



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2018-19

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the winter semester 2018-19 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. 86 questionnaires were returned.

1. Things that students appreciated the most at BOKU

Many exchange students had a positive experience at BOKU. When asked to name three things that they had appreciated at BOKU, 86 students collectively listed 261 responses. The most popular response was that students enjoyed the Welcome Days and events held on campus (40 responses). Students commented that 'The welcome days were very well organised!' and 'A lot of events were organized for erasmus students, it was easier to meet new people.' These responses indicate that Erasmus events played a key role in welcoming exchange students to BOKU, and in helping them to settle in to student life in Vienna. Therefore, it is no surprise that students also valued BOKU's friendly atmosphere and the welcome they received from other students. 39 respondents (15%) wrote that this was the case. Moreover, 31 students felt that teaching staff were friendly and approachable. Other responses to the survey dealt with courses and university life in general. 30 respondents valued the quality of education and small courses sizes, 21 students noted the flexibility of BOKU regarding exam dates and choice of course and 20 students wrote that BOKU had good administrative services.

See responses in Table 1.

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

Number	3 things appreciated by students	Answers	%
1	Welcome Days and other events	40	15%
2	Friendly atmosphere and students	39	15%
3	Teaching staff	31	12%
4	Quality of Education/ small and interesting courses	30	11%
5	Flexibility of the university (choice of course, exam dates)	21	8%
6	Good administrative services/ information	20	8%
7	University facilities (labs, libraries, TÜWI etc.)	18	7%
8	Erasmus student integration	11	4%
9	Campus and park	11	4%
10	ZIB staff/ newsletter	10	4%



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2. Things BOKU could do better for international students

Although most students were satisfied with their time at BOKU, some felt that there was room for improvement. 22 responses requested that BOKU improve its assessment procedure. Students felt that BOKU could better support its students by publishing exam dates earlier and releasing grades faster, which would make the process less stressful. 21 responses wanted BOKU to offer more help to short term students organising their studies, for instance with timetabling. Thirdly, 21 students also commented that many courses had overlapped. They stated that course clashes had made it difficult to organise their timetable, and requested that BOKU make its course blocks smaller, to prevent this issue from reoccurring. Other responses indicated that simplifying the administrative process, offering more events and having longer opening hours at ZIB could also be helpful to exchange students.

See Table 2 for responses.

Table 2. What students felt BOKU could improve upon (10 or more responses)

Number	3 things that BOKU could do better	Answer	%
1	Improve assessment procedure	22	14%
2	Facilitate short term students organising their studies/ help with timetabling	21	13%
3	Prevent courses from clashing/ course blocks are too big	21	13%
4	Simplified administrative process	14	9%
5	More events	13	8%
6	More availability of ZIB staff	11	7%
7	University facilities (Mensa, amount of group study space)	10	6%

3. Motivation, information and events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

98% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 1% carried out an internship and 1% worked on a thesis or research project. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department of Biotechnology
- Institute of Soil Research.

3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

Students decided to come to BOKU for several different reasons, with the most common factor being the desire to experience a different environment. 71% of respondents (83 students) had considered this to be important, followed by wanting to meet new people (77 responses), and cultural reasons (64 students). Other aspects included the desire to improve language proficiency, academic reasons and career plans. Some students also noted that



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they wanted to discover Vienna, that BOKU was relatively close to their home countries and that they appreciated the wide variety of courses offered by the university. These responses indicate that exchange students who come to BOKU are eager to be part of an international community, where they can make friends with people from different countries and cultures, and experience life in a multicultural city.

See Figure 1 for all responses.

