Crick Thesis Committee Guidelines, September 2018

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This document will be reviewed and updated annually. Students are expected to follow the most recent version of this document.

1 Abbreviations, acronyms and terminology

DoAP: Director of Academic Programmes  
GL: Research Group Leader  
TC: Thesis Committee

2 Introduction

Section 2 is extracted from Crick Procedures for PhD Research Students, section 10.

2.1 Role of the Thesis Committee

All Crick students have a TC to provide scientific advice and expertise and assess student progress independently of the primary supervisor and any others involved in the student’s day-to-day supervision. TC members should treat all discussion of unpublished data as confidential. Students meet with their TC at the scheduled progression points on the PhD Programme (see section Error! Reference source not found.). The TC normally comprises the co-secondary supervisors and one other member of academic staff who is capable of assessing the student’s work. At least one member of the TC, normally the secondary or co-secondary supervisor, is a full member of staff in the university at which the student is registered. The DoAP will approve the TC composition on behalf of the Crick Research Degrees Committee and will consult with the appropriate university Academic Lead as required.

The role of the TC is to provide advice and assess progress, independently of the primary supervisor/regular supervision team, normally via meetings at the scheduled progression points on the Crick PhD programme. If a thesis committee member (including a (co)secondary supervisor) becomes more scientifically involved in supervising the student’s research, for example by meeting with them more regularly than at the TC meetings, the TC member’s ability to provide independent advice and assessment may be compromised. If this is the case, or becomes the case during a student’s PhD, the primary supervisor should inform the DoAP so that a replacement TC member can be appointed.

With the exception of TC1 and TC5, the supervisor does not attend the TC meetings. Under exceptional circumstances, e.g. if there are concerns with the student’s progress, or if the student requests it, the supervisor may attend part of a TC meeting (excluding the early stage assessment meeting).

While it is intended that all TC members attend each TC meeting in person or via skype/video conference, the TC meeting may go ahead with two Committee members if all parties concerned, including the student, are in agreement. Students will be encouraged to meet informally with the TC member who cannot attend the scheduled meeting.

In addition to the TC meetings scheduled on the PhD Programme, the student, supervisor or TC can request additional meetings at any time. Students may also approach TC members informally (as individuals or as a group) for advice and support should the need arise.

If the outcome of a TC meeting is ‘satisfactory’, the feedback provided regarding the student’s research is advisory and it is the responsibility of the student and primary supervisor to make the final decisions regarding the student’s research programme. If the outcome of a TC meeting is ‘concerns raised’ or ‘unsatisfactory’, the TC may be involved in defining the requirements that the student has to meet to progress (see section 2.2).
2.2 Progression monitoring and assessment

The academic progress of all students is subject to regular review by the primary supervisor and by the TC at scheduled progression points. The review process varies for each progression point and is outlined in the ‘progression timetable overview’ below; more details are provided in sections Error! Reference source not found.-10.

At each progression point, the primary supervisor provides written feedback on the student’s progress, including an assessment outcome, to the TC and student before the TC meeting. After the TC meeting the committee will provide written feedback on the student’s progress, including an assessment outcome. With the exception of the Early Stage Assessment (TC2, see section Error! Reference source not found.), which has a specific set of the outcomes, the primary supervisor and the TC will select from one of three possible assessment outcomes:

1. **Satisfactory progress**: the student has made satisfactory or beyond satisfactory academic progress and is allowed to continue until the next progression point.

2. **Concerns raised**: the supervisor and/or TC has concerns about the student’s academic progress and continuation on the programme is subject to the student meeting requirements set out by the supervisor, in consultation with the DoAP and possibly the TC. The requirements and a timeframe will be provided in writing and the supervisor and/or TC will review whether the student has met them, in some cases via an additional TC meeting. The DoAP will be involved in this process as required and if requested by the student.

   Following the second review the supervisor and/or TC will either recommend satisfactory progress or unsatisfactory progress.

