

Understanding attrition risk factors: using Q methodology to evaluate student perceptions of their university experience.

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- City-based
- Large University (top 30 in the UK)
 - 24,000 FTE
 - 22,000 full-time
 - 22,000 undergraduate FTE
- High levels of risk to opportunity
 - First generation in University
 - Commuter students
 - Low participation areas
 - Deprivation
- Attrition rates in line with benchmark
 - Fluctuation across subject areas

Importance of retention

- Personal cost of leaving
- Institutional impact of attrition
 - Financial
 - Reputational
 - 'Regulatory'
- Multi-faceted causes
- One-off event or ongoing experience



Developing the attrition risk model

- Literature tends to focus on reasons for leaving (e.g. Thomas, 2013)
 - Positive emphasis on why students decide to stay?

“The process of persistence is not the mirror image of the process of leaving. Though the two are necessarily related, understanding the reasons for leaving doesn’t necessarily translate into helping students to persist.” (Padilla 1999, cited in Tinto, 2006)

“Previous student models put the focus and burden of success on the individual. With those that leave or struggle seen as deficient in some way.” (Kinzie & Kuh, 2017)

- Interviewed 36 former students who had considered leaving university at different points but had successfully graduated
 - Varied age groups, subjects and institutions

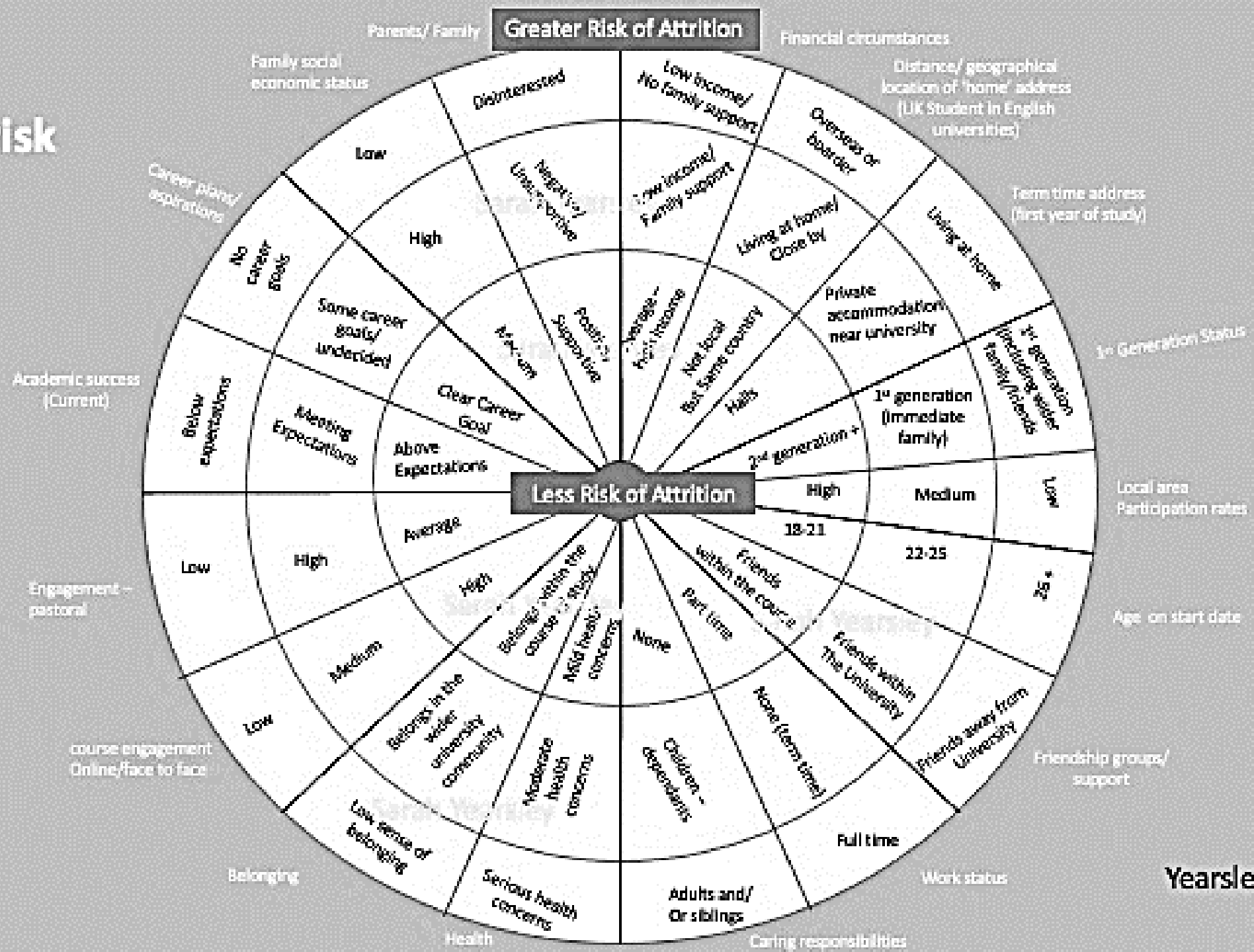
The intersectionality of the student journey

