

WONKHE

Who owns the credit?

Europe, Erasmus+ and Bologna –
what getting closer to Europe
could mean for students

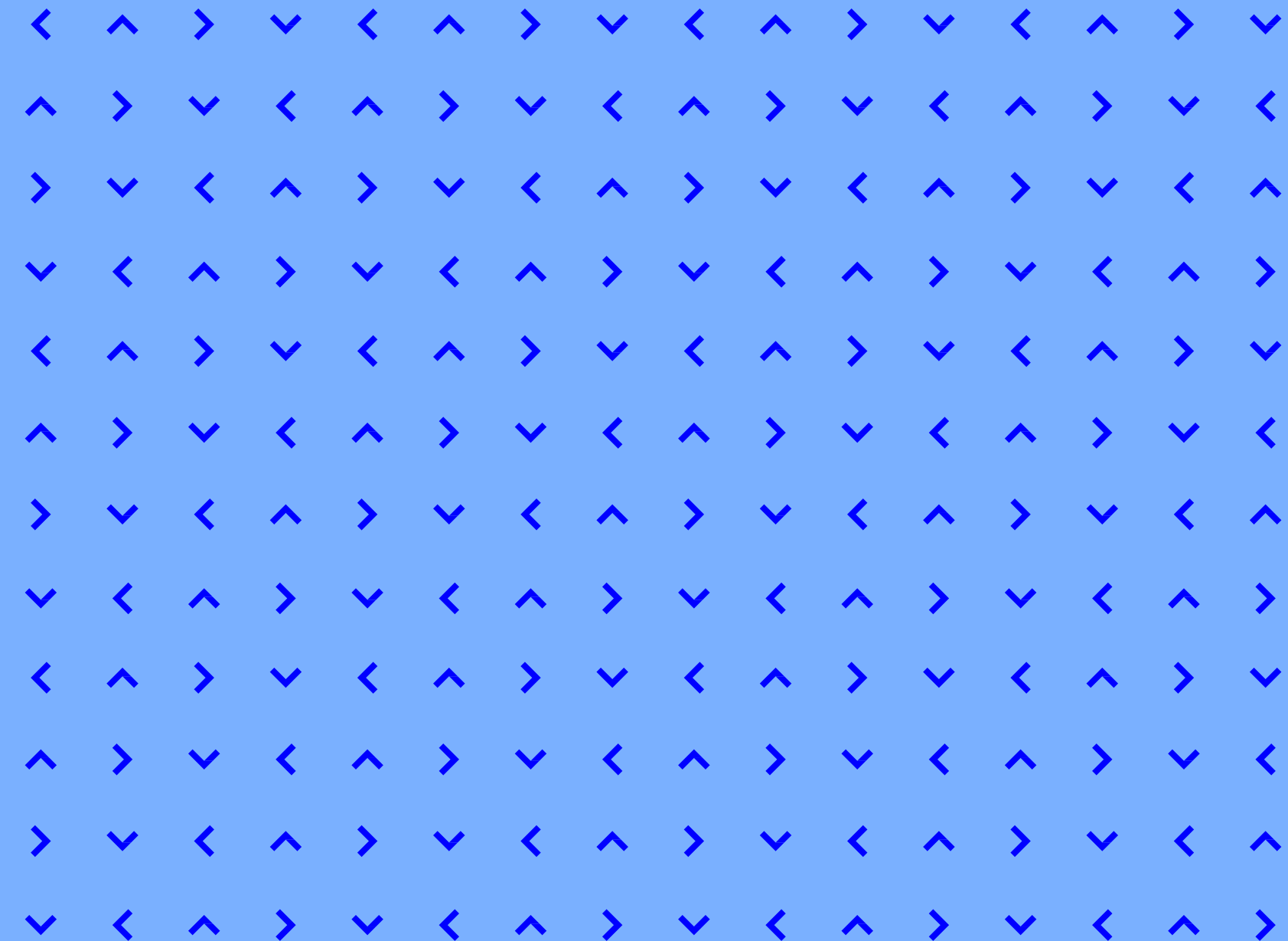
SEPTEMBER 2026

JIM DICKINSON | [JIM@WONKHE.COM](mailto:jim@wonkhe.com)



01

We never left



Three things happening at once

ERASMUS+

January 2027

Back from January 2027, covering 2027–28 only
British Council as national agency
ECHE results this autumn, first calls expected
November 2026
Around £570m, a 30 per cent discount on default
terms

YOUTH EXPERIENCE SCHEME

Autumn 2026

Not agreed – summit postponed from 22 July, now
“later in the year”
Cap versus emergency brake
Tuition fees the sticking point
Soon

BOLOGNA

2027

Chişinău ministerial publishes the first fundamental
values monitoring report
UK likely in red on student participation in
governance
ESG revision and next implementation report land
the same year

Everyone has heard about the first one. Almost nobody is watching the other two – and the other two are where senates matter.

Sources: The essential guide to immigration reform for SUs (Wonkhe SUs, 27 Jul 2026); What UK SUs need to know about Erasmus+ (15 Jan 2026); Little England’s splendid isolation in European HE (10 Nov 2025)

Red on the map

2024 BOLOGNA PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION REPORT – 49 COUNTRIES, ONE OF THEM STAYED IN AFTER LEAVING

COMMITMENT	THE REST OF THE CLASS	UNITED KINGDOM
Student and staff representation on governing bodies required in law	Most of the EHEA	No requirement (except Scotland)
Social dimension strategy adopted after social dialogue	Almost all	No – alongside Kazakhstan
Rectors’ conferences included in national policy-making	Almost all	Not usually – with Kazakhstan, Montenegro, San Marino
Doctoral outward mobility	Typically well above 5 per cent	Below 5 per cent – comparable only to Türkiye
Diploma Supplement issued automatically	Standard	Some issue it, some the HEAR, some neither
Lisbon Recognition Convention principles in law	Ratified and legislated	Not legislated, on autonomy grounds

Source: The European Higher Education Area in 2024 (Bologna Process Implementation Report), via Little England’s splendid isolation in European HE looks increasingly absurd (Wonkhe, 10 Nov 2025). No Westminster minister attended the Tirana ministerial in May 2024.

What Bologna actually asks of a senate/academic board

WHAT THE TIRANA STATEMENT SAYS (MAY 2024)

Students as
co-governors

- Right to initiate debate and set agendas
- Right to participate in all academic and corporate governing bodies
- Right to vote, and to veto on defined matters
- Elected in open, free and fair elections, accountable to electors
- Consulted on access, curriculum, quality assurance, strategy and finance
- Freedom to express views without fear of reprisal
- Monitored from 2027 – in law and in practice

WHAT YOUR SENATE DOES

Students as
consultees?

- Who decides which decisions students take part in?
- Do students vote on Senate, or observe?
- Can a rep put an item on the agenda without permission?
- What protects an officer who challenges a decision?
- Is participation required at faculty and department level?
- Is any of this written down anywhere a student could cite?