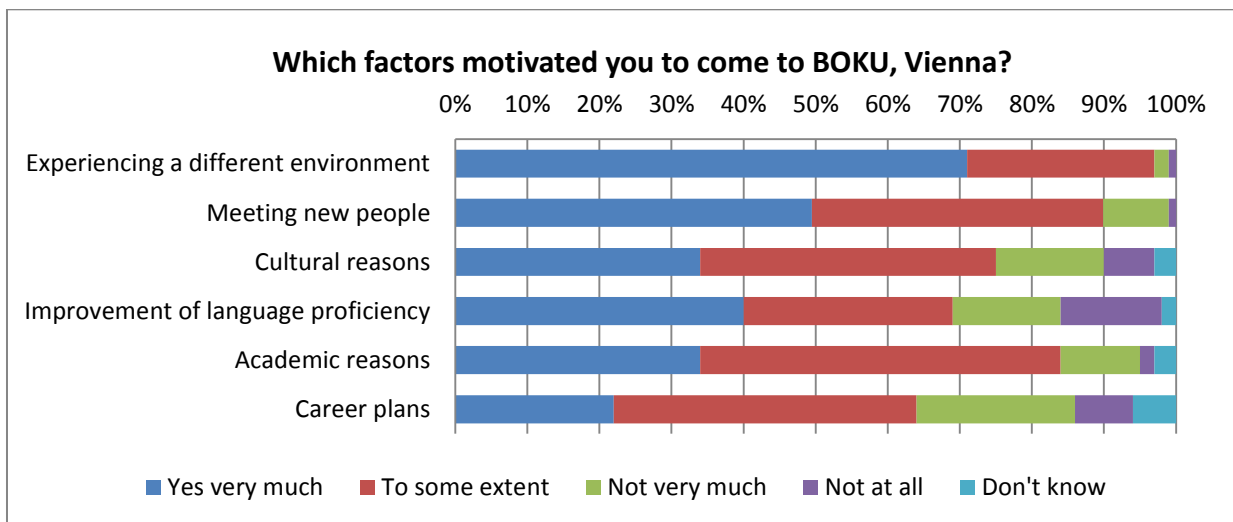


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

3.3 Information before the stay

Students were asked to note where they had found information about studying at BOKU before their stay. The most common response was that information had come from BOKU's website. Around 80% of respondents (69 students) had found this to be their most important source of information, with 58 students (68% of respondents) stating that they were informed by the exchange coordinator at their home universities. Other sources included the following:

- Students from home universities
- Mobility-Online
- The exchange coordinators at ZIB
- Departmental coordinators at BOKU
- Austrian exchange students at home universities.

Alternatively, some students had been informed by their professors, their buddies and by the EnvEuro website.

See Figure 2 for all responses.

