

EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU

EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

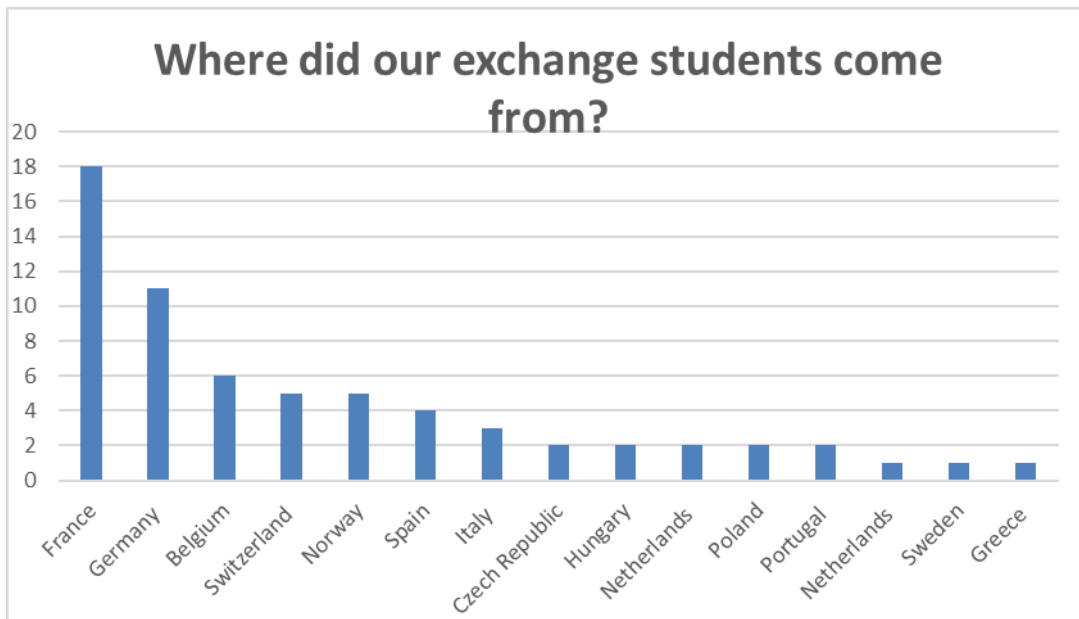
SUMMER SEMESTER 2022

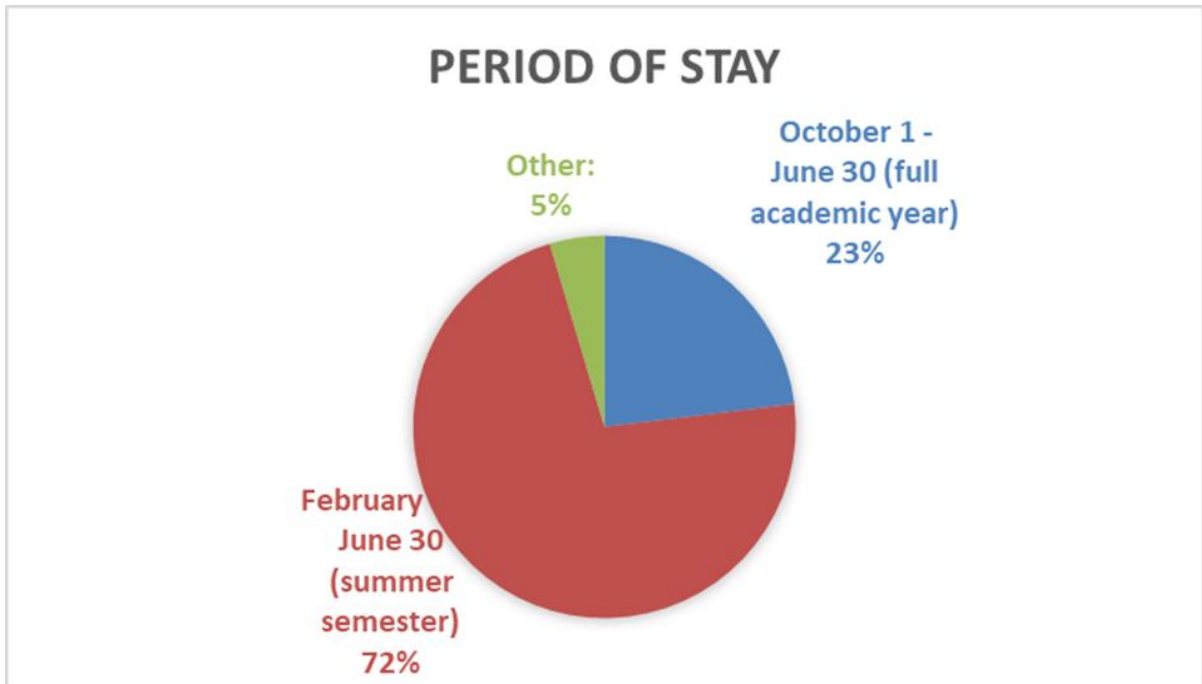
This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted among incoming students who attended BOKU during the summer semester of 2022. At the conclusion of their stay, the students completed a questionnaire that asked them to highlight the aspects of their experience they liked and disliked, as well as areas they felt could be improved. A total of 65 questionnaires were returned.

1. About the sample

In a sample of 65 exchange students, 69% were female, 27% were male, and 3% identified as diverse. The majority of these students originated from Germany (22%), Belgium (14%), and France (13%).

See all responses in Table 1.