The worst student rights in Europe

Lithuania

Student reps hold a veto in senate, faculty councils and the assembly on student-interest issues – a two-thirds majority is needed to override it.

Latvia

SUs receive at least 0.05 per cent of the university's annual budget by law, and a legal right to information from any department.

Poland

Students are a fifth to a quarter of senate, study regulations must be agreed with the SU, and at least 30 per cent of credits are elective.

Austria

Students hold one third of the seats on every curriculum committee, with votes over the elective curriculum.

Spain

Every university must have an independent ombudsperson, chosen by students and staff, with statutory reporting duties.

Serbia

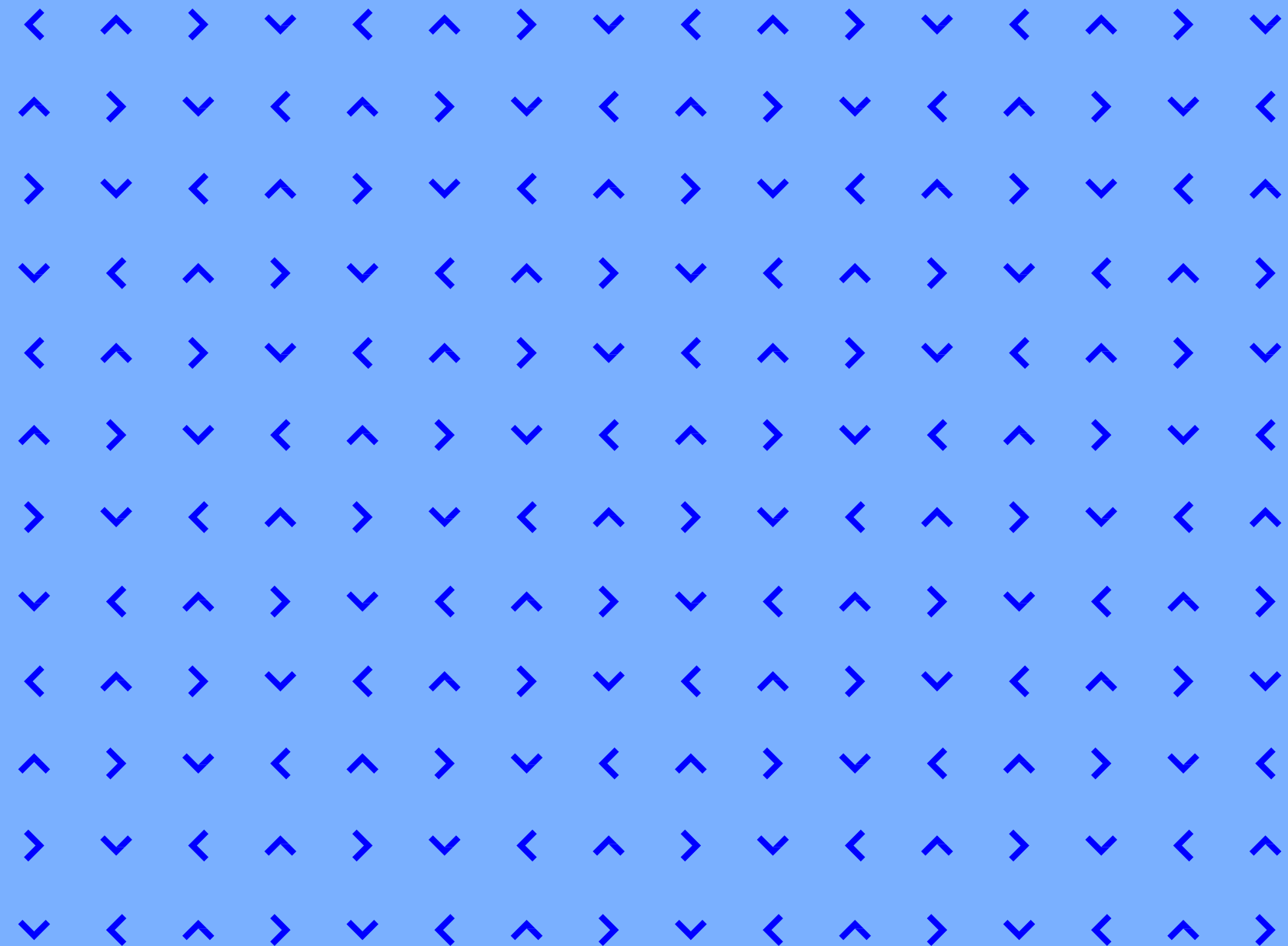
When Belgrade's council decides admissions, programme reform or ECTS values, student membership expands by 20 per cent – with votes.

Save for Scottish-domiciled students in Scotland, UK students pay the highest fees in Europe – and enjoy none of the above.

Sources: Why does the UK have the worst student rights in Europe? (Wonkhe, 29 Apr 2024); A round up of student influence, voice and representation policies from our eurotours, 2026 update (Wonkhe SUs, 3 Sep 2026)

02

Who owns the credit



The arithmetic

180 ECTS

European bachelor's – one credit is 25 to 30 hours

360 UK credits

English, Welsh and Northern Irish honours degree – one credit is ten hours, now written into English law by the LLE regulations

480 SCQF points

Scottish four-year honours – ten hours a point, or 240 ECTS

Same degree, same hours, different accounting. Two UK credits are one ECTS. The interesting question is who decides what fills the hours.

