



**Universität für Bodenkultur Wien**  
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## Exchange Studies at BOKU

### Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, summer semester 2020

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the summer semester 2020 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. 80 questionnaires were returned.

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

The majority of international students have stated in their questionnaires that they have especially appreciated the welcome days and the flexibility of the university. Many students also mentioned that the teaching staff and courses, the Events (included ESN) and the friendly atmosphere was among the things they appreciated the most at the university. The teachers were being friendly towards the students and always ready to help whenever the students needed assistance.

The campuses of BOKU were noted not only for their architectural style and pleasant surroundings (some students specifically mentioned “beautiful parks and buildings” as one of the things that they appreciated the most in BOKU), but also the modern equipment of laboratories and the useful facilities, such as the canteen or the library. The language courses were also praised as one of the highlights of the BOKU University.

The incoming students referred to ZIB staff as being very welcoming, helpful and friendly towards them. Some students also mentioned online services of BOKU, such as how fast the Uni was able to turn the courses into online courses due to Covid-19. Last but not least, the buddy system, the Viennese / Austrian culture, the Buddy system and the public transport in Vienna was mentioned. See all responses in Table 1.

	<b>3 things appreciated by students</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>%</b>
2	Welcome Days / Intro week	13	13%
	Flexibility of the university (choice of course, exam dates)	17	18%
4	Teaching staff	10	10%
6	Friendly atmosphere	8	8%

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

Although most of the students praised BOKU, some of them believed that there are some issues that should be dealt with, and that there was still room for improvement. For example, in some responses it was mentioned that the study process should be better adapted to the needs of students, as the courses that the students want to take in one semester often overlap, and the amount of ECTS does not always correspond to the amount of workload for the course. Some students wrote that they would appreciate more help with organizing and help with the timetable with the different courses. Many students also found



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the administrative process to difficult and too long. They are asking for a more simplified administrative process and make it less bureaucratic.

Some students wished for more language courses with more different levels and less expensive as the current. Some had also wished that they would get more help finding accommodation, as it is not easy to find accommodation for a reasonable price. Some students also felt that at times it was difficult for them to get integrated into the student community at BOKU. As a possible solution; they suggested organizing more events where Austrian and international students could meet and due to Covid-19 arrange more “Distance-friendly” online event. Last but not least some students would have appreciated to get information before arriving to Vienna and setting the exam dates in advance. See Table 2 for responses.

**Table 1. What students felt could be improved at BOKU**

<b>Number</b>	<b>3 things that BOKU could do better</b>
1	Overlapping and full courses. More help organising
2	Welcomedays should be more in english (also more posters/presentations of what's going on on BOKU)
3	Simplify the administrative part (less bureaucracy)
4	Help with timetable

1: Answer 12: 17 %

2: Answer 12: 17 %

3: Answer 9: 13 %

4: Answer 5: 7 %

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

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

84,50% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 3% took an internship and 12,40% worked on a thesis or research project. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department für Angewandte Genetik und Zellbiologie
- IFA – Tulln-Institute of bioanalysis and agrometabolomics
- IBF, good supervisor & support
- Food technology
- Landscape planning institute

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



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The main factors which motivated students to come to BOKU were to experience a new environment and improvement of language skills Academic reasons, cultural reasons and meeting new people, also proved important for students (see Figure 1).

