

Avengers Assemble!  
Working together and  
valuing professional  
services staff expertise  
in programme design

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Leigh Kilpert

*University College London*

*AHEP Fellow*

What will  
this session  
cover?

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Conference reflections

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The issue

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Why it matters

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Our main characters

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A possible solution?

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Discussion

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Implementation



# The issue

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- Administration and marketisation can be a barrier to academic work.
- Academics hold a privileged position as subject and content experts, who can be limited in innovating by perceived bureaucracy.
- PS staff are not routinely involved in 'academic' domains.
- PS staff may be seen, or act, as merely operators, administrators, and bureaucrats, sometimes accepting our own disempowerment.
- Gaps in understanding between communities creates conflict, which in turn affects the student and staff experience.

Does it  
matter?

**DEFINITION** Teaching vs Education (UK Professional Standards Framework)

**POWER** Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1993); Field of Recontextualisation (Bernstein, 2000)

**PROCESS** Shared pain points, interconnectivity (Matthews, 2019; Fung, 2017)

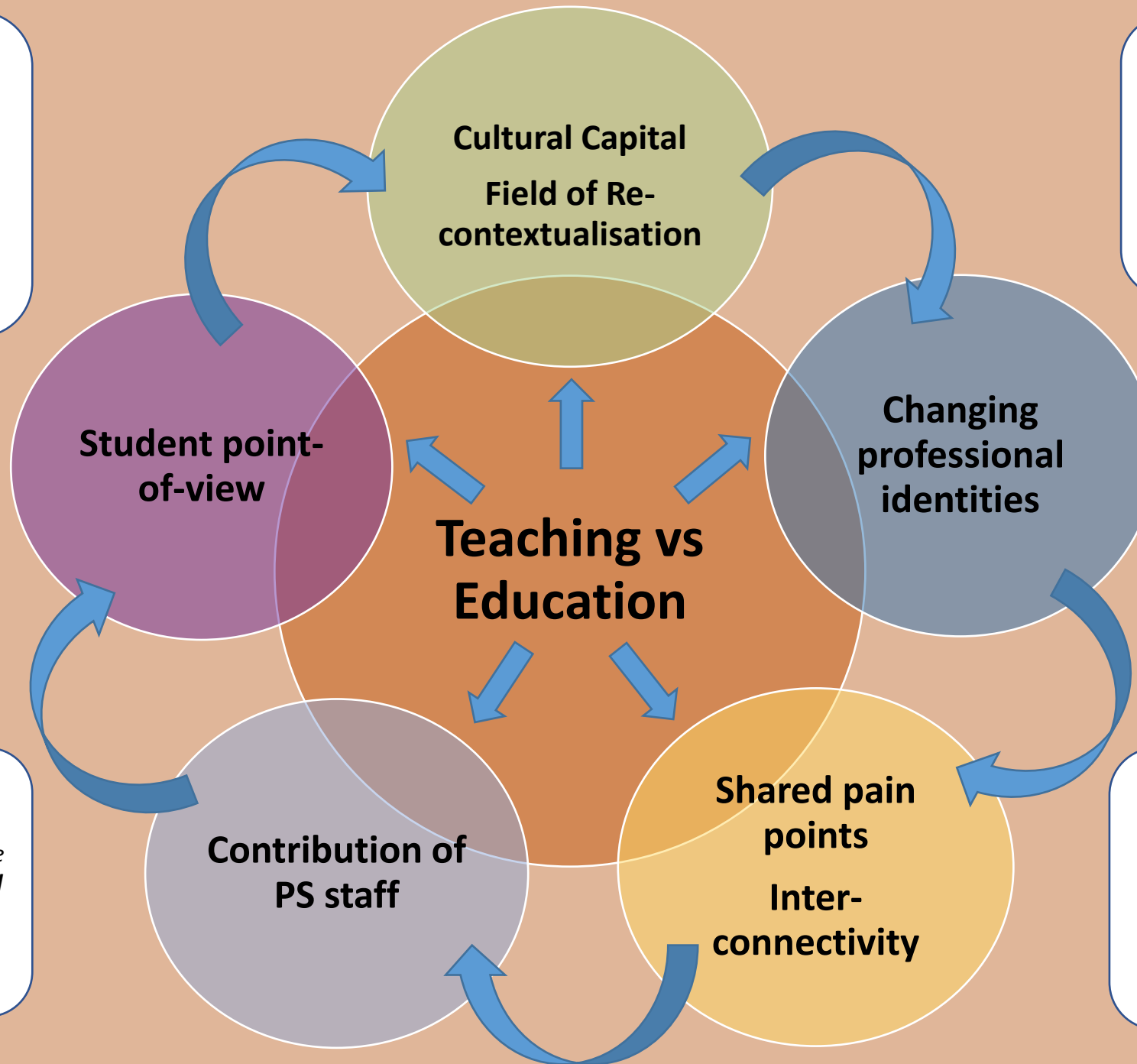
**PEOPLE** Changing professional identities (Whitchurch, 2006; 2008)

