



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

## **Exchange Studies at BOKU**

### **Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2017-18**

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the winter semester 2017-2018 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. 91 questionnaires were returned.

#### **1. The most appreciated things at BOKU**

The most popular response to this question was that incoming students enjoyed the social events organised for them, such as the Welcome Days and the weekly Stammtisch (mentioned 53 times). Students stated that these events were a good opportunity to meet people and get in contact with fellow Erasmus students. Similarly, 39 responses noted that BOKU had a very friendly atmosphere. Exchange students felt welcomed by their fellow students and teaching staff, allowing them to quickly settle in to university life. 35 respondents found teaching staff very approachable, with a further 32 respondents commenting that they were satisfied with the high quality of education available at BOKU. Moreover, 19 students found that the university offered them a wide variety of courses and exam dates, allowing students to tailor their education to their personal needs and interests.

Other common areas of satisfaction were as follows:

- Helpful and friendly ZIB staff
- Picturesque and environmentally-friendly campus and Türkenschanz park
- Useful information given to students, alongside good administrative support
- Satisfactory facilities, such as laboratories, which assisted students in their learning.

See all responses in Table 1.

**Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU (10 or more responses)**

<b>Number</b>	<b>3 things appreciated by students</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Welcome Days and other events	53	20%
2	Friendly atmosphere	39	14%
3	Teaching staff	35	13%
4	Quality of education (including excursions)	32	12%
5	Flexibility of the university (e.g with choice of courses and exam dates)	19	7%
6	ZIB staff	14	5%
7	Campus and surroundings	12	4%
8	Information given to students/ administrative support	10	4%
9	Facilities (e.g laboratories)	10	4%



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## **2. Things BOKU could do better for international students**

Although most of the students praised BOKU, some of them felt there was room for improvement in certain areas. 34 responses stated that students had faced difficulties with overlapping courses, and too few ECTS credits per course. They found that popular courses often clash and the amount of ECTS credits does not always reflect course workloads. Students suggested this issue could be resolved through better timetabling. Students also thought it would be helpful to have more ECTS credits for individual courses, which would facilitate course registration. Secondly, students suggested improving campus facilities. 24 responses mentioned that students had found a shortage of study spaces and computers, as well as a limited choice of food. Students requested a greater and cheaper variety of food outlets. They would also appreciate having more access to computers and study spaces, alongside longer library opening hours, to aid their studies. Another common response to the survey was that many students would prefer a simplified administrative process. Some suggested using an electronic signature on the Learning Agreement as a means of shortening the process, whilst other students requested that paperwork is returned to them in a more timely manner. 13 responses proposed holding more Erasmus events and better organisation from ESN. 11 responses recommended providing more help with accommodation, and with meeting Austrian students.

Other common responses to the survey were:

- Offering more courses and information in English
- Improving the assessment procedure and publishing exam dates earlier
- Providing exchange students with more information before their arrival, and publishing this information online
- Having longer opening hours at ZIB
- Offering Erasmus students for guidance when choosing courses
- Better signposting around campuses

See Table 2 for responses.



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**Table 2. What students felt could be improved at BOKU (10 or more responses)**

Number	3 things that BOKU could do better	Answers	%
1	Improved timetables (e.g. prevent courses from overlapping)/ more ECTS credits for individual courses	34	19%
2	Improved facilities (.e.g. computers, study spaces, food)	24	13%
3	Simplified administrative process (e.g. electronic signature for the Learning Agreement)	17	9%
4	More Erasmus events/ better organisation from ESN	13	7%
5	Provide more help with finding accommodation (e.g. don't recommend the OeAD)	11	6%
6	More integration with Austrian students	11	6%
7	More courses and information in English	10	6%

### 3. Motivation, information and events

#### 3.1 Activities at BOKU

79% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 6% completed an internship and 6% worked on a thesis or research project. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department of Applied Genetics and Cell Biology (DAGZ)
- Department of Food Science and Technology
- Institute for Chemical and Energy Engineering
- Institute of Biophysics
- Institute of Biotechnology
- Institute of Sanitary Engineering and Water Pollution Control
- University and Research Center Tulln.