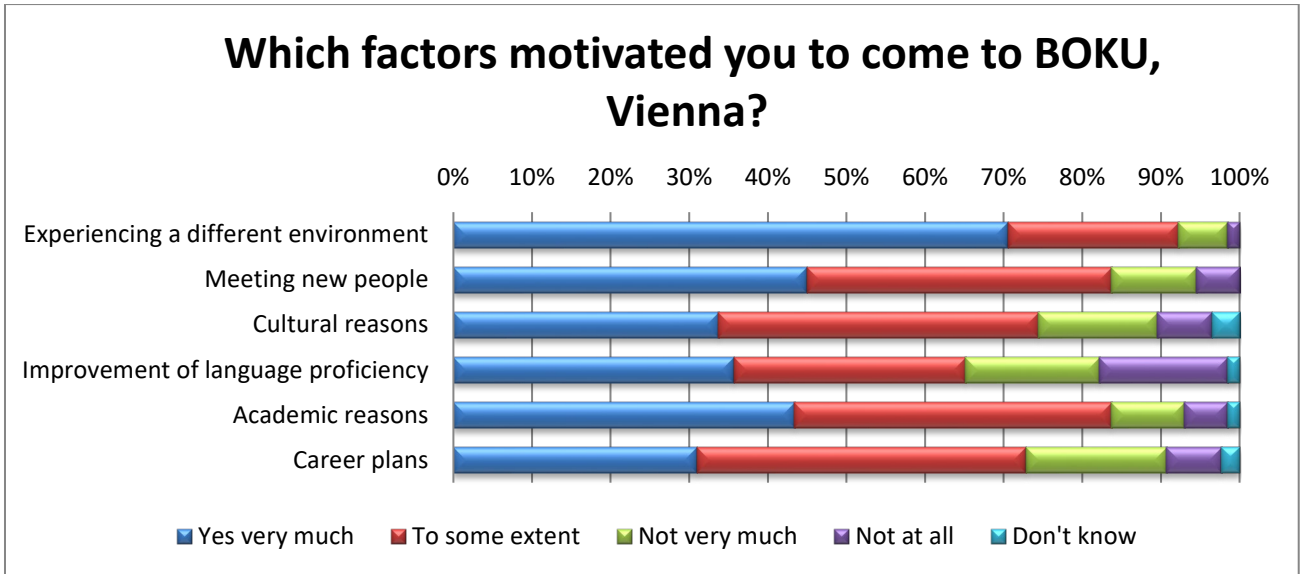
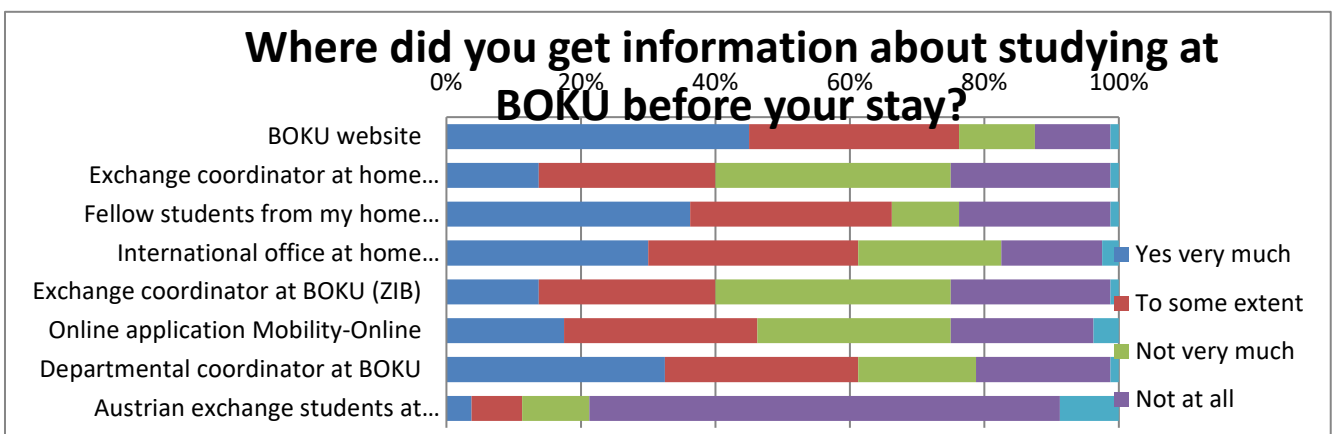


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

Finally, future carer plans played an important role for incoming students, when they decided to study abroad.

### 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 45% of students. Other major sources of information included exchange coordinators, both at home university and at BOKU, fellow students and the international office at home universities. See Figure 2 for all responses.