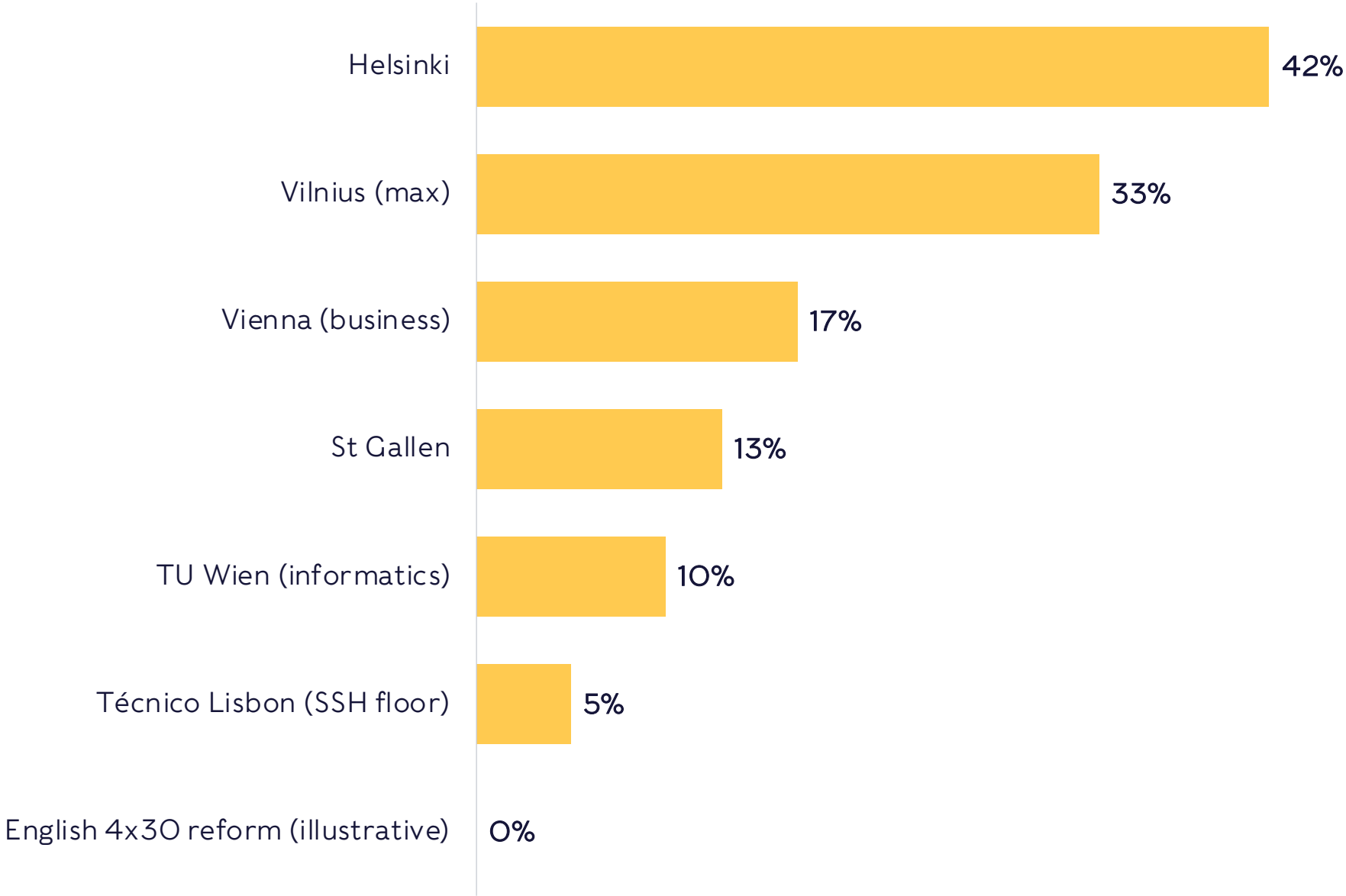
“Would it really have killed us to just switch to ECTS?” – DfE attempts to explain the LLE to applicants, badly (Wonk Corner, 12 Feb 2026)

Sources: Can students use their work experience and/or part-time job to count towards their degree? (Wonkhe SUs, 21 Aug 2026); The ultimate guide to curriculum reform for SUs (31 Jul 2026)

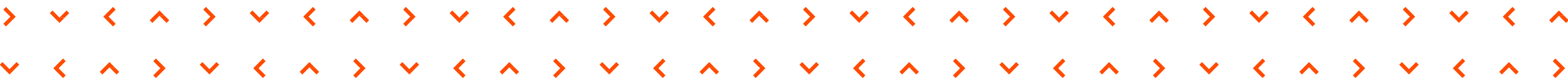
A sixth of the degree

SHARE OF THE DEGREE THE STUDENT STEERS

University of Vienna business – 30 of 180 ECTS open, filled from dozens of extension curricula, a study-abroad term or a specialisation
Helsinki – 90 in the major, 75 from other programmes
Vilnius – up to 60 ECTS of individual studies, won by the SU
St Gallen – 24 ECTS of contextual studies for everyone
The English four-by-thirty degree is illustrative (cupcake) – no measured figure exists



Per cent of a bachelor’s degree under student control – free choice, extension curricula, mandatory breadth or SU-won individual studies.
Sources: Euro visions (Wonkhe, 17 May 2026); With the power of knowledge (15 Apr 2025); Study Tours 2024 Lithuania; Careers, credit and curricula (10 Jun 2026).



Four by thirty

THE ENGLISH REFORM PATTERN

One unit
four jobs

- Fewer, larger 30-credit modules – four a year, not eight or twelve
- All-core first year, curated pathways later, minimum enrolment thresholds
- The LLE’s 30-credit funding floor makes the 30-credit module the convenient purchasing unit – and the convenient failure unit
- The same block is the teaching unit, the assessment unit, the failure unit and the fee unit – a combination found nowhere in the European regulatory corpus

WHAT EUROPE DOES INSTEAD

Container
with things in
it

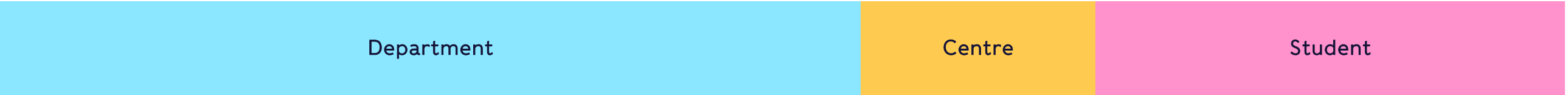
- ETH Zürich – 24 exams credited as four blocks, passed on a weighted average, with hurdles forbidden
- Twente – twelve 15-credit thematic modules, each with three to five assessed units and compensation inside
- Helsinki – five-credit courses feeding a small number of module grades
- Karlsruhe – containers built from small Teilleistungen
- Consolidated on the outside, granular on the inside



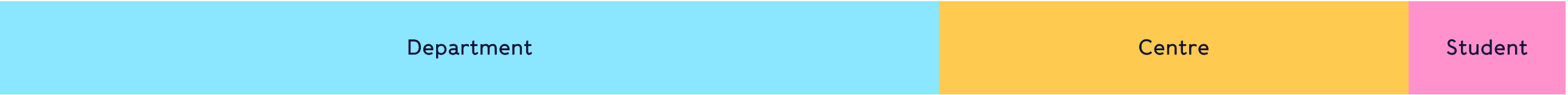
The burden of proof

A CURRICULUM IS AN ALLOCATION OF CONTROL OVER 360 CREDITS AND ROUGHLY 3,600 HOURS OF SOMEONE’S LIFE

Typical before



After a 30-credit reform



Illustrative shares (cupcake) – the direction is documented, the proportions are not measured. Three claimants on the same 360 credits.

Student time is the residual resource

Institutions treat curricular and departmental allocations as fixed and student time as expandable – a full 120-credit year, placements, societies, volunteering, representation and enough paid work to live. Every unresolved curricular demand lands on the student.

