



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2016-17

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the winter semester 2016-17 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. 126 questionnaires were returned.

1. The things that students had appreciated the most at BOKU

The thing that respondents appreciated the most was the behaviour of the teaching staff. The kindness and approachability of the teaching staff was praised 55 times, with students commenting that 'teachers were very understanding and open.' Secondly, students were satisfied with the social events organised for incoming students, such as the Welcome Days, and with the university's flexibility in allowing students to choose their courses and exam dates. These two aspects were both mentioned 41 times in the survey. Special mentions were also given to the quality of education, the Erasmus student integration and friendly atmosphere (both noted 32 times). What is more, many students also appreciated BOKU's facilities and the good administrative services and organisation, as well as the kindness and patience shown to students by staff from the Center for International Relations (ZIB) and other members of the university community. These aspects were praised 25 times and 23 times respectively. Other students mentioned language accessibility, the campus and Türkenschanz park, helpful information provided on their stay, online services, the Buddy system and ESN activities.

See all responses in Table 1.

Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU (answers with more than 10 responses)

Number	3 things appreciated by students	Answers	%
1	Teaching staff	55	16%
2	Welcome Days and events on campus	41	12%
3	Flexibility of the university (choice of course, exam dates)	41	12%
4	Quality of Education	32	9%
5	Erasmus student integration and friendly atmosphere	32	9%
6	University facilities (labs, libraries, TÜWI etc.)	25	7%
7	Good administrative services and organisation	25	7%
8	ZIB staff and other university staff	23	7%
9	Language Accessibility (administrative information & courses available in German and English)	14	4%
10	Campus and Türkenschanzpark	12	4%



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2. Things BOKU could do better for international students

While many students praised BOKU for its administrative processes, many thought there was still room for improvement. 37 responses suggested offering more support and explanation in regards to administrative procedures, such as registering for courses and organising a study plan. Students also requested more help with finding accommodation and registering and de-registering with the city of Vienna. Moreover, 36 responses had faced issues with courses clashes and organisation. Students commented that BOKU could improve its timetable by having fewer courses overlap, which would prevent scheduling issues. 32 respondents also indicated that the university could improve its assessment procedure. They suggested that teaching staff provide clearer explanations on exam procedures and notify students about exam dates earlier. This would give exchange students enough time to schedule their exams before returning home. 23 respondents (8 % of survey responses) also felt it was difficult to make contact with Austrian students, and they advised that BOKU offers more events to facilitate student integration. Additionally, students commented that some of the universities facilities could be improved, such as the cafeteria and the food on offer there, as well as making more group study spaces available (17 responses). Other students suggested simplifying the admission process on Mobility Online, offering more study support to students and providing more English and German language courses (14, 13 and 11 responses respectively). Overall, the survey indicated that exchange students were mostly satisfied with their time at BOKU, but felt that things could be improved further by receiving more guidance with choosing courses, and having better course scheduling.

See Table 2 for responses.

Table 2. What students felt BOKU could improve upon (answers with more than 10 responses)

Number	3 things that BOKU could do better	Answer	%
1	Facilitate short term students organising their studies (choosing courses, finding accommodation)	37	17%
2	Stop courses from overlapping/ general course organisation	36	17%
3	Improve assessment procedure/ provide exam info earlier	32	15%
4	Erasmus student integration/ events	23	11%
5	University facilities (Mensa, amount of group study space)	17	8%
6	Administrative process (Mobility Online)/ less paperwork	14	7%
7	More study support offered to students/ more accessible study materials	13	6%
8	More language courses (namely English and German) with more levels	11	5%



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3. Motivation, information and events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

92% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 4% carried out an internship and 4% worked on a thesis or research project. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Institute of Biophysics
- Institute of Food Technology
- Institute of Forest Entomology, Forest Pathology and Forest Protection
- Institute of Landscape Architecture
- Institute of Mountain Risk Engineering
- Institute of Structural Engineering.

3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

The main factors which motivated students to come to BOKU were to experience a new environment (81% of students), meet new people (70% of students) and cultural reasons (64%). Improving their language proficiency, academic reasons and experiencing a different environment also proved important for students.

