Mastering the labour market? The destinations of UK master’s students

A) RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT
The postgraduate master’s degree has grown significantly in recent years. However, little is currently understood in the UK about what master’s graduates go on to do after their studies. Overall there are indications that master’s graduates, on average, have earnings advantages. It is thought that there are few specifically postgraduate jobs outside of particular specialist areas (such as academic research). It is also unclear what factors affect master’s destinations (such as subject discipline, university attended, gender, ethnicity and social class). This project would involve investigating the ‘destinations’ of graduates from postgraduate master’s degree programmes. The aim would be both to describe outcomes and how they might vary across universities, fields of study and student characteristics, but also to relate these findings to concerns of social justice and inequality (e.g. social mobility).

B) REFERENCES THAT SHOULD BE READ (if you do not have access to these, please email me)

C) RESEARCH AIMS / QUESTIONS
1. How do the destinations of master’s graduates from UK universities differ from those of first-degree graduates (occupation, income, further study)?
2. What factors are associated with more favourable outcomes (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic background, subject discipline, institution, geography, mode of study)?
3. Have master’s destinations changed over time? If so, how?
4. How can we use evidence about master’s destinations to improve understanding of theories of educational inequality and social mobility?

D) METHODS
The research is likely to involve secondary analysis of administrative data, possibly combined with primary quantitative or qualitative research. This is most likely to be analysis of specially-procured Higher Education Statistics Agency Student Record and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey data, perhaps supplemented with other major social surveys (such as Next Steps, Understanding Society and the Labour Force Survey). The UK could be substituted for a different country, or included in a comparison with other countries.