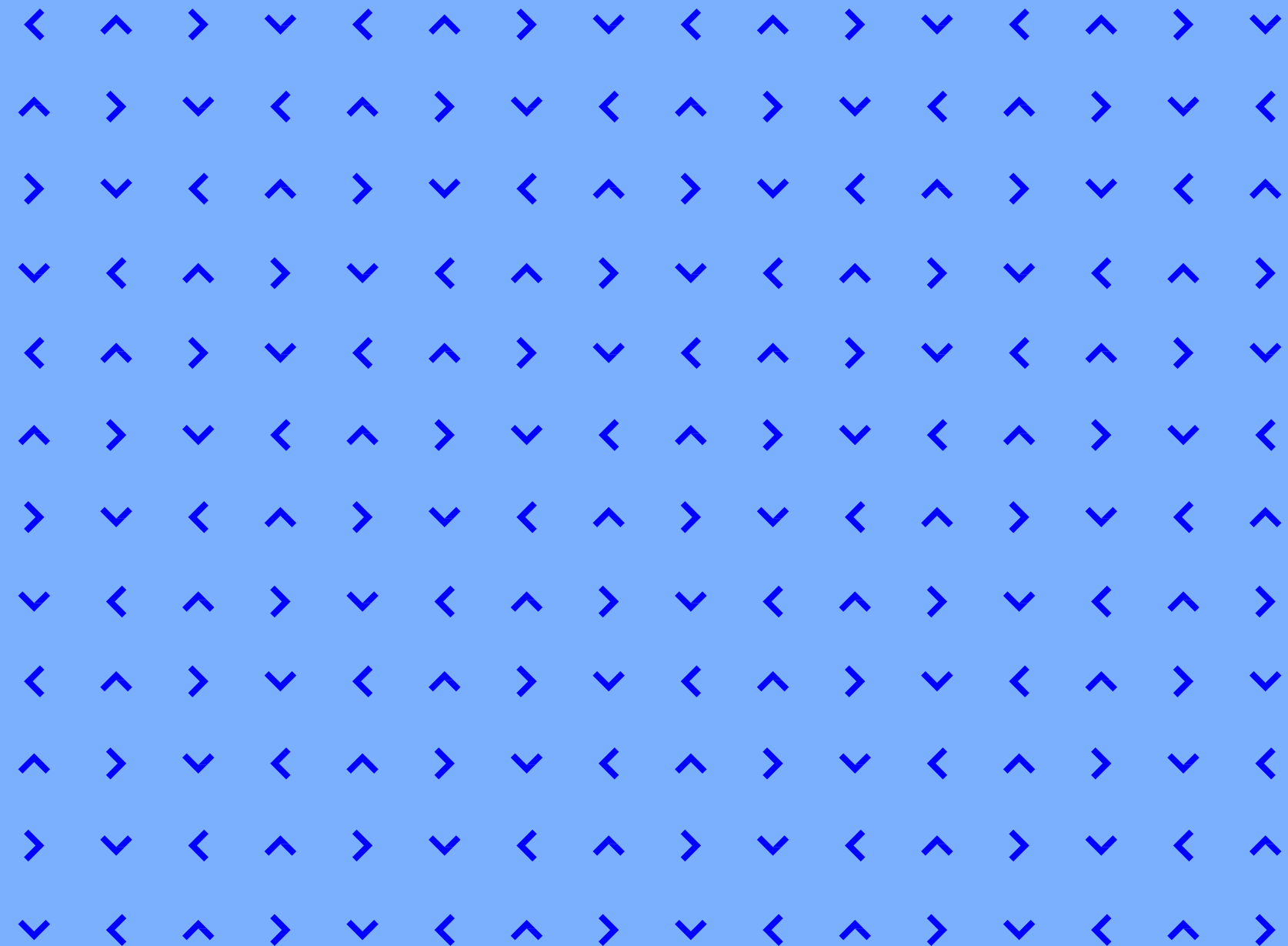
So reverse the burden

Rather than asking why students should be allowed to choose this credit, the institution should have to explain why it is necessary to remove the student’s authority over it.

The single most useful sentence to take into a senate paper on curriculum reform.

03

**Credit for what
students do**



Section 6.1

THE DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT – A STANDARD BOLOGNA DOCUMENT UK UNIVERSITIES ALREADY ISSUE

Eight fixed sections. Around 90 per cent of surveyed European HR professionals have used it.

Section 6.1, “additional information”, is where European universities record representative and voluntary work.

TU Munich – 90 unpaid hours equals three credits; student council presidents and senate reps on the published list.

Poland – published catalogues covering senate, faculty council and quality body membership, with hours confirmed by the students’ government.

Lund – capability statements naming leadership, communication and democratic decision-making.

Bozen-Bolzano – a dedicated field for “role as a student representative in institutional bodies”.

Their university already issues the form. It just leaves the box empty.

DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT

- 1. Information identifying the holder
- 2. Information identifying the qualification
- 3. Level and duration
- 4. Contents and results gained
- 5. Function of the qualification

6. Additional information 6.1 Additional information

- 7. Certification of the supplement
- 8. National higher education system

The student has served in an honorary capacity as an elected member of Senate and as Education Officer of the Students’ Union, 2025–26, 140 hours – equivalent to three ECTS credits.

Source: Euro unis are using diploma supplements to recognise student volunteer roles – and the UK could too (Wonkhe SUs, 22 Jan 2026). Sample entry is illustrative, using TU Munich’s 90-hour threshold.

