

What we can learn from SUs in Switzerland, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Canada

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Southern SUs Feb 2026



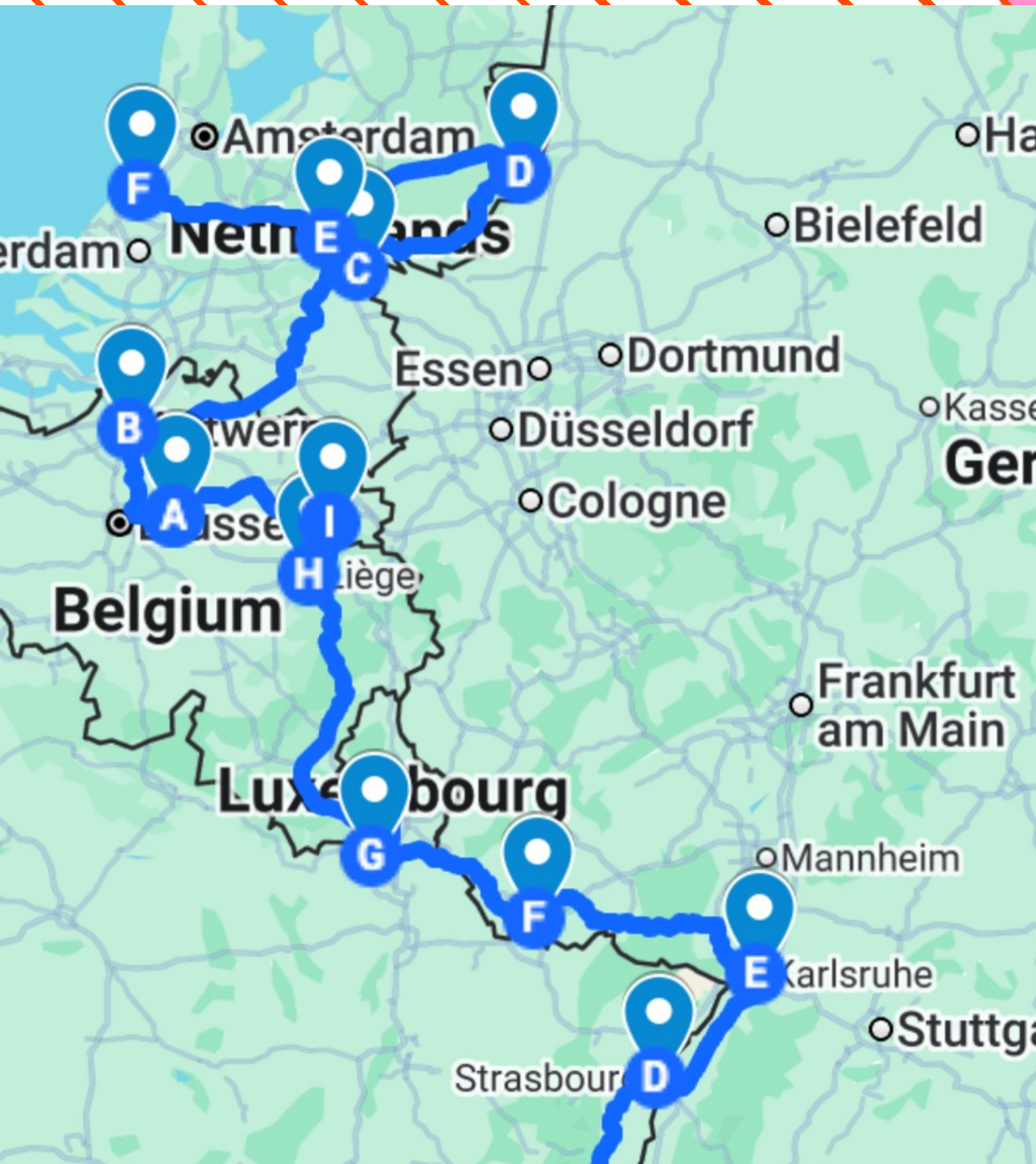
Why we've been doing this

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY TOURS

- Build links and networks with European SUs and related orgs to work on collaborative projects
- Record multiple alternative models for representation, student democracy and governance for evaluation in the UK context
- Gather examples of effective student campaign and activism practice for use in the SU
- Identify potential student social enterprise projects for funding and support from the SU
- Identify methods for collaboration between SUs in the campaigning and student activities space
- To gather examples of practice in supporting, funding and coordinating student led activities, societies and sporting activity