#### 3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

For 90% of respondents (82 students), the desire to experience a different environment was the main factor that motivated them to come to BOKU. The second most common reason was meeting new people, as stated by 90% of respondents. Other factors included cultural reasons, a desire to improve language proficiency, academic reasons and career prospects. Other reasons included the opportunity to live in Vienna, the wide variety of courses available at BOKU and the chance to be independent.



Exact figures are shown in Figure 1.

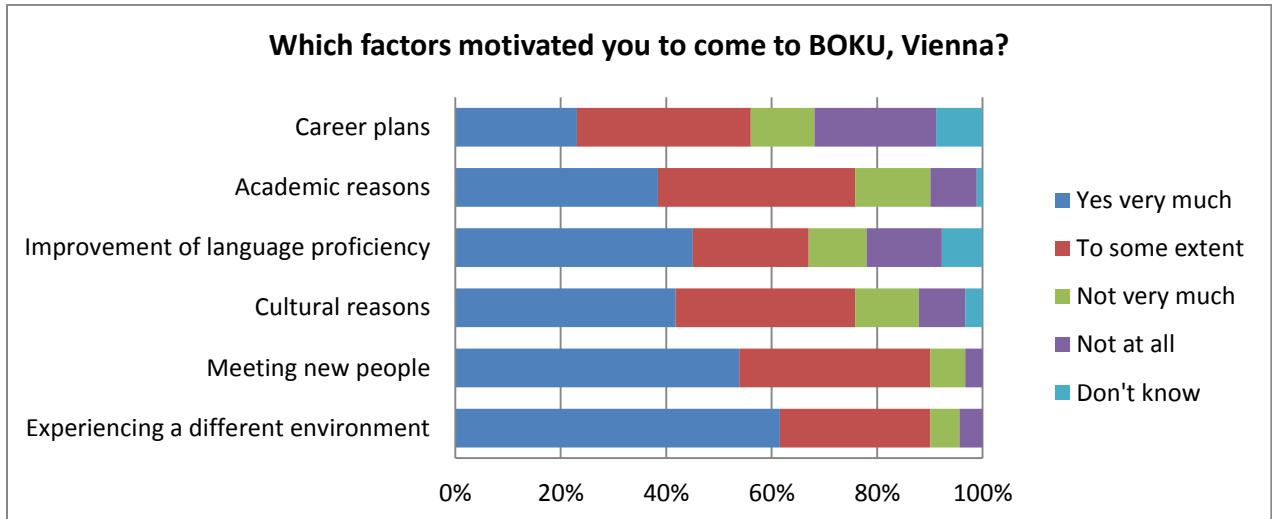


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

### 3.3 Information before the stay

The BOKU website was the most popular source of information for students before they arrived at the university; it was used by 81% of students. Other major sources of information included exchange coordinators, both at home universities (57 responses) and at BOKU (49 responses). Fellow students at home universities (44 responses), the international office at home universities (41 responses) and Mobility-Online (38 responses) also gave students information before their stay. Only 10 students received information about BOKU from Austrian exchange students at their home universities.

See Figure 2 for all responses.