3. **Unsatisfactory progress**: the student has not made satisfactory academic progress. Normally this recommendation is only made if the student does not satisfactorily meet the conditions set out following a ‘concerns raised’ assessment outcome. The recommendation of unsatisfactory progress may be used as evidence in ‘unsatisfactory academic progress proceedings’ in accordance with university guidelines (see box).

   All assessment outcomes made by the TC will be confirmed by the DoAP before the student is informed.

   If the progression point outcomes selected by the supervisor and TC are different, the supervisor, TC and DoAP should meet to agree a final outcome. In this case the student will receive the original report from the supervisor and TC and a summary report of the final decision from the DoAP.

   Note that if a student’s progress becomes unsatisfactory at any point during the Programme and informal attempts to improve the student’s progress have failed, it may be recommended that the student be referred to their university under the university’s unsatisfactory academic progress procedures.

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**University regulations and guidelines on unsatisfactory academic progress**

**Imperial:**
https://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/governance/academic-governance/regulations/

**King’s:**
https://www.kcl.ac.uk/campuslife/acservices/Academic-Regulations/assets-18-19/R08.pdf
GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

3 The purpose of your thesis committee

TCs monitor your progression on the Crick PhD Programme and provide you with a source of scientific advice and expertise that is independent of your primary supervisor. You will meet with your TCs at specific points during your PhD to receive regular feedback on progress and submitted reports. TC meetings provide an opportunity for you to get used to discussing and defending your work with other scientists, in preparation for your viva examination.

Primary supervisors do not normally attend thesis committee meetings (other than TC5 and possibly TC1), but joint meetings involving the primary supervisor can be scheduled to help with prioritising / resolving differing scientific advice, if required. Ultimately, it is you and your primary supervisor who make the decisions regarding, and take responsibility for, what you do.

4 Meeting preparation - overview

Students are responsible for scheduling their TC meetings and booking a room for them - you are advised to do this at least two months in advance of the meeting to ensure that all TC members can participate and the meeting is completed before the deadline. Thesis committee meetings should not normally last more than 90 minutes.

All progress points require students to prepare a short presentation to give at the start of the meeting that, if uninterrupted, would last no longer than 20 minutes. Some progression points also require preparation of a scientific report. If a report is required and a word limit is set, it may not be exceeded. If the word limit is exceeded you may be asked to revise and resubmit the report. Reports should be polished documents with consistent nomenclature and abbreviations, and without spelling or grammatical errors.

At each progression point you are required to complete the progress update and training log on Crick Grad Log. For TC2 and TC3 students are also required to complete the skills section following a discussion with their supervisor. The requirements of each progression point are outlined below.

5 TC meeting 1 (TC1), 3-4 months - project proposal review

After your ten-minute talk, and prior to TC1, you are required to prepare a research proposal and meet with your TC to discuss it.

5.1 Report content
Your TC1 report is a ‘project proposal’ that should convey the aims of your PhD research project. It should include the following:

- Project Title
- Project Aims/Hypothesis
- Research Proposal: A brief overview of your project, including reference to key data that your project builds on (your own or others’), followed by a more detailed research plan for the next 6-12 months, including experimental approaches and any relevant contingency plans
- Up to 3 figures (e.g. schematics of research or experimental strategy, relevant key results)
- Bibliography: Author-date format, max 20 references
• Max word count: 600 (excluding figure legends and bibliography; including citations).

5.2 Report submission
Your report should be submitted via the Crick Grad Log by the given deadline. It is important that you discuss your draft report with your supervisor in advance of the submission date, allowing sufficient time for you to incorporate their feedback before final submission. You will be asked to include the word count of your report on submission.

5.3 Supervisor feedback report
Following submission of your TC1 report via the Crick Grad Log, your supervisor will be asked to submit a feedback report on your progress, your 10 minute talk and your project proposal before providing an assessment outcome. You will receive an email when this feedback report is available to view.