**IMPACT** Contribution of PS staff to student outcomes (Graham, 2012; Roberts, 2018)

**EVALUATION** Student point of view (National Student Survey, “the course is well-organised and running smoothly”)

*“While **academic agendas** centre on the fulfilment of teaching and research programmes, **organisational agendas** provide the operating structures and systems that facilitate these activities, enabling them to be **contextualised** against external constraints and opportunities”*  
(Whitchurch, 2006, p.164)

*“Universities will have to **nurture and use the potential of all their staff** in order to be able to deliver quality education and research. Academic and professional staff will all **need to work together collaboratively and cooperatively**”*  
(Graham, 2012, p.448)



*“A holistic institution-wide **commitment to successful student outcomes** necessitates the **coming together of academic and professional staff** in support of the student learning journey”*  
(Roberts, 2018, p.151)

*“**Focusing on connections** between processes and **making connections** between the **different groups of people** who deal with them provides a new perspective on process improvements that can **lead to real progress**”*  
(Matthews, 2019, p.10)

# Introducing some of the main characters...



Academics, teaching staff

*super intelligent, experts in their field, don't always play well with others*



Departmental education/academic administrators, student support staff

*use ideals and systems as a shield, likes to plan, can be dogmatic*



Registry staff (central)

*two sided: can be enablers or blockers, powerful, can lack connection with other teams*



Digital education staff (central)

*ready to fly in with powerful tools, knowledge of practice beyond local understanding, live in another world so (historically) not always present*



Education development staff (central)

*persuades using facts and information, can easily integrate in different teams, often underpowered*



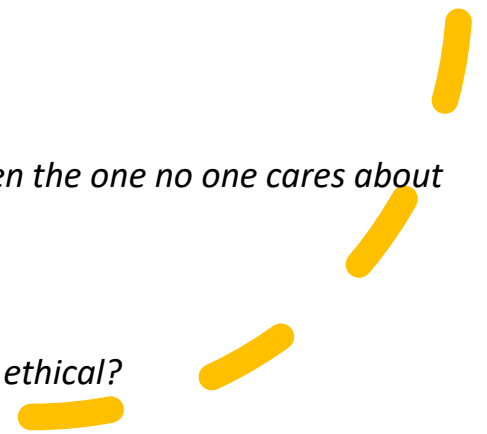
Students

*always get to the centre of an issue, task orientated, often the one no one cares about*