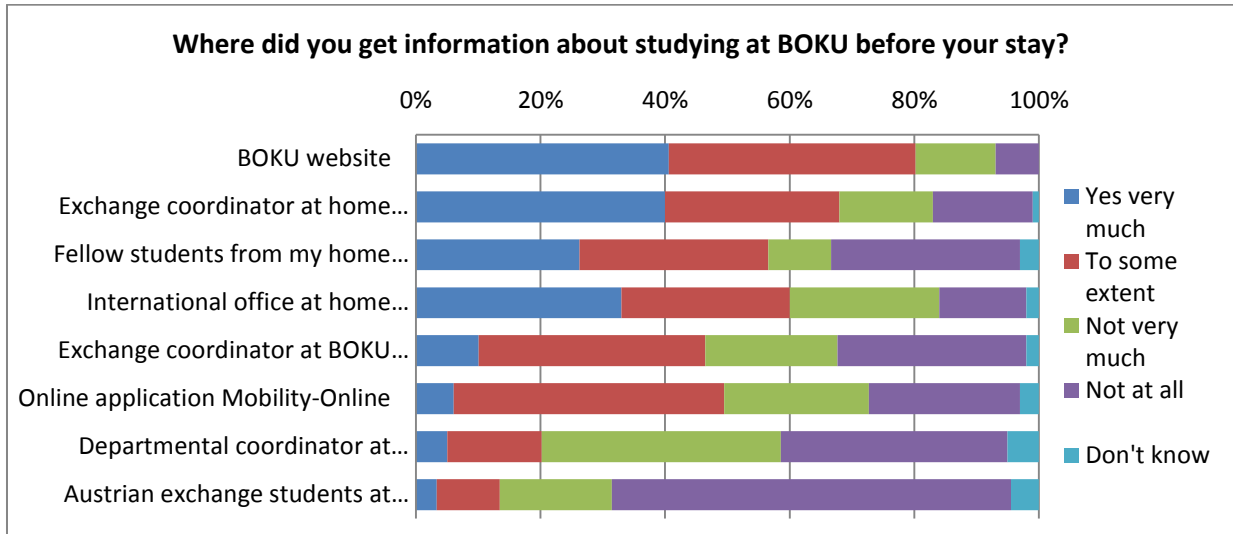


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

3.4 Information from BOKU

When asked to comment on the information that they had been given by BOKU, students had a mostly positive response. For instance, 94% of responses (81 students) were satisfied with the information they had received during their stay. Furthermore, 92% had appreciated the information given to them before their arrival, and 61% had received adequate information from their departments. Lastly, 50% of students were satisfied with the information given to them by other service departments.

All data can be seen in Figure 3.

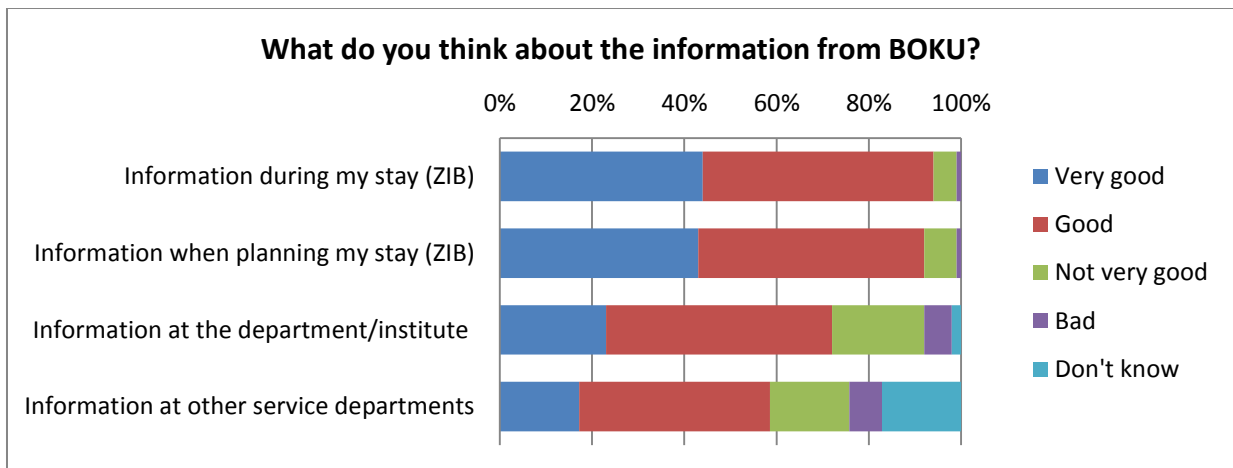


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

3.5 Mobility -Online

The survey was also used to collect student experiences of using Mobility-Online. It showed that the student response towards Mobility-Online was predominantly positive. The most common response was that the system sent out clear emails to students, clarifying the admissions procedure (mentioned 74 times). Moreover, 70 students thought that the system



was reliable, with 66 thinking that it was a reasonable effort. 79% of students were satisfied with the clarity of instructions in the data base, and 75% agreed that Mobility-Online was simple to fill in.

All responses are shown in Figure 4.

