Retention and success on UK master's programmes

A) RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT
Higher education researchers have a relatively well-developed understanding of the causes and correlates of higher education drop-out and non-completion among first-degree students. There is also an extensive literature on doctoral student completion. Far less is understood about retention on masters-level programmes. This is despite very substantial growth in master’s student numbers in recent years, including significant incoming international student mobility to the UK at master's level and investment in master's degrees through new loans for 'home' students. This project would investigate patterns of retention and success at master's level and assess the utility of models of student retention and success for understanding drop-out and completion among full-time master’s students.

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

C) RESEARCH AIMS / QUESTIONS
1. What are the predictors of completion and non-completion among full-time postgraduate master's students? How do these differ across key academic and demographic characteristics (e.g. nationality, socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, age, subject discipline, institution)?
2. How useful are theories about student retention and success in understanding master’s student persistence?
3. How do master's students experience their studies and explain their outcomes?

D) METHODS
Research is likely to combine secondary statistical analysis of administrative data and qualitative research with master's students. This could be a two-stage approach. The first phase would involve investigation of relevant patterns using Higher Education Statistics Agency data, and/or institution's own student databases. This would identify rates of completion and non-completion and key sources of variation in these rates. The second stage would use findings from the first stage to identify those students predicted to be at highest risk of dropping out, with a sample to be tracked longitudinally. Here the emphasis would be on the collection of qualitative data. This phase would aim to understand in greater detail the experience of master’s study, students’ approaches to their studies and how their success or non-completion connects with their context.