Responses are shown in Figure 1.

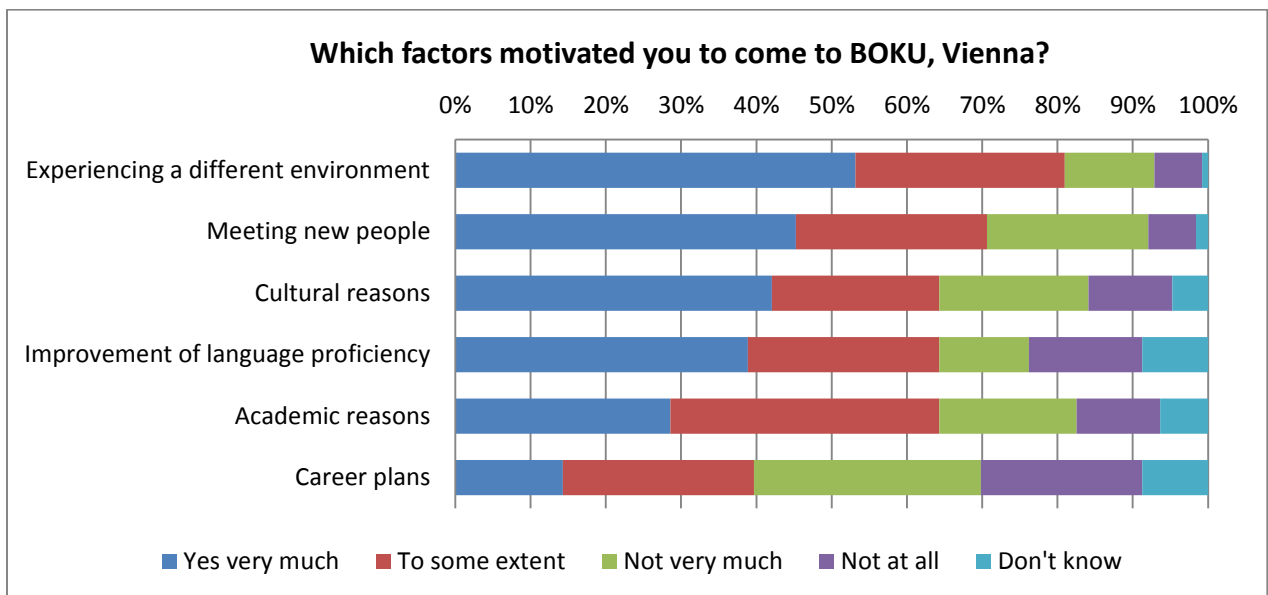


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

Other factors which motivated students to come to BOKU included:

- The opportunity to study courses that are not available at other universities
- The opportunity to experience another European university system
- The opportunity to live in Vienna
- Recommendations from other students.



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 67% of students. Other major sources of information included fellow students (52% of responses), exchange coordinators (47% of responses) and Mobility-Online (39% of responses). Students also revealed that the international office at home university, alongside departmental coordinators at BOKU and Austrian exchange students at their home university also gave them information before arriving at BOKU.

See Figure 2 for all responses.

