



**Universität für Bodenkultur Wien**  
University of Natural Resources  
and Life Sciences, Vienna

# Exchange Studies at BOKU

## Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, summer semester 2016

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the 2016 summer semester at BOKU. At the end of their stay, the students were given a questionnaire asking them what they liked and disliked about their stay and what they felt could be improved upon. 114 questionnaires were returned.

### 1. What students appreciated at BOKU

The aspects of BOKU appreciated the most by students were the wide variety of courses, the social events organised for incoming students – such as the Welcome Days and the weekly Stammtisch – and the teaching staff. Students also appreciated the facilities on offer around the various BOKU campuses. 28 respondents commented on the friendly and welcoming atmosphere at the university, 23 praised the support staff and 20 appreciated the organisation of BOKU in general. Students also liked the opportunities they had to meet new people. 16 students cited the user-friendly nature and clear structure of online systems such as BOKUonline and Mobility Online as highlights of their stay. 5 students praised the language courses on offer and 4 felt the Buddy system was particularly useful, as it helped them to get settled into both life in Vienna and life at BOKU. See Table 1 for all responses.

**Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
<b>1</b>	Courses (range of courses on offer, ability to create own schedule)	58
<b>2</b>	Social events (incl. Welcome Days, Stammtisch)	54
<b>3</b>	Teaching staff	47
<b>4</b>	Facilities (e.g. computer rooms, library, wifi)	30
<b>5</b>	Atmosphere (open-minded, positive)	28
<b>6</b>	Support staff (incl. ZIB team)	23
<b>7</b>	Organisation in general	20
<b>8</b>	Opportunity to meet new people	18
<b>9</b>	Location	17
<b>10</b>	Online systems (BOKUonline & Mobility Online)	16
<b>11</b>	Excursions	9
<b>12</b>	Language courses	5
<b>13</b>	Buddy system	4
<b>14</b>	TUWI and Student Union	4
<b>15</b>	International newsletter	2

### 2. What BOKU could do better for international students

Although the variety of courses on offer at BOKU was the area most appreciated by students, they felt that the organisation of these courses needed the most improvement. Many students said they would have appreciated more information before their arrival on how the course



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registration process worked; they also would have liked to be able to sign up for classes earlier – on their arrival at BOKU, many found that classes were already full or that there was a long waiting list for spaces. Some students also found it difficult to create their schedules because of clashes between classes.

35 students thought that the information given to them by BOKU could be improved – they would have liked to be told more about the events going on at the university, as well as paperwork and course deadlines. 25 respondents said they would have appreciated more social events throughout their stay. 14 students thought the university could improve their administration process. 12 felt the facilities at BOKU could be better, and the main issue here was a lack of study spaces, rooms to do group work in and areas to sit and eat.

Respondents also thought that the opening hours of the ZIB office should be extended, that the exam period could be better organised and exam results given to students sooner, and that online systems could be improved (such as by combining BOKUonline, Mobility Online and BOKU Learn into one website). 7 students wanted more help from the university in finding accommodation (especially with providers other than the OeAD). The ECTS credit system was mentioned 5 times as an area for improvement – as well as struggling to sign up for classes and create a schedule without clashes, 5 students said they also found it difficult to reach the necessary number of ECTS credits during the semester and would have liked the university to allocate more credits per course.

See all responses in Table 2.

**Table 2. What students felt could be improved at BOKU**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
<b>1</b>	Course organisation	37
<b>2</b>	Information (about events, deadlines, life at BOKU)	35
<b>3</b>	Not enough social events	25
<b>4</b>	Administration (registration process, documents to fill out)	14
<b>5</b>	More language courses	13
<b>6</b>	Facilities (e.g. classrooms, computer rooms, library, study areas)	12
<b>7</b>	Longer opening hours for ZIB	12
<b>8</b>	Exam period (publish exam dates earlier, spread them out more, mark papers quicker)	8
<b>9</b>	Online systems	8
<b>10</b>	Accommodation	7
<b>11</b>	ECTS credit system (give courses more credits)	5
<b>12</b>	More information in English	5
<b>13</b>	More courses in English	3
<b>14</b>	Food supply (price, quality)	3
<b>15</b>	Buddy system	2
<b>16</b>	More excursions	1



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### **3. Motivation, information and events**

#### **3.1 Activities at BOKU**

77% of students took part in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 18% worked on a thesis or research project and 5% did an internship. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Center for Development Research
- Center for International Relations (ZIB)
- Department of Economics and Social Sciences
- Department of Forest and Soil Sciences
- Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Division of Livestock Sciences
- Institute for Biophysics
- Institute of Food Technology
- Institute of Geotechnical Engineering
- Institute of Hydrobiology and Aquatic Ecosystem Management
- Institute of Marketing and Innovation
- Institute of Molecular Modelling and Simulations
- Institute of Sanitary Engineering and Water Pollution Control
- Institute of Structural Engineering
- Institute of Surveying, Remote Sensing and Land Information
- Institute of Synthetic Bioarchitectures (Department of Nanobiotechnology)
- UFT Tulln
- Vienna Institute of Biotechnology

#### **3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU**

The main factors which motivated students to come to BOKU were to experience a different environment, meet new people and improve their language proficiency. Cultural and academic reasons were also important factors (see Figure 1).