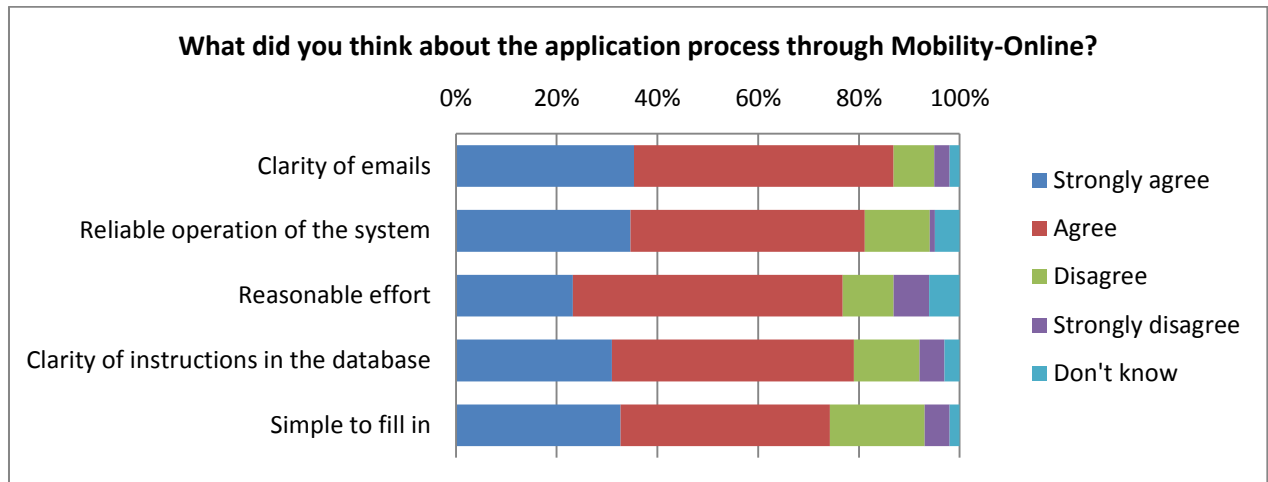


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility-Online

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

- Clarify that there are (or can be) two different Mobility online platforms (home school, guest school)
- Send emails to students when there is a problem with their documents
- Allow students to change the Learning Agreement digitally.

3.6 Welcome Days

88% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 76% of these students came away with a good or very good impression of the events. ZIB ran a wide variety of events, including a visit to a Heurigen (a traditional Viennese wine bar) and tours of campus and Vienna. Out of 82 responses, the most common answer was that students had enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people the most (15 responses). The Heurigen and getting to know campus also proved to be popular, both receiving 13 responses. Students had also enjoyed participating in the other Welcome Days events, and appreciated the general information that they had been given.

Students also provided suggestions on how to improve the Welcome Days. The most common suggestions were offering a wider variety of events, and holding events in different parts of Vienna. Students felt this would allow them to meet more people, and to get better acquainted with their new city.



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Other suggestions included:

- Placing students into smaller groups, or grouping together students from the same degree
- Allowing more time for registration, and simplifying the registration process
- Holding more 'get to know people' events.

3.7 BOKUonline info session

A BOKUonline information session had also been offered as part of the Welcome Days. Out of the 86 students who had answered the survey, 75 had attended this session. 71% of these students had found it helpful, as it had explained how to register for courses, and provided more information on individual professors and departments.

Although the response was largely positive, some students felt that the information session could be improved.

Feedback included:

- 'I think finding the things you need in BOKUonline is pretty self-explanatory. I don't think it needs a whole information session.'
- 'Was helpful but rushed - to enough time for questions.'

3.8 Buddy system

BOKU has implemented a Buddy system, to allow exchange students to meet and befriend their Austrian classmates. This enables new students to get help with administrative processes, and gain more of an insight into life in Vienna. In the 2019-20 winter semester survey, 63 respondents stated that they had had a buddy. Out of these 63 students, 37% said their buddies had helped them with their first steps after their arrival, and 30% received help with getting used to academic life. 23 respondents also had buddies who could help them adapt to social life in Vienna.

Those who had decided not to get a Buddy did so for different reasons. These included having friends or flat mates who could help them, or being a native German speaker who felt that they would not have any difficulties in adjusting to life in Austria. Several students also noted that their Buddy never contacted them, or never had time to meet.

All responses are noted in Figure 5.