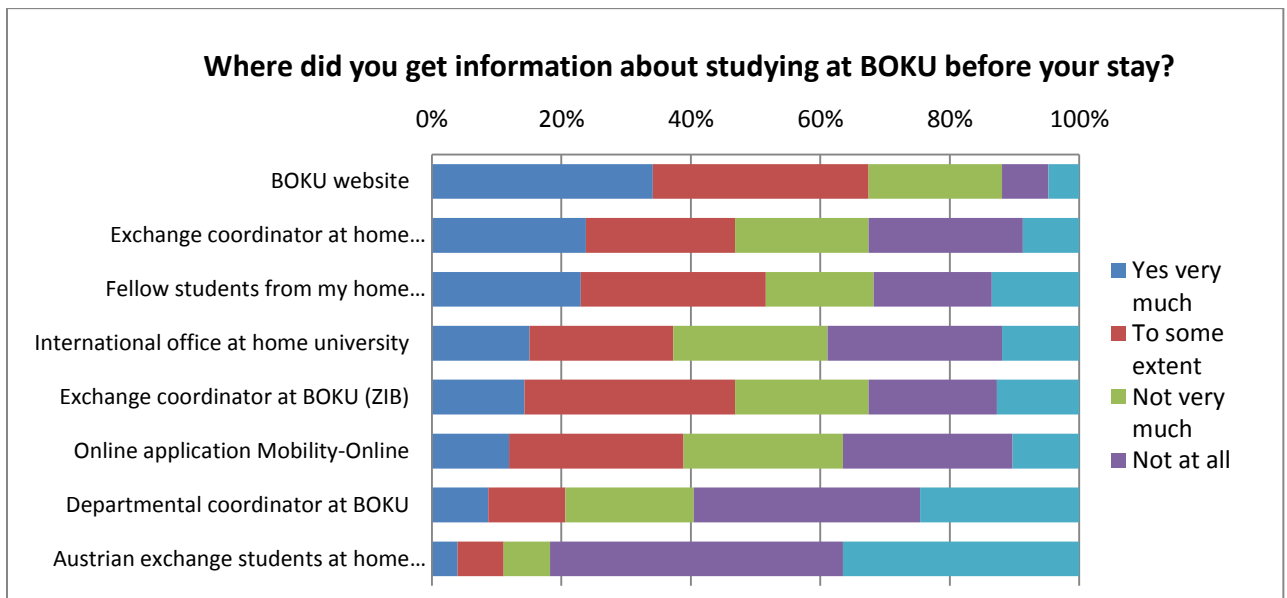


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

3.4 Information from BOKU

77% of students who responded to the survey thought the information they received from ZIB during their stay was either good or very good. 72% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 52% valued the information from their department or institute and 32% expressed positive opinions on the information provided from other service departments.

All data can be seen in Figure 3.

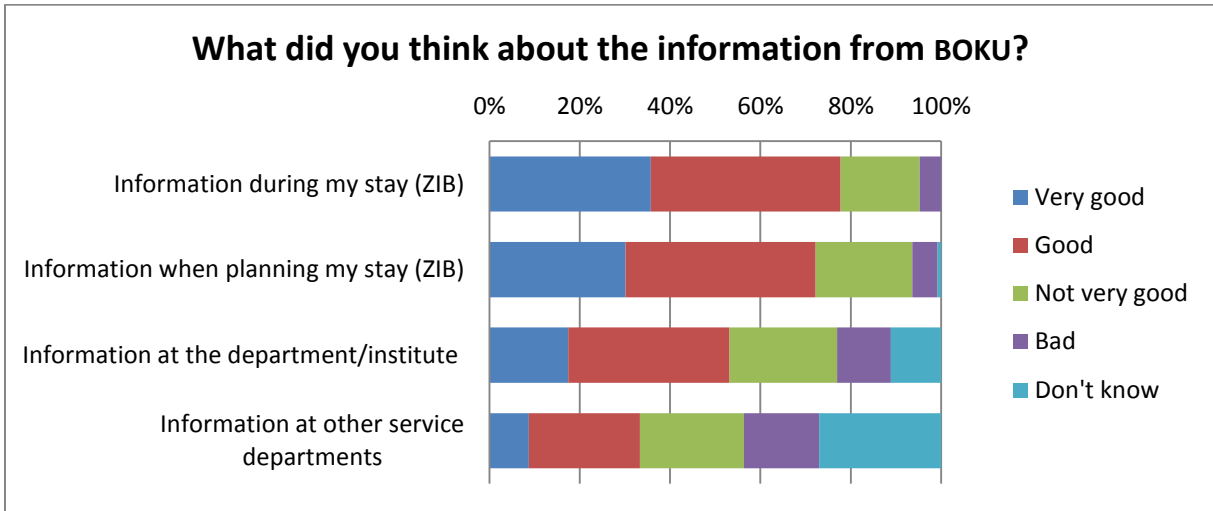


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

3.5 Mobility -Online

Opinions on Mobility-Online were largely positive. 3 out of 4 students were pleased with the clarity of the emails, and 69% (88 students) thought that they could rely on Mobility-Online to operate well. Around 60% felt that the application form was simple to fill in and that the instructions in the database were clear.