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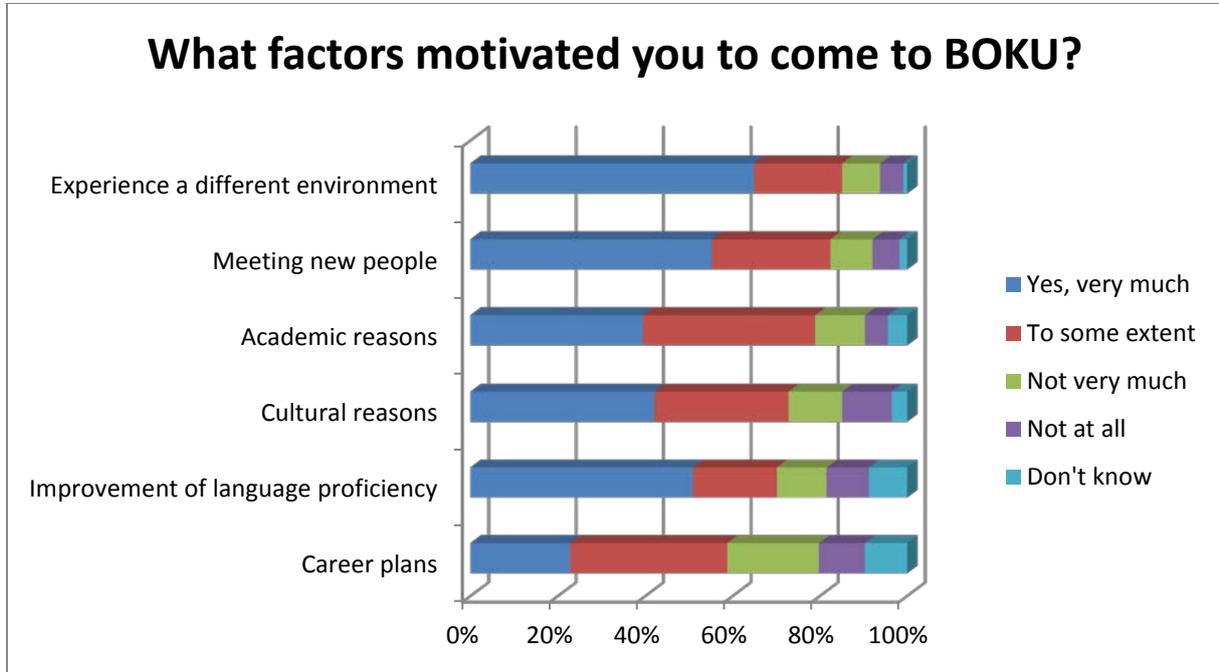


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

Other factors which motivated students to come to BOKU included:

- The possibility to choose from a wide range of different courses
- The practical nature of the courses
- The opportunity to gain new perspectives on a topic and to discover new ways of working
- The university's location
- The chance to travel from Vienna to other cities, mountains and countries
- Friends already living in Vienna

### 3.3 Information before the stay

The BOKU website was the most popular source of information for students before they arrived at the university; it was used by 75% of students. Other major sources of information included fellow students, departmental coordinators and international offices at their home universities. Mobility Online was also a popular source of information. All responses can be found in Figure 2.



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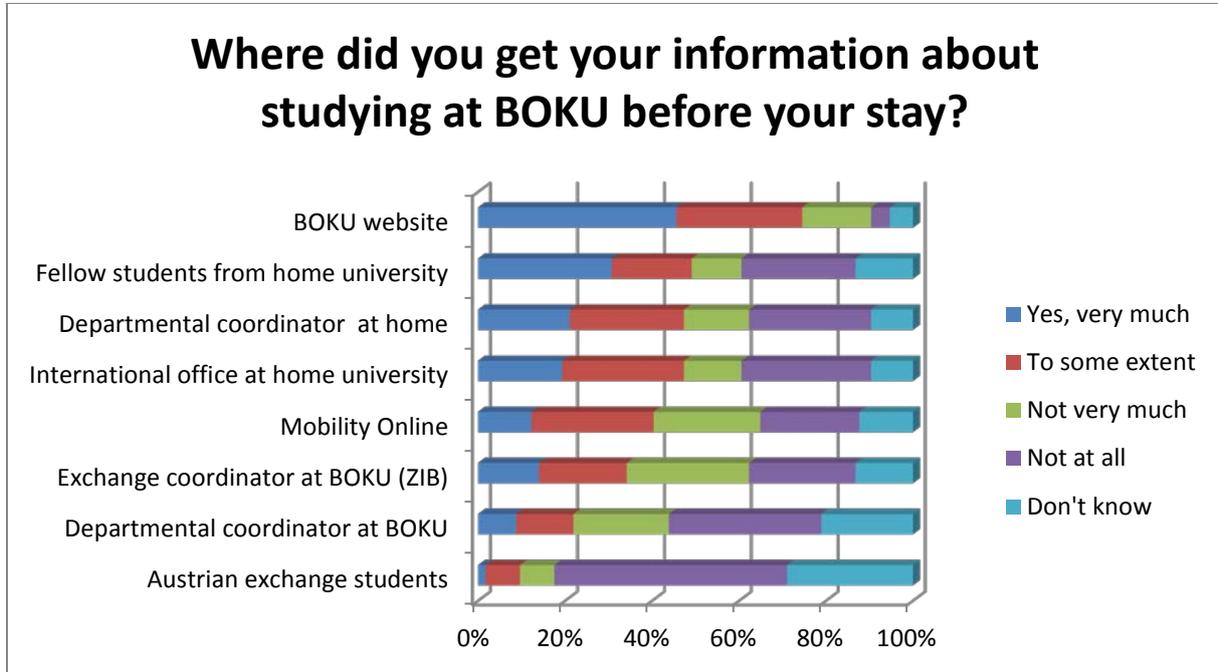