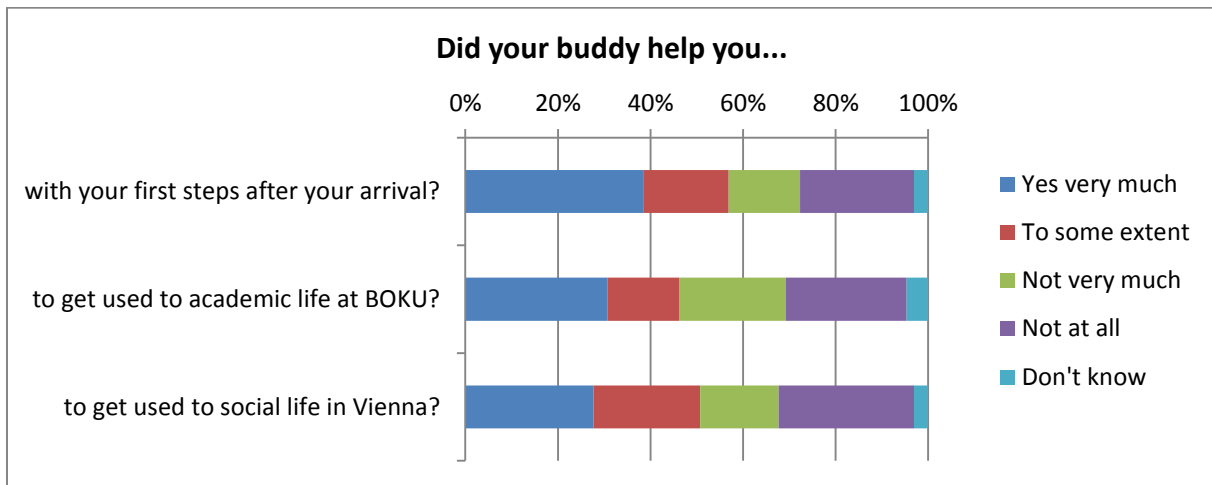


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

Over the course of the semester, ZIB sent out an international newsletter to students, informing them about different events at the university. 77 students who responded to the survey either read this newsletter regularly (36%) or now and then (54%). 76% of respondents (65 students) found the information it provided useful, and other students offered suggestions on how to improve the newsletter. One student requested 'mountain trips for students every month,' with another commenting that most of the information was already available on Facebook.

3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group

73 survey respondents (85%) had joined the 'ESN BOKU Incomings' Facebook group, and 63 students had found it useful. When asked why they had not joined the group, the only response given by students was that they did not have a Facebook account. Many students found the information helpful, but one student noted that the page could be more helpful if it was more active and promoted more events.

3.11 Stammtisch

BOKU held a weekly *Stammtisch*, encouraging students to meet new people. Out of 86 survey responses, 63 stated that students had either attended the *Stammtisch* regularly or every now and then. Student suggestions on how to improve the event included the following:

- Organise more games and activities
- Hold the Stammtisch in different venues
- Have some Stammtisch events at TUWI
- Hold the events in non-smoking bars or cafes.

3.12 Other events

Two of the main events held during the Welcome Days were the *Willkommens-Heuriger* and the Adventparty for International Students. 57 students who answered the survey had also



attended the Heuriger, with 53 finding it enjoyable. The Adventparty was attended by 40 students who responded to the survey, and 35 of them had enjoyed the event.

3.13 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students

When asked to provide feedback for these two events, students wrote the following:

- The Heuriger had been a very popular event
- Most students enjoyed the Advent party
- Students wanted more ice breaker games at Welcome Day events.

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

The survey included questions about the infrastructure at BOKU, ranging from library access to the food supply. 75 out of 86 respondents were happy with the facilities at BOKU in general, with a further 71 students being satisfied with the social events on offer. Additionally, 69 respondents were pleased with the access to computers and media, and 63 appreciated the access that they had had to libraries. The food supply at BOKU was the area where most students indicated there was room for improvement, namely by selling cheaper food in the Mensa.

Other suggestions for improvement included:

- Allowing students to take their things into the library
- Opening the library at weekends
- Reducing the price of sports activities for exchange students.

All responses are noted in Figure 6.