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

### 3.4 Information from BOKU

91% of students claimed that they found the information they received from the Center for International Relations (ZIB) during their stay either good or very good. 94% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 69% valued the information from their department or institute and 60% expressed positive opinions on the information from other service departments. All data can be seen in Figure 3.

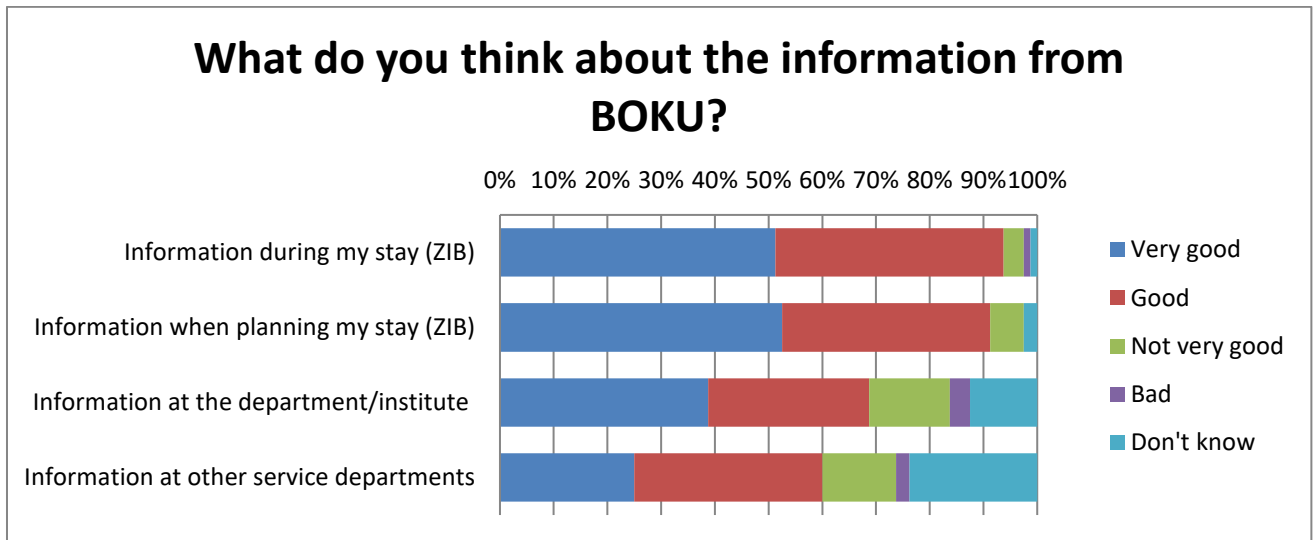


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

### 3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were largely positive. 85% of students were pleased with the clarity of the emails, and 83,75% believed that the operation of the system was reliable. 72,50% felt that the application form was simple to fill. 71,25% thought the instructions in the database were clear and easy to understand. All responses can be found in Figure 4.