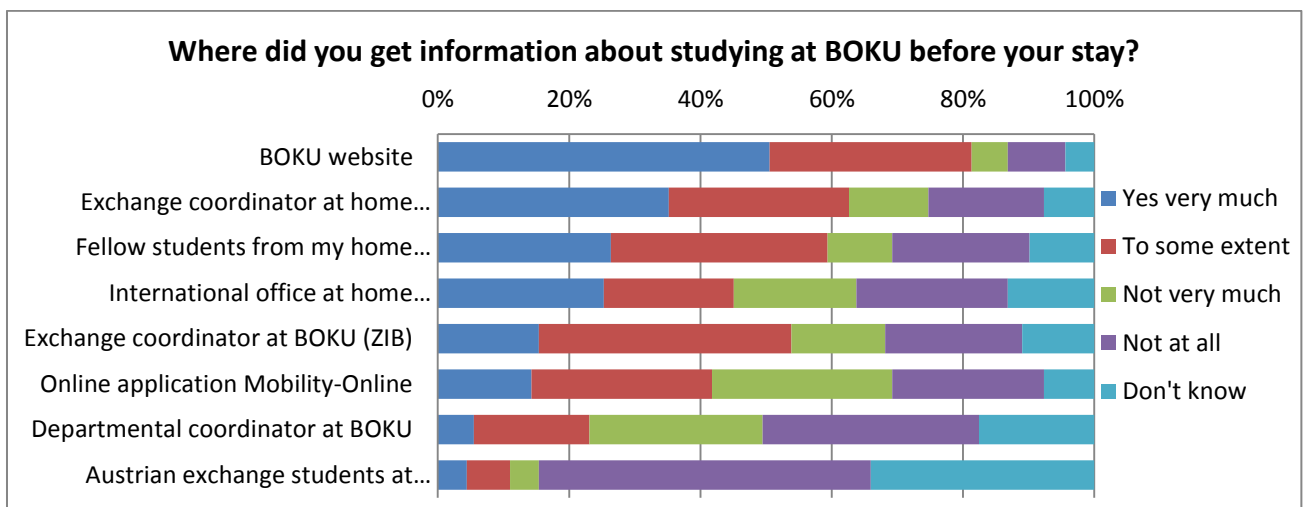


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay



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### 3.4 Information from BOKU

92% of students stated that they found the information they received from the Center for International Relations (ZIB) during their stay was either good or very good. 90% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 65% valued the information from their department or institute and 58% were satisfied with the information from other service departments.

All data can be seen in Figure 3.

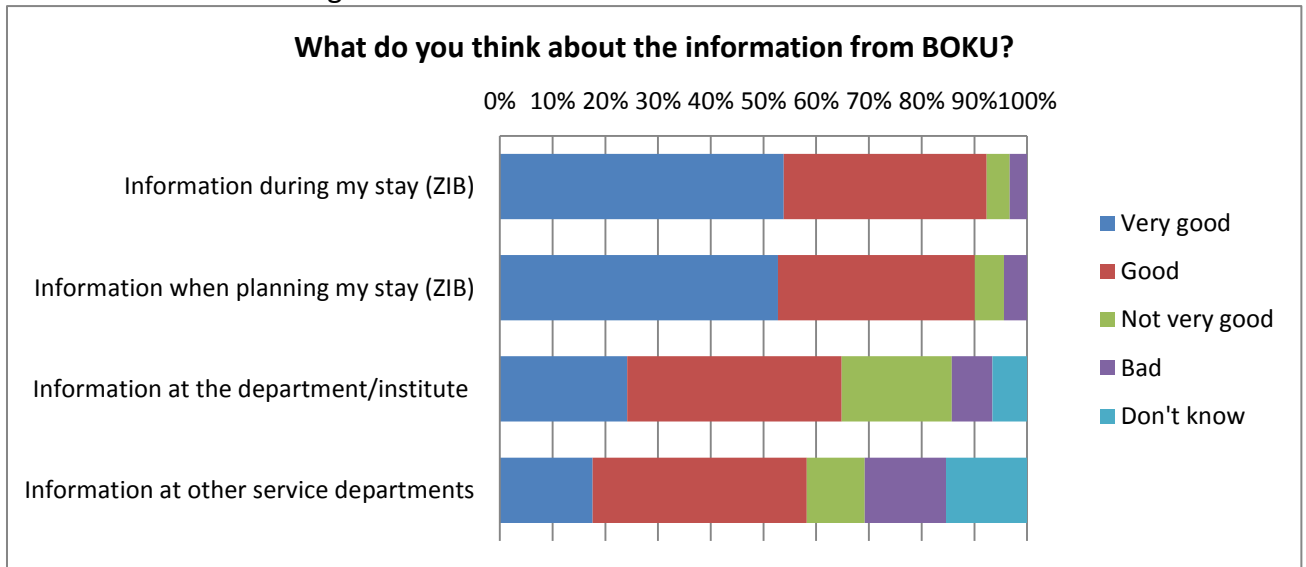
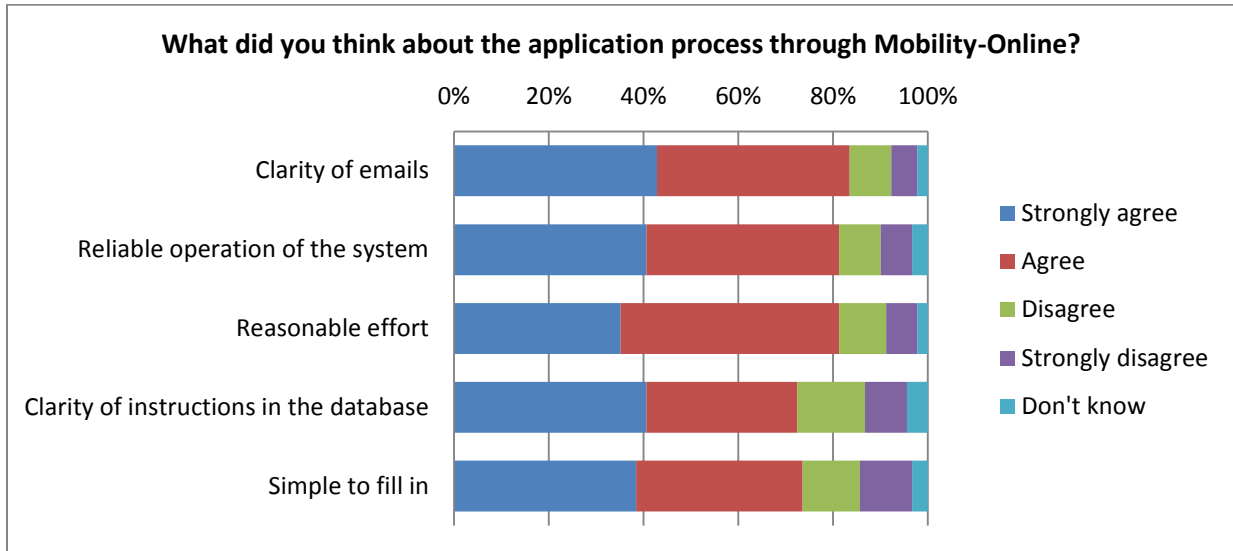


