yDiv short guide to PAC meetings for doctoral researchers

The PhD Advisory Committee (PAC) and its regular meetings are an essential part of the yDiv graduate training programme. Each yDiv doctoral researcher is required to organise regular PAC meetings, and the members of the advisory committee are required to actively participate in these meetings. You can also contact individual PAC members whenever necessary.

It is important to note that the PAC meetings are not meant to replace one-to-one meetings with your supervisor and that the role of your supervisor reaches much further than just the scheduled PAC meetings.

The purpose of the PhD Advisory Committee and its regular meetings is to:

- Make sure that your **project plan** is clear and realistic, and achievable in the planned timeframe – and adjust the plan when needed
- Check your **progress** against the set milestones and help solve any questions or problems
- Receive constructive feedback regarding your **scientific approach**
- Develop your scientific **network** via opening up the PAC members networks
- Use the experience of your advisors and mentors to choose the best **conferences and publications** to target
- Make sure that you get the best possible support to develop into an independent researcher or a post-PhD **career** outside academia
- Receive advice in regard to **self-development**: do you need extra skills training, which courses to take, which events to participate in etc.
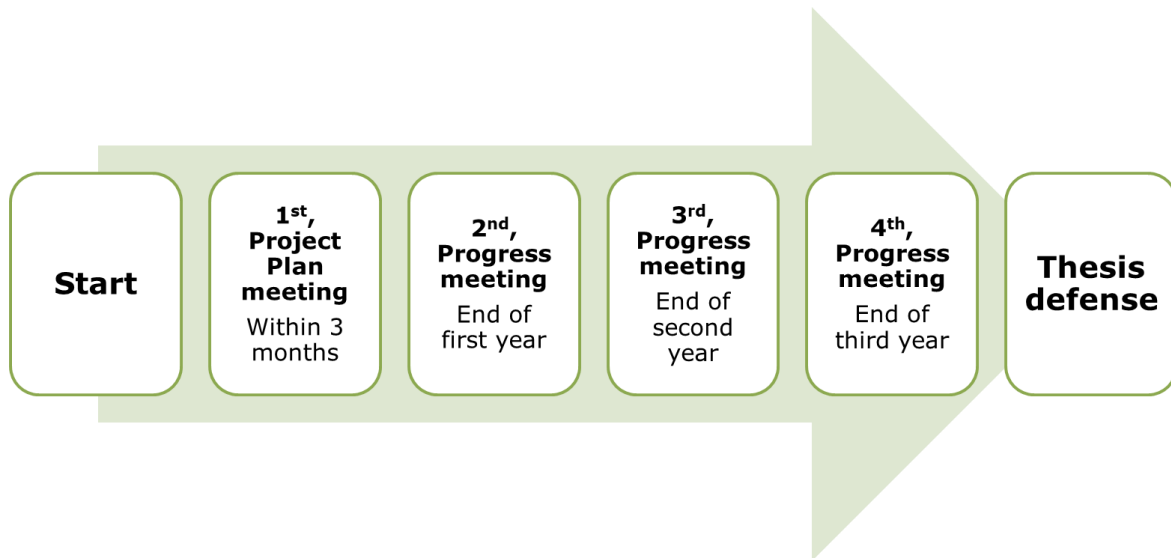- Receive support and advise to prepare for the **thesis defense**

Who forms the PAC team?

- Your **main supervisor** is always central to the PAC, and you should make sure that your supervisor is present at all PAC meetings
- Your **co-supervisors**, out of whom at least one should represent a different research group/field than your supervisor. yDiv fosters interdisciplinary and integrative PhD projects, and it is important to include expertise from different approaches into your PAC team.
- Co-supervisors can also be **external** (to iDiv, usually also based abroad); for example, this may be a collaborator who will host your fieldwork/ stay abroad.
- There is no upper limit to the number of co-supervisors, however we recommend **3-5 members**.
- yDiv strongly recommends you to seek at least one **postdoc** as a co-supervisor: they are often eager to participate, able to give very good advise regarding early career decisions, and often master very useful technical skills
- Invite the **yDiv coordinator** to your Project Plan meeting (or whenever needed)

> **!** Note that in some cases (e.g. flexible pool projects), there is a PAC established before you start – in these cases, the team typically involves the researchers that collaborated in drafting the proposal. For other cases, it may be required that you take the initiative yourself in seeking an advisory committee. In any case, it is essential to start by discussing with your supervisor! (Do not ask any co-supervisors before checking with your main supervisor).