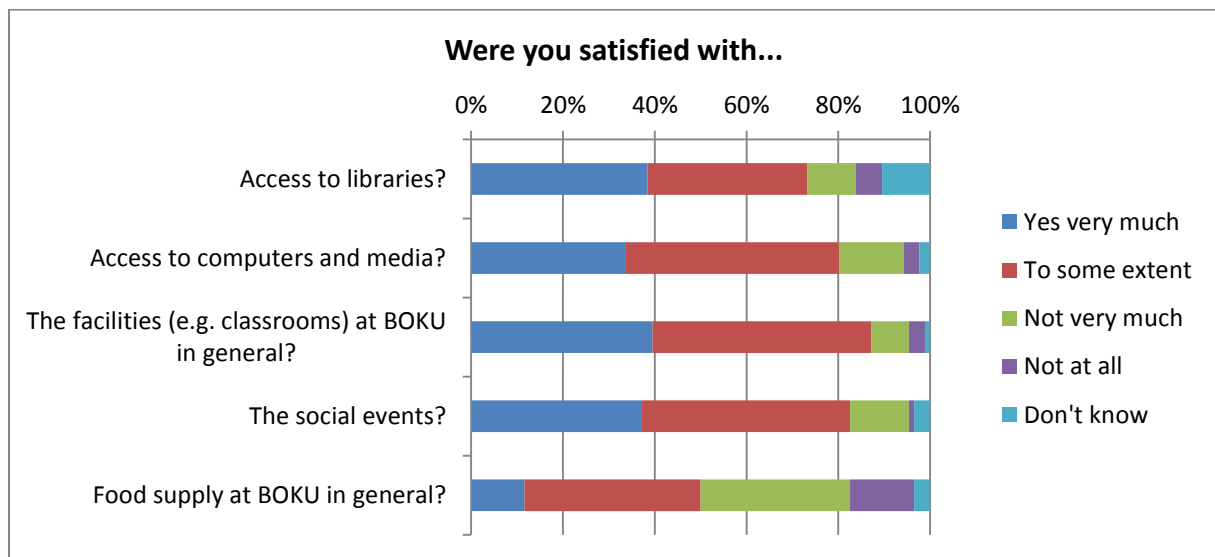


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU



5. Languages

5.1 Language problems

Students were also asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, as most were not native German speakers. Out of 86 respondents, 79 reported that they had not regularly any problems with the language. Those who had had problems stated that those had been in the classroom (26 students), in contact with Austrian students (20 students) and with written assignments (11 students). Other responses indicated that some students had encountered issues with oral exams, in their private life, or when dealing with professors or administrators at BOKU.

Data can be seen in Figure 7.