Of the exchange students, 47 stayed in Vienna from February to June 30th. Fifteen students opted to stay at BOKU for the full academic year. The remaining three students selected different durations: May 2nd to July 1st, February 14th to July 26th, and October 1st, 2021 to September 30th, 2022.

2. Most appreciated things at BOKU

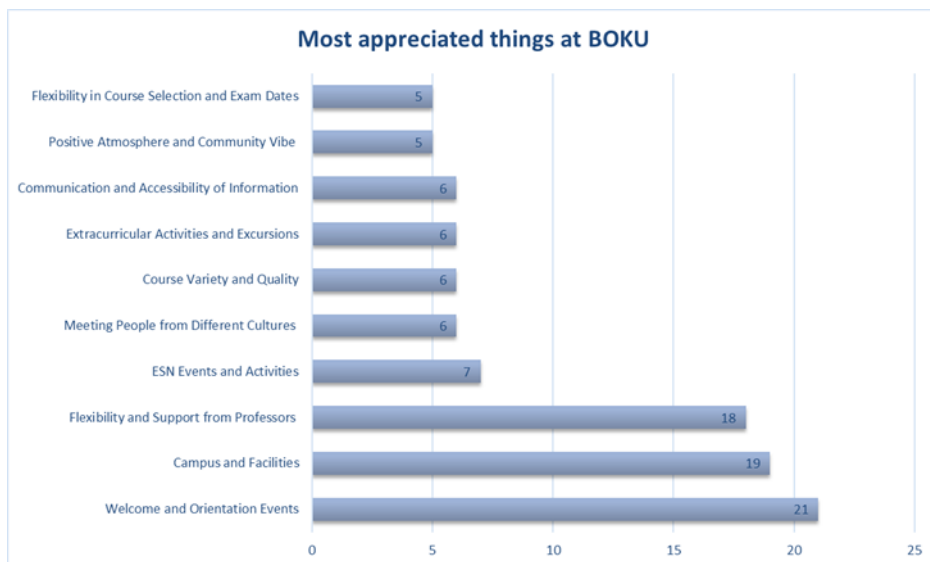


Figure 1. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

The survey reveals that exchange students at BOKU had a highly positive experience, with several key aspects standing out as particularly appreciated. The most favored aspect was the Welcome and Orientation Events, which received 21 mentions. Closely following, the flexibility and support from professors gathered 19

responses, highlighting the appreciation for their professionalism and helpfulness, especially during the challenging pandemic period. The BOKU campus and its facilities were also highly valued, with 18 mentions, underscoring the importance of a well-equipped and conducive learning environment. ESN events and activities were noted by 7 students as a highlight of their experience, providing valuable social and cultural engagement.

All data is shown in Table 3.