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

### 3.5 Mobility- Online

Opinions on Mobility-Online were largely positive. 84% of students were pleased with the clarity of the emails sent by the system, and 81% believed that the operation of the system was reliable. 74% thought the instructions in the database were clear and easy to understand. Moreover, around 80% of students agreed that the application portal was a reasonable effort. Lastly, 73% felt that the application form was simple to fill in.

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:

- Allow students to upload documents they have in no particular order to make the process faster
- Enable moving to the next step if the previous isn't filled in
- Make the first link that leads to Mobility-Online clearer and easier to find
- Enable uploading documents of larger size.

### 3.6 Welcome Days

83% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 93% of them reported that they came away with a good or very good overall impression. Students could also elaborate on which events they had enjoyed the most. An equal amount (16 students) chose the Heurigen party and the opportunity to meet new people as highlights of their week. 14 students mentioned enjoying the city and campus tours. 5 people said they thought the information that was distributed was very useful. Students also mentioned enjoying the welcome from ZIB and the ESN activities.

When asked how they thought the Welcome Days could be improved, students provided the following responses:

- More 'getting to know' people games (8 responses)
- More activities in smaller groups (5 responses)
- Making the infosessions shorter (5 responses)
- Making the discovery sessions shorter (3 responses).

### 3.7 BOKUonline info session

76% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 91% 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 register for courses was noted as very useful, and all questions were answered well.

For the 24% 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, that they came to Vienna too late, or that the session was scheduled to be too long.

### 3.8 Buddy system

All exchange students were offered a chance to have a Buddy, an Austrian student who could help them with their arrival and to get used to life at BOKU and in Vienna. 77% of respondents took this opportunity. Reasons given by those who opted not to have a buddy were that they were native German speakers and therefore didn't need help with the paperwork, or because they just preferred to manage their affairs without help. In some rare cases, the international students were assigned a buddy by the university, but could not contact their buddy either before or after their arrival.

