



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, Summer Semester 2018

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the summer semester 2018 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. 90 questionnaires were returned.

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

Students provided 261 responses to this question. The most common response was that events for Erasmus students, such as the Welcome Days activities and Stammtisch, were well organised (37 responses). One respondent stated that 'the welcome days were really interesting to meet people and become familiar with the campus.' Students were highly satisfied with the range of activities on offer, and with the opportunity to meet fellow Erasmus students. What is more, 33 students praised the support that they received. Students specifically mentioned staff from the Center for International Relations (ZIB). They commented that 'communication with [the] International office was great, they explained us everything right at the beginning and that made our stay a lot easier.' This implies that the support provided by ZIB and other colleagues played a crucial part in helping international students to adapt to life at BOKU. Moreover, 32 student responses indicate that professors were approachable and that there was good communication between students and staff. 32 students also indicated that BOKU offered a wide variety of courses, many of which are not available at their home universities. 'Small course sizes,' 'large choices of courses' and 'very interesting and specialized' courses were some of the factors mentioned by students in their surveys. Furthermore, 29 students signalled that the atmosphere at BOKU was very welcoming. Students commented on the 'warm approach to international students' and the 'friendly environment' that they experienced. Other factors mentioned included university facilities, BOKU's flexibility, the campus, ESN and Vienna itself. All in all, the survey illustrates that student satisfaction was at its highest regarding events on campus, BOKU staff, the courses and the general atmosphere.

See Table 1 for responses.



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Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU (more than 5 responses)

Number	3 things appreciated by students	Answers	%
1	Events for Erasmus students (Welcome Days, Stammtisch etc.)/ events on campus	37	14%
2	General support (administrative support+ZIB staff)	33	13%
3	Courses - choice, class sizes, different to what is offered elsewhere	32	12%
4	Teaching staff	32	12%
5	General atmosphere and friendliness of other students	29	11%
6	University facilities (labs, libraries, TÜWI etc.)	16	6%
7	Flexibility of the university (choice of course, exam dates)	12	5%
8	Campus and Türkenschanz park	9	3%
9	ESN	8	3%
10	Vienna	6	2%

2. Things BOKU could do better for international students

Although most of the students praised BOKU, some of them believe that there is still room for improvement. Out of 138 responses for this question, 22 indicate that courses should be better organised, to avoid overlapping. One student suggested 'grouping some courses per study programme.' 18 students recommended simplifying administrative processes. Suggestions ranged from streamlining Mobility-Online to allowing students to use electronic signatures in their Learning Agreements. Moreover, 15 students requested more administrative information and courses available in English, and 12 wanted to have more integration with Austrian students. Other students wanted BOKU to improve its administrative procedure, by offering more exam dates and publishing test results faster. Some students also wanted ZIB to have longer opening hours, and for ZIB and ESN to run more events. Finally, campus facilities, communication between students and staff and language courses were other suggested areas for improvement.

See Table 2 for responses.



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Table 2. What students felt could be improved at BOKU (more than 5 responses)

Number	3 things that BOKU could do better	Answer	%
1	Better organization of courses (less overlapping, more ECTS etc)	22	16%
2	Improved administration	18	13%
3	More administrative information and courses in English	15	11%
4	More possibilities for communication between Austrian and international students	12	9%
5	Improved exam procedure	10	7%
6	Improve ZIB availability	9	7%
7	More events (including ESN)	9	7%
8	University facilities (Mensa, amount of group study space, library open hours)	8	6%
9	Better communication between staff and students	7	5%
10	More language courses	6	4%

3. Motivation, information and events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

87% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 11% worked on a thesis or research project and 2% did an internship . Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department of Agrobiotechnology
- Department of Chemistry - Biochemistry Division
- Institute for Hydrology and Water Management
- Institute of Food Technology
- Institute of Landscape Architecture
- Institute of Spatial Planning, Environmental Planning and Land Rearrangement
- Institute of Surveying, Remote Sensing and Land Management
- Institute of Viticulture and Pomology
- The Austrian Centre of Industrial Biotechnology.