3. Things that could have been done better in international students' opinion

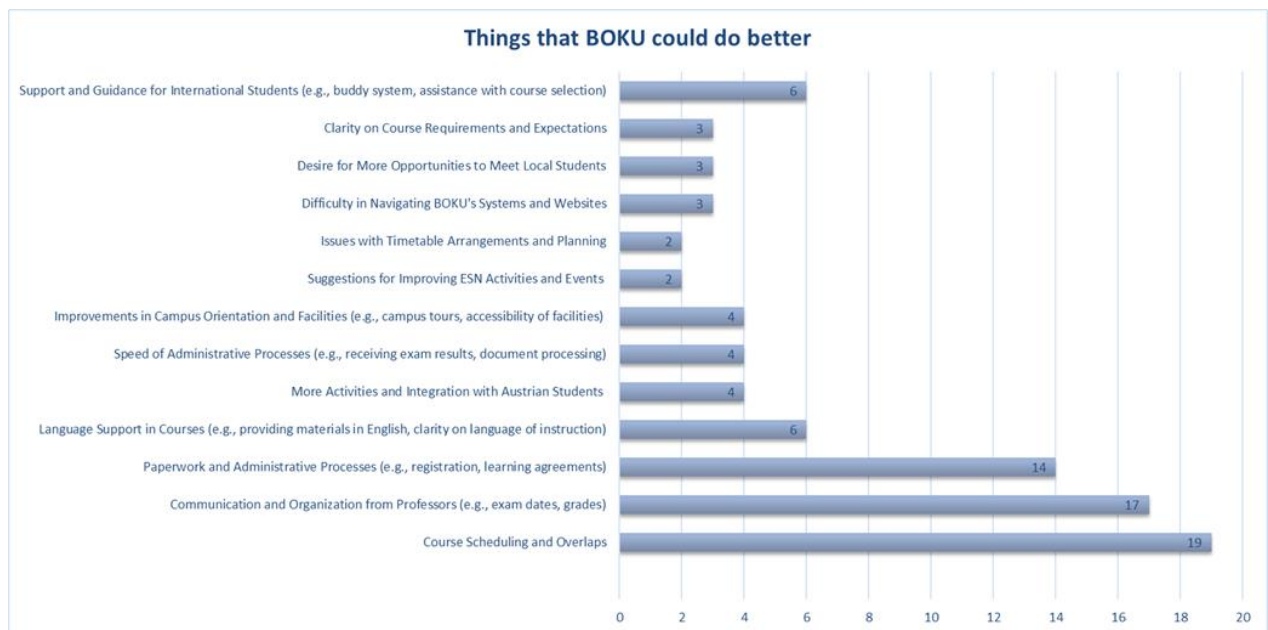


Figure 2. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

While the majority of students enjoyed their experience at BOKU, there were a few who believed that there is still scope for enhancement. 19 students expressed the belief that BOKU could improve its handling of Course Scheduling and Overlaps. 17 students voiced dissatisfaction with the Communication and Organization from Professors at BOKU, particularly concerning aspects such as clarity on exam dates and grades. 14 students expressed frustration with Paperwork and Administrative Processes at BOKU, including tasks such as registration and managing learning agreements. Additionally, six students noted challenges with Language Support in Courses, which encompassed issues like providing materials in English and clarity on the language of instruction. Furthermore, four students each cited difficulty in the following areas: More Activities and Integration with Austrian Students, Speed of Administrative Processes (e.g., receiving exam results, document processing), Improvements in Campus Orientation and Facilities (e.g., campus tours, accessibility of facilities), and Issues with Timetable Arrangements and Planning.

4. Motivation, information and events

4.1 Activities at BOKU

93% of students engaged in regular coursework, while 3% dedicated their efforts to thesis or research projects. Additionally, 3% pursued internships to complement their academic pursuits.

Students involved in thesis or research projects were based at the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology, where they found the experience enriching. They enjoyed collaborating with lab colleagues and the work itself. However, they encountered a setback due to construction work in the lab, which temporarily delayed their progress. At the Institute of Food Technology, students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work there. They appreciated the supportive and friendly environment provided by their colleagues.

4.2. Reasons for coming to BOKU

Students chose to attend BOKU for various reasons, with the primary motivation being the desire for a change of environment, cited by 86% of respondents as highly significant. Following closely behind were the eagerness to meet new people (58%) and cultural reasons (52%). Other factors contributing to their decision included the aspiration to enhance language skills, cultural enrichment, and career advancement plans.

All responses are shown in table 5.