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

2 students also got information from professors at their home university. One student got in contact with Austrian students from BOKU.

### 3.4 Information from BOKU

87% of students thought the information they received from the Center for International Relations (ZIB) during their stay was either good or very good. 79% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 61% appreciated the information from their department or institute and 47% expressed positive opinions on the information from other service departments. All results can be seen in Figure 3.

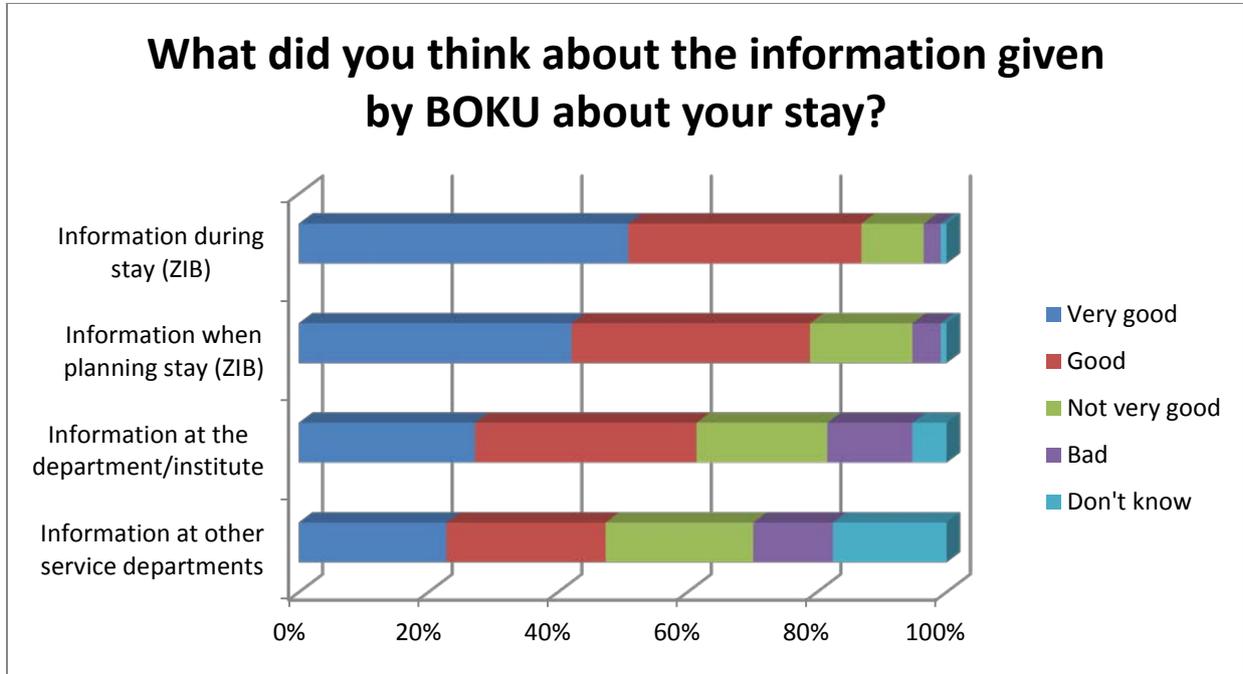


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

### 3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were mostly positive. 81% thought the instructions in the database were clear and easy to understand, and 80% thought the same of the emails they received. 78% were pleased with the reliable operation of the system and 75% thought the application form was simple to fill in. See Figure 4 for all responses.