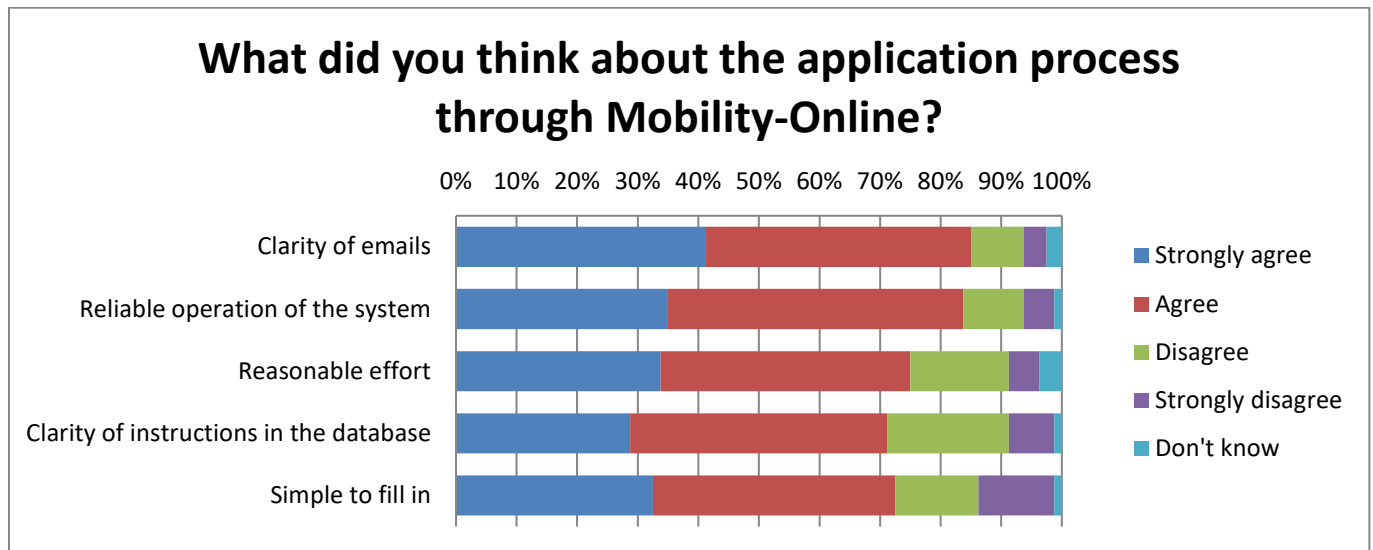


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility Online

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

- There was a very unclear communication from BOKU, and if there was any misunderstandings, it was made very clear that the student was wrong, and causing the misunderstanding, instead of trying to help.
- It was a mess filling in Mobility Online & way too much paperwork
- Better translation in English and overview
- Better description of how to fill out "Changes during mobility" and where coordinator should sign it etc.
- Shorter the emails, or write them as bullet points or steps!
- Too many papers!! And the website doesn't make it easy to know where to look for information.
- Not necessary for students with the right background to email teachers for admittance to their course, that is unnecessary work which takes a lot of time, and all these courses were definitely not too hard for me.
- it is impossible to plan what documents you need when you cant see the next step
- very confusing because of the different platforms.

- **3.6 Welcome Days**

81,25% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 77,5% of them reported that they had a good or very good overall impression.

Students also could elaborate on what they liked and enjoyed the most in particular. An equal amount (13 students) chose meeting people another amount (15 students) chose the events and the activities (12 students). 11 students mentioned getting to know campus and the general information given and the explanation of Boku Online. Students also mentioned enjoying the Heurigen-tour, the Weinwandertag, the ZIB-team and the buddy system.



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When asked how they thought the Welcome Days could be improved, the responses were usually the following:

- More 'get to know people' games and events e.g. Heurigen especially in the first week
- More time for registration/ simplified registration process
- Meeting with students of same degree/ meeting in smaller groups
- Language course is overlapping activities
- Food during the exploration of the uni
- More varied events/ more events around Vienna
- Sometimes the information provided during the info session could be found online, so it was too long
- Everything was repeated (eng. & ger.)
- More information about "living" the campus: where to eat, go out etc.
- More interaction with locals

### **3.7 BOKUonline info session**

81,25% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 75% 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 18,75% of students who didn't attend the info session, the main reasons for their absence were that they found it too rushed. It was too much information when they hadn't seen BOKUonline yet.