Schedule of PAC meetings at yDiv during your PhD time:

Start → **1st, Project Plan meeting** Within 3 months → **2nd, Progress meeting** End of first year → **3rd, Progress meeting** End of second year → **4th, Progress meeting** End of third year → **Thesis defense**

Timing	Meeting	Suggested main outcomes
Within three months of starting your PhD	**1st, Project Plan meeting**	• Agreed project plan for the three-year PhD • Agreed milestones for the first year • Initial plan for training needs and how to complete training • Plan for local and international conferences • Plan the timing of the three-month stay abroad
End of first year	**2nd, Progress meeting**	• Check progress against the original project plan and adjust time plan • Discuss and tackle any obstacles/issues faced • Discuss and revise publications plan
End of second year	**3rd, Progress meeting**	• Check progress against the previously agreed original project plan and adjust time plan again • Discuss and tackle any obstacles/issues faced • Discuss and revise publications plan
End of third year	**4th, Progress meeting**	• Check progress against the previously agreed original project plan and adjust time plan again

	• Set timelines for thesis preparation
	• Discuss preparations for career post defense
Additional meetings	*We recommend you to have additional progress meetings whenever necessary! For example, at the end of a field work period/prior to submitting papers etc., when you feel that you need support from your entire PAC team.*

How to prepare for the meeting?

1) Agree the meeting date and time with your PAC *(cc:ing yDiv coordinator)* well in advance. Do **schedule a minimum of 1.5-2 hours** for each PAC meeting. *Remember to also reserve a meeting room.*

2) Note that finding a time that suits all your supervisors is likely to be very demanding – a good way to start is by finding several **dates and times with your main supervisor**. Do try to optimize your likelihood of success by scheduling the meeting well in time!

3) Once you find a date that suits all, remember to send a **confirmation email** to your PAC so that they book the time in their calendar. Generally, Skype participation is ok but remember to organise the equipment (if at iDiv premises, ask IT).

4) Download the **project plan/progress form** from the yDiv website and fill this in. You should send the completed form to yDiv coordination and your entire PAC a minimum of *one week before the meeting*. This is important to remind and update your PAC team of your project plan and progress.

5) Prepare a **short presentation** to update your PAC on your progress (see "usual" meeting process below). Remember that this is not a conference presentation, i.e. it should not focus only on your best achievements, but you should bring forward key problems that you have experienced and that may be hindering your progress.

6) Be prepared to present and defend your **publications plan**.

The "usual" PAC meeting process

1. Your **presentation** (usually with slides, but format is free)

   • Start with an introduction to your project, focusing on the main research questions/hypotheses (do not expect your PAC to remember these from the previous meeting)

   • Include a short summary of the main things you have achieved since the previous meeting

   • Note that you can invite discussion in the middle of your presentation (e.g. identifying questions related to each work package) or at the end

2. **Discussion** among the PAC team and the doctoral researcher

   • For topics, follow the project plan/progress forms, and see below (issues that you should always raise…)

Issues that you should raise at a PAC meeting

Remember that the main purpose of your PAC meetings is to <u>help you</u> progress in your PhD project and in your development towards becoming an independent researcher. Be honest, and focus on finding solutions to your problems.

- What are the main **obstacles** to the progress of your work?
  - Are there some specific approaches/techniques in which you would need help or advice with? (Be specific!)
  - Are you getting enough material/technical support – if not, why not? How could the situation be improved?
- How are you going to plan your **publications** (approach, data, analyses, journals)
  - Good to discuss in detail because your PAC team often has good recommendations for you
- Your plan for **training** within (and beyond) the yDiv framework
  - Which courses are you going to take and why? How do they support your personal development and progress?
  - Asking for recommendations on summer schools, sDiv workshops etc.
  - Stay abroad: what would be the most useful way of completing this?
- Your plans in regard to **teaching/supervision activities**: can the PAC support you in this?
- Your plans for the **future**: do you need support in the form of career advice or networking contacts?

> **!** Take notes and send a **summary of the outcomes of the meeting** to your PAC within one week after the meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the PAC process, or if you have any problems with your supervisor or PAC team, do not hesitate to contact yDiv coordination!
You can also invite the yDiv coordinator to your progress meetings if needed.

yDiv project plan and progress reports are available on the main yDiv website:
https://www.idiv.de/ydiv/downloads_and_information.html