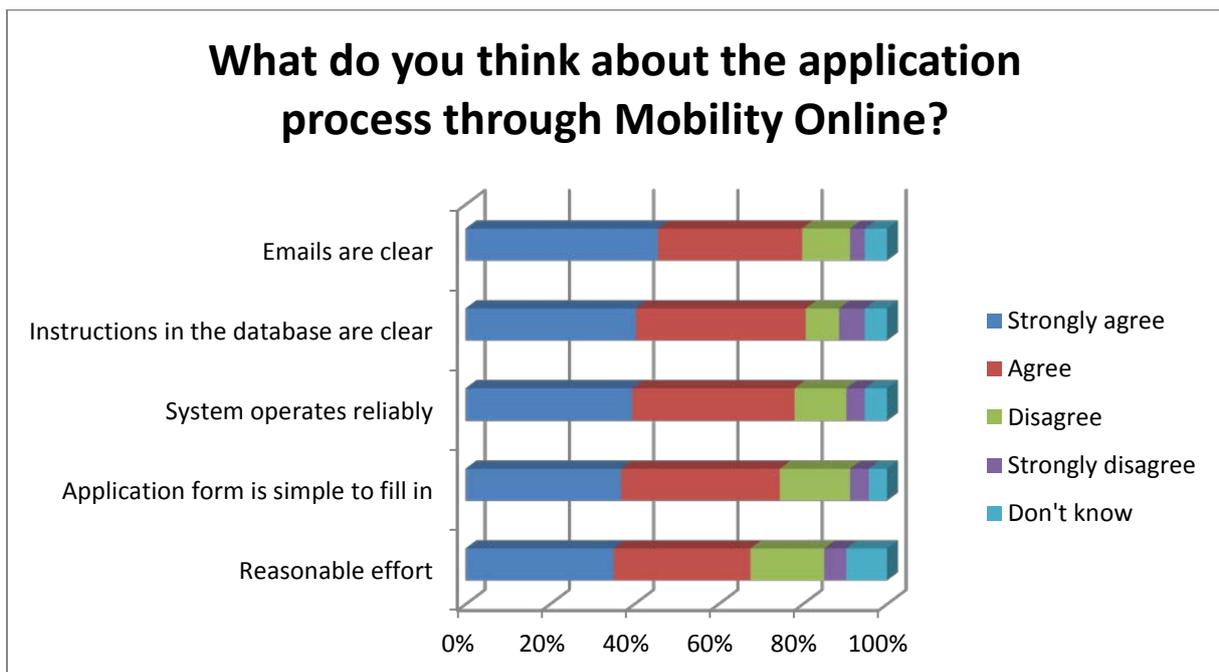


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility Online



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Students were also asked to leave comments on how the system could be improved. These included:

- Connect Mobility Online to BOKUonline
- Provide students with more information about how the system works and how to use it
- Give students an overview or list of all the documents they need to fill out and get signed
- Create one website which all universities use for exchange programmes, instead of having two different systems for the home and host universities and therefore double the paperwork
- Make the website's interface more modern
- Reduce the amount of paperwork required
- Make it clearer how students can extend their stay
- Provide students with an alternative means of accessing the database, as the original email with the access link could easily be lost, accidentally deleted or buried in an inbox
- Allow students to upload documents out of the order they appear in the database

### **3.6 Welcome Days**

69% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 85% of these students thought they were either good or very good.

Students had the opportunity to leave comments on what they had enjoyed at the Welcome Days. 23 respondents liked the opportunities they had to meet new people and get to know other international students. 18 thought the Heurigen party was a highlight and 15 said they thought the information given out was useful and comprehensive. 12 singled out the city tour and 9 the Türkenschanz campus discovery game as events they enjoyed most during the Welcome Days. 6 commented that the ZIB team were welcoming and friendly. 2 students thought the tours of the Muthgasse campus were a standout, 2 said they particularly enjoyed the ESN events, and another 2 students thought the Welcome Days were very well organised.

When asked how they thought the Welcome Days could be improved, the majority of students suggested that more group activities, or activities focused on getting to know other people, should be provided. Other suggestions included:

- Reduce the amount of information given out, or make it more concise
- Give an actual tour of the Türkenschanz campus on top of the discovery game
- Make it obligatory for Buddies to attend events
- Provide an extra session for latecomers or anyone who couldn't make the original Welcome Days
- Organise the Welcome Days around the intensive German language courses, or vice versa
- Visit more BOKU locations
- Provide students with more free food



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### 3.7 BOKUonline info session

71% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 85% of these students found it helpful. Students appreciated the detailed explanations of the system, the clear information given about the email system, how to navigate the site and register for courses, and the chance to ask questions. Many said that the session was clear and easy to understand.

For the 15% of students who didn't attend the info session, the main reasons they were absent were that they arrived in Vienna too late or they were too busy with paperwork or administration tasks. 2 students felt they already knew the information.

### 3.8 Buddy system

All exchange students had the opportunity to be assigned a Buddy, an Austrian student who could help them with their arrival in Vienna and to get used to life at BOKU. 69% of students took this opportunity. Out of those who did not, 13 felt they didn't need one (because they already spoke German, had been to Vienna or the university before, or had friends or family living in the city), 4 people weren't aware of the system or didn't know how it worked, 2 arrived too late, 1 applied for a Buddy but got no answer, and another thought they'd asked for one but actually hadn't.

58% of students with a Buddy felt that they assisted them very much or to some extent with the first steps after their arrival in Vienna. 44% said they helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and 41% credited their Buddies with helping them get used to social life in Vienna.