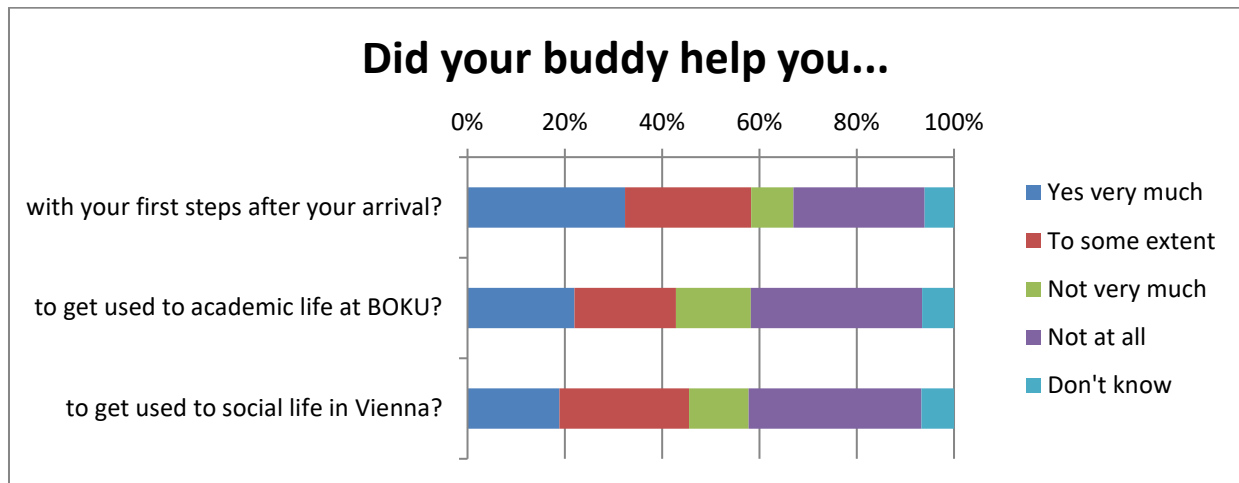
### **3.8 Buddy system**

All exchange students were offered a chance to have a Buddy, an Austrian student who could help them with their arrival in Vienna and to get used to life at BOKU and in the city. 66% of respondents took this opportunity. Reasons given by those who did not 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, they had a buddy but never met or that

55,71% of students felt that their Buddies assisted them with the first steps after their arrival in Vienna. 45% said they helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and 49% appreciated that their Buddies helped them get used to social life in Vienna (see Figure 5).



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**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 did not live in Vienna or he/she was busy with something else.

### 3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

21,25% of students who answered the feedback questionnaire said that they read the weekly International newsletter regularly, 53,75% saying they read it now and then. 51,50% found the included information useful. When asked what could be improved in the newsletter, students suggested to send the letter a bit earlier, and use the newsletter to inform about internships offers.

### 3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group

86,25% of students joined the ESN BOKU incomings Facebook page. 74% cited the page as being useful for different purposes, from reminding about the departure checklist to finding information about future events and activities. For students who didn't join the Facebook page, the only reason given was that they did not have a Facebook account.

### 3.11 Stammtisch

67,5% 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. Due to corona the online version of Stammtisch was appreciated. Several students also suggested organizing different themes for every Tuesdays.

**3.12 Other events** The Willkommens-Heuriger (Viennese Wine Bar) was attended by 66,25% of respondents, 3,75% attended the Apfelstrudel goes international event.

### 3.13 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students



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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. Most of the students responded that they liked the information as it was, and that it has been very helpful. However, some of them suggested the following:

- Make an easily searchable information booklet with all the relevant information. Sometimes it was really searching for the right information (printers etc.)
- Well BOKU could make improve ALL it's information by having a simpler and more predictable structure for things. Have a clear plan for the semester ready from day 1 for example. But when you have so many locations, homepages and courses. You'll need a lot more information as a student. In Copenhagen they just have one long hallway with all event and group posters and four courses with set structures per semester. try something like that.
- Would be an idea to explain more before arrival.
- Sometimes not enough tickets for everyone.
- Maybe plan the events on 3 weeks. First one is the welcome days and then many events every 2 days with sport contest, parties, visits etc...