All responses can be found in Figure 4.

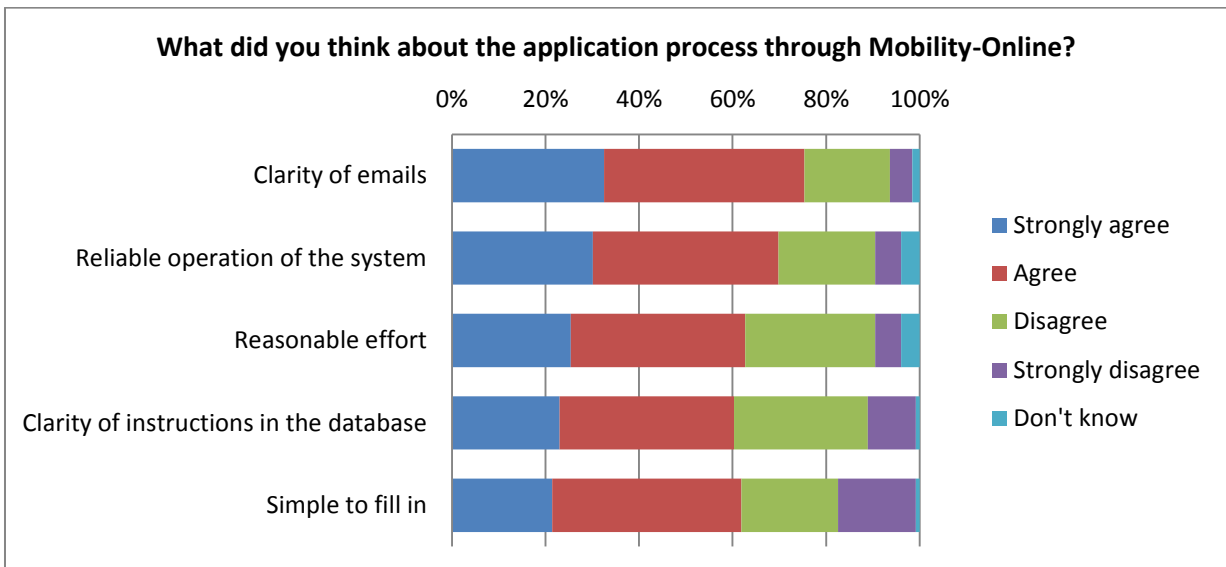


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility-Online

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

- Improving the interface on a mobile device



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- Allow students to upload documents in varying sizes; constantly having to compress files to make them ready to upload is time consuming
- 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 it easier to make changes to the learning agreements, as the process was confusing
- Give more flexibility with upload dates.

3.6 Welcome Days

78% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 65% of these students came away with a good or very good impression of the events. Students had the opportunity to comment on their experiences at the Welcome Days in the survey. 46 people picked out the chance to attend events and meet new people as their highlight, and 17 students also enjoyed the Heurigen party. 17 respondents enjoyed the campus *Entdeckungstour* and 16 were satisfied with the information that they received. Others also mentioned the city tour and the welcome from ZIB as particular highlights.

When asked how they thought the Welcome Days could be improved, the majority of students suggested more group activities, or more activities focused on getting to know people (13 responses).

Other suggestions included:

- Streamline the info-sessions by making them shorter, and avoid repeating information
- Have a larger student capacity at certain events such as the Heuriger, and lay on more food
- Offer more course information
- Shorten the discovery tour of campus
- Provide more opportunities for students to meet others studying for the same degree.

3.7 BOKUonline info session

82% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 56% of them found it helpful. Students thought the information was very well explained and appreciated the detailed explanations of the system. The explanation of how to select modules was noted as very useful, and all questions were well answered.

For the 18% of students who did not attend the info session, the main reasons for their absence were that they felt the information was mainly self-explanatory, or that the session was scheduled to be too long.