What involvement is worth

LUXEMBOURG’S CERTIFICATE IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

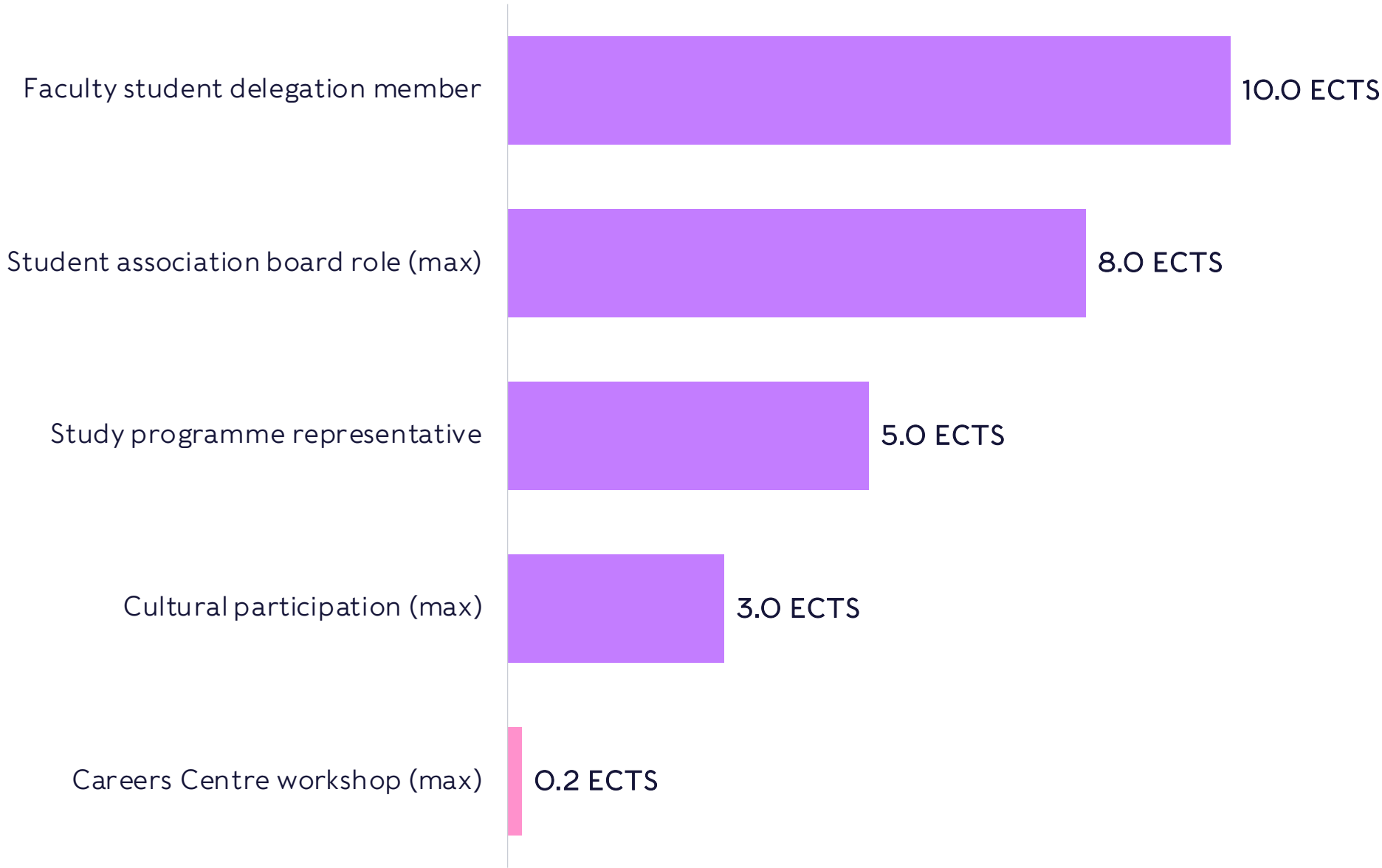
10 to 15 ECTS, built up from a published catalogue alongside the degree

Twente – a 15-ECTS Governance of Student Organisations minor, activism grants over €1m a year, a Rector-signed certificate

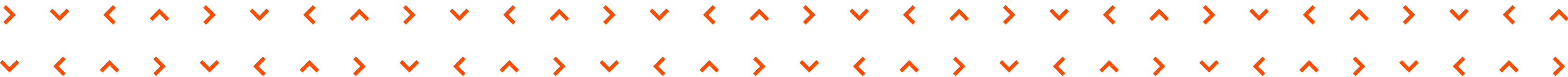
Tampere – two- and three-credit accredited tutoring courses inside the degree

Reykjavík – six one-ECTS pass-fail personal development courses in every degree, and five ECTS for mentoring refugees

St Gallen – campus credits at 90 hours each, four-credit minimum



ECTS allocated per activity in the University of Luxembourg catalogue – a rep role is worth fifty careers workshops. Sources: A captivating experience that showcases the beauty of cultural exchange (Wonkhe SUs, 8 Jan 2026); What are Dutch study associations (13 Jan 2026); Tuutorointi (9 Nov 2025); Study Tour Spring 2026 Reykjavík.



Credit for work

44.2 hours

a week – study plus paid work for the 65 per cent of full-time undergraduates who work in term, averaging nearly 14 paid hours (SAES 2026)

20 credits

Newcastle’s final-year career development module – 50 hours of experiential activity, including “learning from work” in an existing job

30 of 37

European systems that let non-formal and informal learning count towards a first-cycle qualification (Eurydice, 2024)

WHENEVER SOMEONE MUTTERS ABOUT BOLOGNA OR THE EXTERNAL EXAMINER – THE SOURCES THAT SAY YES

QAA credit framework

Credit recognises learning “whenever and wherever it is achieved.”

ECTS users’ guide, 2015

Openly discusses recognising work experience, voluntary work and student participation.

Poland

600 hours of subject-related work, up to 20 ECTS, on a job description, employer letter and portfolio.

France – VAE

Validation des acquis de l’expérience can carry part or, in some cases, all of a qualification.

Sources: Can students use their work experience and/or part-time job to count towards their degree? (Wonkhe SUs, 21 Aug 2026); Study Tour 2025 Poland; Students say employability is their top priority (25 Feb 2026)

Inside the 180, not on top of the 360

A EUROPEAN DEGREE

180 ECTS

all inside

- Humanities for engineers, credit for placements, volunteering, positions of trust and skills all sit inside the standard credit volume
- No extra year of fees, no bolt-on that time-poor students skip
- REFLEX – UK graduates gathered far less work experience during study than Dutch or German peers
- Mason, Williams and Cranmer – structured work experience and employer involvement in course design improved graduate outcomes; explicit teaching of employability skills showed no relationship