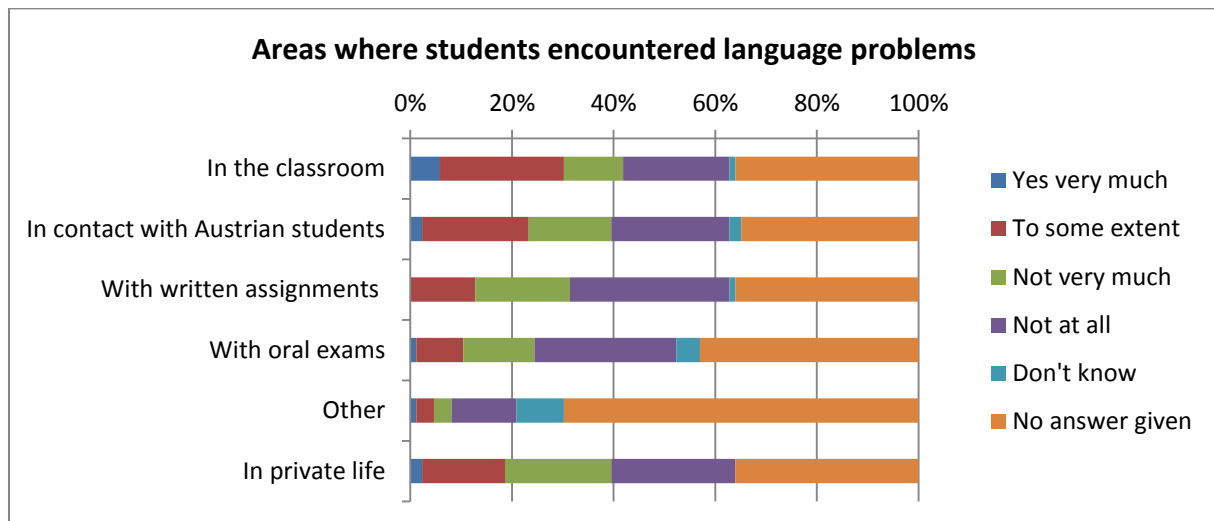


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

5.2 German language courses

Students had the option to take a German course both before and during the semester. 10 students who responded to the survey had enrolled on an intensive German course before the semester started, and 11 students took a German course during the semester at BOKU. 2 students chose to follow an external German course during the semester. Students were also able to participate in the Tandem scheme, where they could both teach and learn from another student in a different language. 14 students who responded to the survey took part in this scheme.

6. Accommodation

Students had the option of either living in a student residence organised by the OeAD, of finding their own room in a student residence or moving into private accommodation, such as a flat share. The latter was the most common type of accommodation amongst the survey respondents, chosen by 41 students (48%). 24 students decided upon the first option (28%), and 21 students chose to find a room in a student residence themselves (24%).



6.1 Satisfaction with accommodation

20 respondents (23%) reported that they were satisfied with OeAD accommodation, and 19 (22%) were pleased with the residences that they had chosen themselves. The majority of students (46%) valued their private accommodation.

Many students had experienced difficulties in finding accommodation. Comments included:

- Students having difficulties in finding accommodation in Vienna
- The OeAD asking for an expensive deposit
- Living far away from BOKU.

6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

When asked to list important factors in choosing accommodation, students revealed that price was their biggest consideration. 83 out of 86 respondents said it was the most decisive factor, followed by the condition of the property (77 students), proximity to the university (65 students) and proximity to the city centre (60 students). Other factors were living with other foreign students or exchange students.

All responses are recorded in Figure 8.

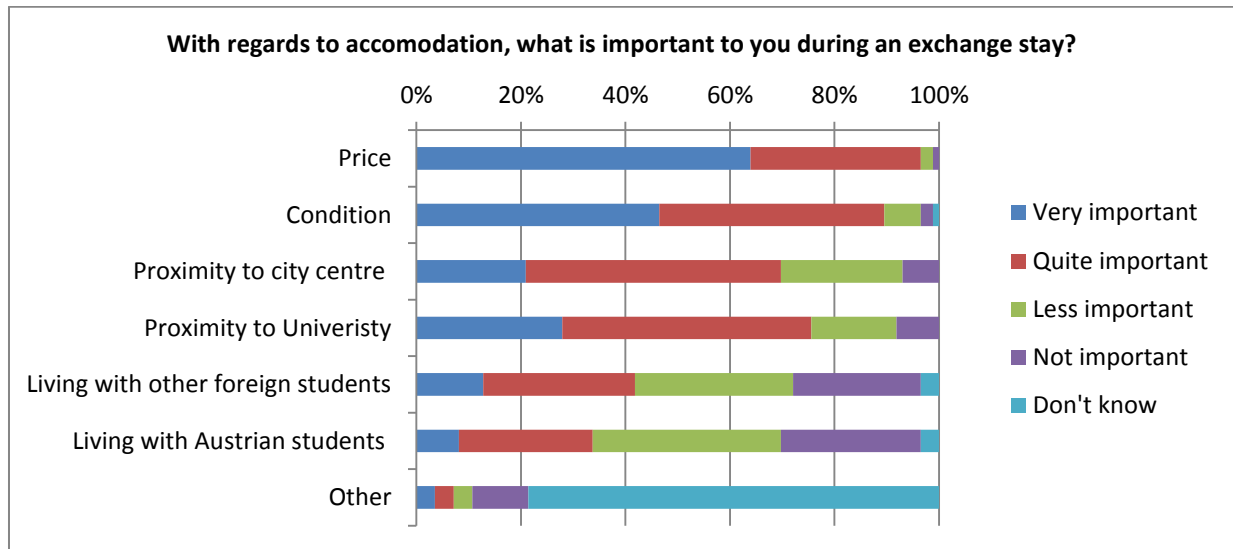


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

7. Academic and personal outcomes

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

Students were also asked to evaluate both the academic and personal outcome of their stay at BOKU. Respondents gave a largely positive response to both questions, with 81 students satisfied with the personal outcome and 69 students satisfied with the academic outcome of their stay.