Where we went in January



1. St Gallen
2. Zurich
3. Mulhouse
4. Strasbourg
5. Karlsruhe
6. Saarbrücken
7. Esch-Belval
8. Liège
9. Maastricht
10. Leuven
11. Antwerp
12. Nijmegen
13. Enschede
14. Wageningen
15. Leiden

What we encountered

A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS

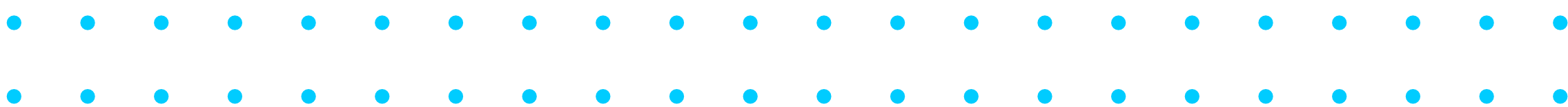
- Buildings
- Student leaders
- SU staff
- Corporate structures
- Democratic structures
- Student life
- Higher education systems
- Ways of doing things
- Projects
- Culture





Erasmus+

- **Rebuild (or relaunch) ESN on your campus, SU-style:** recruit committees early, give them space + training + expense policy, and set up a simple SU–international office–ESN operating agreement so buddying/welcome isn’t improvised in September.
- **Create outbound “students helping students” pathways:** returner-led briefings, destination-specific peer mentoring, and an SU-run debrief loop that turns mobility experience into campaigns, rep asks, and better support for the next cohort.
- **Use Erasmus+ to fund SU staff/officer exchange of practice:** job-shadow other European unions on advice/casework, housing rights, welfare models, volunteering/credits systems, and student-city partnership working—bring back templates and training.
- **Build cross-border SU projects (not just trips):** partner with 2–5 unions abroad on one shared deliverable (e.g., housing scam toolkit, peer mental health training, international student rights pack, buddy-matching model) and apply under Erasmus+ cooperation/youth strands where SUs can be direct beneficiaries.





1. Legal personality creates power

Examples:

Germany (non-Bavaria): Student bodies as Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts with mandatory fees and political mandates

ETH Zurich: VSETH has 3,000m² of guaranteed campus space secured "in perpetuity" via contract

Munich Olydorf: Verein Studenten im Olympiazentrum e.V. holds funds, employs staff, runs venues

Questions for UK SUs: Where are you relying on goodwill that could be formalised?



2. Welfare is infrastructure, not charity

Examples:

Studierendenwerk München: Regional public body serving 143,000 students across 15 institutions with €85/semester hypothecated fee

Flanders STUVO: Six mandated welfare domains with ring-fenced funding and student-majority governance councils

CROUS France: National system delivering housing, catering, counselling and grants separate from individual universities

Questions for UK SUs: Is student welfare treated as core infrastructure or discretionary service? Could regional pooling reduce duplication and postcode lotteries between institutions?





3. Students can build what institutions won't

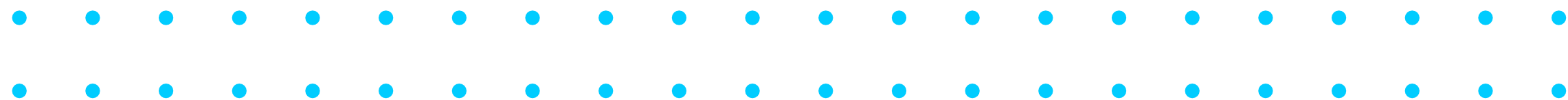
Examples:

St Gallen Biddit: Two students built a course allocation tool in five weeks — SU bought and now maintains it

TUM.live: Student-built lecture recording platform scaled across campus via teaching innovation fund

ETH Focus Groups: Student-designed tutorial support targeting confidence gaps, continued after academic sponsor left

Questions for UK SUs: Do you have pathways for student-built solutions to become institutional infrastructure? Who owns and maintains successful student innovations?



