *(see Chapter 4.2).* Initiating the organization of the meetings (both on-site or online) on time is very important. It is the PhD candidate's responsibility to invite the TAC members, arrange TAC meetings, and upload completed and signed TAC Assessment Reports (*see Annex*) to the Homework Vaults of the course S5013.

* Except for the students who started their studies in the year 2018 or 2017, who have established the TAC in the second or third year of study.

3.1. Schedule of meetings

Year of Enrollment	1st Meeting	2nd Meeting	3rd Meeting	Follow-up Meetings
2019 or later	2nd semester	4th – 5th semester	7th semester	9th, 11th, etc.
2017 or 2018	N/A	4th – 5th semester	7th semester	9th, 11th, etc.
Before 2017	TAC concept is not applicable – progress is monitored at annual Progress Days			

3.2. The course S5013 TAC Meeting

Every semester the Meeting is planned and realized the PhD candidate needs to register for the course *S5013 TAC Meeting*. The *TAC Assessment Reports* are then uploaded to the Homework Vaults of the course S5013.

3.3. Procedures of meetings

3.3.1. Before the Meeting

Two weeks before every TAC meeting, the PhD candidate submits to all TAC members a written material:

- A thesis proposal (for the 1st Meeting)
- A brief report on the project's progress (for following meetings) – the *Progress Report* template can be used (see Annex)

3.3.2. During the Meeting

One of the TAC members (other than the supervisor) acts as a chairperson, who summarizes conclusions of the Meeting and finalizes the *TAC Assessment Report*.

The Meeting is divided into four parts.

- The PhD candidate gives a short (approximately 20 min.) presentation of his/her current research. The presentation should avoid technical details and focus on the key points needed to assess the project and/or for which advice is wanted. A discussion with the TAC members follows.
- A discussion* between the PhD candidate and the TAC without the supervisor - a discussion about PhD candidate's satisfaction with his/her supervisor or any other sensitive topic.
- A discussion* between the entire TAC committee, without the PhD candidate. It should reveal the satisfaction of the supervisor with the candidate.
- Final discussion - the chairperson finishes the Meeting with a summary and recommendations.

* The part of the Meeting where the supervisor or PhD candidate is not present is **confidential**. If the outputs of this section are important, they should be mentioned in the report in an anonymized form. Any potential misunderstandings should be identified and treated in time.

3.3.3. After the Meeting

A scan of the *TAC Assessment Report,* signed by PhD candidate, supervisor, and chairperson, must be uploaded to the Homework Vaults of the course *S5013 TAC Meeting* within one month of the Meeting.

3.4. Types of meetings

3.4.1. 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 will be recorded 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

The brief thesis proposal and conclusion of the Meeting are recommended to be inserted into the IS MU as the proposal of the individual study plan (ISP) for the entire study period.

3.4.2. 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 explicit measures must be taken to prevent any failures.

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

The TAC will assess the following criteria, which will be recorded on the *TAC Assessment Report*:

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

3.4.3. Third Meeting

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

The TAC will assess the following criteria, which will be recorded on the *TAC Assessment Report*:

- Status of the Project
- Progress made
- Goals for the period until completion of study/for the coming year (in case more time is needed for completion of study)
- A tentative date for defence (year, month)
- Career plans

3.4.4. 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.

3.4.5. 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.

4. EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

4.1. Process of amendments

Any necessary amendment (postponement of the TAC meeting, the addition of another TAC member, replacement of the TAC member, etc.) must be notified to the *CEITEC PhD Studies Coordinator* using the form *Amendment of the TAC Settings*

4.2. 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); however, it can be held online. The PhD candidate is still responsible for the organization of the Meeting and the uploading of the signed *TAC Assessment Report* to the Homework Vaults of the course S5013.

- A seminar room in any of the CEITEC MU pavilions can be used for the Meeting, the contact person for the reservation: an assistant of the relevant research group.
- AV equipment is available to be used for online meetings (portable surround microphone, surround camera)

  - equipment available at CEITEC MU - the contact person for the reservation: an assistant of the Director's Office Barbora Mertová, barbora.mertova@ceitec.muni.cz, line 4511.
  - equipment available at CIT UKB - the contact person for the reservation Mr. Šišma, sisma@ukb.muni.cz, line 8644.

4.3. Ombudsperson

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

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

4.4. 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 *Doctoral Board* must approve the replacement.

4.5. Exchange of TAC members

Any member of the TAC can be replaced by another, if necessary. The replacement must be announced to the *CEITEC PhD Studies Coordinator* (see 4.1) and then approved by the *Doctoral Board*.

4.6. Other specific situations

The solution of other specific situations can be verified in the material *Frequently Asked Questions*. Furthermore, creating a platform for a comprehensive system of individual quality assessment and support of PhD candidates was a students' initiative; therefore, the sharing of good practice among students is expected. A key role in this activity is played by the *CEITEC PhD Students Committee*, which organizes regular meetings and provides information on its own website http://studentcommittee.ceitec.cz/

5. PHD SCHOOL CONFERENCE

CEITEC PhD School Conference is organized annually in spring and helps to promote students' competencies in presentation skills.

It is mandatory for all PhD candidates of CEITEC PhD School; supervisors and other TAC members are also welcome.

Year of the study	Type of participation
1st and 2nd	Participation in the conference auditorium
3rd	Presentation of results in the form of a poster
4th	Presentation of results in the form of a lecture
5th or higher*	Presentation of results in the form of a poster * *until the application for state exam and defence is submitted*

The PhD School Conference also aims to provide a regular assessment of PhD candidates' performance by the *Doctoral Boards*, whose representatives also participate in the conference.

6. ANNEXES

1. TAC Members Proposal
2. TAC Assessment Report 1
3. TAC Assessment Report 2
4. TAC Assessment Report 3
5. TAC Assessment Report 4+
6. Amendment of the TAC Settings
7. TAC Progress Report