#### 4. Infrastructure at BOKU

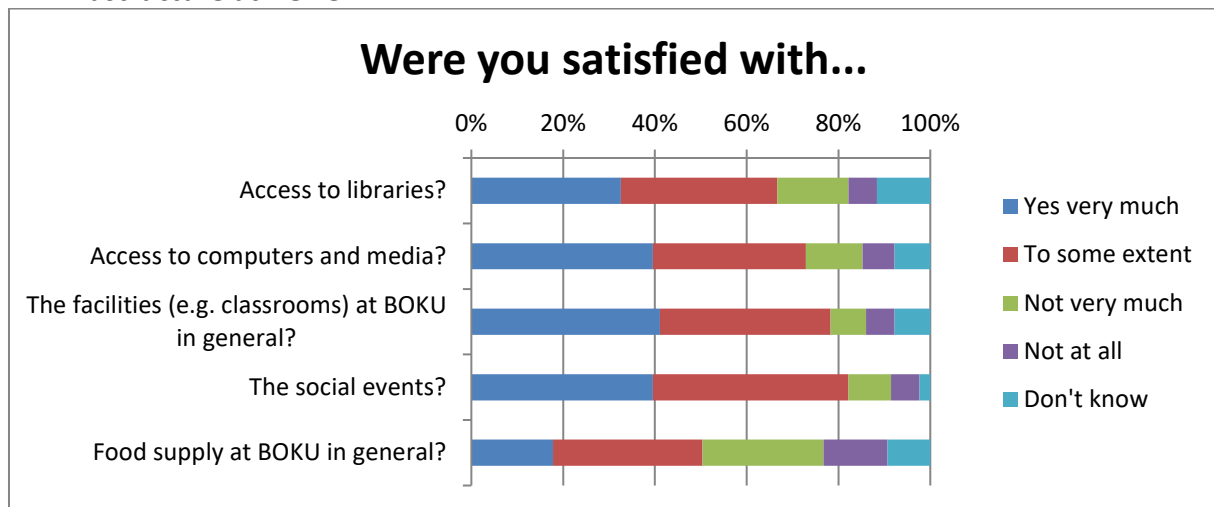


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

#### 5. Languages

##### 5.1 Language problems

3,17% of international students experienced language problems regularly, 27% now and then, and 33,33% never had any difficulties.

Of the 30% of students who did have language problems, they mostly occurred in the classroom and when students came into contact with Austrian 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 Austrian accent (see Figure 7).



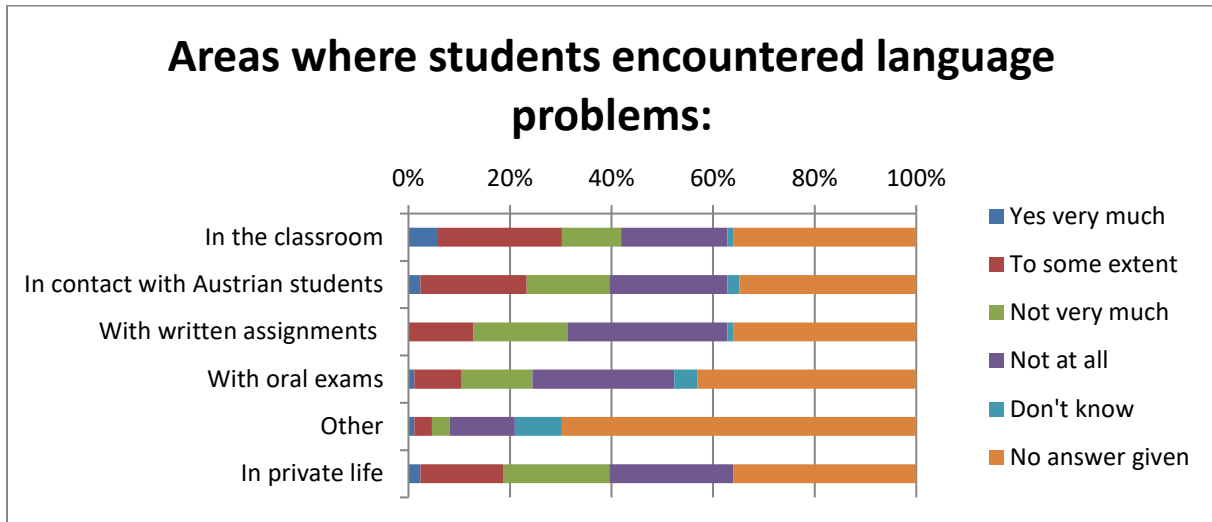


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

## 5.2 German language courses and Tandem

12,75% of respondents took part in an intensive German language course before the semester 23,75% took one during the semester and 17,5% participated in the Tandem programme.

