

Short guide to PAC meetings for iDiv doctoral researchers

The PhD Advisory Committee (PAC) and its regular meetings are an essential part of the iDiv Graduate School. Each iDiv 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 may also contact individual PAC members as needed.

Please note: The PAC meetings are not meant to replace one-to-one meetings with your supervisor! The role of your supervisor reaches much further than just the scheduled PAC meetings.

The purpose of the regular meetings with your PhD Advisory Committee is to:

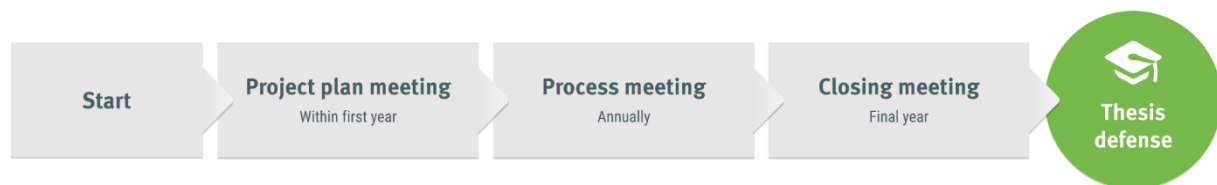
- Make sure that your **project plan** is clear, realistic, and achievable in the planned timeframe. Adjust the plan when needed.
- Check if your **progress** matches the milestones and help you solve any questions or problems.
- Receive constructive feedback regarding your **scientific approach**.
- Develop your scientific **network** via 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 for starting your **career** in or outside academia.
- Get advice regarding your **personal development**: do you need extra skills training, which courses to take, which events to participate in etc.
- Receive support and advice to prepare for the **thesis defense**.

Who forms the PAC?

- Your **main supervisor** plays a crucial role in the PAC, and you should make sure that your supervisor is present at all PAC meetings.
- Your **co-supervisors**, of which at least one should represent a research group/field different from that of your supervisor. iDiv fosters interdisciplinary and integrative PhD projects, and it is important to include expertise from different approaches in your PAC team.
- It is also possible that one of the co-supervisors is **external** to iDiv (sometimes also based abroad); this could for example be a collaborator who will host your fieldwork or stay abroad.
- There is no upper limit to the number of co-supervisors, however a typical PAC has **3-5 members**.
- We strongly recommend to seek at least one **postdoc** as a co-supervisor: they are often eager to participate, able to give very good advice on early career decisions, and often master very useful technical skills.
- Invite the **Scientific Manager of the iDiv Graduate School** to your Project Plan meeting (or whenever needed).
- All PAC members have to sign the **PAC supervision agreement** (available on the iDiv Graduate School website).

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. In other cases, it may be required that you take the initiative 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 during your PhD time



Timing	Meeting	Suggested main outcomes
First year (as early as possible)	Project plan meeting	• Agreed project plan for the PhD • Agreed milestones for the first year • Plan for local and international conferences • Plan the timing of the three-month stay abroad
Annual meetings from second year until you submit your thesis	Further progress meetings	• 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 • Set timelines for thesis preparation • Discuss preparations for career after defense

We recommend you to have additional progress meetings whenever necessary! For example, at the end of a fieldwork 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 the Scientific Manager of the iDiv Graduate School) well in advance. Do **schedule a minimum of 1.5-2 hours** for each PAC meeting. *Remember to also reserve a meeting room or to organize an online meeting platform.*
- 2) Note that finding a date that suits all your PAC supervisors can be demanding – a good way to start is by finding several **dates and times with your main supervisor**, and then contact the other PAC members (using an online calendar tool). Do schedule 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.
- 4) Download the **project plan/progress form** from the iDiv Graduate School website and fill it in. You should send the completed form to the Graduate School coordination and your entire PAC at the latest *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), including a time and publications plan. 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) After each PAC meeting, you should send the **results/minutes** (you can use the PAC summary form) **or updated project plan/progress report** to your PAC and the Graduate School coordination. Your PAC members need to sign the project plan/progress report.

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. related to each work package) or at the end
2. **Discussion** among the PAC team and the doctoral researcher
 - For topics, you can 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 help you 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 iDiv Graduate School
 - Which courses are you going to take and why? How do they support your personal development and progress?
 - Ask for recommendations on summer schools, sDiv working groups etc.
 - Stay abroad: what would be the most useful way of completing this?
- Your plans concerning **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?

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 the Graduate School coordination!

The project plan and progress reports as well as further PAC documents are available on the [iDiv website "Supervision & PhD Advisory Committee"](#).