5.4 TC meeting
When scheduling TC1, please bear in mind that your primary supervisor may attend the meeting, if you, they and your TC agree. At the beginning of the meeting you should present the 10-minute talk you gave as part of the student 10-minute talk programme, incorporating any feedback from your supervisor after the talk, and any new results or revised project plans.

5.5 Outcome
Following the TC meeting, your TC will write a report on your progress, providing feedback and suggestions, and will select one of three possible outcomes (see 2.2). The TC report will be reviewed by the DoAP before being released to you and supervisor.

6 TC meeting 2 (TC2), 9 months - early stage assessment (ESA)

The early stage assessment, TC2, takes place nine months after registration and is the point at which your supervisor and TC confirm that you have demonstrated the aptitude, commitment and intellectual ability to complete a PhD within four years (or, for students on the 3-year pathway, within three years) of initial registration. You are required to submit a 2700-word report and complete the skills review section of the Crick Grad Log following a discussion with your supervisor. Your supervisor will provide feedback and recommend an assessment outcome (see 6.6 below). You will then meet with your TC for your ‘early stage assessment viva’. Taking into account your supervisor’s recommendation, the TC selects one of three possible outcomes (6.6) of the early stage assessment viva.

6.1 Criteria for early stage assessment:
   i. Commitment to pursuing research leading to the completion of a PhD degree.
   ii. Satisfactory progress in the work so far.
   iii. Ability to formulate and defend a viable hypothesis or research question that could be completed within the normal timeframe of the PhD Programme.
   iv. Ability to formulate a viable research plan.
   v. Satisfactory technical and generic skills development.
   vi. Awareness and understanding of the key associated literature.
   vii. Ability to develop own ideas and exercise independent critical analysis.
   viii. Consideration of the research ethics dimensions of the project and application for ethics approval from the relevant research ethics committee if appropriate.
   ix. English language proficiency, both written and spoken.
   x. Completion of the appropriate sections of the Crick Grad Log.
   xi. Ability to keep an accurate record of their research (e.g. lab book).
6.2 The early stage assessment report

Your report should include the following:

- **Title page**: Project title (max 120 characters), student name, primary supervisor name, secondary supervisor name, thesis committee members’ names.
- **Contents page & abbreviations**.
- **Abstract** (max 150 words): Briefly introduce your research area and define your research question /hypothesis. Then provide a concise summary of your findings and conclusions so far. Finish by outlining the issues you plan to address/experiments that you plan to carry out in the future.
- **Introduction** (~1200 words): An up-to-date literature review of the relevant papers, providing an introduction to and summary of the background for your project. Do not exclude key papers contradictory to your findings / research strategy - you should be able to defend your approach.
- **Progress to date** (~750 words): Describe the research you have carried out so far. Explain each part of your project or group of results including what you set out to do and why, your key results, and what they tell you. Use subheadings to structure this section if you think it will be beneficial. You may want to discuss the pros and cons of your experimental approach. Methods should not be described in detail here, unless they are novel and their development has been an important part of your project. Instead, refer briefly to the methods used in the figure legends (see below). Alternatively, an appendix (max 500 words) can be added to your report. End with a short summary of your conclusions so far.
- **Future research proposal and timeline of future work** (~750 words): Begin with a short summary of your future research aims for the rest of your PhD. Then explain these aims and how you plan to achieve them in more detail, focussing on the next 12-18 months. You may want to discuss experiments’ feasibility and any back-up strategies that will be used if the initial approach fails. You can also discuss possible outcomes and what your proposed research may allow you to conclude.
- **Figures**: Relevant figures should be embedded in the text of the literature review, progress to date and future research proposal sections (e.g. schematics, key results, future research timeline). Figures should be accompanied by concise and informative legends; where appropriate, scale and error bars should be included and the degree of repetition should be stated in the legends.
- **Bibliography**: Author-date format, max 50 references.
- **Word limit**: 2700 words (excluding abstract, figure and table legends and bibliography; including citations).