## 6. Accommodation

### 6.1 Accommodation type

Around 65% of the students who submitted the questionnaire lived in student residences during their stay in Vienna – 23,75% in student residences organised by the OeAD and 41,24% in those they had organised themselves. 35% lived in private accommodation (such as a shared flat).

Commenting on their accommodation, some students said that private accommodation was difficult to find and that the rent in Vienna was higher than expected. Due to Covid-19 it was even harder to find an accommodation.

### 6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

The most important factor for students when choosing their accommodation was the price – 89% of respondents rated this as quite or very important. Condition was the second biggest factor (a priority for 86% of students), followed by proximity to the university; being important for 82,5% of students and the city center (81,25%).

Living with other international students was a priority to 66 %, and 49% saying that living with Austrian students was important to them.

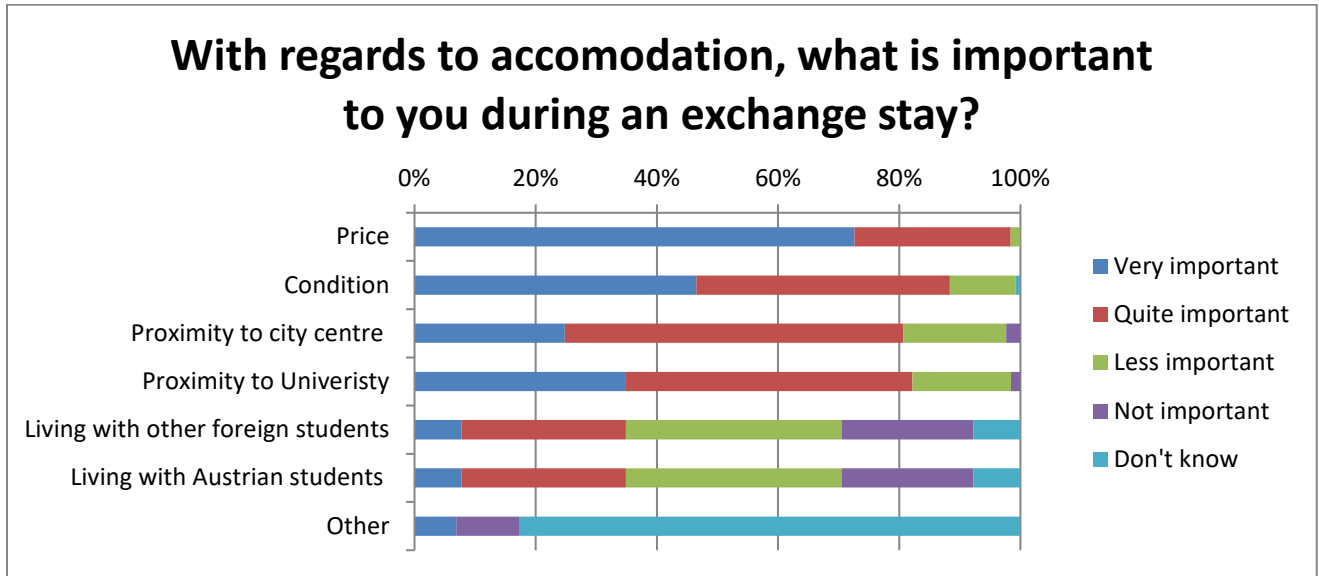


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

## 7. Academic and personal outcomes

### 7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

85% of the students believed the personal outcome of their stay at BOKU to be good or very good. 82% thought the academic outcome was also good or very good.

### 7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

77,50% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 43,25% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU, 52,5% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies and 52,5% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies (see Figure 9).