3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

The main factors which motivated students to come to BOKU were experiencing a new environment and meeting new people. This was stated by 94% and 86% of students respectively. Academic reasons was a factor considered by 84% of students, followed by improving language proficiency (76%) and cultural reasons and career plans (both chosen by 69% of students).

Other factors included the opportunity to ‘go abroad and be independent’ and ‘The fact that Vienna is in the middle of Europe and you can travel to many countries.’

Responses are shown in Figure 1.



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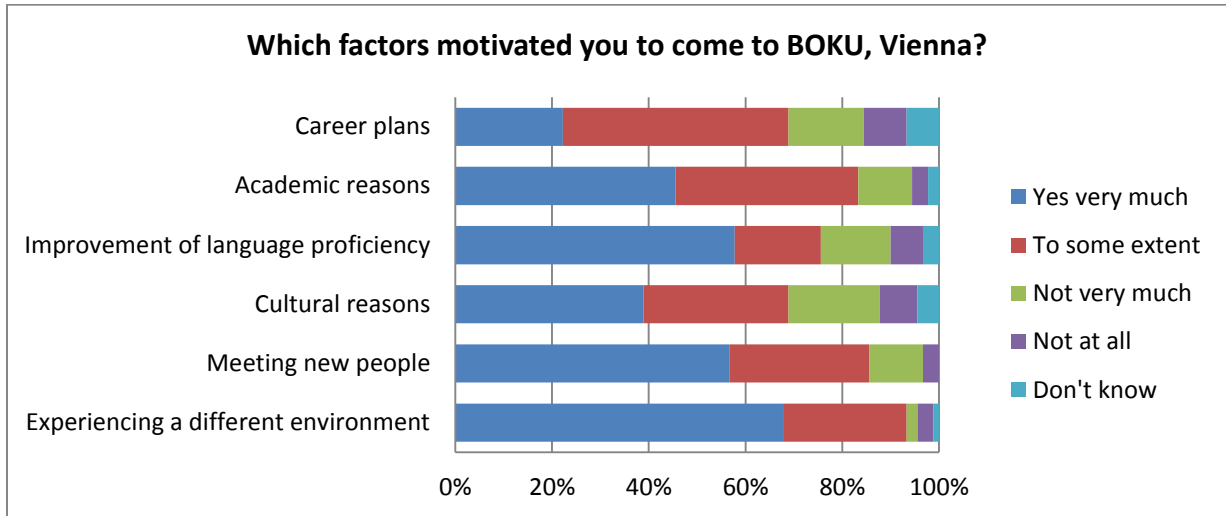


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

3.3 Information before the stay

The BOKU website was the most popular source of information for students before they arrived at the university; 40 out of 90 students said that they had used it regularly. Additionally, 39 respondents said that fellow students from their home university had been an important source of information for them. Other students also found exchange coordinators and the international office at their home universities, Mobility Online, exchange coordinators at BOKU and Austrian exchange students at their university helpful.

See Figure 2 for responses.