67% of students felt that their Buddies assisted them with the first steps after their arrival in Vienna. 57% said they helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and 53% appreciated their Buddies helping them get used to social life in Vienna.

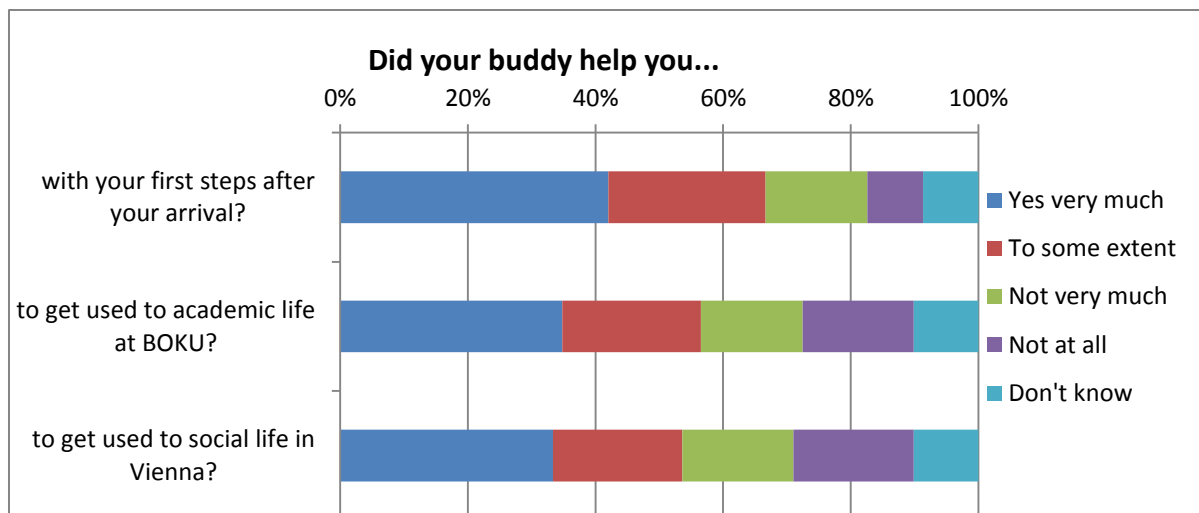


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

For those who were unsatisfied with their Buddies, the main issue was a lack of contact when the students arrived at BOKU – their buddies simply did not have time to meet them after arrival, or did not respond to emails at all. Some students said their Buddy was not in Vienna when they arrived.

See Figure 5 for all responses.



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

37% of students who answered the feedback questionnaire said that they read the weekly International newsletter regularly, with 46% stating that they read it now and then. 75% found the information included in the newsletter useful. When asked what could be improved, students suggested providing information in English to all of the international students (as not all of them understand German), and listing events in Vienna.

### **3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group**

88% of students joined the ESN BOKU incomings Facebook page. 79% cited the page as being useful for different purposes, from reminding students about the departure checklist to providing information about future events and activities. 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**

70% 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 change the location of the Stammtisch regularly, 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 52 respondents, with 33 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. Although most students were satisfied with the information given, some students suggested the following:

- Offer more guidance on finding accommodation
- Simplify Mobility-Online
- Provide more information on BOKUOnline before the Welcome Days.

## **4. Infrastructure at BOKU**

In general, exchange students were highly satisfied with the infrastructure at BOKU. 80% of students were very satisfied or satisfied with the access to computers and media at BOKU. Similarly, 80% were pleased with the general facilities, such as classrooms at BOKU, and with the study environment. Moreover, 76% of survey respondents found the access to libraries satisfactory. The area with which students were least pleased was the food supply. In their feedback, students stated that they would prefer to have more food outlets on campus selling cheaper food.

All responses are detailed in Figure 6.