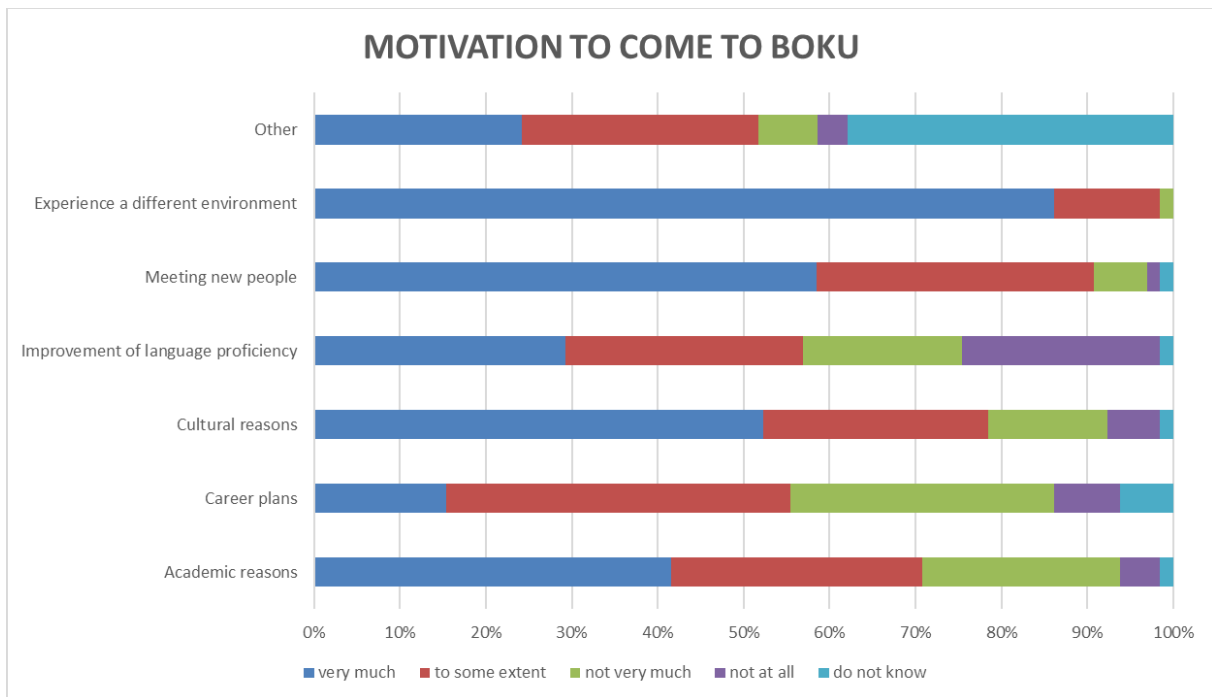


Figure 3. Motivation to come to BOKU

4.3. Information before the stay

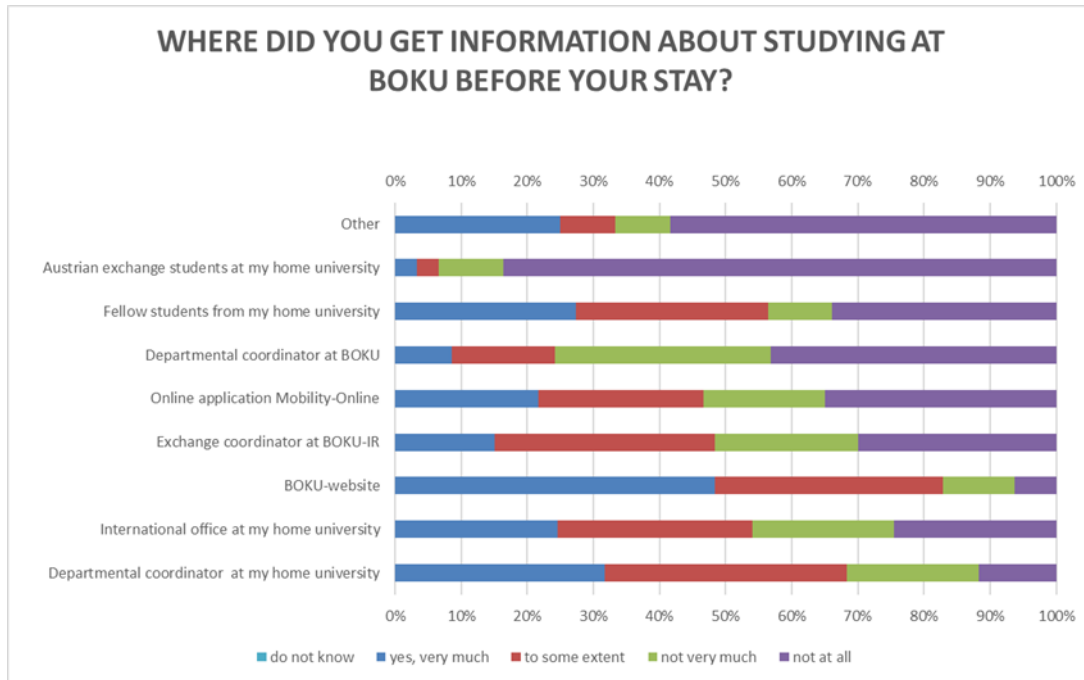


Figure 6. Sources of information used by students before their stay

The predominant source of information for students regarding studying at BOKU was the university's website, as indicated by approximately 47% of respondents, marking it as their primary resource.

Other sources included the following:

- Fellow student from home university (26%);
- Departmental coordinator at my home university (29%)
- International office at home university (23%);

4.4. Information from BOKU

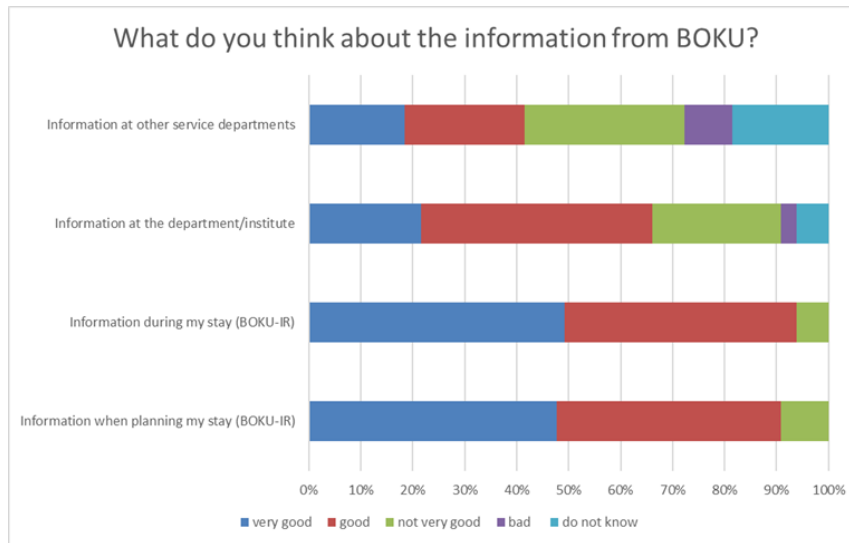


Figure 7. Evaluation of information from BOKU

As depicted in the diagram provided, students overwhelmingly responded positively when asked to comment on the information provided by BOKU. Notably, a staggering 90% of responses indicated satisfaction, with many ratings their experience as either high or very high. Moreover, 83% expressed appreciation for the information received during their stay at BOKU-IR, highlighting the effectiveness and value of the information provided by the institution throughout their time there.