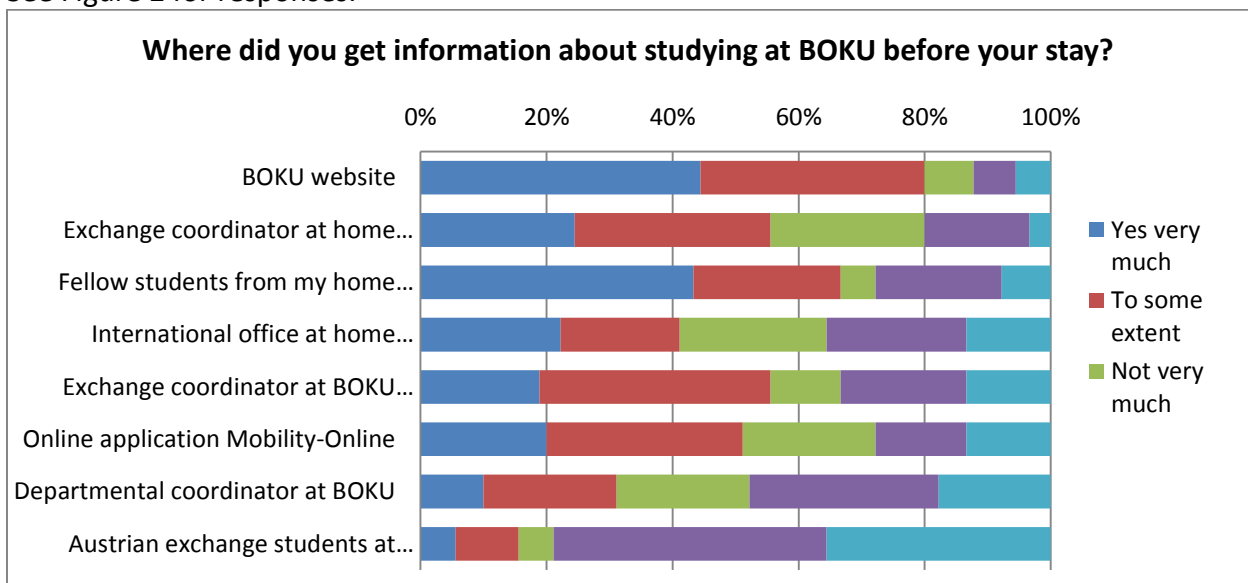


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

3.4 Information from BOKU

95% of students asserted that they found the information they received from the Center for



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International Relations (ZIB) during their stay either good or very good. 85% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 68% valued the information from their department or institute and 56% expressed positive opinions on the information from other service departments.

All responses are shown in Figure 3.

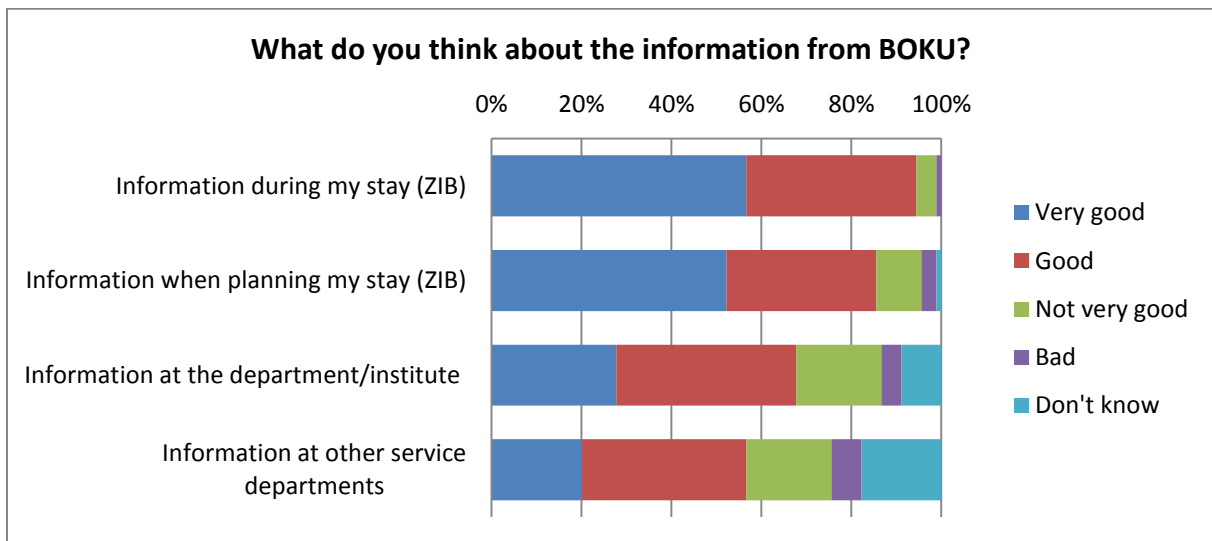


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were mostly positive. 71% of students stated that the application portal was simple to fill in, and 84% found it to be reliable. 79% of respondents said that the 'clarity of instructions in the data base' was either very good or good. A further 86% were satisfied with the clarity of emails and 65% of students thought the application process was a reasonable effort.

All responses can be found in Figure 4.