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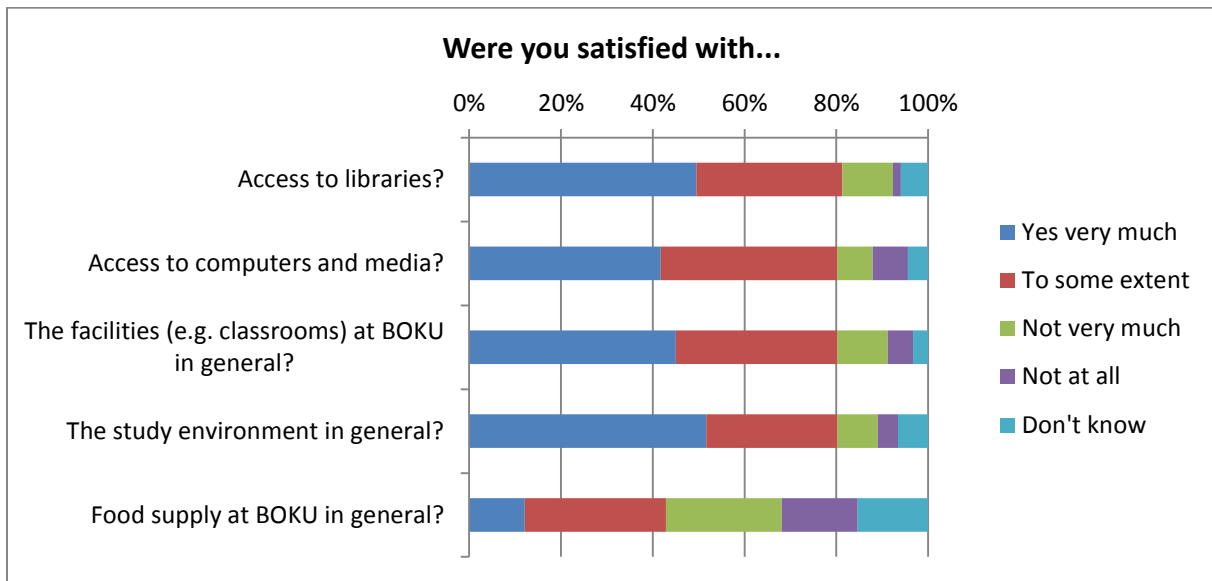


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

## 5. Languages

### 5.1 Language problems

4% of international students experienced language problems regularly, 57% now and then, and 39% never had any difficulties. Students noted that these difficulties mostly occurred either in their private lives (21 students), in the classroom (19 students) and when talking to Austrian students (17 students). A few students noted they also had language problems when doing written assignments and oral exams. Other comments included that the students had troubles with communication in the city, as well as with understanding the Austrian accent.

All data is in Figure 7.