7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

42 out of 86 respondents would be happy to extend their stay at BOKU. Moreover, 64 would consider returning to Austria for a job or an internship, 42 would return to BOKU for further study and 35 would consider studying at another Austrian institution. These responses are predominantly positive. They indicate that exchange students valued their time at BOKU, and are eager to pursue both academic and employment opportunities at BOKU or in Austria in the future.

All responses can be found in Figure 9.

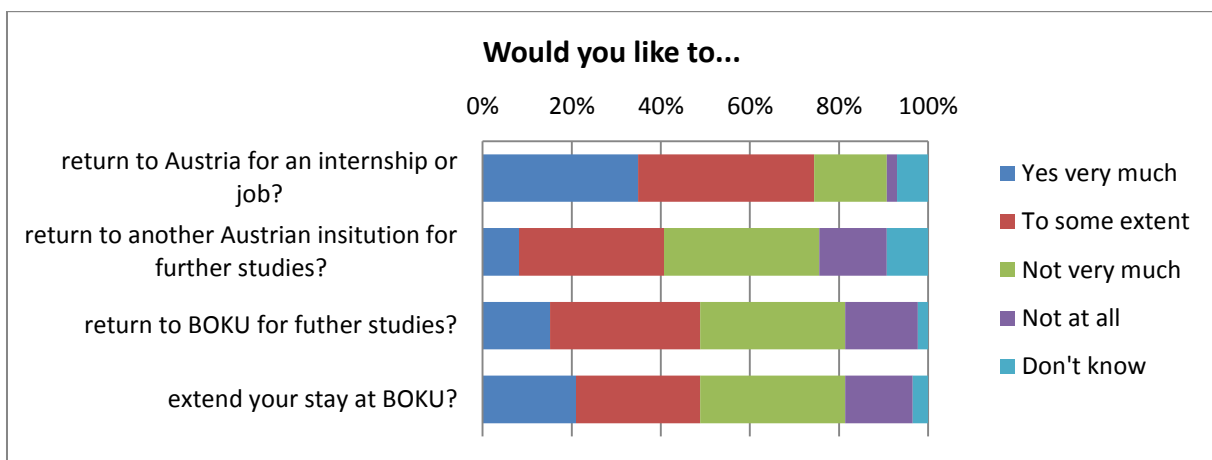


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

7.3 Situations requiring special attention

The majority of students did not encounter many problems during their time at BOKU. Some students did, however, find themselves in situations requiring special attention. These situations ranged from a trip to the doctors to issues with course management and failing an exam.

7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Provide more information on events in Vienna
- Improve the availability of ZIB staff
- Ask professors to provide more detailed course descriptions.



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8. Background information

57 survey respondents were female and 29 were male. The majority of respondents (77) were at BOKU for the winter semester, 2 were there for the full academic year and 7 had alternative arrival and departure dates.

Exchange students came to BOKU from various countries. The most common nationalities were French and German, both consisting of 20 survey respondents. 12 Belgian students spent the winter semester at BOKU, as well as 6 Italians and 6 Dutch. Other nationalities included Finnish, Spanish and Slovakian, among others.

All nationalities are listed in the table below:

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

Nationality	Answer	%
French	20	23%
German	20	23%
Belgium	12	14%
Italian	6	7%
Dutch	6	7%
Finnish	2	2%
Slovakian	2	2%
Spanish	2	2%
Croatian	2	2%
Norway	2	2%
Turkish	2	2%
Czech	1	1%
Polish	1	1%
New Zealand	1	1%
Swiss	1	1%
European	1	1%
Lao	1	1%
Greek	1	1%
Nepal	1	1%
Peru	1	1%
Denmark	1	1%
SUM	86	100%