6.3 Report submission

Your report should be submitted via the Crick Grad Log by the given deadline. It is important that you discuss your draft report with your supervisor in advance of the submission date, allowing sufficient time for you to incorporate their feedback before final submission. You will be asked to include the word count of your report on submission.

6.4 Supervisor feedback report

Prior to the early stage assessment viva your supervisor is required to submit a feedback report on your progress, commenting on how you meet the criteria, and providing a recommended early stage assessment outcome (see below). The feedback report will be submitted via the Crick Grad Log.

6.5 Early stage assessment viva

The purpose of the viva, in conjunction with your report and the report from your supervisor, is to confirm whether you meet the early stage assessment criteria (6.1). Your supervisor is not present during the viva.

It is your responsibility to organise your TC meeting and you are advised to set the date at least two months in advance to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline. The
meeting can take place any time after your TC has had the opportunity to read your report and your supervisor has submitted their report.

At the beginning of the viva you should give a 15-20 minute presentation summarising your report. This presentation, along with the report, forms the basis of the viva discussion.

6.6 Outcome
Following your viva the TC will write a report on your progress, providing feedback and suggestions, and will select one of three possible outcomes:

PhD registration confirmed: student fully meets early stage assessment criteria.

Referred: the student has not met all the early stage assessment criteria and PhD registration is subject to the student meeting specific requirements. The TC in consultation with the primary supervisor and DoAP should set these requirements and a timeframe for meeting them. The student will be assessed by the TC, who will determine whether the requirements have been met. It is expected that students should have completed this process and have had their PhD registration confirmed within 12 months of registration.

MPhil registration: the student fails to meet the early stage assessment criteria, normally following a referral, and is registered for MPhil. The TC should only make this recommendation following consultation with the supervisor and DoAP.

The award of MPhil is not an automatic consequence of a failed early stage assessment and will only be achieved following additional research, study and successful examination (see University regulations on MPhil examination below).

Students who successfully pass their early stage assessment but wish to work towards an MPhil should discuss this option with their supervisor and DoAP.

A second attempt at the early stage assessment which does not result in ‘PhD registration confirmed’ may be used as evidence in any subsequent ‘unsatisfactory academic progress proceedings’ in accordance with university guidelines.

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7 TC meeting 3 (TC3), 18 months - mid-term review

The TC3 mid-term review takes place in the middle of the second year and allows your supervisor and TC to determine whether you continue to demonstrate the aptitude, commitment and intellectual ability to complete a PhD within the timeframe of the Programme. You are required to submit a 5500-word report and complete the skills review section of the Crick Grad Log following a discussion with your supervisor.

7.1 The mid-term review report
Your report should include the following:

- **Title page:** Project title (max 120 characters), student name, primary supervisor name, secondary supervisor name, thesis committee members’ names.
- **Contents page & abbreviations.**
• **Abstract** (max 150 words): Briefly introduce your research area and define your research question/hypothesis. Then provide a concise summary of your findings and conclusions so far. Finish by outlining the issues you plan to address/ experiments that you plan to carry out in the future.

• **Introduction** (~2500 words): Your introduction should include an up-to-date and comprehensive literature review of the papers that provide the background to your project. Do not exclude key papers contradictory to your findings / research strategy - you should be able to defend your approach. You should also include your overall project aims and hypothesis.

• **Methods** (~500 words): Your methods should provide sufficient detail, in conjunction with the cited references, for your experiments to be repeated.

• **Results** (~1750 words): Describe and present the key results that you have obtained so far. Structure the section using appropriate sub-headings, and include high quality illustrative figures and tables, which are clearly titled and have informative figure legends. Both positive and negative results should be included. Briefly summarise/discuss your results in sufficient detail to lead the reader to the next results section.

