Guidelines for follow-up meetings in the CSE research school

David Sands and Jan Jonsson

2007-05-21; revised 2008-05-14; revised 2008-06-13, revised 2015-06-25

Background

Each PhD student at Chalmers and GU is required to have an individual study plan that contains planned, ongoing and completed parts of the student’s doctoral education. An initial version of the individual study plan should be submitted via email to the Vice Head of Department no later than three months (for GU students: two months) after the student’s admission to the research school.

To facilitate the monitoring of the doctoral education, each PhD student (including external students who are registered at Chalmers/GU) has a follow-up group. The group consists of the main supervisor and the examiner plus one or two additional members. A meeting with the PhD student’s follow-up group should take place at least once per year to discuss the progress of the student and to make revisions to the student’s individual study plan.

These guidelines are suggested to clarify the purpose and procedures for PhD follow-up meetings.

Composition of the group

The main supervisor has the job of suggesting, in discussion with the student, a suitable follow-up group. The group consists of the main supervisor and the examiner plus one or two additional members\(^1\). In some cases (e.g. for interdisciplinary research) it may be advantageous to have up to three members. It is always possible to add additional members to the group at a later stage.

When forming a PhD follow-up group it is advisable to include one “specialist” and one “generalist”. The specialist is someone with knowledge of the technical area in which the student works, whereas the generalist has broad experience with postgraduate education but is typically (and intentionally) not too close to the research group of the student and supervisor. One of the members of the group may come from another department at Chalmers/GU, or from industry (given that the member has adequate academic credentials).

For external students, who are registered at Chalmers/GU but have their regular supervision at another university, the follow-up group should contain at least one member with a permanent position at Chalmers/GU.

The members of the follow-up group should be approved by the Vice Head of Department. The initial version of the PhD student’s individual study plan should therefore contain the names of the suggested members of the follow-up group.

\(^1\)One of the additional members must be the co-supervisor as required by both Chalmers and GU.
Frequency and announcement of the meetings

PhD follow-up meetings should take place at least once a year, with the first meeting taking place no later than six months after the student’s admission to the research school. Additional meetings can be scheduled as needed, for example, in order to follow up on problems, or to discuss the final stages of licentiate or PhD thesis preparations.

The chairman of the follow-up meeting is either one of the Directors of Studies or the Vice Head of Department. To facilitate that a chairman can be present at the meeting, the research school provides a list of suggestions for meeting times when a chairman is available.

The student has the responsibility to schedule each follow-up meeting (taking into account the availability of a chairman), and announce the date and time to the members of the follow-up group and the Vice Head of Department. Around the same time the student, in discussion with the main supervisor, should make sure that the individual study plan is duly updated and distributed to allow the participants to prepare themselves for the meeting.

Agenda for the meetings

The purpose of the PhD follow-up meetings is to monitor progress of the student, to offer advice and to discuss problems. The meetings should help students set goals, identify problems and to update the student’s individual study plan for the coming year. Important actions to be taken by the student, the main supervisor, or the research school as a result of the discussions during the meeting should be clearly documented in the revised study plan, and be followed up at the next meeting.

It is recommended that the student gives a short high-level presentation of the completed and ongoing research work (bearing in mind that the group may contain nonspecialists).

Other issues that are discussed are the course work component – for example the planned courses – and issues related to other activities such as teaching, in terms of their effect on the PhD studies of the student. These points are enumerated on the individual study plan form which the student should complete before the meeting.

The follow-up meeting is also the appropriate place to discuss possible licentiate discussion leaders or PhD defense opponents and grading committee members.

After the meeting

Immediately after the follow-up meeting the chairman should have a meeting with the group without the student present. This should be considered a routine part of the meeting - i.e. not just something which is initiated at the discretion of the main supervisor. This gives the opportunity for the group to have a frank discussion about possible problems concerning both student and the main supervisor – for example to confront the main supervisor about insufficient supervision or questionable research agendas – in situations where the group might otherwise not discuss these points at the main meeting.

The student will have corresponding opportunities to discuss problems relating to their supervisor(s) and follow-up group. To that end, the chairman should have a separate meeting with the student shortly after the follow-up meeting. At this meeting the student is informed about the outcome of the chairman’s separate meeting with the follow-up group. In addition to this, the student can also discuss such issues at the annual appraisal talk (“medarbetarsamtal”) with the division manager.
The student updates the individual study plan in accordance to the agreements made at the follow-up meeting, and sends it to the chairman. When the chairman has confirmed that the updates are correct, the study plan is signed by the student and the main supervisor and then the original document and an electronic copy are submitted to the Vice Head of Department no later than two weeks after the meeting.

**Mid-term review**

In normal cases the planning should be formulated in such a way that the student will achieve licentiate level at the half-way stage of the doctoral education. If a licentiate degree is not taken, an interim seminar shall be held to indicate the licentiate level.

If, at the follow-up meeting which is closest to the half-way stage of the doctoral education, it becomes clear that the licentiate level cannot be achieved at the nominal time there should be a focussed discussion on this point at the meeting and a detailed plan of action for achieving the licentiate level should be included in the revised study plan.