4.5. Application Process – Mobility Online

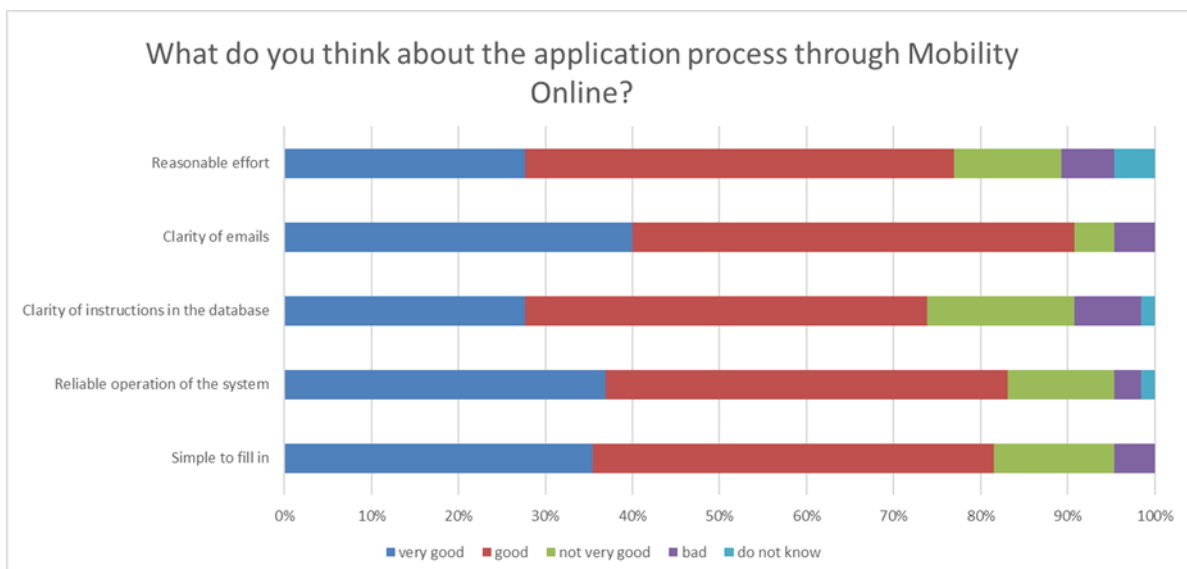


Figure 8. Evaluation of Mobility Online

According to the survey findings, 35% of students reported that filling out Opinions on Mobility Online was a straightforward process. Additionally, 27% of respondents indicated having a positive

experience with the clarity of instructions provided in the database. Students were also asked to leave comments on how the system could be improved.

These included:

- It is so many steps that it is difficult to follow, but it is doable,
- One can't upload files if the name is too long. It would be good to have that mentioned next to the upload fields

4.6. Welcome Days

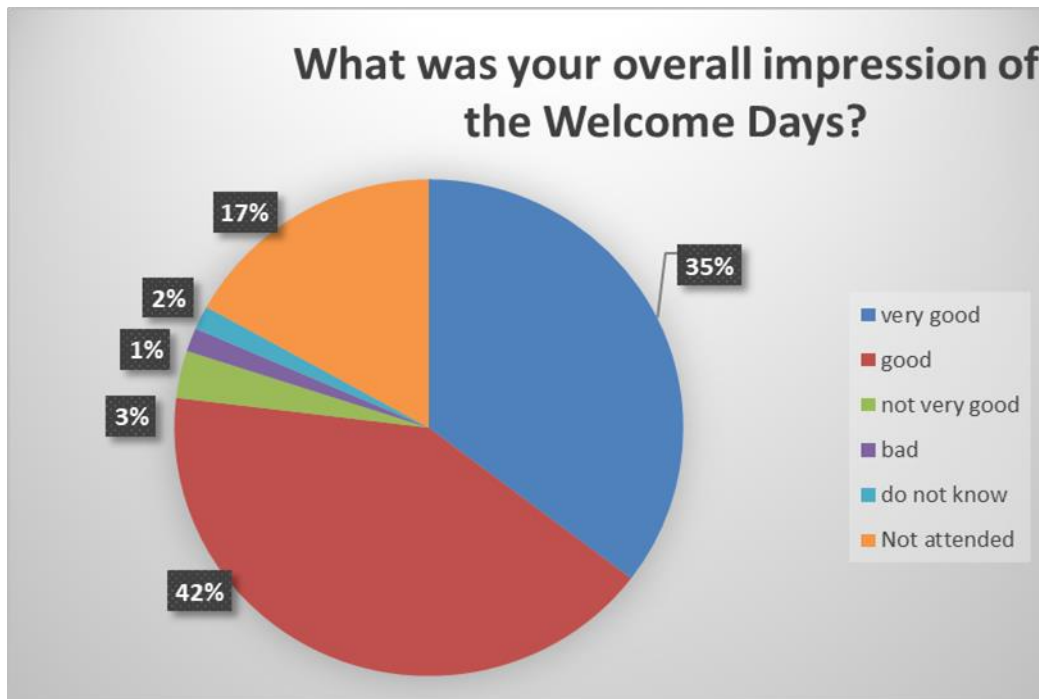


Figure 9. General impression of Welcome Days

Of the survey respondents, a notable 81% participated in the Welcome Days, with 74% of them expressing a favorable impression of the events. Students were given the chance to provide feedback on their experiences during the Welcome Days, with many expressing appreciations for the rare opportunity to physically meet other international students, forge friendships, and explore the campus. While some students suggested improvements in terms of the variety and accessibility of activities, the majority acknowledged the broader context and commended BOKU-IR for its efforts in maximizing the Welcome Days' potential given the circumstances.

Other suggestions included:

- Due to corona, it was partly online. I hope in the future it can take part in real life.

4.7. BOKU Info Session

The BOKUonline info session was included in the Welcome Days activities. Out of 65 students who responded to the survey, 52 attended the session. Among those attendees, 85% found it helpful. The session explained how to register for courses and provided detailed information about individual professors and departments.

For the 20% of students who did not attend the info session, the main reasons for their absence included:

- Feeling that the information was redundant because they had similar resources at their home university.
- Needing to focus on writing their bachelor's thesis, which left them with no free time.

However, some expressed regret over missing the session, believing it would have made the start of the semester easier. Similarly, for the Welcome Days, these students also cited a lack of time but wished they could have participated to meet new people at the beginning of the semester.

4.8. Buddy system

BOKU has implemented a Buddy System to help exchange students connect with their Austrian classmates. This initiative assists new students with administrative processes and provides valuable insights into life in Vienna. According to a survey conducted in the summer semester of 2022, 52 out of 65 respondents reported having a buddy. Among these 52 students, 44% said their buddies helped them with their initial steps upon arrival, and 36% received assistance in adapting to academic life.

For those who were unsatisfied with their buddies, the main issues included:

- A lack of interaction due to their buddy's exam period coinciding with their arrival, preventing them from meeting.
- Limited communication, with some buddies only checking in once and not following up after being told help wasn't needed at that moment.
- Minimal effort from some buddies to engage, resulting in little to no contact.
- Disappointment over buddies not asking about their stay or responding to messages, with some students only meeting their buddy once and receiving no further support.