• **Discussion** (~500 words): Summarise then discuss your results to date and their interpretation, relating them to the overall aims of your project and any relevant literature. You many also want to discuss the pros and cons of your experimental approach(es), and the impact of your results and conclusion on the future direction of your project.

• **Future Priorities** (~250 words): Provide a brief summary of your key future experimental priorities as a bullet point list, indicating the time-frame within which you intend to complete them.

• **Bibliography**: Author-date format, max 100 references.

**Word limit: 5500 words (excluding abstract, figure and table legends, and bibliography; including citations).** The suggested number of words for each section that is given above is a guide. However, at this stage in your PhD, it is important that you can demonstrate that you have a clear understanding of the literature that is relevant to your project and that you have a generated a substantial body of data, which why we have suggested that these sections form the majority or your report.

7.2 **Report submission**
Your report should be submitted via the Crick Grad Log by the deadline given in the year 2 programme calendar. It is important that you discuss your draft report with your supervisor to allow sufficient time for you to incorporate their feedback before final submission. You will be asked to include the word count of your report on submission.

7.3 **Supervisor feedback report**
Following submission of your TC3 report via the Crick Grad Log, your supervisor will be asked to submit a feedback report of your progress and an assessment outcome. You will receive an email when this report is available to view.

7.4 **TC meeting**
At the beginning of the meeting you should give a 15-20 minute presentation summarising your report, giving particular emphasis to your data and future work.

7.5 **Outcome**
Following the TC meeting, your TC will write a report on your progress, providing feedback and suggestions, and will select one of three possible outcomes (see 2.2). The TC report will be reviewed by the DoAP before being released to you and your supervisor.
8 TC meeting 4 (TC4), 24 months - progress meeting

TC4 provides you with an opportunity to discuss your progress and plans with your TC. You are not required to produce a written report, but you are expected to complete the Crick Grad Log and prepare a short presentation for your TC meeting.

8.1 Supervisor feedback report
Following submission of your TC4 entry via the Crick Grad Log, your supervisor will be asked to submit a feedback report of your progress and assessment outcome. You will receive an email when this report is available to view.

8.2 TC meeting
At the beginning of the meeting you should give a 15-20 minute presentation summarising your work to date and future plans.

8.3 Outcome
Following the TC meeting your TC will write a report on your progress, providing feedback and suggestions, and will select one of three possible outcomes (see 2.2). The TC report will be reviewed by the DoAP before being released to you and your supervisor.

9 TC meeting 5 (TC5), 30-33 months - progress meeting

TC5 provides you, your supervisor and TC with the opportunity to discuss your progress and future plans for completion of your PhD and research publications. The meeting should also be used to discuss your future career plans. The date of this meeting is flexible and should be held at the point that is most beneficial to you. It should normally take place by 33 months.

You are not required to produce a written report, but you are expected complete the Crick Grad Log, prepare a ‘chalk-talk’ and, after your TC5 meeting, prepare a PhD completion plan.

9.1 Supervisor feedback report
Following submission of your TC5 entry via the Crick Grad Log, your supervisor will be asked to submit a feedback report of your progress and assessment outcome. You will receive an email when this report is available to view.

9.2 Chalk talk preparation
Your chalk talk should cover your progress, objectives, future experimental plans and timeline for thesis submission. The talk should be given using a white board or flip chart, but no additional visual aids (no slides, hand-outs, figures etc.). Training will be provided.

9.3 TC meeting
When scheduling TC5, please remember that your supervisor as well as your TC members should attend.

If you wish to show the committee any recent data that you have generated since your last TC meeting, you may prepare a short presentation for the start of the meeting to do this. This presentation should last no more than 5 minutes and consist of no more than 3 slides. The committee should not ask any questions during this presentation.

You should then move on to give your chalk talk. Following your chalk talk, you should have a short discussion about your future career plans.