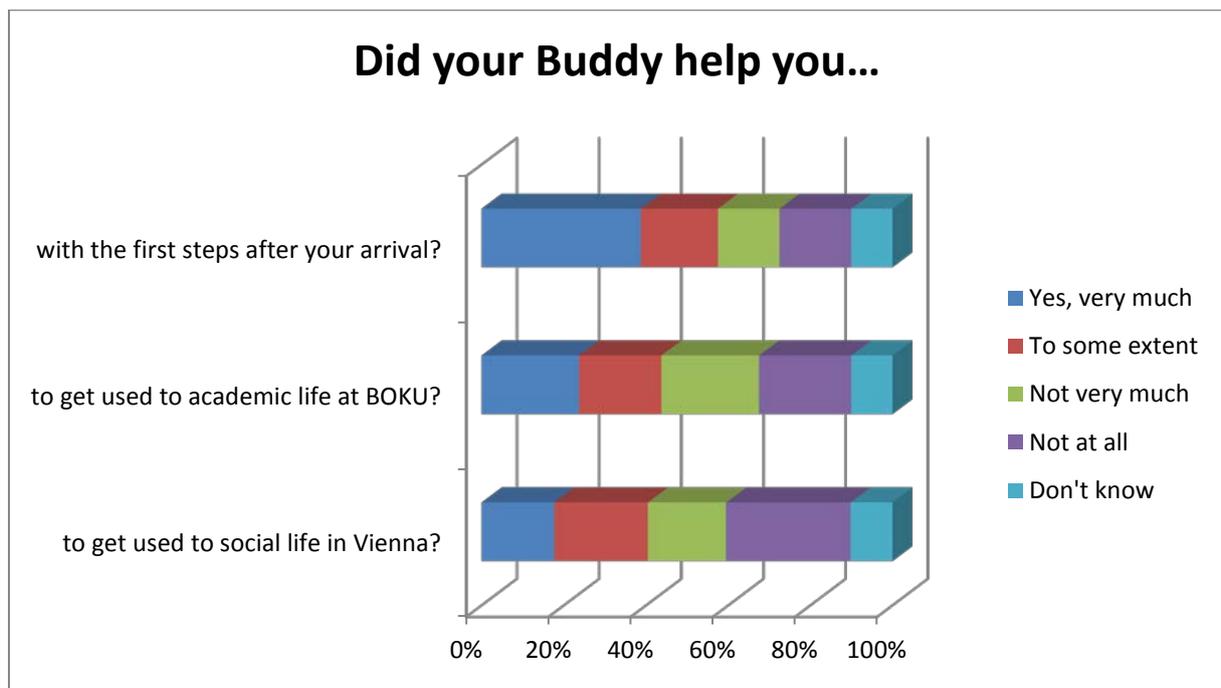


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy



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For those who were unsatisfied with their Buddies, the main issue was a lack of contact when the students arrived at BOKU – several students said that they exchanged emails with their Buddy before coming to Vienna, but didn't hear from them again once they'd arrived or never actually met them. One Buddy was not in Vienna when their student arrived and so couldn't help them settle in, and another commented that their Buddy was too busy during term time to meet up with them. 3 students said their Buddies never returned their emails. One student also felt that the age gap between them and their Buddy was too large.

### **3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB**

86% of students read the international newsletter either regularly or now and again. 58% found the included information useful. When asked what other things they would like to read about in the newsletter, students suggested:

- More information about events at BOKU
- More information about events in Vienna
- Current news in Austria and Europe

Two students thought the layout of the newsletter could be improved, with more colour and pictures, as well as bullet points to break up the text.

### **3.10 Stammtisch**

72% of respondents attended the weekly Stammtisch either regularly or every now and then. When asked how the event could be made more attractive, students' responses were similar to previous years – the most common suggestion was either to change the location of the Stammtisch regularly or to move it to a larger or non-smoking bar. Students also suggested that there should be a variety of activities at the event, such as games or fancy dress parties. One student also suggested that when the weather improves, the Stammtisch should be moved outside too.

### **3.11 Other events**

60% of students went to the Willkommens-Heuriger (Viennese Wine Bar). The Apfelstrudel event was attended by 23% of students.

### **3.12 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students**

When filling out the questionnaire, students were asked what they felt BOKU could do to improve the information and make the planning and first steps easier for exchange students. They suggested the following:

- Provide more information about the course registration process, important dates and deadlines
- Provide more information about public transport in Vienna (e.g. how to get to and from the airport, how to navigate the city, the ticket options available)
- Help students to find accommodation
- Create a guide explaining each step of the application process
- Allow students to access BOKUonline and register for classes earlier
- Create a calendar of events for international students
- Highly recommend that all students attend the Welcome Days



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#### 4. Infrastructure at BOKU

74% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied to some extent with the facilities, such as classrooms, at BOKU in general. 73% were pleased with their access to computers and media and 72% liked the study environment (which included social events, student clubs and sports facilities) in general. 67% were satisfied with their access to libraries. The area with which students were least satisfied was the food supply (see Figure 6), finding it too limited or much more expensive than they were used to at their home university.