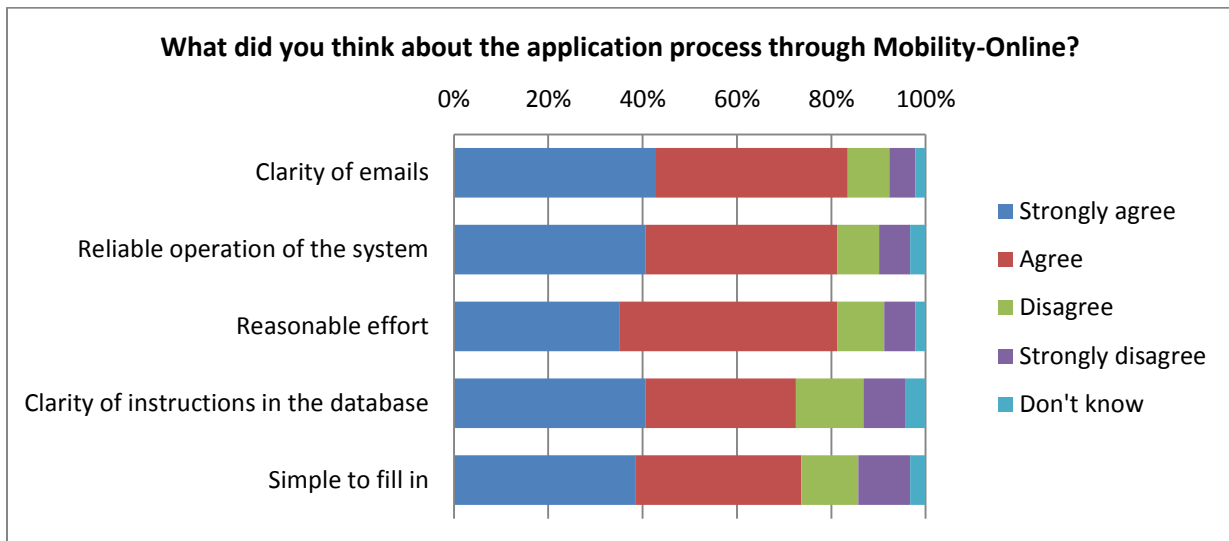


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility Online

Students suggested that the system could be improved by requiring less paperwork.

3.6 Welcome Days

79% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, of which 73% came away with a positive impression. 29% appreciated the events ran by BOKU to meet new people. Students also enjoyed the events that allowed them to explore the campus, such as the *Entdeckungstour*, and with the amount of information given (22% and 16% respectively).

Students also provided suggestions for how to improve the Welcome Days. Of out 25 responses, 10 people requested more 'getting to know people' games and events. 3 students recommend having lunch at a bigger location, so more students can attend, and having shorter information sessions.

3.7 BOKUonline info session

79% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, with 66% finding it useful. Students were pleased with the information provided on course registration, and with the information on Vienna and public transport tickets.

21% of respondents did not attend this info session. Some students commented that they had already registered for courses, or that they arrived in Vienna after the session.

3.8 Buddy system

Every exchange student had the opportunity to be matched with a Buddy. Buddies are Austrian students who volunteer to help new students settle into life at BOKU and adapt to living in Vienna. In summer semester 2018, 82% of respondents (74 students) decided to apply for a Buddy. 44 students thought that their Buddy had helped them with their first steps after arrival, and 36 commented that their Buddy had helped them adapt to academic life at BOKU. 30 students had buddies who helped them integrate into social life in Vienna.



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Students who chose not to take part in the programme were asked to give their reasons why. Responses ranged from students being native German speakers to students feeling that they did not need help from a Buddy. When asked to provide feedback on the Buddy programme, one respondent replied that they never met their buddy. Another student also commented that their buddy was very helpful at first, but that they did not keep in contact during their stay.

See Figure 5 for responses.