AN ENGLISH DEGREE

360 credits

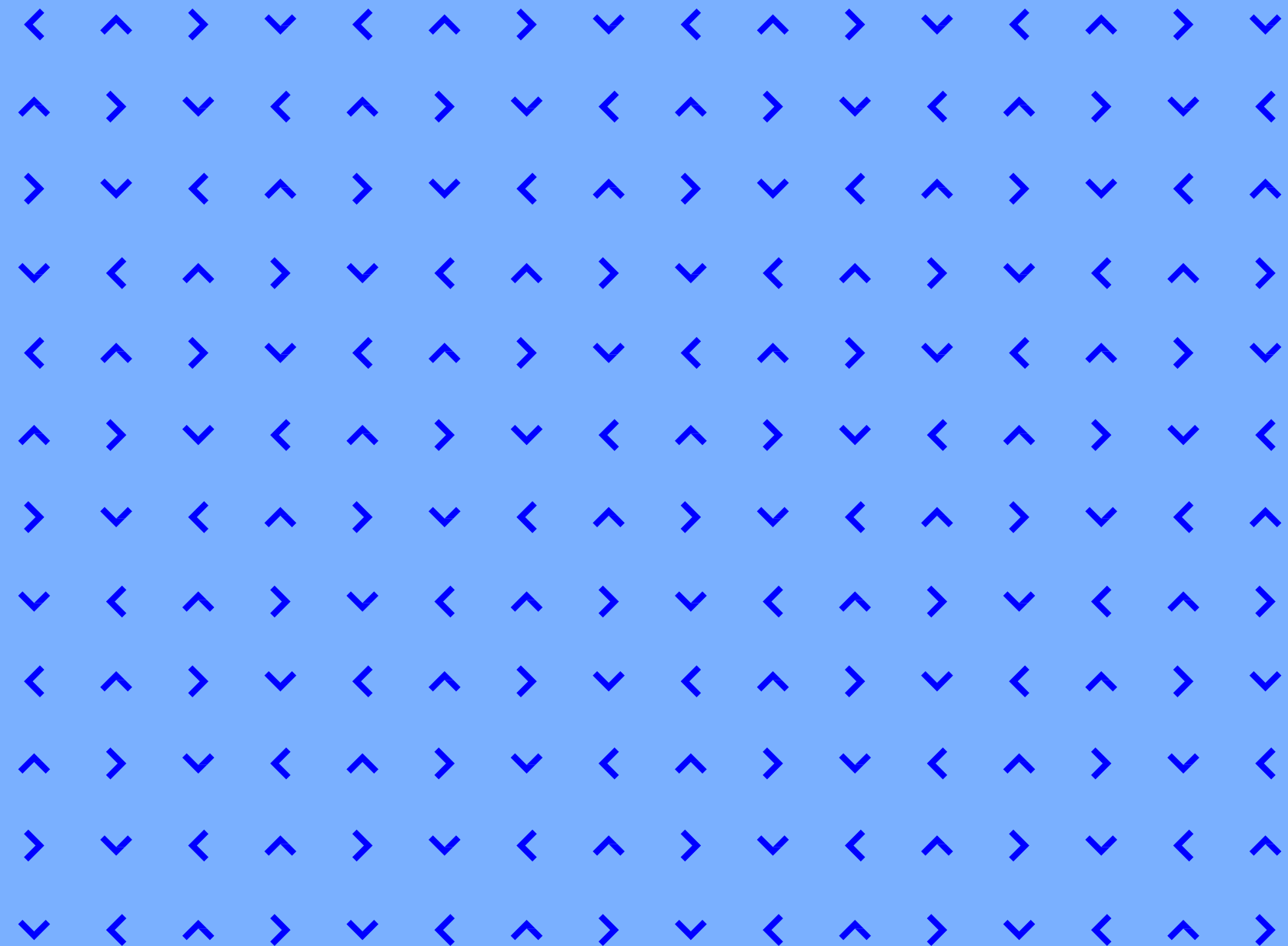
plus extras

- The subject is sacrosanct and everything else is an add-on
- Manchester Met’s RISE lets 3,000 students a year “over-credit” – the best UK example, and it still sits on top
- A sandwich year means an extra year of debt, at the point where structured experience matters most
- Not “add an employability module” – redesign the credit structure so the things that work do not cost time and money many students do not have



04

Credit that moves



Erasmus+ is back – the terms



Over 100,000 participants expected in year one across HE, FE, schools, youth and sport. One year is agreed. Everything after that depends on it looking like it worked – for more than the usual suspects.

Sources: What UK SUs need to know about Erasmus+ (Wonkhe SUs, 15 Jan 2026); The essential guide to immigration reform for SUs (27 Jul 2026); UUK FAQs on the UK’s association to Erasmus+ (updated 25 Aug 2026). Summit date not confirmed (cupcake).

Not your granddad's Erasmus

KEY ACTION 1 – MOBILITY

- Study periods and traineeships of 2 to 12 months
- Doctoral mobility from five days
- Blended intensive programmes – 5 to 30 days plus online
- Staff, youth worker and coach mobility
- Youth exchanges
- DiscoverEU rail passes at 18

KEY ACTION 2 – COOPERATION

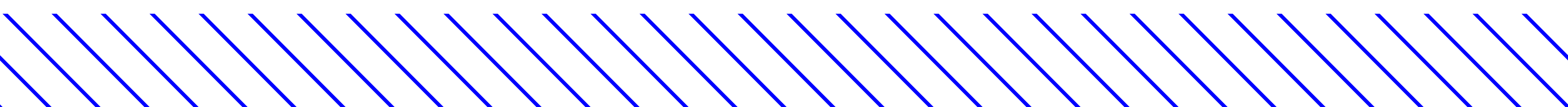
- Cooperation and small-scale partnerships
- European University Alliances – 64 of them
- Erasmus Mundus joint masters
- Alliances for innovation, centres of vocational excellence, teacher academies
- European Student Card, Erasmus Without Paper

KEY ACTION 3 AND JEAN MONNET

- Policy development and system-level reform support
- Jean Monnet – teaching and research about the EU
- European Degree label and automatic recognition work
- Managed by the Commission's executive agency rather than the national agency

OPEN TO SUS DIRECTLY

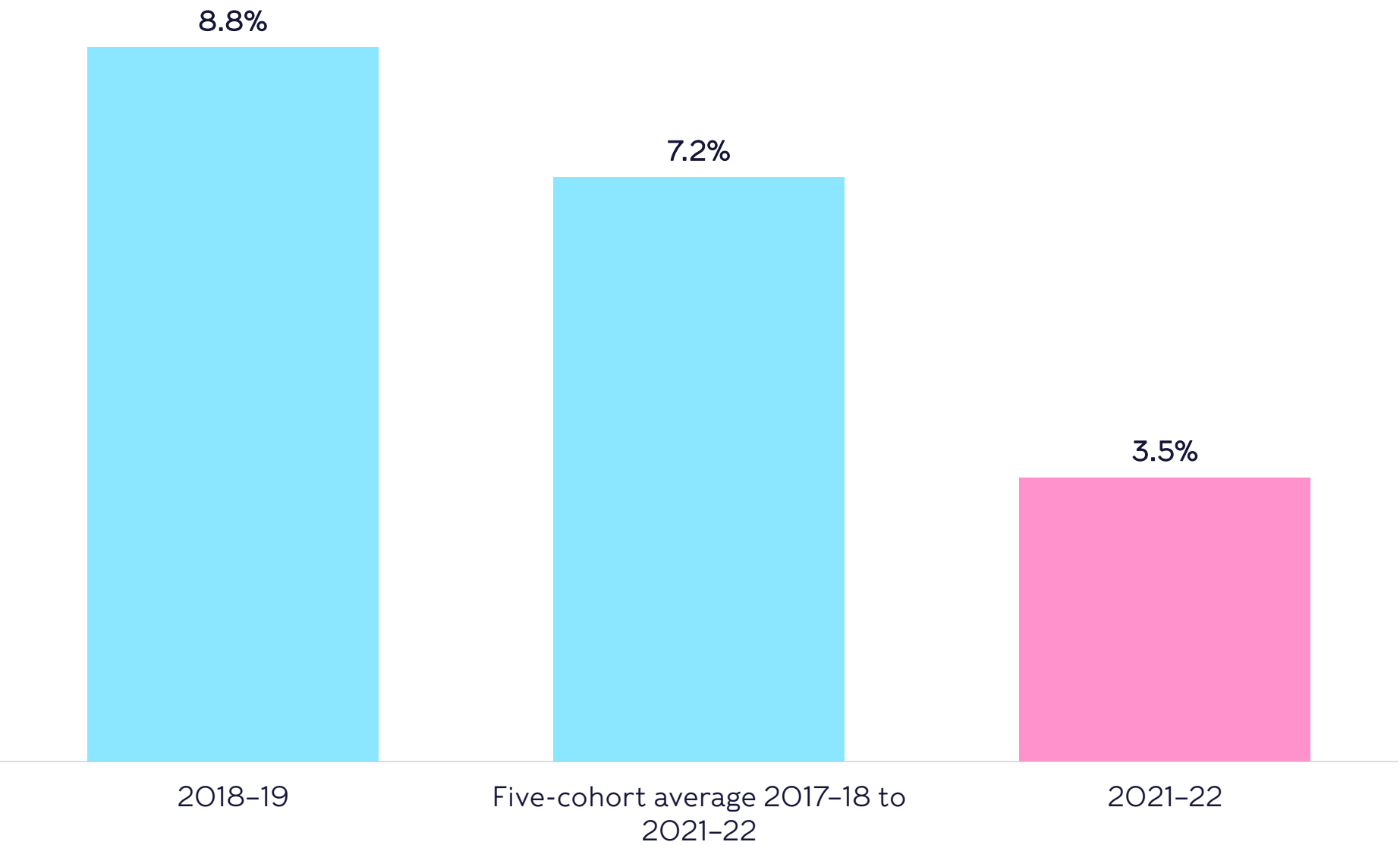
- Youth exchanges – 13 to 30 year olds, themed group programmes
- Youth participation activities – students and decision-makers
- Youth worker mobility for SU staff
- Small-scale partnerships for less experienced organisations
- Erasmus accreditation in the youth field for repeat work