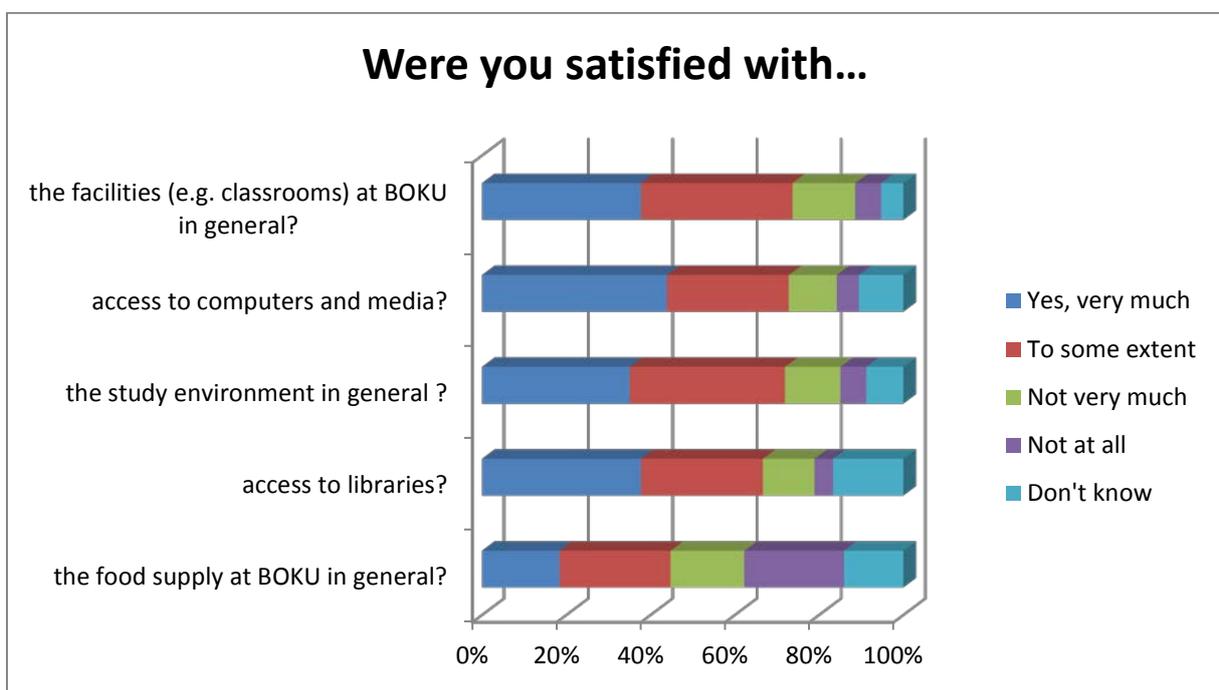


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

Students also had the chance to leave comments about the infrastructure at BOKU. Several commented that there weren't enough chairs or spaces to study in the library and not enough computer rooms or study areas. Others thought the library opening hours were too limited, and 3 commented that they found it difficult to navigate the buildings and didn't really know where they were going or where their classrooms were.

#### 5. Languages

##### 5.1 Language problems

6% of international students experienced language problems regularly, 50% now and then, and 44% never had any difficulties.

Of the 56% who did face problems, the majority occurred in their private lives or when they came into contact with Austrian students. 2 students said they also had language problems when dealing with bureaucratic and administrative procedures. For all responses, see Figure 7.