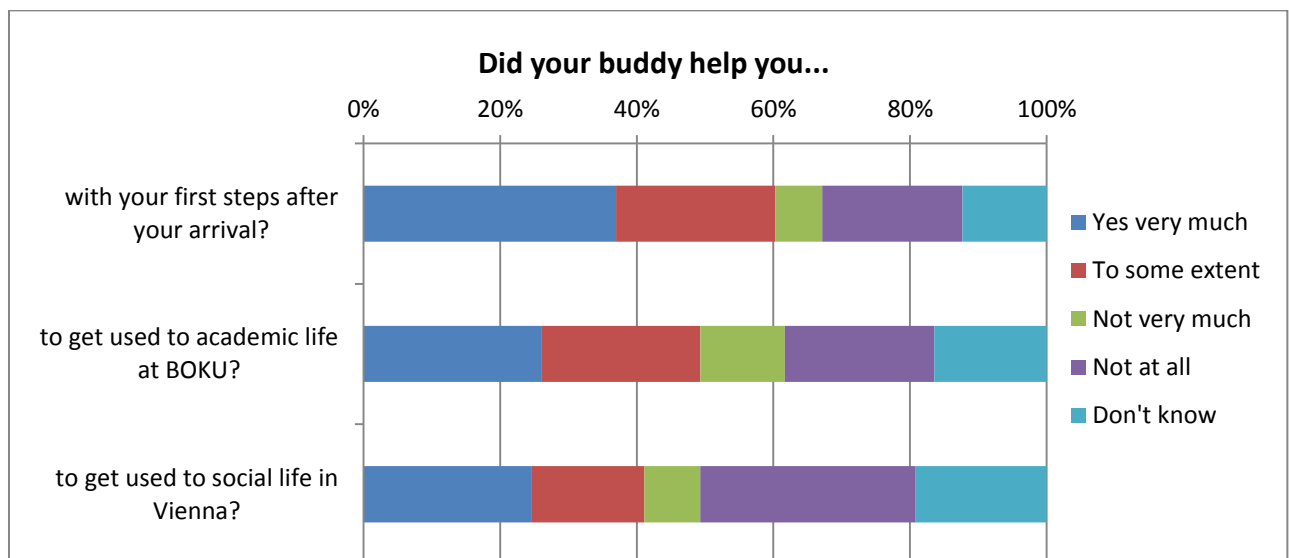


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

44% of student responses to the questionnaire indicated that students read the international newsletter every now and then, with 40% (36 students) reading it regularly. 68% of respondents (76 students) found it helpful. When asked for feedback for the newsletter, students commented that it could be improved by including more information about events in Vienna and upcoming trips run by BOKU.

3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group

96% of students who completed the survey joined the ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group. Out of those students, 76% (68 students) said that they found the information on the page useful. Students wrote that this information was very useful at the beginning of the semester, but one student mentioned that the information provided was less useful as time went on.

3.11 Stammtisch

Out of the 90 students surveyed, 21% regularly attended the weekly Stammtisch, with 48% going every now and then. Some students also gave suggestions for future Stammtisch



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events, such as holding the event in larger venues and having 'ice breaker' activities, to make it easier to connect with new people.

3.12 Other events

In the survey, 64 people wrote that they had attended the Wilkommens Heuriger (Viennese wine bar). Out of the attendees, 61 students (68%) commented that they had enjoyed the event. Moreover, 24% attended the Advent party for international students, of which 19% had been pleased with the event.

3.13 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students

Students were also asked to offer suggestions on how BOKU could improve the information given to exchange students. Many students were satisfied with the existing procedures, but others thought that BOKU could improve its communications.

Students wrote the following:

- 'In my opinion, everything is very well organised and perfect University for erasmus, I would recomend BOKU to everyone. I didn't saw any mistake niether missing something.'
- 'Improve communication on the events'
- 'The possibility to see the date of the exams in advanced and not only at the end of the course.'

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

Overall, the survey indicated that students were satisfied with the infrastructure at BOKU. 85% of respondents (77 students) were pleased with the facilities at BOKU in general and with the general study environment (student clubs and sport facilities) respectively. 76% of students commented that the access to libraries was satisfactory, and a further 75% were happy with the access they had to computers and media. The area with which students were least satisfied was the Mensa (see Figure 5), stating that the food was quite expensive. Students also had the opportunity to leave comments about the infrastructure at BOKU.

Examples of the comments provided:

- 'I find it inconvenient that you cannot bring your bag with stuff into the library and have to take a basket.'
- 'There should be more student lounges for studying.'