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 with getting used to life at BOKU. 75% of respondents took this opportunity. Reasons given by those who opted not to have a buddy were that they already had contacts at BOKU, were native German speakers and therefore didn't need help with the paperwork, or because they just preferred to manage their affairs without help. Some people unfortunately missed the registration deadline, and some said their buddies did not have time to meet.

54% of students felt that their Buddies assisted them with the first steps after their arrival in Vienna. 43% said they helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and 39% credited their Buddies with helping them get used to social life in Vienna (see Figure 5 for all responses).

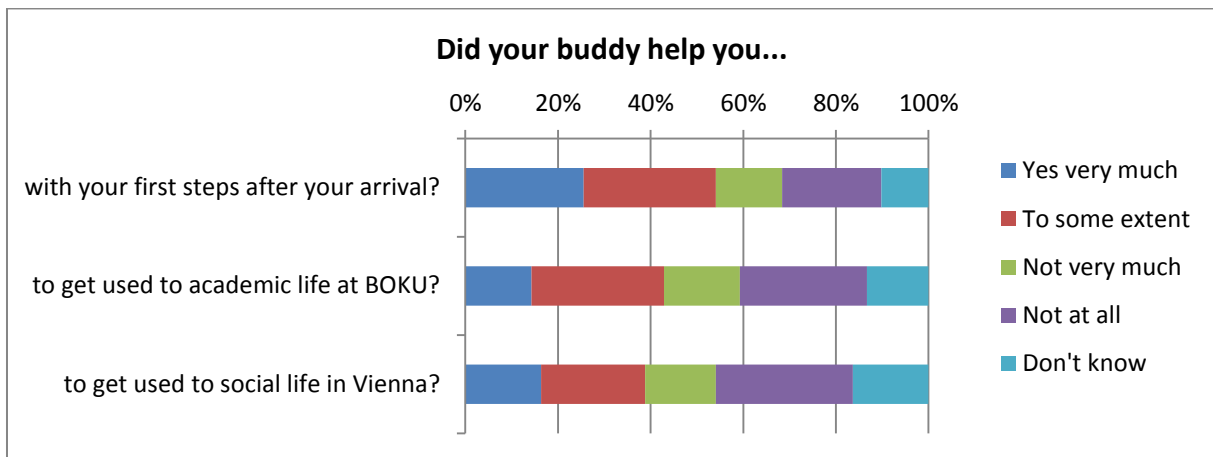


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

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 had exchanged emails with their Buddies before arriving in Vienna, but never actually met up with them or did not hear from them again once the semester started. Some students said their Buddy was not in Vienna when they arrived, and others commented that their Buddies were too busy during the semester with their own work to help out. In short, some buddies simply did not have time to spare for their international student.

3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

40% of students who answered the feedback questionnaire said that they read the weekly International newsletter regularly, with 45% saying they read it now and then. 46% found the included information useful. When asked what other things they would like to read about in the newsletter, students suggested:

- Giving a timetable or events, so it is clear what is happening on each day, and include events going on outside of BOKU
- Providing information on sport opportunities
- Listing the opening and closing times at ZIB.



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3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group

88% of students joined the ESN BOKU incomings Facebook page, with 81% of these students using the Facebook page regularly. Most students cited the page as being useful at the beginning of the semester, when they were trying to find accommodation and events, although other students thought it was useful for ESN events during the semester. For students who did not join the Facebook page, the only reason given was that they did not have a Facebook account.

3.11 Stammtisch

67% of students attended the weekly Stammtisch either regularly or every now and then. The most common suggestions for ways to make the event more attractive were either to regularly change the location of the Stammtisch, namely to a more central location, or to choose a larger, non-smoking bar. Several students also suggested that the event could involve more activities and games.

3.12 Other events

The Willkommens-Heuriger (Viennese Wine Bar) was attended by 54% of respondents, with 15% attending the Advent party for international students.

3.13 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 tutorial videos for students to follow regarding administrative processes
- Help students to find accommodation
- Simplify BOKUonline and reduce the number of administrative steps and the amount of paperwork required
- Provide more information about public transport and registering in Vienna, especially before arrival.

