SUCCEEDING IN POSTGRADUATE STUDY
SESSION 2| Activity 4 - Walkthrough
Differences between Bachelor's with Honours & Master's Degree Graduates

(a) How do the skills and attributes expected from a Master's graduate differ from those of a Bachelor's with honours graduate?

The key skills and core attributes for both Bachelor's with Honours and Master's graduates [1,2] can be broadly categorised under three headings "Knowledge, Understanding and its Application", "Critical Skills", "Practical, Professional and Employability Skills". There is some overlap between levels, but this is to be expected - it reflects the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate, where skills and attributes learned previously will continue to be engaged, developed further and assessed at a more advanced level. The expectation therefore, is of a continuous rather than a disjointed or 'clear-cut' learning journey. However, in reviewing the information provided in the extracts, several key differences emerged for Master's graduates:

- **Independent learning ability (required for continuing professional development).** A significantly greater emphasis appeared to be placed on the importance of independent learning ability, reflection and continued professional development for Master's degree graduates. "Independent Learning Ability" could constitute a separate (i.e. distinct) qualitative criterion for Master's.
- **Critical skills.** Apart from independent learning ability, a prominent qualitative emphasis was placed on 'contemporary' critical skills (awareness and evaluation) expected from a Master's graduate. This includes critical awareness of current issues, developments, and insights at (or informed by) the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study or professional area; the ability to critically evaluate current research, advanced scholarship, methodologies in the area, and where appropriate, to develop critiques and propose new hypotheses.
- **Knowledge, understanding and its application**. The emphasis on 'specialist' and 'advanced' knowledge and understanding was clear. Knowledge and understanding of a Master's graduate should be informed by current practice, scholarship and research, and expected to be in-depth, advanced, and at the forefront of the field or discipline. Master's graduates are also expected to be able to demonstrate originality in applying their knowledge, understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research, to have a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship, as well as knowledge of professional responsibility, integrity and ethics.
- **Practical, professional and employability skills**. Those that stood out for Master's graduates (compared with Bachelor's with Honours graduates) emphasised the importance of acting autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at this level, being able to demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and to deal with complex issues systematically and creatively. These are high-level competency skills relevant to employment.

(b) Are there any skills or attributes that you would consider to be unique to Master's?

The following attributes particularly stood out for Master's [2] (and are underscored for emphasis):
- knowledge of <u>professional responsibility, integrity and ethics</u>
- ability to demonstrate self-direction and <u>originality in tackling and solving problems</u>
- ability to deal with complex issues both <u>systematically and creatively</u>
- ability to <u>reflect on own progress as a learner, to continue to advance own knowledge and understanding, and develop new skills to a high level</u>

References
1. UK Quality Code for Higher Education Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards; the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (October 2014)
2. QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement (September 2015)

Total Word Count: 450 words*
(*) Word count excludes references and question rubric; (a) 383 words; (b) 67 words