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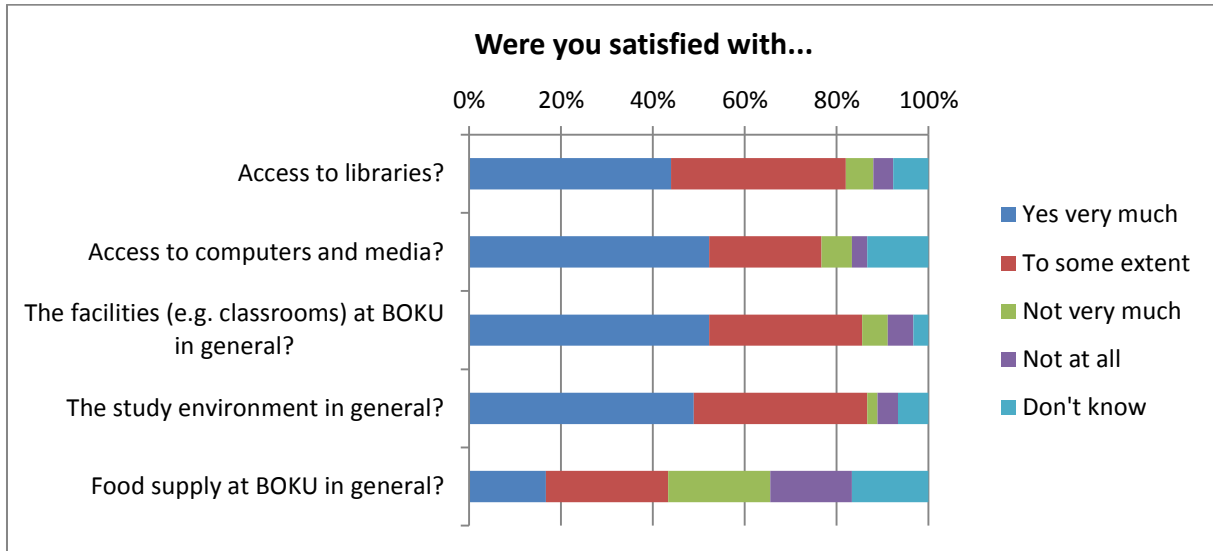


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

5. Languages

5.1 Language problems

Only 9% of respondents had experienced language problems regularly. 60% had problems now and then, and 31% felt that they had never encountered any difficulties.

Out of the 68% of respondents who had dealt with language problems (64 students), 21% had experienced these issues in the classroom, 12% when writing assignments, and 12% in oral exams. On the other hand, only 14% of respondents stated that they had had difficulties communicating with Austrian students. What is more, 75% did not encounter many language problems in their private life. Some students wrote that these issues had occurred at 'Austrian public offices' or with 'administration personnel.'

See Figure 7 for responses.