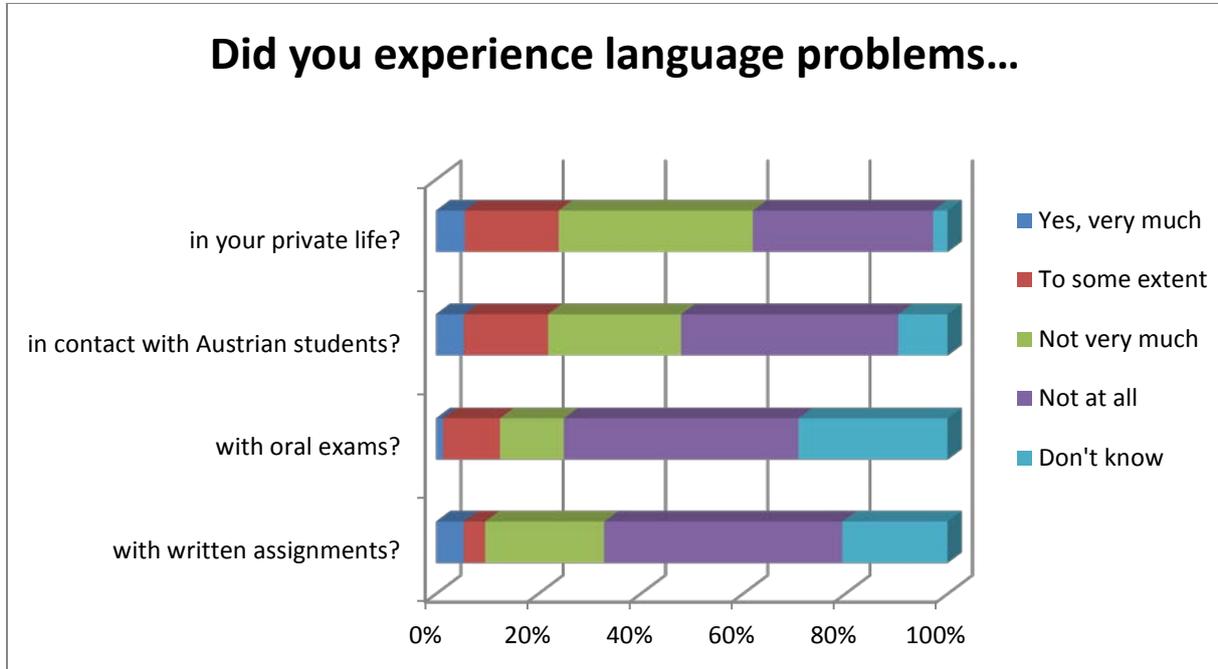


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

## 5.2 German language courses

23% of students took part in an intensive German language course before the semester. 30% took one during the semester and 19% participated in the Tandem programme. 2 students took German classes at the Uni Wien.

## 6. Accommodation

### 6.1 Accommodation type

54% of the 114 students who took the questionnaire lived in student residences during their stay in Vienna – 26% in student residences organised by the OeAD and 28% in those they had organised themselves. 46% lived in private accommodation (such as a shared flat).

78% of students were satisfied with their accommodation; the main issue for those who were not was the expensive rent. 4 students were dissatisfied with the location of their accommodation. 2 were unaware of any providers other than the OeAD or the different kinds of accommodation available to them. Others found it difficult to even find somewhere to live – one student said it was particularly challenging to find a room for only for months and found it almost impossible to do so when they weren't in Vienna, as they couldn't arrange to see the flat in person or meet their potential roommates.

2 students were unhappy with the way they were treated by their accommodation providers, with one commenting that maintenance workers could enter their room without any prior notice and without knocking (even in the morning when they were still asleep). 3 students weren't satisfied with the information they received from their residences – either it was all in German, or they were given no explanation of how and when to move into their rooms. 1



student said that they didn't get on well with their flatmates and had issues with a racist landlord.

## 6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

The most important factor for students when choosing their accommodation was the price – 91% of students rated it as quite or very important. The condition of the accommodation was the second most important factor (a priority for 73% of students), followed by proximity to the university, which was important for 68% of respondents. All responses can be found in Figure 8.

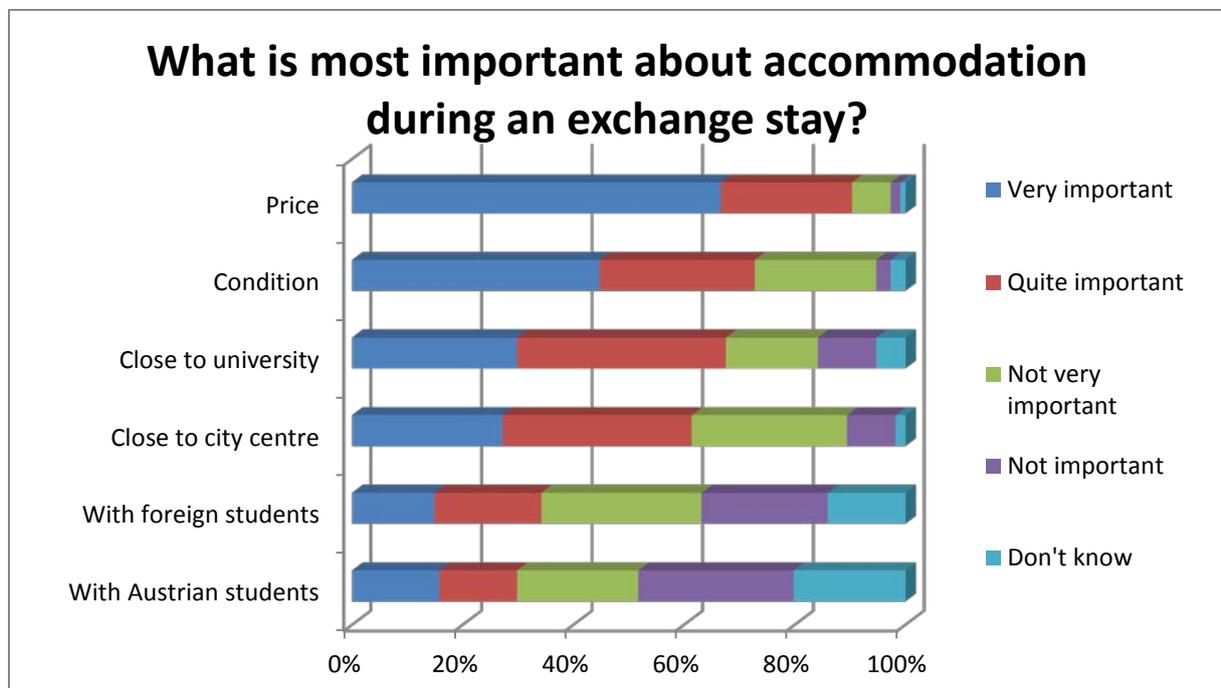


Figure 8. The most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

Only 34% rated living with other foreign students as quite or very important, and 30% thought living with Austrian students was a priority.