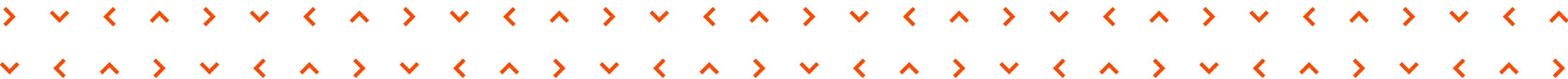
What is missing when it comes back

OUTWARD MOBILITY, UK-DOMICILED UNDERGRADUATES

Language students dominate; part-time, mature, care-experienced and working students go least
The OfS mobility supplement of around £2,250 for a full year abroad was scrapped in the 2025–26 allocation – nothing replaces it
Turing runs a final year in 2026–27 with no inflationary uplift
Home providers can charge 15 per cent of the fee for a year abroad – around £1,430 – which pushes institutions towards semester and short mobility inside a full-fee year
ESN survey – average recognition shortfall around two ECTS, a minority get nothing recognised



Share of UK-domiciled undergraduates with a period abroad, by graduating cohort. Source: UUKi, gone international: a new generation, via What UK SUs need to know about Erasmus+ (Wonkhe SUs, 15 Jan 2026); Re-associating with Erasmus+ is only the first step (17 Dec 2025); The Turing scheme returns for at least one more year (20 Jan 2026).



Pass or fail

THREE DECISIONS THAT SHAPE WHETHER A SEMESTER ABROAD COUNTS – ALL OF THEM SENATE DECISIONS

How is mobility structured?	How is the credit weighted?	Who gets a place when demand exceeds supply?
Additional year – typically not classified, three full-fee years plus a 15 per cent year	Pass/fail – protects against grade conversion, but a brilliant semester abroad changes nothing	Merit, language, interview, first come first served – each favours the already advantaged
Integrated – replaces home modules, tighter mapping, higher stakes if recognition fails	Graded – Austria and Finland convert Erasmus credits into the home scale on return	Lottery or targeting – fairer, rarely used, and rarely published

Partner due diligence on harassment and mental health policy is questionnaire-level. Nobody has asked the senate about any of this.

Sources: What UK SUs need to know about Erasmus+ (Wonkhe SUs, 15 Jan 2026); Euro visions – scaffolding in Vienna (17 May 2026)

The old chestnut



6,000+

credit transfer applications a year at the Open University alone

1 in 5

students told SAES they would, with hindsight, have chosen a different course or institution