4. Space is the platform for everything else

Examples:

TUM StudiTUM houses: €15m investment across three campuses for student activity space

Antwerp GATE15: City-centre student hub housing cross-institution services

Leuven Pangaea: Dedicated "living room" for international students with €8 mug-as-membership model

Questions for UK SUs: Is space guaranteed or annually negotiated? Do you have a strategy for multi-campus visibility and presence?





5. Faculty-level associations are the "first home"

Examples:

ETH Fachvereine: Department associations deliver orientation, exam archives, mentoring, careers fairs — students identify with them first

Leuven kringen: Faculty associations run student life; LOKO coordinates across them

Wageningen ESN/ISOW: International associations with shared lounge and distinct missions

Questions for UK SUs: Are school/department-level communities empowered and resourced, or does everything default to the centre? Could course communities be your strongest belonging intervention?



6. Representation needs consent, not just consultation

Examples:

Baden-Württemberg Studienkommissionen: Curriculum and exam regulations require Einvernehmen (agreement) of student members — cannot pass without it

University of Luxembourg: Student delegation president is a voting member of the Board of Governors

Maastricht medezeggenschap: Half of University Council seats are students with formal co-determination rights

Questions for UK SUs: Where do students have genuine consent/veto power versus advisory voice? Which decisions should require student agreement rather than consultation?





7. Credit recognition makes leadership accessible

Examples:

HSG campus credits: SU work earns ECTS via defined projects, faculty supervision and reporting — sits within degree structure

Maastricht: University compensates association board members taking a year out with ~€350/month

Munich Olydorf Honorarsemester: Tenancy extensions awarded for volunteer engagement

Questions for UK SUs: Does taking on leadership require students to sacrifice academic progress or income? What recognition and compensation would make participation equitable?

8. Peer teaching is a staffing strategy

Examples:

TUM: Paid student tutors (€12–14/hour) recruited for all compulsory courses, trained via Tutor Academy

ETH Focus Groups: Student TAs recruited by VSETH to run confidence-building exercise classes

Wageningen: Student-led tutorial groups embedded in problem-based learning model

Questions for UK SUs: Are there paid, trained peer-teaching pathways alongside PGTA provision? Could student-led academic support be scaled and formalised?



9. Induction is a designed system

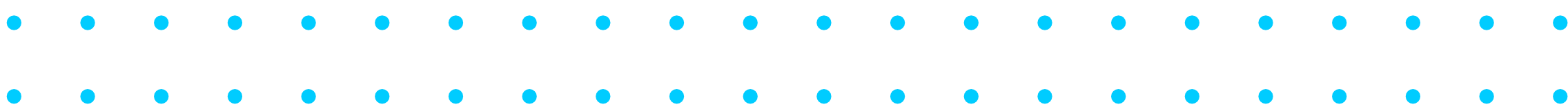
Examples:

Twente Kick-In: 9-day student-run programme with €87.50 fee, 200 crew, "do-group" micro-cohorts that persist

Antwerp Unifac Verkenningdagen: Pre-term three-day trip for first-years before term starts

Leuven buddy matching: Algorithm-assisted pairing of ~3,000 students annually with explicit comfort-weighting

Questions for UK SUs: Is induction a coherent system or fragmented competing programmes? Do belonging interventions start before arrival and persist beyond week one?





10. Student-led culture can be mass-scale

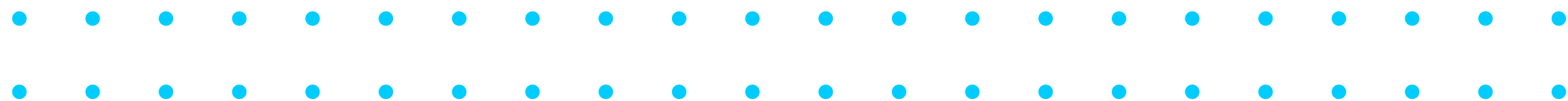
Examples:

StuStaCulum Munich: 30,000 visitors, €12 entry, 900+ volunteer shifts — Germany's largest student-run festival

Konstanz Campus Festival: 23,500 attendees, organised by StuVe since 2015

Antwerp Unifestival: 20,000+ at free campus festival, student committee works year-round

Questions for UK SUs: Where has professionalisation displaced student-led cultural production? Could large-scale events be run by students with institutional support rather than outsourced?



