Masters Programmes and Projects

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Goals of This Talk

• To cover the educational aims and outcomes of Masters degrees:
  – at the University of Southampton
  – in the UK, and the EU
• To relate these aims to Masters projects
• To advise you on how to write Masters level reports and your MSc dissertation
Sources

- The University of Southampton Quality Handbook describes the Masters degrees we offer
  http://www.soton.ac.uk/quality/approval/masters_degree.html

- Our standards are, we believe, compatible with those of the English, UK and European Qualifications Frameworks
  http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/fheq/default.asp
  http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_19302.aspx
Bologna Process

• Nearly 50 countries have now signed the Bologna Treaty which aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
  – common standards promote mobility, increase employability, and improve the quality of life
• The EHEA has three cycles of higher education:
  – in the UK these lead to Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctor’s degrees
  – the “Dublin descriptors” provide standard descriptions of the learning outcomes of each cycle
  – part of the EHEA qualifications framework
Masters Degree Outcomes

• These standards all define the abilities of Masters students in similar ways

• The UoS and NQF, for example, expect

  – systematic/comprehensive understanding
  – at the forefront of the discipline/profession
  – originality in the application of knowledge
  – the ability to learn independently and
  – continue developing knowledge/skills
understanding/evaluation of research methodologies and techniques
– critique/evaluation of current research
– where appropriate, propose new hypotheses

judge/decision-making/responsibility
– deal systematically/creatively with complex and unpredictable situations/incomplete data
– self-direction/originality in solving problems
– communication to specialists/non-specialists
Masters Projects and Reports

• All your reports should, where possible:
  – show advanced knowledge/understanding
  – apply this knowledge with confidence to solve problems, preferably in a creative/original way
  – cite relevant research/standards/white papers
  – critically evaluate the literature/state of the art
  – reflect on your own achievements
Relative to Undergraduate Projects

• Masters project reports and dissertations should contain an extended survey of relevant literature
• Show innovation/creativity in the application of your knowledge to solve the problems that arise
• Emphasise your use of advanced/state of the art tools/technologies/techniques
  – avoid or summarise standard material/techniques
• Include critical, comparative & self-evaluation
  – relative to the literature/state of the art/your goals
Finally

• Note that MSc projects have a higher pass mark (50%) than undergraduate projects
• Make sure you achieve this
  – aim high
  – manage your time
  – listen carefully to your supervisor