Overlapping effects

- Individual
 - Institutional
 - Socio-cultural
 - Economic
- Core themes identified from research
 - Supportive influences
 - Engagement dynamics
 - Demographic factors
 - Belonging



Model of attrition risk factors



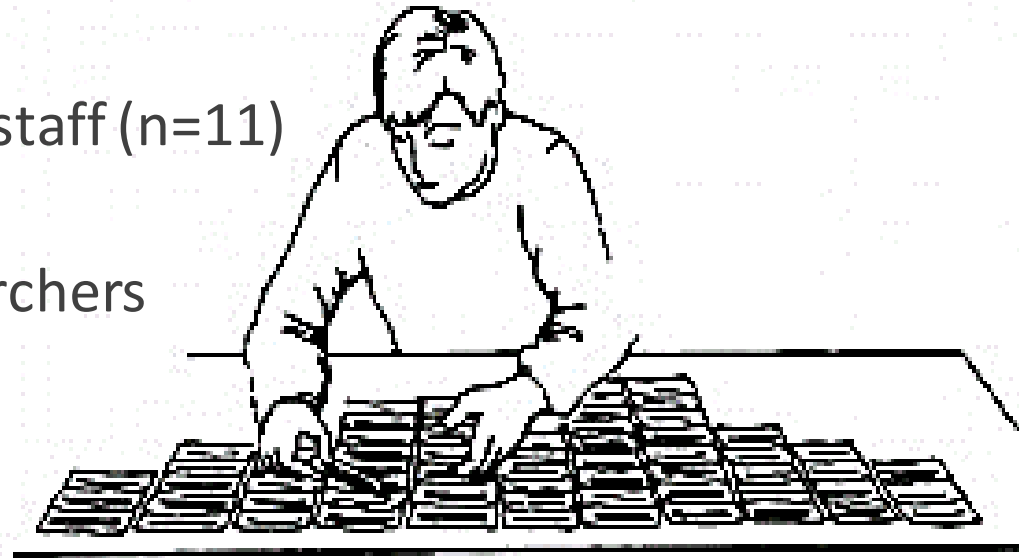
Yearsley (2023)

- A social issue is identified, and a set of interrelated statements are fashioned from a “concourse” (Millar et al., 2022).
- A diverse and relevant participant base (or P-Set) is chosen to consent and take part in the study (Millar et al., 2022).
- Participants place each statement on the grid from their interpretation, establishing a point of view (McKeown and Thomas, 2013; Ramlo, 2015).
- Short interviews are performed to understand a participant’s placement of certain statements (McKeown and Thomas, 2013; Millar et al., 2022).
- Data analysis is then performed using software to identify clusters and correlations (Millar, 2022).
- Results primarily lead to a deeper understanding of attitudes and human behaviour, potentially leading to the enhancement of practice (Millar, 2022).

Producing the Concourse

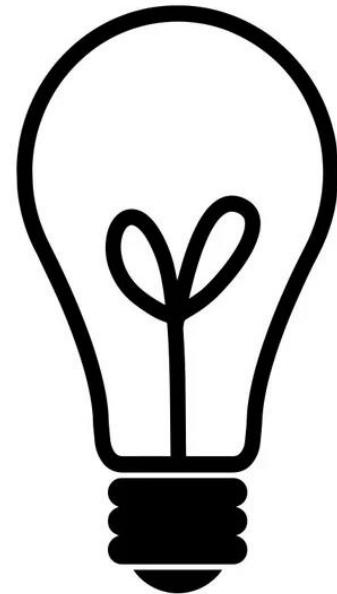
The concourse will consist of a wide range of possible views or opinions on a given issue and its sub-components (Coogan and Harrington, 2011).

- Concourse #1 created by researcher
 - Pilot with professional service and academic staff (n=11)
 - Demographic questions removed
- Concourse #2 co-created with two student researchers
 - Pilot with team of student researchers (n=4)
- Final statements agreed (n=44)
- 37 participants interviewed – purposive sampling to reflect student demographics and disciplines