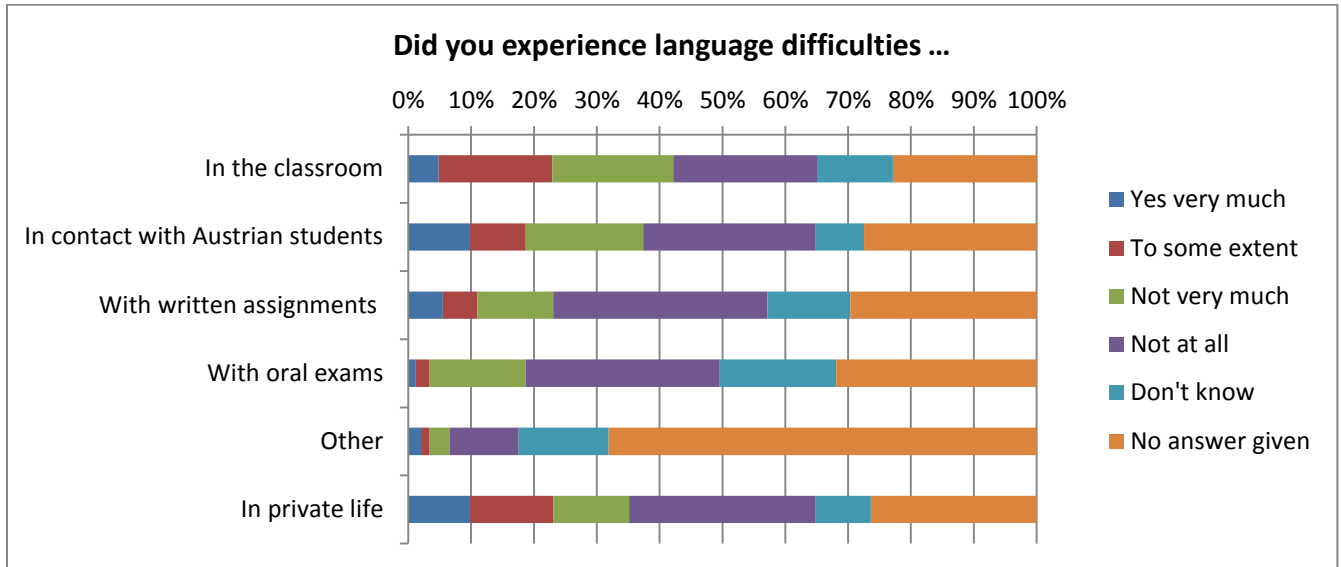


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

## 5.2 German language courses and Tandem scheme

15% of respondents took part in an intensive German language course before the semester began. 16% took one during the semester and 9% participated in the Tandem programme.

## 6. Accommodation

### 6.1 Accommodation type

Around 60% of the students who submitted the questionnaire lived in student residences during their stay in Vienna - 23% in student residences organised by the OeAD and 36% in those they had found themselves. 41% lived in private accommodation (such as a shared flat). When commenting on their experiences, some students said that private accommodation was difficult to find. Other students voiced dissatisfaction with OeAD and wished that the university would provide more information about other dormitory agencies. Another common concern was that the accommodation in Vienna is expensive for students.

### 6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

The most important factor for students when choosing their accommodation was the price – 98% of respondents rated this as quite or very important. Condition was the second biggest factor (a priority for 92% of students), followed by proximity to the university being important for 81% of students.

Living with other international students was a priority for just over half of students, with 35% of survey respondents saying that living with Austrian students was important to them.

All responses are in Figure 8.

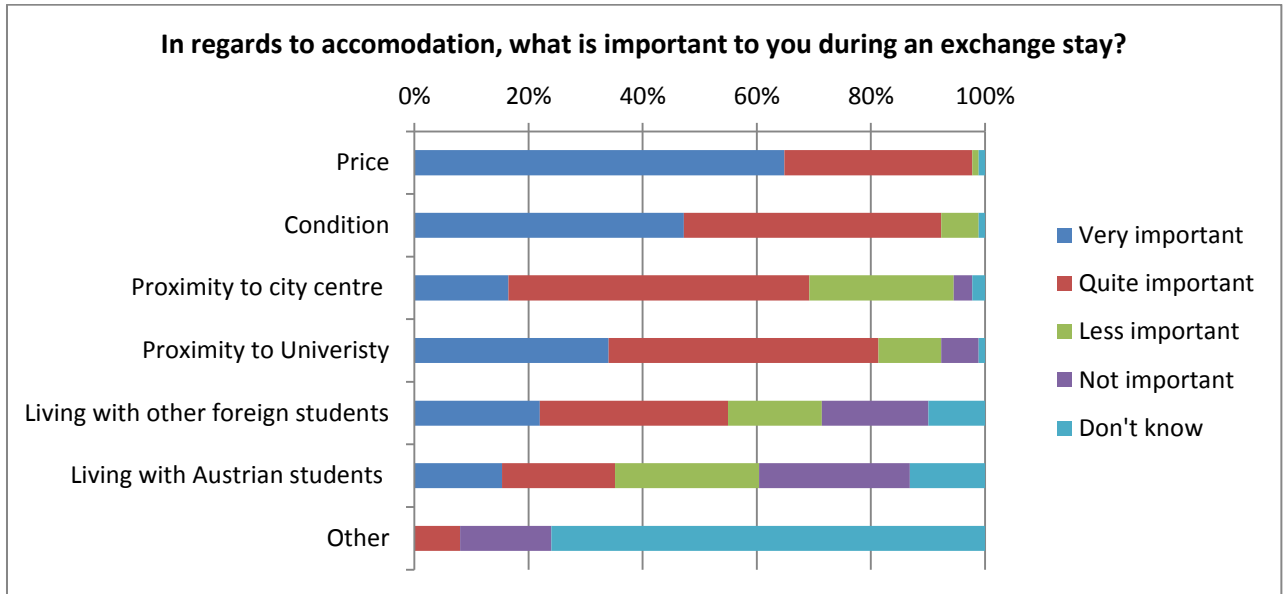


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

## 7. Academic and personal outcomes

### 7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

97% of the students believed the personal outcome of their stay at BOKU to be good or very good. 82% were also pleased with the academic outcome of their stay.