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

71% of students were very satisfied or partially satisfied with the access to computers and media at BOKU. Similarly, 71% were pleased with the access to libraries and 76% were satisfied with the general facilities, such as classrooms at BOKU. 58% approved of the study environment (including social events, student clubs and sports facilities). The area with which students were least satisfied was the food supply. Many found it too limited and too expensive.

Students also had the opportunity to leave comments about the infrastructure at BOKU. These included:

- 'Lack of places to sit.'
- 'Lack of cafeteria was unfortunate.'



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- 'TÜWI is a popular location, liked by many.'

Figure 6 shows the responses.

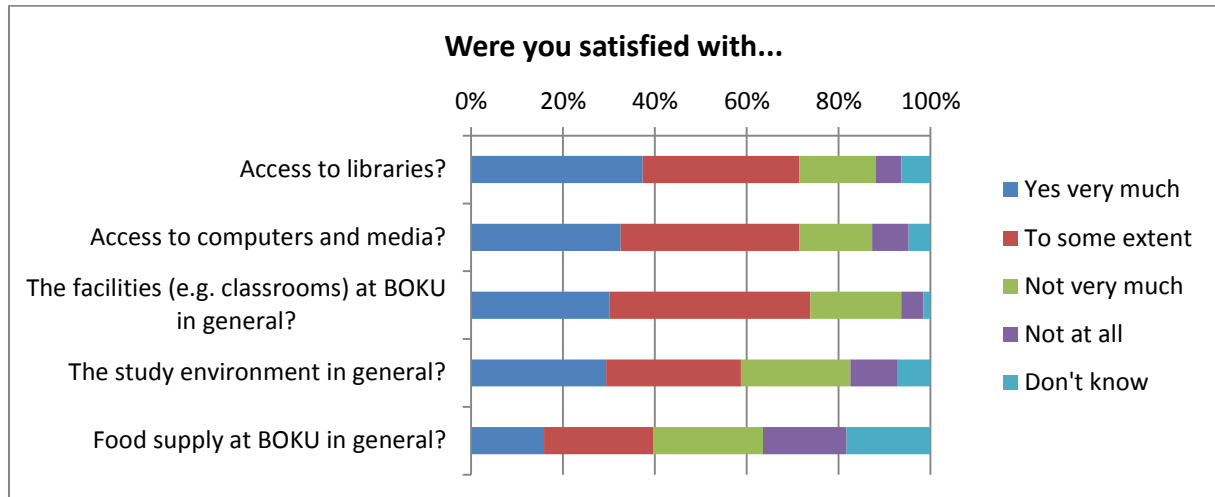


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

5. Languages

5.1 Language problems

6% of the international students who answered the survey experienced language problems regularly, 49% now and then, and 45% never had any difficulties.

Out of the students who did have language problems, many stated that these issues mostly occurred in the classroom and when they came into contact with Austrian students. A few students noted they also had language problems when doing written assignments and oral exams. Other comments mentioned that OeAD and cafeteria staff spoke little English, and that some lectures were only in German.

Data can be seen in Figure 7.