11. Housing is a rights issue

Examples:

France VISALE: Free state-backed guarantor scheme for under-30s — universal, no cost

Strasbourg AFGES: Housing casework as rights-based intervention with structured escalation and temporary accommodation partnerships

Antwerp kotlabel: City-wide quality labelling for student accommodation (now Flemish-wide but voluntary)

Questions for UK SUs: Do you treat housing as consumer advice or enforceable rights? What would it take to challenge landlord discrimination and poor conditions systematically?





12. Mutual aid scales when designed

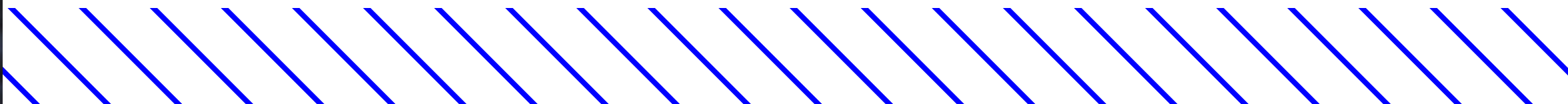
Examples:

FACE AGORAé network: 43 solidarity groceries across France with shared model, eligibility assessment and annual user survey feeding lobbying

Strasbourg AGORA'Truck: Mobile unit bringing food support to satellite campuses

CSTE Les Maraîchers Solidaires: Monthly solidarity markets with no means-testing, paired with cooking workshops

Questions for UK SUs: Are food banks designed as community hubs or distribution points? Could a shared model across campuses generate national evidence and advocacy weight?



13. City-level coordination multiplies impact

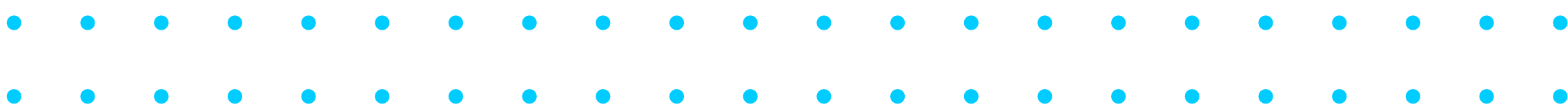
Examples:

Antwerp STAN: City-wide platform (since 2008) with 9 staff and 45 student workers, funded jointly by city and institutions

Study 360 Antwerp: Exam-period study space network across 700 seats in venues from cathedral to IKEA

Antwerp student charter: Enforceable annual agreement between city, institutions and students governing public-space events

Questions for UK SUs: Is there a city-level student life coordination body? Could municipal partnerships unlock space, safety infrastructure and civic legitimacy?





14. National coordination wins national policy

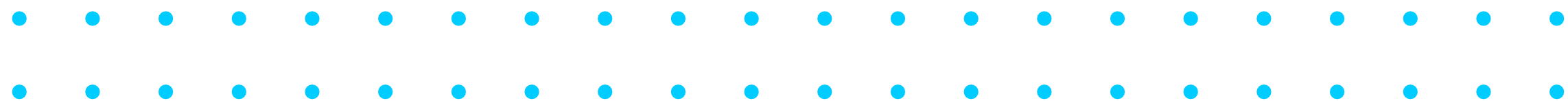
Examples:

Netherlands ISO + LSVb: Split tactics beat €3,000 "study delay" penalty — LSVb ran 131,000-signature petition while ISO lobbied parliament

FAGE France: Claimed role in extending VISALE eligibility and abolishing €217 student social security contribution

VVS Flanders: 1,000 empty chairs action plus sober-shaming survey combining symbolic protest with evidence

Questions for UK SUs: Do UK student organisations have the capacity for sustained multi-year national campaigns? What governance and mandate discipline would enable stronger coordination?