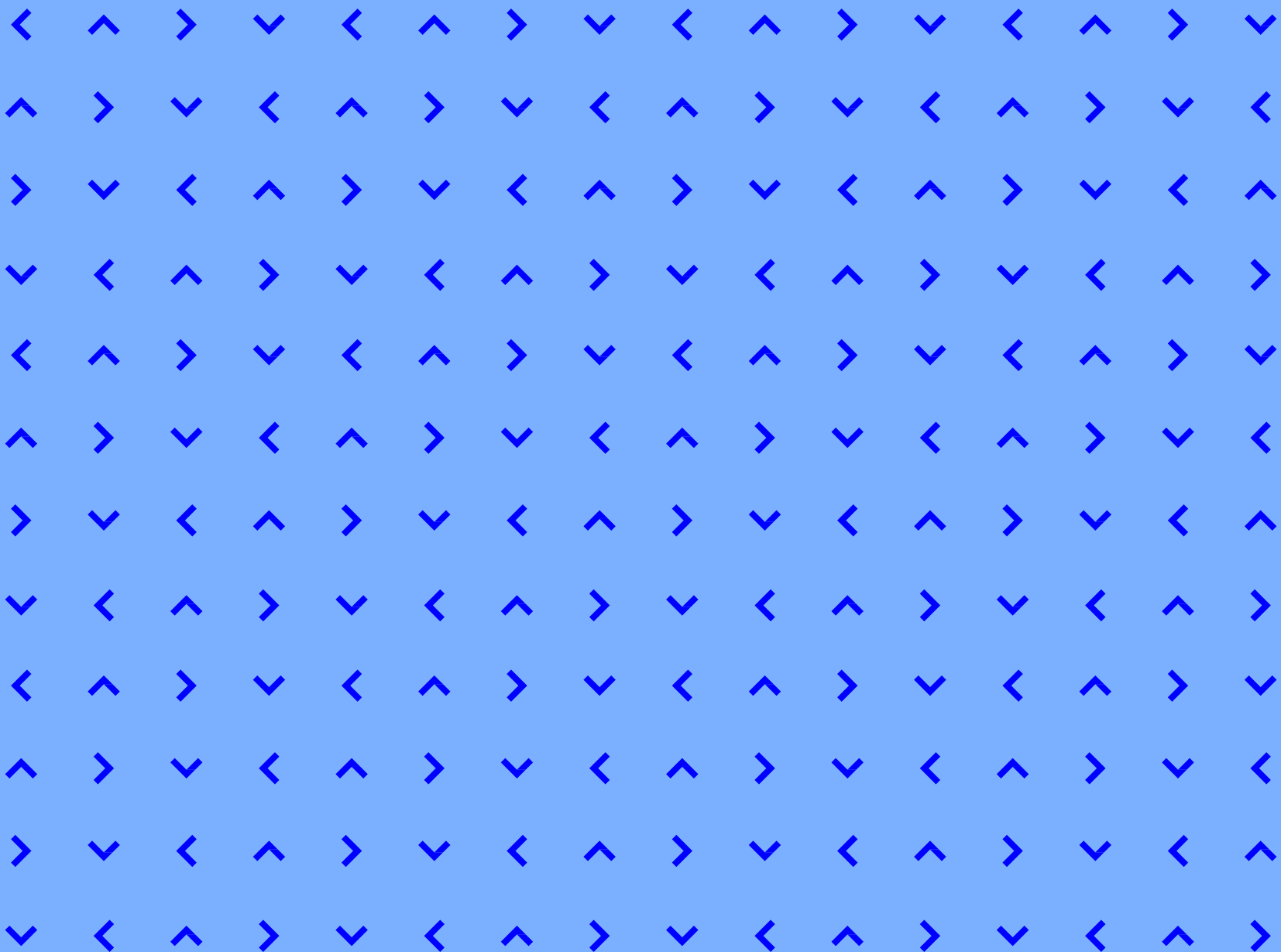
82%

of disabled graduates who regret their choice wish they had transferred

Sources: How do we solve a problem like credit transfer? (Wonkhe, 11 Oct 2023); The sector needs a more credible position on credit transfer (12 Nov 2024); We can all share the credit (27 Mar 2025); The realities of student transfer (10 Dec 2024); The ultimate guide to curriculum reform for SUs (31 Jul 2026)

05

**Who pays, and
what to do**



The fees row

WHAT THE UK SAID

May 2025
to now

- May 2025 summit – the deal “doesn’t deal with university fees” (Starmer)
- February 2026 – fee equalisation a “non-starter”
- March 2026 – “exploring” a concession as part of a “very big” offer; DfE doing the maths
- Cap of 50,000 wanted; emergency brake called a non-starter
- August 2026 – Burnham reported open to moving on fees for a big enough trade offer (cupcake – one THE report)
- Summit postponed from 22 July; no date confirmed

WHAT THE EU SAID

Apr 2024
to now

- April 2024 – Commission recommendation proposes equal treatment on tuition fees
- June 2025 – Council mandate: “equal treatment is also provided in respect of tuition fees”, but not grants or loans
- No fixed cap – annual review and an emergency brake instead; up to 150,000 floated
- August 2026 – reportedly willing to compromise between home and international rates (cupcake)
- Ireland holds the presidency to December and wants the reset banked



£140m, £500m, £580m, £940m

£140m

year one, static, on 2023–24 entry volumes – £400m over a three-year course (Corver, Campus Numerics)

£500m

per cohort on 63,600 EU students and a £7,000 to £8,000 gap – the sum found for underrepresented entrepreneurs in 2025 (Lombardo)

£580m

Russell Group – “a deal that costs the sector over £500m is not good news”

£940m

still earned from EU fees in 2022–23 despite far fewer students – EU students are now net contributors to the cross-subsidy (Migration Observatory)

Nobody models demand

EU enrolments fell 57 per cent after the post-Brexit rules; Poland and Romania down around 80 per cent. 22,630 EU applicants in the 2026 UCAS cycle, 54 per cent below 2020. Without loan access, many still could not pay even the home rate upfront.

And then Scotland

Equal treatment would resurrect the old anomaly – EU undergraduates paying nothing in Scotland while students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland pay £9,535.

The sector’s line is uniform – keep international fees. Do you agree with your vice chancellor, and if you do, what would you want in return?

Sources: A tuition fees row could sink the UK’s Brexit reset (Wonk Corner, 15 Mar 2026); Labour’s EU reset has a university problem (Wonkhe, 19 Jun 2026); The essential guide to immigration reform for SUs (27 Jul 2026); Times Higher Education, 25 Aug 2026

The Swiss precedent

THE FEE DIFFERENTIAL BEING ELIMINATED, DRAWN TO SCALE

Switzerland

hundreds of francs

United Kingdom

up to £14,000 a year per student

Swiss base fees are CHF 1,000 to 4,000 a year; the UK gap is the difference between a home fee of £9,790 and international fees that can exceed £24,000 (cupcake – indicative scale).

Thrown out, negotiated back

Switzerland lost Erasmus+ in 2014 after an immigration referendum, ran a 40 per cent university-funded substitute, and returns in 2027.

Non-discrimination with managed numbers

CHF 41m a year, quotas on EU numbers permitted, a standstill clause, and federal compensation to universities because the cantons would have blocked the deal otherwise.

The UK has no cantons

Fee equalisation can be presented to Brussels as a big move and cost the Treasury nothing at the point of agreement. If recent form is any guide, universities pay.

Sources: A tuition fees row could sink the UK’s Brexit reset (Wonk Corner, 15 Mar 2026); Euro visions – what the hell just happened? (Wonkhe, 12 May 2025)

Inbound, and the campus

OUTBOUND

Pent-up demand and English-taught European degrees pull UK students out

Cheaper housing, pass/fail second years, modules that actually run

Scaffolding for anyone other than the confident and well-off is thin

INBOUND

Reciprocity is not guaranteed – visa friction, cost of living, UK prices

ESN sections hollowed out over five years

Visiting and exchange students often a peripheral membership category without voting rights

AT HOME

Formal, informal and hidden curriculum – what most students who never travel actually get

Central European Studentenwerke run mentor programmes, intercultural seminars with ECTS attached, language tandems

Student-led structures are part of the hidden curriculum whether the SU knows it or not

If fewer European students come, the campus is less international regardless of how many of ours go.

Sources: What UK SUs need to know about Erasmus+ (Wonkhe SUs, 15 Jan 2026); What can UK SUs learn from how Central Europe supports international students? (15 Jan 2026)

Six questions for your senate

1

Has the ECHE result arrived, and who owns the November call?

2

Is mobility credit pass/fail or graded, and are recognition timelines published?

3

What share of the degree does the student control, and which way is it moving?

4

Will section 6.1 of the Diploma Supplement record elected and voluntary roles?

5

Is there a work-based learning module on the Newcastle model, rather than another unpaid placement scheme?

6

What does the transfer and RPL policy actually say – and would the university accept its own modules from a neighbour?

Every one of these is a senate or academic board decision. None of them requires a summit.

“

**The UK is not short
of the tools. It is
short of the culture.**

Credit is the currency

The culture – and the legal standing – that make European students the owners of a share of their own degree. In 2027 the maps get redrawn.

Thank you

Get in touch
jim@wonkhe.com
wonkhe.com