Artificial Intelligence

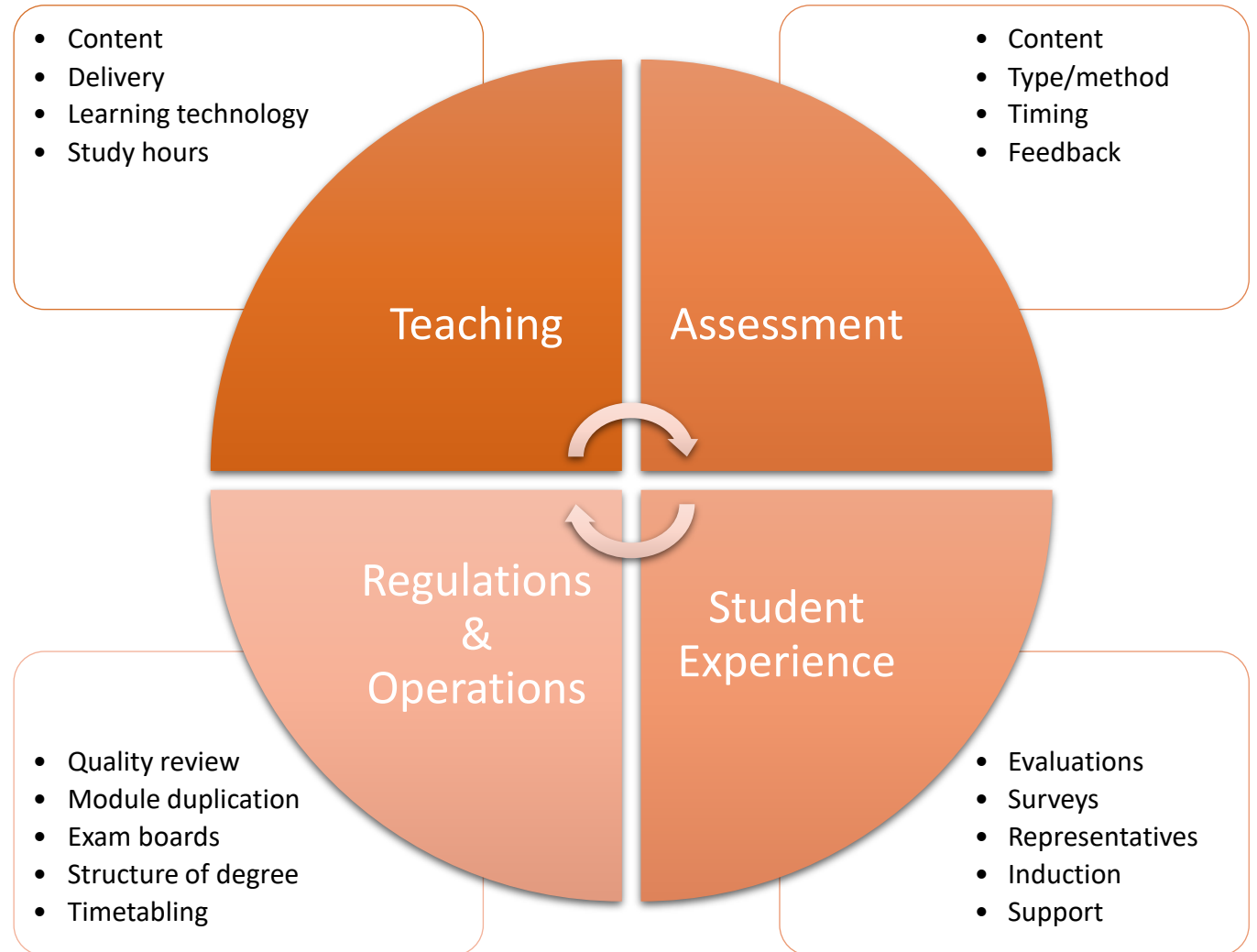
*Access to a huge amount of information, but is it always ethical?*