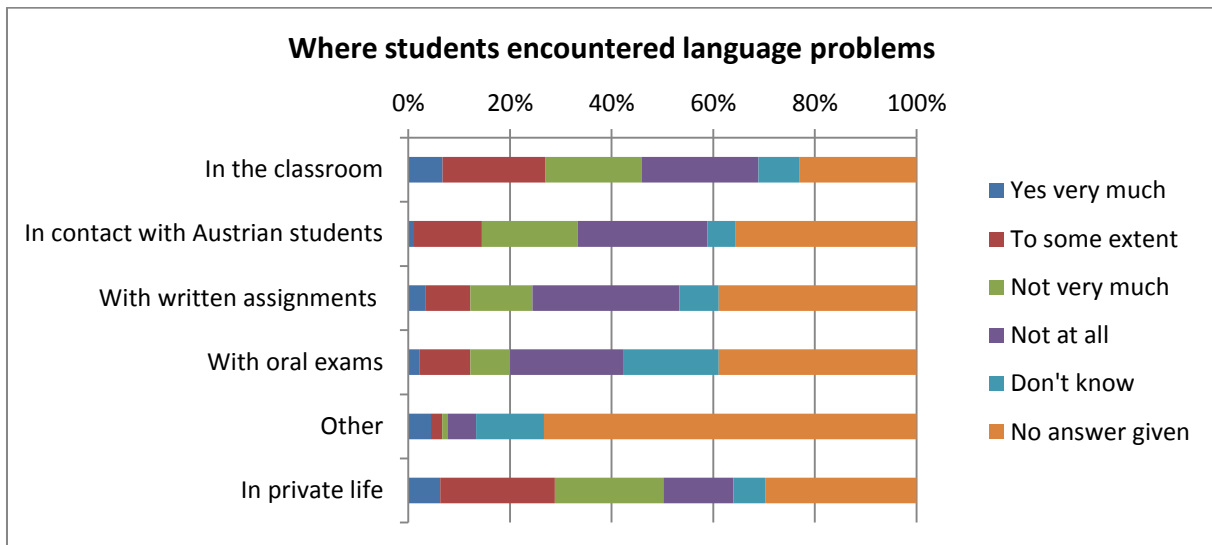


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

5.2 German language courses and Tandem

26% of respondents (24 students) attended an intensive German language course before the start of term. 33% took part in a German course during the semester and 13% took part in the Tandem programme. Moreover, 2% of students attended other German courses.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation type

Students were also asked about their accommodation. 17% of students who submitted the questionnaire stayed in a student residence run by the OeAD, with a third finding their own student residence. 50% had opted to live in a shared flat. Student responses to the survey indicated that some students had experienced difficulties with their accommodation. 76% were either dissatisfied with accommodation offered by the OeAD, or said that they didn't know. On the other hand, 28% indicated that they were satisfied with student residences that they had found themselves, and 39% were happy with their private accommodation.

When asked to provide further comment on accommodation, students wrote the following:

- They were satisfied with their OJAB accommodation
- Accommodation in Vienna is hard to find, and expensive
- Living in a shared flat helps Erasmus students to make friends with Austrians

6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

Those who responded to the survey indicated that condition was the most important factor when choosing accommodation. 92% of student responses ranked this as either very important or quite important. Other considerations were price, which was prioritised by 91% of respondents, alongside proximity to the city centre, as mentioned by 74% of students. Another aspect considered by students when choosing accommodation was who they would



live with. 51% wanted to live with Austrian students and 48% of respondents thought it was important to live with other foreign students. Other criteria constituted 16% of responses.

See Figure 8 for more information.

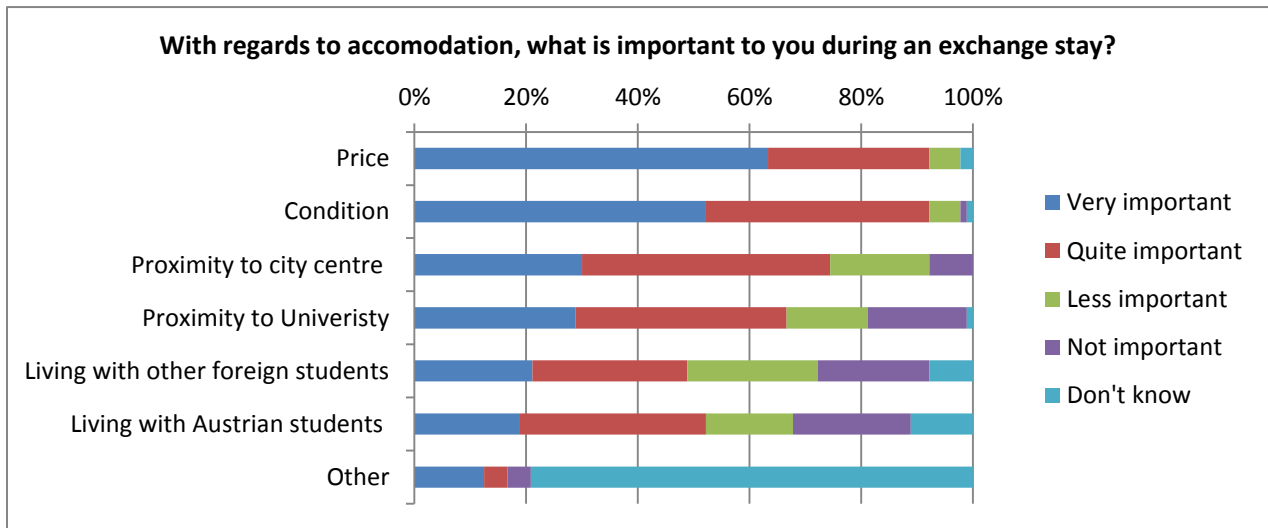


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

7. Academic and personal outcomes

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

The majority of the students thought that their time at BOKU had been a success. Out of the 90 students who completed the survey, 75 (86%) judged the academic outcome to be either very good or good. With regards to their personal development, 87 students (96%) were satisfied with the outcome.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

60% of student responses showed that students wanted to extend their stay at BOKU and 59% would return to BOKU for further study. Additionally, 53% would pursue further education at another Austrian institution, with a further 82% of respondents stating that they would return to Austria for a job or an internship.