### 7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

72% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 54% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU, 45% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies and 39% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies.

See Figure 9 for all responses.

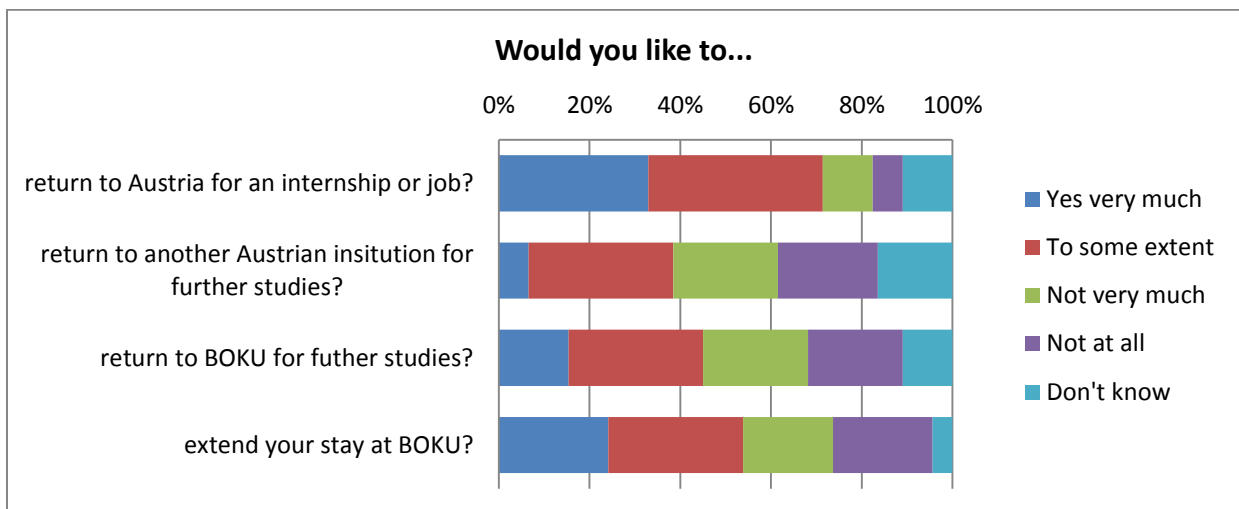


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria



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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 students complained about the OEAD suggesting expensive and unsuitable accommodation. Two of the students even mentioned that the OEAD dorm they lived in (Sechshauserstrasse) was located in a dangerous area. Another student had problems while finding a parking space. One student mentioned that the professors teaching the courses in English did not have sufficient English proficiency themselves.

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

Students provided the following responses:

- 'Extend the work hours of ZIB.'
- 'Give the students the possibility to register for courses before they come to BOKU.'
- 'More international activities.'



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## 8. Background information

73% of the respondents were female and 27% male. 83 students spent the winter semester at BOKU, 2 students stayed for the whole academic year and 6 had alternative arrival and departure dates.

Students' nationalities are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Nationalities of students who took part in the evaluation questionnaire**

Nationality	Answer	%
French	20	22%
German	13	14%
Belgium	13	14%
Czech	4	4%
Italian	6	7%
Polish	4	4%
Finnish	1	1%
Slovakian	2	2%
Spanish	3	3%
Dutch	5	5%
Croatian	4	4%
Hungarian	2	2%
Slovenian	4	4%
Swiss	1	1%
China	1	1%
Greek	2	2%
Swedish	3	3%
Norway	2	2%
India	1	1%
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