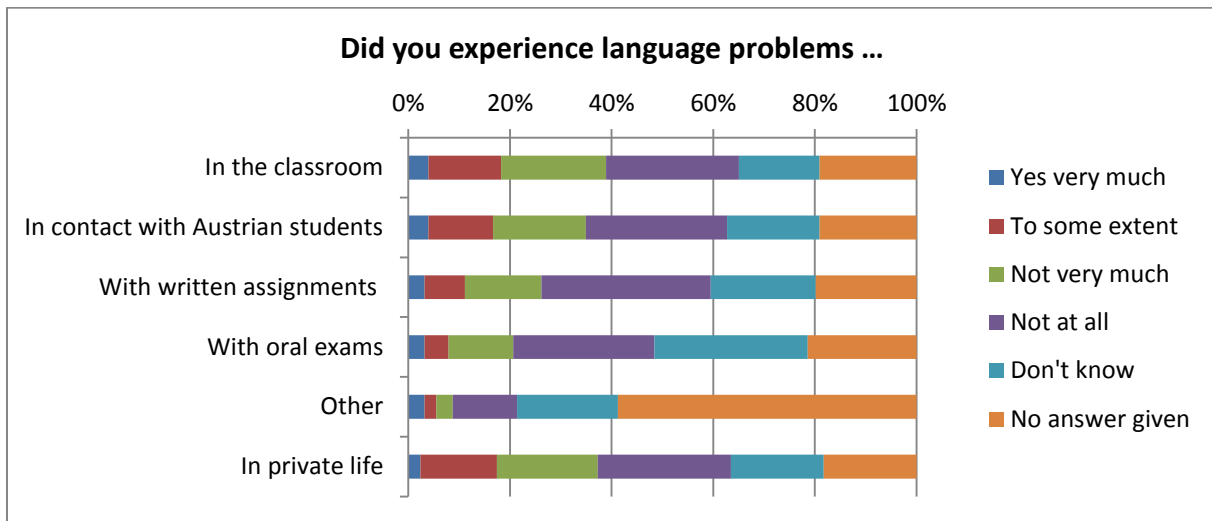


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

5.2 German language courses

21% of respondents took part in an intensive German language course before the semester. 21% took one during the semester and 15% participated in the Tandem programme. 15% of students also took German courses at other institutions.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation type

Just under half of the 126 students who took the questionnaire lived in student residences during their stay in Vienna. 29% stayed in student residences organised by the OeAD and 19% in those they had organised themselves. 52% lived in private accommodation (such as a shared flat).

80% of students were satisfied with their accommodation. For those who were not, they commented that accommodation was difficult to find. Reasons for this included some accommodation not accepting students for just one semester, or that it was difficult to find accommodation once the semester had already started. Other students voiced dissatisfaction with OeAD, with some not realising that it was possible to book accommodation through other providers. Many students also found accommodation to be too expensive in general.

6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

The most important factor for students when choosing their accommodation was the price – 104 out of 126 respondents rated this as quite or very important. Condition was the second biggest factor (a priority for 77% of students), followed by proximity to the university (important for 60% of students).

Living with other international students was a consideration for just over half of students, with 37% saying that living with Austrian students was important to them.

All data is shown in Figure 8.

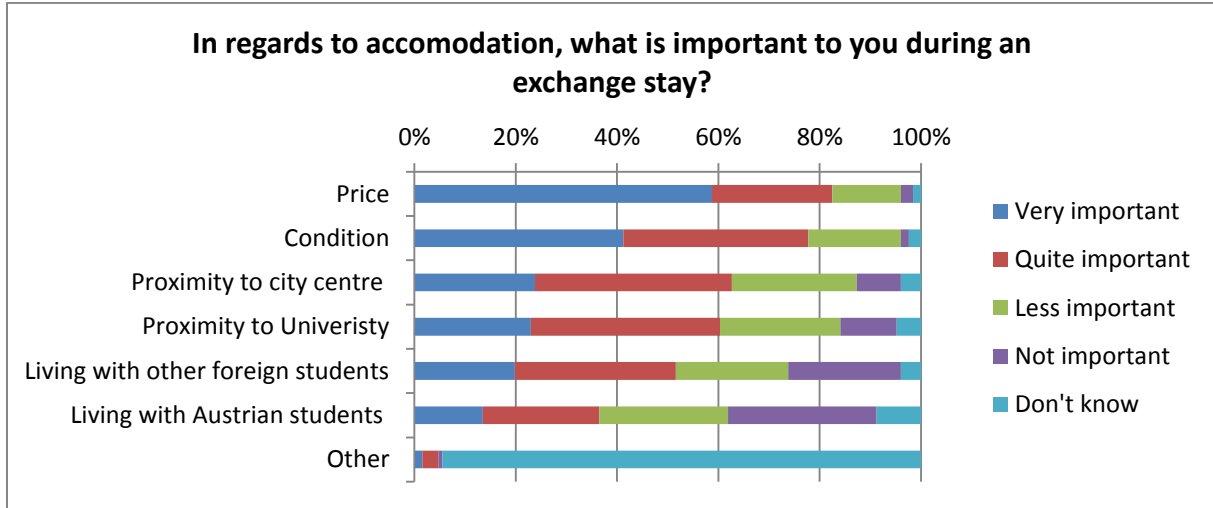


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

7. Academic and personal outcomes

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

79% of the students judged the personal outcome of their stay at BOKU as good or very good. 66% thought the academic outcome was also satisfactory.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

61% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 40% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies, 38% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies and 34% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU.