See Figure 9 for all responses.

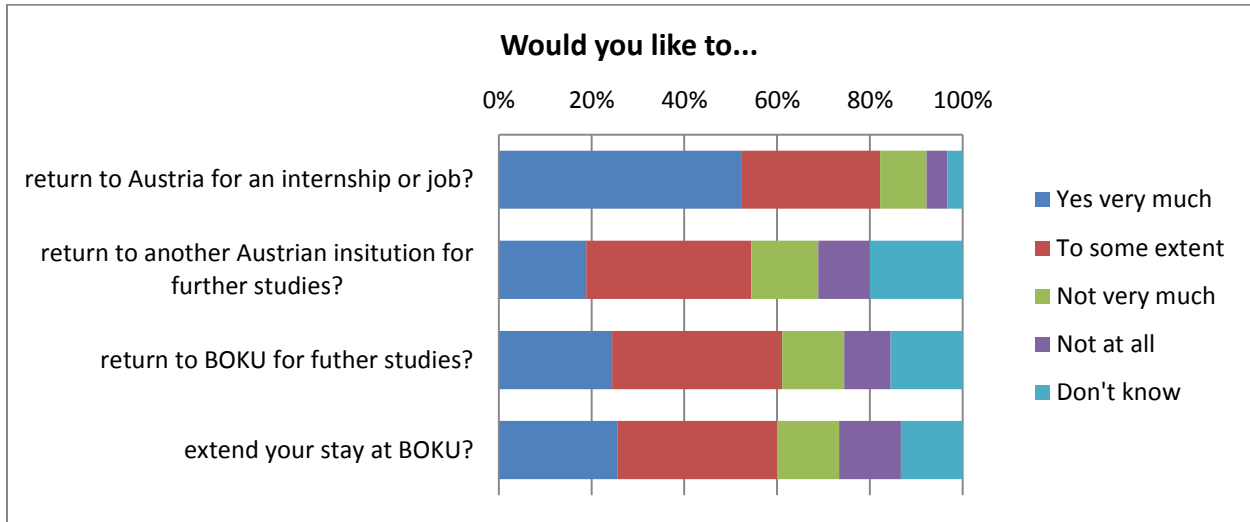


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

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 students commented that they had difficulties in finding accommodation. One student found there was a lack of security at the Haus Panorama student residence, and that they found the environment there to be unsatisfactory. What is more, another student found it difficult to process the residence permit and organise insurance.

7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

6 students out of 90 gave recommendations. Suggestions included the following:

- Improve the quality of email responses
- Offer more weekend activities
- Provide students with more information before their arrival.



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8. Background information

71% of respondents were male (64 students) and 29% were female (26 students). 81% spent the summer semester at BOKU, 1% stayed only for the winter semester and 9% of respondents were at BOKU for the whole academic year. 9% had alternative arrival and departure dates.

The majority of exchange students were French (26%). Other common nationalities were Italian (13%) and German, Croatian and Greek (all constituted 8% of the student exchange population).

Nationality	Answer	%
French	23	26%
Italian	12	13%
German	7	8%
Croatian	7	8%
Greek	7	8%
Belgium	4	4%
Czech	4	4%
Polish	4	4%
Dutch	4	4%
Finnish	3	3%
Spanish	3	3%
Hungarian	2	2%
Ukraine	2	2%
Norway	2	2%
Romania	2	2%
Portuguese	1	1%
Slovenian	1	1%
China	1	1%
Swedish	1	1%
SUM	90	100%

Table3. Nationalities of students who took part in the evaluation questionnaire