15. Safeguarding can be structural

Examples:

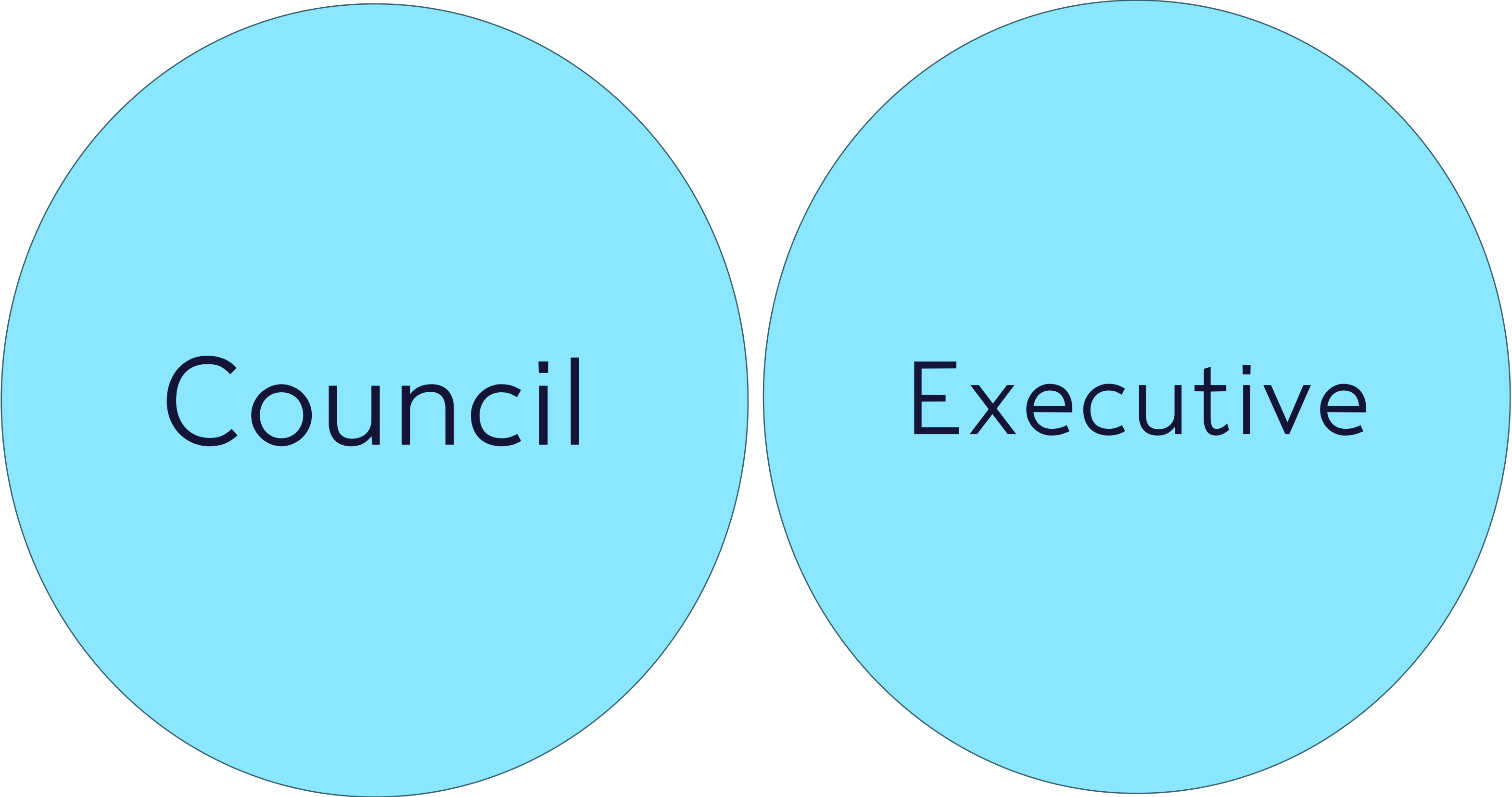
Antwerp student charter: Designated sober supervisors, alcohol training, ban on hazardous practices, right to refuse alcohol — all enforceable conditions

Maastricht safeguarding regime: University cut ties with two associations and withdrew board-member financial support after transgressive behaviour

KoKo Maastricht: Designated sober person, bystander training, bartenders as "eyes" during events

Questions for UK SUs: Are safeguarding requirements tied to recognition and funding with enforceable sanctions? Do societies have mandatory sober leads and trained bystanders?