All data is represented in Figure 9.

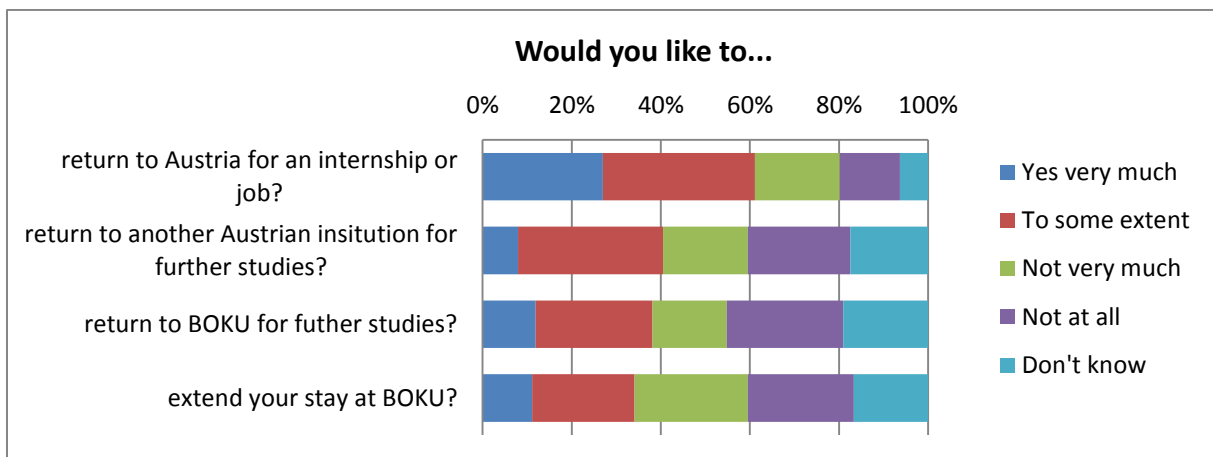


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria



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7.3 Situations requiring special attention

Students were asked if they experienced any situations during their study abroad which required special attention. For most people, this was not the case. However, some of the things mentioned included one student complaining that the credits they earned at BOKU were not recognised at her home university. Another student lost money when applying for a flat before her stay, due to a false advertisement. Some students mentioned the workload at BOKU being more than they were used to at their home university, and struggling to keep up. One student had to travel back to BOKU a month after they had finished, in order to take their final exam.

7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Take students out on more cultural trips in Vienna, such as to the theatre or the opera
- Distribute more information about sport activities and facilities in Vienna
- Hold more ESN activities
- Offer day trips to the areas around Vienna to see nature
- Have more flexible dates for inductions and tours
- Run more Welcome Day style activities offered throughout the semester (especially for students unable to attend the original Welcome Days).



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University of Natural Resources
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8. Background information

67% of the respondents were female and 33% male. 94% spent the winter semester at BOKU, 1 student stayed for the whole academic year and 5% had alternative arrival and departure dates.

Table 2. Nationalities of students who took part in the evaluation questionnaire

Nationality	Answer	%
French	24	19%
German	20	16%
Belgian	19	15%
Czech	13	10%
Italian	10	8%
Polish	8	6%
Finnish	6	5%
Slovakian	4	3%
Spanish	4	3%
Dutch	3	2%
Croatian	2	2%
Hungarian	2	2%
Iranian	2	2%
Swiss	2	2%
Asian	1	1%
Columbian	1	1%
Greek	1	1%
Swedish	1	1%
Turkish	1	1%
USA	1	1%
Not given	1	1%
SUM	126	100%