# Possible solution: More than just assembling a team

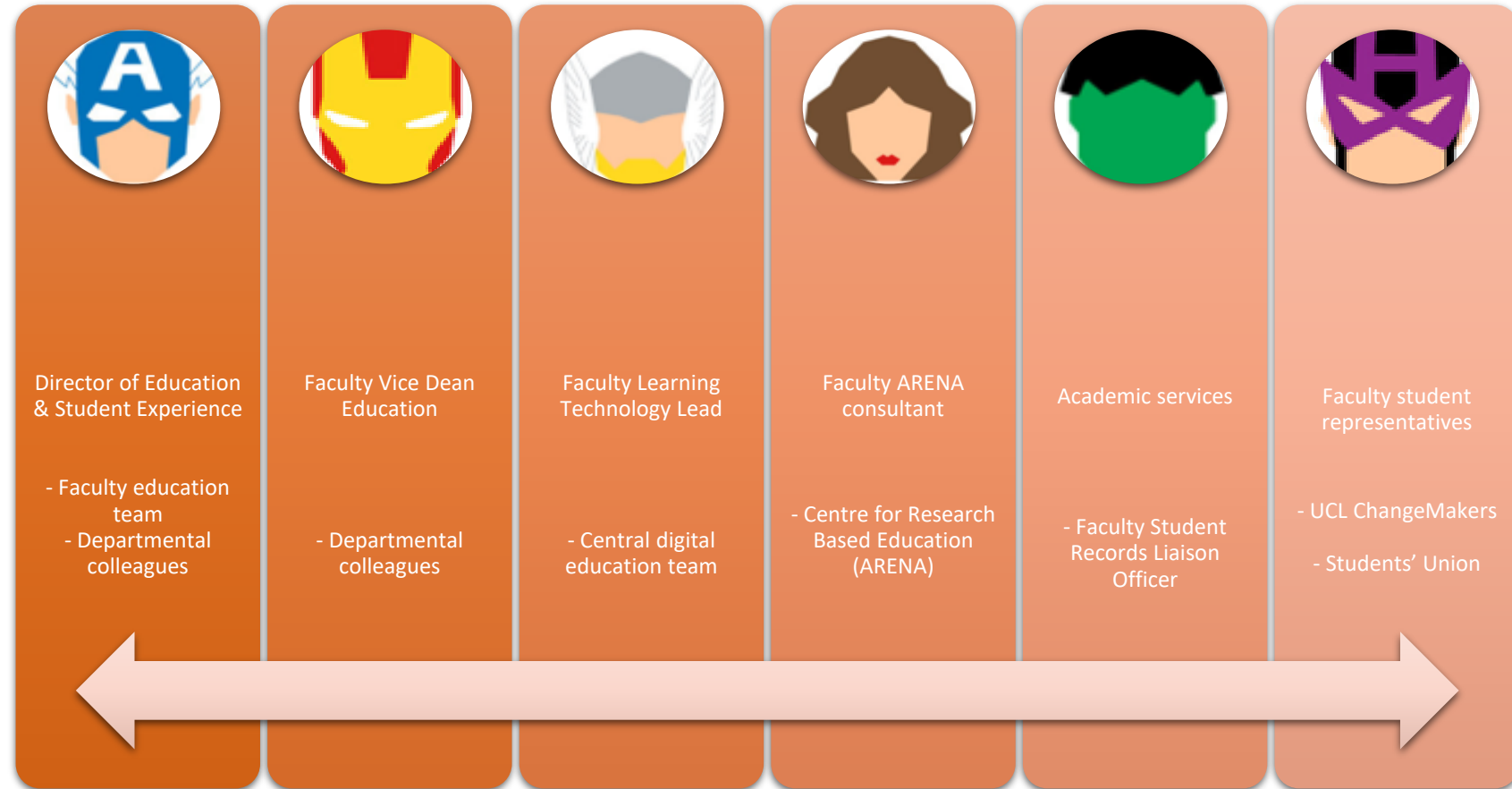
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- Create “programme heroes”: Key players, contributing with equal responsibility and authority including expert PS Staff, and other “heroes”.
- Bring together discussions currently fragmented between heroes.
- Applicable for both programme design and review.
- Continued engagement between heroes.
- Rotating Chairs.
- Requires modelling at senior level.



# Practical implementation: Senior Faculty example

- Core Team: DESE/VDE/FLTL/ARENA bi-weekly meetings, no chair.
- Working together throughout the pandemic on big education challenges, developing Faculty policies, practices, resources, and support of departments.
- Faculty embedded digital education and registry experts.
- Faculty student reps, Student Partnership Committees, and ChangeMakers projects continue student engagement.



*"The availability of the multi-faceted team at faculty level means we've been able to draw on all the expertise we need without hunting across the university. Each department has a focus which means they also can feedback to us all the best practice quicker, ensure we all do the same (and right!) things. **We've been able to support each other across the faculty** – PS, teaching, digital education and pastoral support – incredibly effectively meaning we've done so much in a year that we will keep forever."  
- **Chemistry Departmental Tutor, Senior Lecturer***



# Discussion

- Do you think that similar dynamics exist in South African universities?
- Do you think a 'university heroes' approach might work in your institution?
- What challenges do you envision?
- What benefits could be realised through recognition of mutual expertise?
- Who is missing from the team?

# Summary



Time efficiency, financial & reputational implications



Understanding the value of the work that you do as academic administrators



Building a culture of mutual respect and recognising that you all want the same thing



The Avengers grow - so can your teams



Level playing field, with expectation of contribution



Thank you

Questions?

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