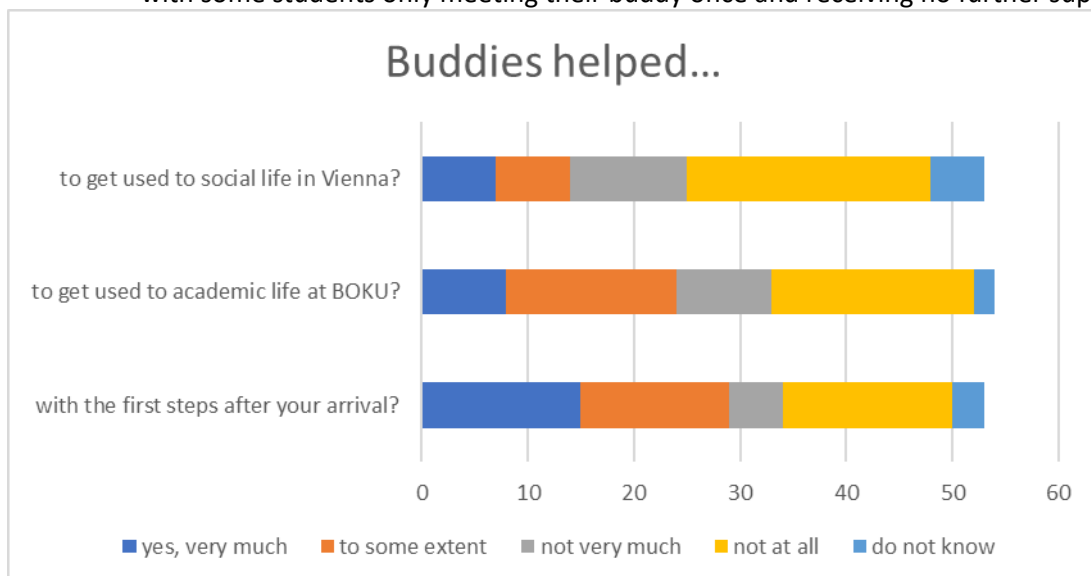


Figure 10. Areas in which Buddies helped incoming students

4.9. BOKU-IR newsletter

According to the survey, 35% of students read the BOKU-IR newsletter regularly. Only 7% have never read it. Some students suggested promoting a broader variety of events. Additionally, 22% found the newsletter very helpful, while 24% found it somewhat helpful.

4.10. Facebook Group *ESN BOKU Incomings and WhatsApp group*

69% of the exchange students who took part in the survey decided to join the official ESN BOKU Facebook group. 54% found it helpful.

Suggestions for improvement included:

- Information already being available on Instagram, WhatsApp, or via email, making the newsletter seem redundant.
- Some students felt the newsletter lacked useful information.
- A few admitted they might have missed important details by not paying enough attention to it.

4.11. Weekly Stammtisch and other activities

According to the survey, 52% of respondents never attended the weekly "Stammtisch," while 12% attended regularly.

When asked for suggestions to make the "Stammtisch" more attractive, some students responded with the following ideas:

- One student mentioned attempting to attend but found no one there at 8 or even 8:30 PM, leading them to leave. They noted that this was later in the semester, possibly when motivation had decreased.
- Another suggestion was to make the Stammtisch more interactive by giving it themes based on different countries, including snacks from the featured country.
- It was also proposed to rotate the location each week to keep the event fresh and interesting.

4.12. Improvements that can be made to information and planning

When filling out the questionnaire, students were asked how BOKU could improve the information and make the planning and initial steps easier for exchange students. They suggested the following:

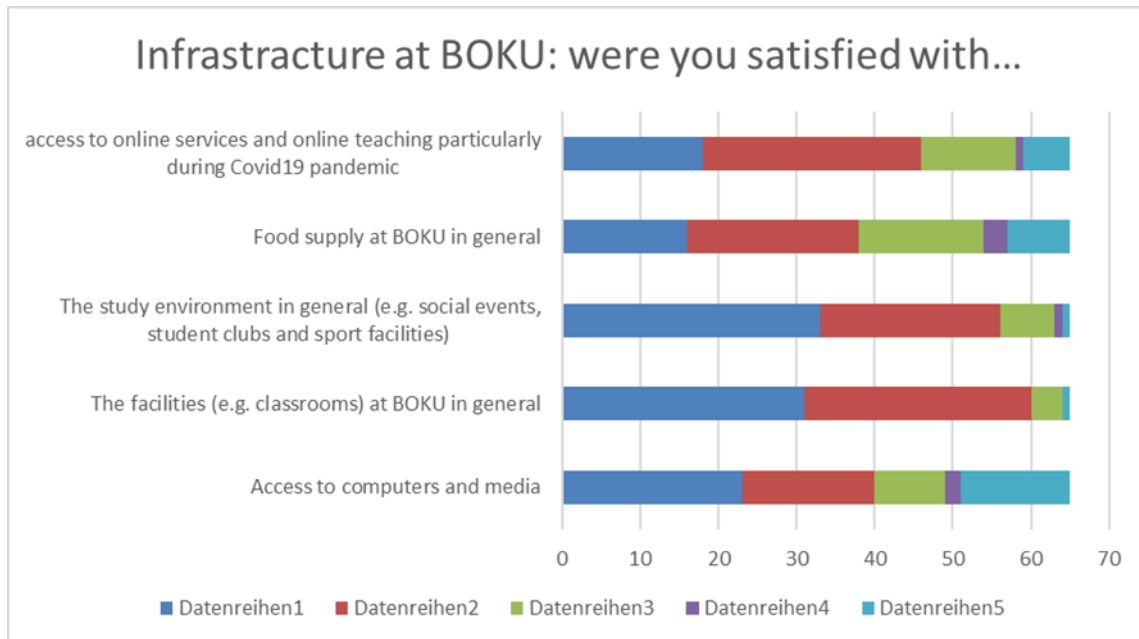
- Increase opportunities for interaction with Austrian students
- Advise students that they will need to create their own schedules
- Offer more advertisement for events and resources
- Reduce obligations, such as removing the requirement to register in person on campus and allowing online registration