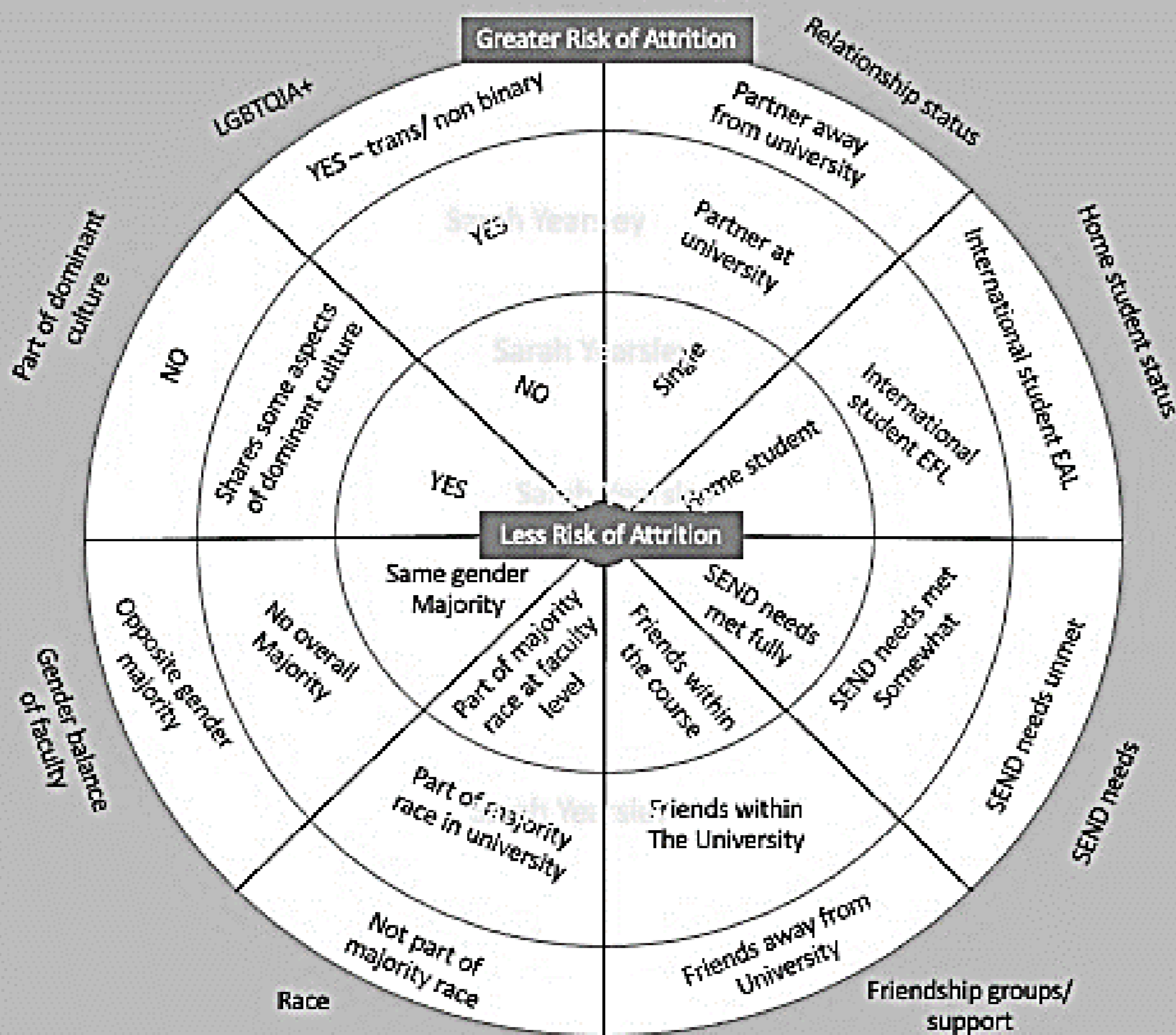


Data analysis and qualitative findings

- Reinforced validity of original model
 - Generated sub-models for enhanced clarity and understanding
- Belonging
- e.g. Role models
 - e.g. Minority status
 - e.g. Faith and religion



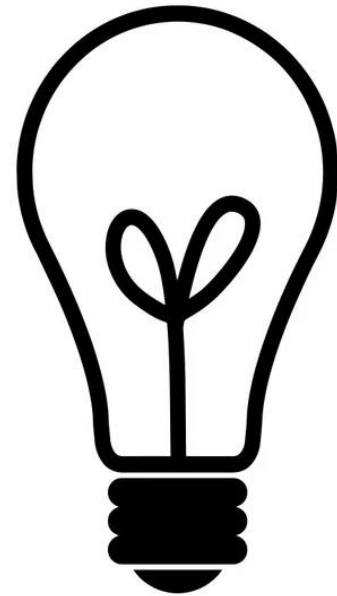
Belonging



Yearsley (2023)

Further sub-models (in production)

- Demographic
 - e.g. First generation status
- Supportive influences
 - e.g. Impact of 'licence to practice' programmes
- Engagement
 - e.g. enjoyment



Academic development

- Complete Q methodology quantitative analysis.
- Write up and dissemination.
- Enhancements e.g. pilot project on asset-based awareness.

University implementation

- Roll out to institutional student advice and wellbeing teams.
- Add to personal tutor resources.
- Feature of personal tutor policy review.

Thank you

Comments?

Observations?

Questions?

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