Writing the dissertation

The length of the Computing MSc dissertation is 15,000 words (excluding references and appendices).
The dissertation is essentially an academic study and, as such, needs to reflect academic ideas and concepts situated within a critically analyzed and synthesized framework. There is more information about the form of the dissertation in the Dissertation handbook/policy.

Software development is also possible and encouraged, but the development of this must be within an academic context. Students wishing to include software development as part of their dissertation should agree a percentage division of words and words equivalent with the Module Tutor and Course Leader. This will not exceed 50% of words equivalent for the implementation.

Overview of the Dissertation
The order of content may vary according to the research design and topic area. However, the outline given below is considered a standard framework for most academic pieces of work, although it leans more towards a project focus.

Preliminary Pages
This section should include a title page, declaration, abstract, and table of contents. If appropriate it should show acknowledgements, list of tables and list of figures. Detailed guidelines on the numbering, style and wording of the preliminary pages is given the University Dissertation Handbook.

Chapter 1: Introduction
The Introduction is a relatively short chapter which states the terms of reference of the research. It sets the parameters stating exactly what is being investigated and what is not and culminates in the **research question**. It should set the investigation in context by giving a brief background to the research area and then outline why it is an important problem to solve by giving the background to the issue. It should explicitly state the **aims and objectives** of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review
In this section the focus is solely on the literature. This is a relatively large chapter so should be broken down into subsections with suitable titles to signpost the reader. It should present a critical review of the relevant literature, citing a variety of different sources. The literature review should take the reader on a journey from the broad to the specific. It is important that links between literature and the research question are made explicit. You should **compare and contrast the opinions of different authors** on the issues presented and be critical of the published work. It is usually summarised at the end and the research question reiterated.

Chapter 3: Method
Again this section may benefit from subsections. The topics to be covered should include the methodological approach explaining the underpinning theory concerning the researcher's standpoint. In addition there should be a justification for the methods adopted explaining why they are appropriate for the study. If appropriate, details of the population to be studied should be given including why this population has been selected.

Where a sample from the population has been taken, details must be given regarding recruitment, selection and response rates. If any materials or resources have been used, e.g. **interview schedules, specialist software or equipment**, these must be listed. If a pilot study was conducted this must be described here together with any outcomes. A description of the procedure followed during data gathering must be included and this should be in sufficient detail for another researcher to replicate your study. Finally, any **ethical considerations** and actions to ameliorate their effects should be given.

Chapter 4: Results
This chapter presents the data gathered in an understandable form. It may be summarised in tables and graphs together with some textual explanation. Where appropriate, further tables may be placed in the appendix. The results of any statistical analysis should be reported. No comment, explanation or evaluation of the results should be presented here.

Chapter 5: Discussion
It is in this chapter that you should evaluate and explain your results. Pay attention to whether your results support or contradict previous studies by referring to points raised in the literature review. You may propose explanations for this. You should also state any limitations to your study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion
Start by restating the research question and objectives as your conclusions must relate to the purpose of the study. Conclusions need to flow logically from the analysis presented in previous chapters and should generate some key points. The ensuing discussion should revolve around key points and their implications. From your conclusions you should make recommendations for future work.
The reference list should present all and only the sources that you have cited in the main text formatted to the Harvard style.

Appendix
Any information that adds context or support to your work but would otherwise clutter the main text should be contained here. Appendices must be appropriately labelled and titled and must be referred to in the main text.

Checklist for Editing your Dissertation
Students have, in the past, failed to adequately check their work prior to submission. Due to poor time management, 'dissertation fatigue', or whatever, error-laden dissertations have been submitted, which create a poor impression and result in reduced marks. Often you will be too close to the dissertation to recognise all the errors, so for a final check it is helpful to ask a sympathetic colleague or friend to review the work for you. However, before handing it over you need to have considered the items below:

a) Have you clearly explained the objectives of your study?
b) Does the end fulfil the original aims and objectives? Have you done what you undertook to do in the study? If not, have you explained the reasons for the changes?
c) Do the statements made in one place of the dissertation tally with statements in

another?

d) Do the interpretations given match the facts quoted?
e) Do the conclusions flow from the data?
f) Have you given readers enough information to follow and check your reasoning?
g) Is the sequence of information presented logically?
h) Are terms consistently used and clearly defined?
i) Is the method of presentation appropriate?
j) Is there enough signposting and guidance for readers?
k) Have you provided summaries at the appropriate points?
l) Are recurring points consistently treated?
m) Has everything been put as briefly as is consistent with clarity?
n) Is each sentence and paragraph logical?
o) Do the chapters in the contents list tally with the titles as given at the head of each chapter, section and subsection?
p) Is the heading system consistently applied?
q) Is the numbering system consistently applied?
r) Do all the references in the text link up with the final reference list?

Plagiarism Advice.