Additional feedback included:

- One student appreciated the salsa meetup, describing it as very nice

- Some felt the system worked well for them, with one student noting they approached the year as studying in a new city rather than an Erasmus experience
- One student suggested not making the planning process too easy, as the stress of dealing with overlapping schedules and spontaneous changes was good preparation for future work
- Another student mentioned they received all relevant information in a timely manner and found everything to be great

5. INFRASTRUCTURE AT BOKU



Figure

11. Students' satisfaction with infrastructure at BOKU

The survey also included questions about BOKU's infrastructure, covering topics such as library access and food services. Some of the comments included:

- I find it very annoying to have to register for a study place in the library. I want to be able to go there spontaneously. I know Covid was a factor, but it could have been made more accessible for students
- The Mensa is really expensive for a student cafeteria, and for the price, the portions are small
- Printing is an issue. Exchange students don't print that many papers, so maybe providing a few credits for printing would be nice
- The opening hours of the buildings were not clear and could be longer, especially for the library. The library should be open longer and on weekends because students need to study and print the
- Some classrooms could be renovated and modernized
- I find it difficult that a large part of the school is closed in the evenings and on weekends, making it hard to study during those times

6. LANGUAGES

6.1. Language Problems

In the survey, students were asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, particularly as most were not native German speakers. Out of 65 respondents, 31 reported that they had never encountered any problematic language experiences. However, 30 students admitted to occasionally facing language barriers, while only 4 students complained about regularly encountering language problem.

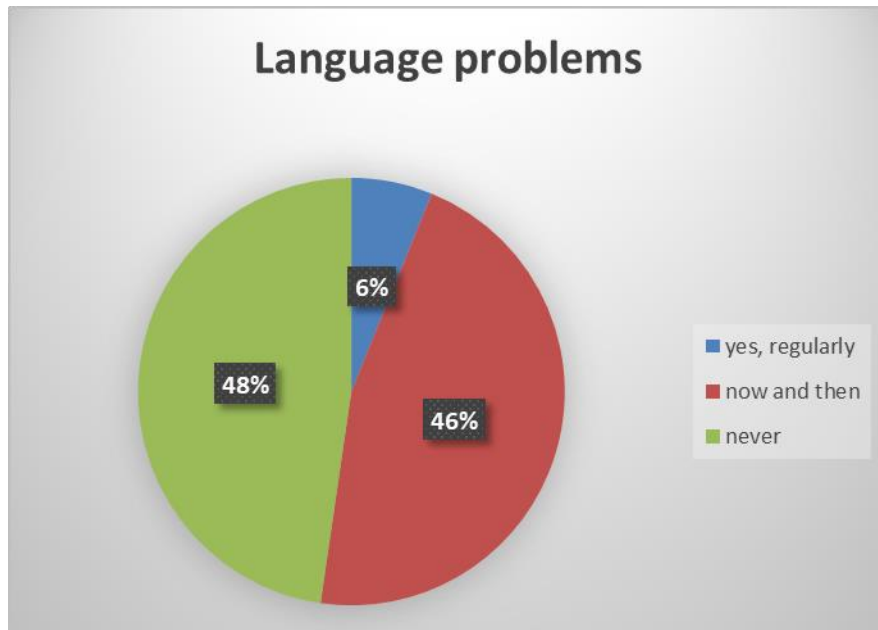


Figure 13. Occurrence of language problems.

Most often, language problems were perceived in the classroom and in interactions with Austrian students.