No later than a week after your TC5 meeting, you should prepare and submit to your thesis committee a PhD completion plan (remaining experiments and timeline) which is based on the discussion at your TC meeting. A copy should also be sent to student@crick.ac.uk.
9.4 Outcome
Following the TC meeting your TC will write a report of your progress, providing feedback and suggestions, and will select one of three possible outcomes (see 2.2). The TC report will be reviewed by the DoAP before being released to you and your supervisor.

10 Progress meeting, 36 months
Although not a TC meeting, the 36 month meeting with your supervisor is a formal progression point. At this point you and your supervisor meet to discuss progress and to confirm that you are on track to submit within the following 12 months (i.e. by 48 months following initial registration). Your supervisor will provide written feedback including an assessment outcome.

You are not required to produce a written report, but you are expected complete ‘36 month progress review’ section of the Crick Grad Log.

10.1 TC meeting 6 (TC6), 42 months - thesis outline
All students are required to submit a thesis plan to their supervisor and TC by 42 months. An additional meeting (TC6) is not mandatory, but may be requested by the student, supervisor or TC. Although TC6 is normally scheduled between January and March of the fourth year, students may submit their thesis outline earlier than this, and six months prior to expected thesis submission date. The supervisor and TC will provide written feedback.

GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISORS

11 Supervisor responsibilities in relation to TC meetings
Section 11 is extracted from the Crick Procedures for PhD Students, section 8.3.

Primary supervisors are expected to:
  i. Prior to the student registering, appoint a university staff member onto the student’s TC.
  ii. Prior to the first TC meeting, in consultation with the student (as required) and normally within the first two months, appoint remaining TC members.
  iii. Appoint a TC chair.
  iv. Monitor the composition and appropriateness of the TC and discuss with the DoAP any changes that may need to be made.
  v. Ensure the student completes each progression point, recording the relevant information on the Crick Grad Log.
  vi. Review and approve the Crick Grad Log, providing comments where requested, in a timely fashion at each progression point, including providing an assessment outcome.
  vii. No later than three months after registration, agree the basic research plan and attend the student’s ten-minute talk during which they will present their research plan to their peers.
  viii. Attend the student’s third year seminar and TC5 ‘chalk talk’, and possibly TC1.
  ix. Be a TC member for other Crick students. As a general rule a supervisor should participate on approximately two TCs for every student he or she supervises (as a primary supervisor).

12 Additional notes for supervisors
Supervisors are not normally expected to attend TC meetings with the exception of TC5, at which their attendance is expected, and TC1, which the supervisor, student and TC may agree the supervisor will attend.
Prior to each TC meeting, supervisors are expected to submit a report of the student’s progress and assessment outcome via the Crick Grad Log. Supervisors will receive an email letting them know the report is due.

GUIDELINES FOR TC MEMBERS

13 TC member responsibilities

Section 13 is extracted from the Crick Procedures for PhD Students, section 8.5.

TC members are expected to:

i. Participate fully in the student’s TC meetings at the progression points on the PhD Programme, contributing to the preparation of the TC reports via the Crick Grad Log to provide feedback, advice and an assessment outcome.

ii. Treat all discussions of unpublished data as confidential.

iii. One member of the TC, nominated by the primary supervisor, is required to act as the TC chair and is responsible for ensuring the completion of the TC reports via the Crick Grad Log, including feedback, advice and an assessment outcome.

iv. If required, provide additional support for the student e.g. additional committee meetings outside of those scheduled to monitor progress.

v. Raise any concerns regarding the student’s academic progress and/or supervision with the DoAP.

vi. Where possible, attend the student’s ten-minute talk and third year seminar.

vii. During TC meetings, and as appropriate, discuss with the student their career options/plan.

14 Additional notes for TC members

TC feedback reports must be submitted via the Crick Grad Log. The template for each progression point includes a number of questions and it is recommended that the TC members familiarise themselves with the questions before the TC meetings take place.