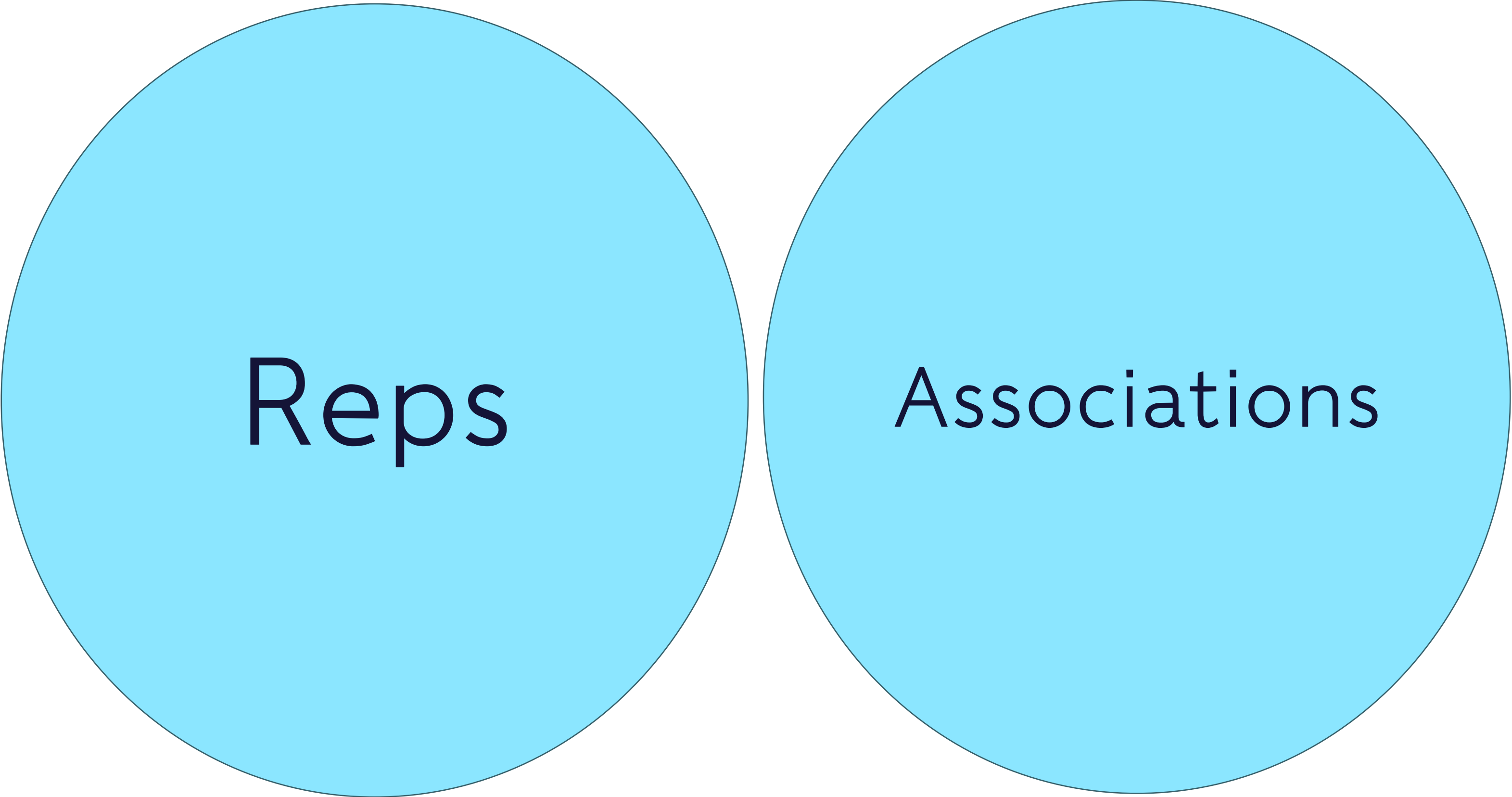




A diagram consisting of two large, light blue circles positioned side-by-side. The left circle contains the word "Council" and the right circle contains the word "Executive". Both circles have a thin dark blue outline.

Council

Executive

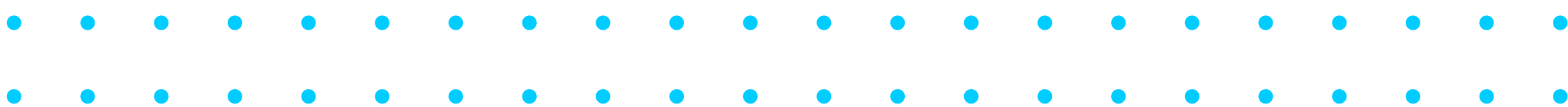


Reps

Associations

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