## 7. Academic and personal outcomes

### 7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

97% of students judged the personal outcome of their stay at BOKU as good or very good. 91% thought their academic outcome was also good or very good.

### 7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

82% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria for an internship or job. 59% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies, 54% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU and 48% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies. See Figure 9 for all results.



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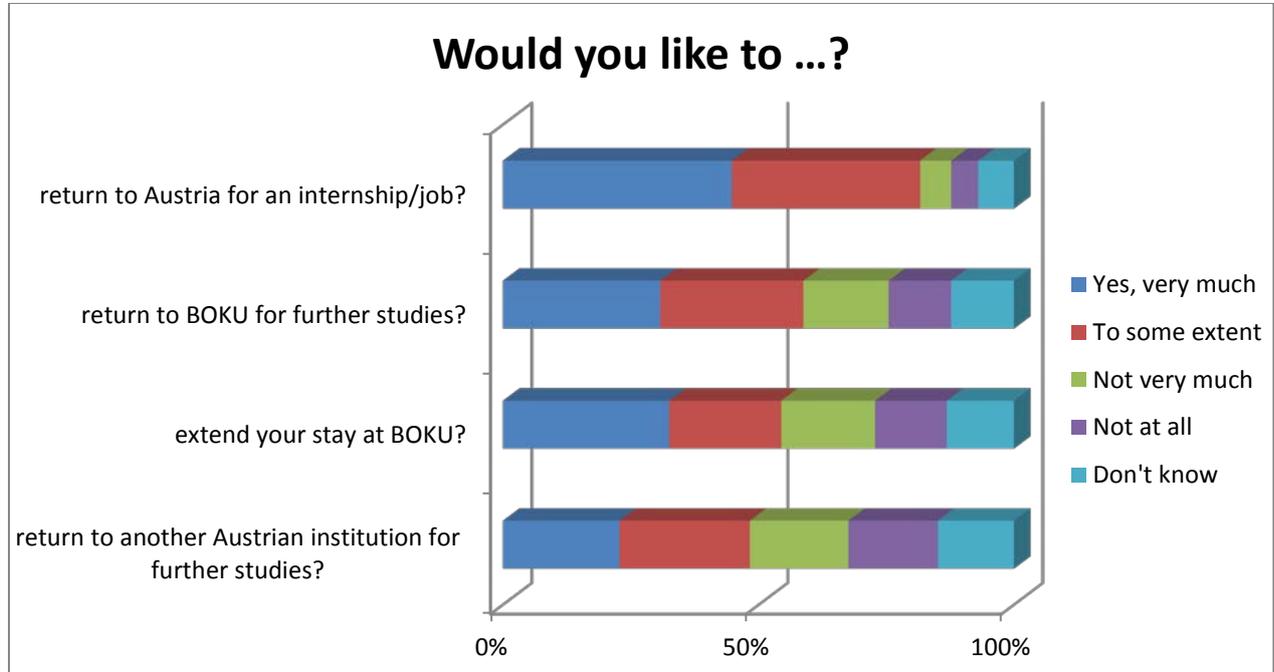


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

### 7.3 Situations requiring special attention

Students were asked if they experienced any situations during their stay abroad that required special attention. For most people, this was not the case. However, one student mentioned that they had some difficulties during classes with only German speakers, as they felt their German was lacking. One student fell ill during their time at BOKU and would have appreciated support in finding a doctor; another mentioned the difficulties they faced in trying to reach the necessary number of ECTS they needed and when trying to create a schedule without overlapping classes.

Another student suggested that “more attention should be given to the evaluation of professors” – although the majority of their teachers were excellent, there was one professor they thought could not teach at all and this had a negative impact on their view of the teaching quality at BOKU on the whole; they suggested therefore that teachers should be evaluated more to prevent future students from experiencing the same problems.

### 7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Organise more sports activities / more sports courses in English
- Plan trips further in advance
- Help students to find accommodation
- Change the course registration system to make it easier for students to get a place in the classes they want
- Provide clearer information on events and deadlines, as well as on the three BOKU different BOKU campuses



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## 8. Background information

74% of the respondents were female and 26% male. 69% spent the summer semester at BOKU, 18% stayed for the whole academic year and 13% had alternative dates of arrival and departure.

**Table 3. Nationalities of exchange students at BOKU**

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>%</b>
French	29	25%
Italian	13	11%
German	11	10%
Polish	9	8%
Croatian	8	7%
Belgian	6	5%
Spain	5	4%
Czech	5	4%
Norwegian	3	2%
American	2	2%
Hungarian	2	2%
Iranian	2	2%
Slovenian	2	2%
Swedish	2	2%
Swiss	2	2%
Turkish	2	2%
Afghan	1	1%
Austrian	1	1%
British	1	1%
Canadian	1	1%
Finnish	1	1%
Greek	1	1%
Pakistani	1	1%
Portuguese	1	1%
Romanian	1	1%
Slovakian	1	1%
Luxembourgish	1	1%
<b>SUM</b>	<b>114</b>	