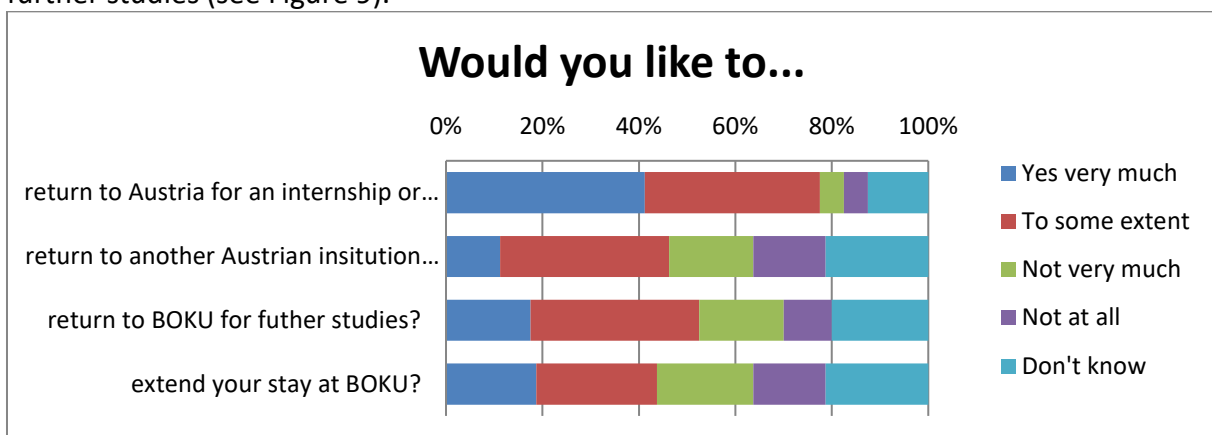


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

### 7.3 Situations requiring special attention



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Students were asked if they experienced any situations during their study abroad which required special attention. For most people, corona was a big issue. Some students took home earlier as expected because of the strict isolation and the lockdown in Vienna during autumn. The isolation caused a slight depression for some students. However, some students were very grateful for Bokus flexibility and ability to do the courses online.

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

The following responses were suggested:

- Make available organizational - practical info's also before arriving to BOKU
- More help in recommending Sim-karte may be. I was really frustrated while searching for nice sim card.
- Probably organising a reunion after the first month of classes to check if everything is going as planned with the courses and so on, and if anyone needs help/support. Also useful at the end of the semester.
- No, I think it was all handled good. Except for some difficulties with online environments like Mobility Online, but this is more due to the interface.
- Trying to find new ways to do activities with the situation of Covid-19
- I think BOKU did great job in general. I don't really have anything to complain. Application process was a bit confusing now and then but still very manageable.

#### **7.5 Due to Covid-19 in the SS 20 there was an extra question: How did you experience the changes due to Covid-19 pandemics? Do you have any recommendations for BOKU – IR or BOKU general to improve?**

- To send the informative emails also in English
- For me, it was fine. Some information was hard to come by at first (like one of the courses being apparently canceled) but it all got cleared up over time.
- I think many courses responded well to the changes needed to allow for online teaching. I have been able to take all my courses. Some courses required group work, which however was a real difficulty.
- A good thing would be to translate some news about the Covid-19 situation so as the international students to be aware and also the university announcements e.g. regarding the new regulations for online exams.
- Professors generally heavily underestimated the effect that distance learning has on the quality (much lower) of teaching & learning (also not so nice without libraries..)
- It was really hard not to interact with other people.

#### **8. Background information**

70% of the respondents were female and 30% male. 58 students spent the summer semester at BOKU, 1 for the winter, 17 students stayed for the whole academic year and 4 had alternative arrival and departure dates.



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

<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>%</b>
French	18	23%
German	10	13%
Belgium	6	8%
Switzerland	3	4 %
Italian	9	11%
Dutch	1	1%
Finnish	3	4%
Polish	3	4%
Norwegian	2	3%
Croatian	3	4%
Spain	5	6%
USA	1	1%
Czech	2	3%
British	1	1%
Sweden	2	3%
Denmark	2	3%
Peru	1	1%
Greek	2	3%
Austria	1	1%
Belgium	1	1%
Nepal	1	1%
Hungarian	1	1%
Bulgarian	1	1%
EGY	1	1%
	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>