

# PhD Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC):

*What is it?*

Each PhD candidate's research work is supervised by a principal supervisor. Additionally, supervision will be provided and can be requested by an individual Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) consisting of one to two independent researchers (Postdoc, PD or Professor), **preferably with scientific expertise in the field**. It is strongly recommended that at least one of the TAC members is free of any dependency on the PhD supervisor. The committee provides supervision of the scientific development of the doctoral candidate in general by surveying the progress of the research work as well as the education of the doctoral candidate. The committee members answer meeting requests of the PhD students promptly and offer a meeting within two weeks. The Committee will be accepted by the respective Graduate School (BCGS or IMPRS) of the PhD-candidate.

## Timeline:

### - Up to 6 months after the start of the PhD:

The doctoral candidate has to select one to two independent scientists as committee members within 6 months after start of the thesis. In case of discontinuation of a co-supervisor, the principal supervisor should suggest a substitute in accordance with the doctoral candidate. In justified cases, the doctoral candidate in accordance with the principal supervisor, might request a re-placement of a supervisor. The [Thesis Committee Agreement](#) must be forwarded in copy to the SFB 1601 coordinator (**Dr. Isabelle Breloy, breloy[at]ph1.uni-koeln.de**) latest 6 months after beginning of the thesis.

(Note that registration of the doctoral candidate at the Faculty of their respective host University is a different process and must be done additionally in accordance with their Graduate School guidelines.)

### - At least once a year:

Independent of the requirements of the respective graduate school, the SFB 1601 requires a thesis advisory committee (TAC) meeting **once per year** for discussion and review. **It is the responsibility of the doctoral candidate to initiate these advisory meetings**. The thesis committee meeting is intended to assess that the:

- Doctoral candidate has the best possible support from their supervisor.
- Thesis project is sufficiently well defined and manageable in the course of the PhD study timeline.
- The project is reasonably well on schedule, and if not, to discuss mitigation strategies.
- Doctoral candidate can access all necessary data, software, and experimental equipment available at the Institutes.
- Doctoral candidate can present their work in a scientific environment.
- Doctoral candidate has obtained international visibility via publications, conference participation, and collaborations.

### - 2-1 week before the meeting:

The doctoral candidate should prepare a **short report** (<2 pages) on the progress of the work. This report should highlight the status of the PhD work, and if applicable, any mention of conference participation, internal or external collaborations, or publications, and send it to all the TAC members up to a week before the meeting. The report may also highlight any bottlenecks/issues related to work that have come up, as well as a timeline of planned work for the remaining duration of the PhD project.

The Gantt chart in the TAC form should also be **filled out before the meeting!**

### - During the meeting (duration: minimum 1 hour):

- The doctoral candidate gives a **20 minute presentation** outlining the progress status and perspectives of their PhD-project.
- **The primary supervisor (SV1) is in charge of filling the first part of the thesis committee supervision report.**



- Discussion about the subject, the difficulties face during the period of work, and anything relevant for an optimal PhD continuation, from the PhD student as well as the supervisors. It can be a good idea to go through the [previous TAC meeting forms](#) to account for any improvements or remaining issues. **Questions that go beyond scientific issues are voluntary.** All the comments related to the project should be filled in this part of the TAC form. **It is recommended that all the committee members and the student finalise this form and sign it.** If it is not possible within the meeting itself, the student can take a maximum of one week to get the signatures of all the TAC members.
  - The **student gets to choose at their discretion which committee members are present to discuss questions related to well-being.** It is recommended that only internal members of the SFB remain for this discussion. This part of the conversation should happen exclusively between the student and the chosen TAC members. Only they are allowed to stay in the room for this last part of the meeting, and the first (or any other) supervisor should leave the room. One of the remaining supervisors has to fill the second part of the TAC form, and should put their recommendations in it, upon the request of the student. At the end, the members who are present and the student should sign the form to finalise it.
1. **The questions act as pointers to start the conversation on the relevant section and thus it is not a requirement to fill them individually. They can be filled as the members deem fit.**
  2. **This form needs to be filled in by one of the supervisors.**
  3. **The second form should be filled in upon the request of the student, but it is strongly recommended to discuss the relevant issues.**
  4. **A copy of this form can be sent to the Student Council or the Diversity Board if the student feels like they need support/help.**
  5. **Some questions are also voluntary, especially if they are not relevant at this moment in the PhD.**

### - Up to 1 week after the meeting:

Each member signs the first part of the TAC form (excluding the well-being section). At the end of the meeting, or during the following week, the doctoral student has to send it to the coordinator (**Dr. Isabelle Breloy**, [breloy\[at\]ph1.uni-koeln.de](mailto:breloy[at]ph1.uni-koeln.de)). The TAC report can also be sent to the coordinator to keep track of the evolution of the thesis. The members who stayed for the well-being part sign the second form. The **second form is intended to stay with the student**, and is up to the student to decide if they want to share the form with another party, should they wish to bring the matter to the attention of: Student Council: [studentscouncil\[at\]ph1.uni-koeln.de](mailto:studentscouncil[at]ph1.uni-koeln.de), Diversity Board [sfb-db\[at\]ph1.uni-koeln.de](mailto:sfb-db[at]ph1.uni-koeln.de), or an Ombudsperson. This form can be kept for safe-keeping by the student and **will not** lead to any consequences if the student