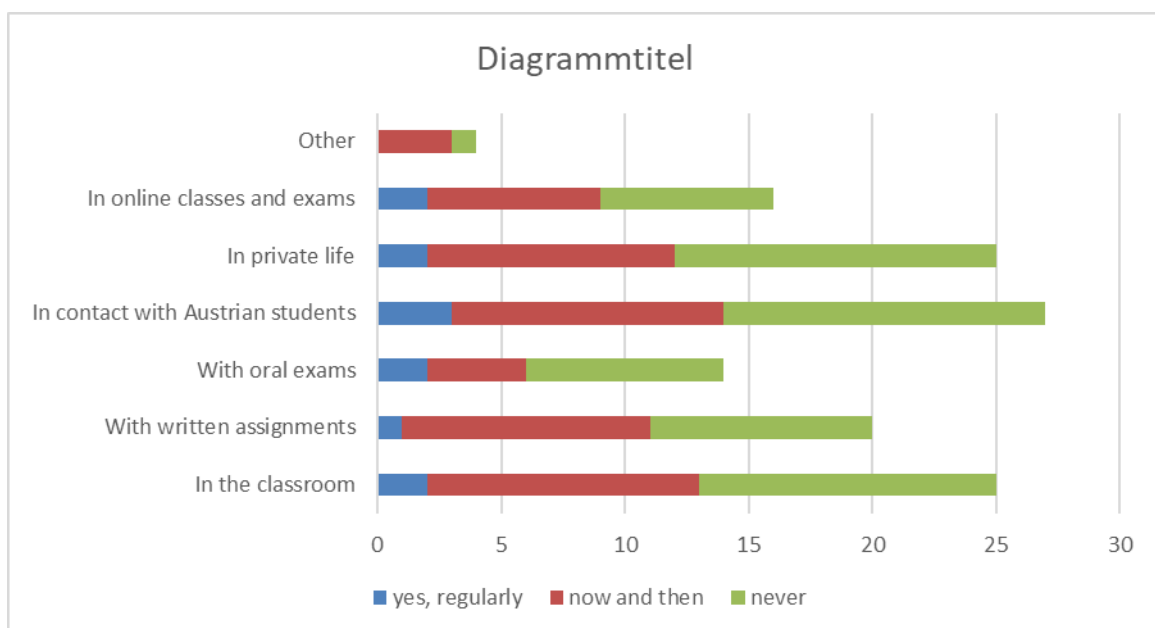


Figure 14. Settings in which language problems appeared

6.2. German language course

Students had the option to take German courses both before and during the semester. According to the survey, 6 students enrolled in an intensive German course before the semester started, while 15 students opted for a German course during the semester at BOKU. Additionally, 5 students chose to follow an external German course during the semester. Moreover, students had the opportunity to

participate in the Tandem scheme, where they could both teach and learn from another student in a different language. Out of the respondents, 11 students took

advantage of this opportunity. The vast majority of students who participated in any of these courses expressed satisfaction with them.

7. ACCOMODATION

Among the survey respondents, student residence organized by themselves (43%) was the most common type of housing, chosen by 28 students. Private accommodation (e.g., in a shared flat) was the second most common type of housing, chosen by 25 students (38%). Additionally, 12 students (18%) opted for student residence organized by the institution.

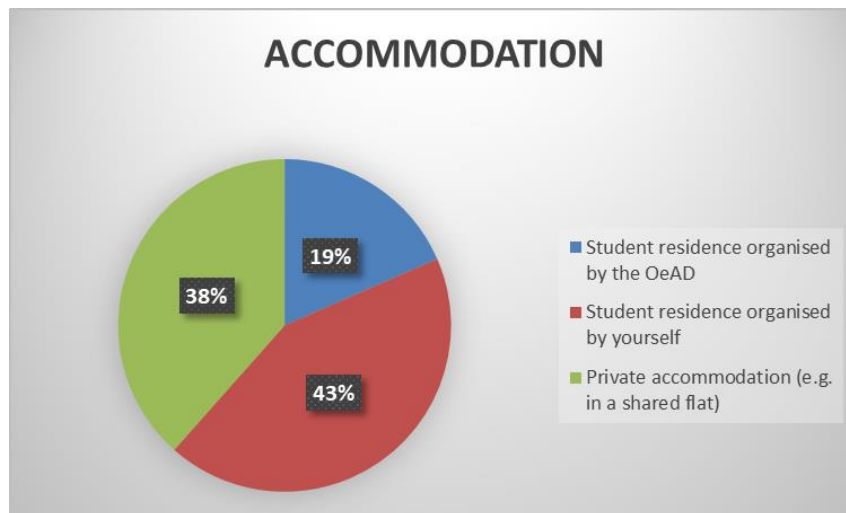


Figure 15. Chosen accommodation

7.1. Satisfaction with accommodation

Out of the respondents, 10 reported satisfaction with OeAD accommodation, while 7 expressed contentment with residences they chose themselves. The majority of students, 25 of them, also valued their private accommodation.

7.2. Important factors in choosing accommodation

When asked to list important factors in choosing accommodation, students revealed that price was their biggest consideration, with 86% of respondents declaring it as the most decisive factor. Following closely behind, 84% considered the condition of the property, while 77% prioritized proximity to the university. Additionally, 57% valued proximity to the city center. The least important factor for exchange students in this survey when it came to choosing accommodation was the possibility to live together with Austrian students, with only 30% considering it significant.

8. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL OUTCOME

Students were also asked to evaluate both the academic and personal outcomes of their stay at BOKU. Respondents gave a largely positive response to both questions, with 46 students expressing satisfaction with the personal outcome and 56 students expressing satisfaction with the academic outcome of their stay.

8.1. Situations requiring special attention

The majority of students did not encounter any problems during their time at BOKU. However, some found themselves in situations requiring special attention. These included instances where teachers would speak German until right before the (English) lecture started, making it challenging to obtain information about the course.

8.2. Recommendations for BOKU-IR or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Provide information about internships at BOKU and in Austria in general. Some students felt lost in finding internship opportunities and wished for more guidance.
- Enjoy the experience, meet people, and participate in Stammtisch and other activities.
- Some students had nothing to add, feeling well accompanied and integrated.
- Ensure all buddies have clear instructions on what steps to take initially.
- Include information about the GebührenInfoService/GIS in the arrival and departure checklists. One student had a negative encounter with GIS and wished they had known about it beforehand.
- Add a reminder in the departure checklist for students registered at MA35 Referat 5.1 to inform MA35 about leaving Austria.
- Overall, one student felt that BOKU offers a lot and didn't have any additional recommendations.

8.3. Experience of changes due to COVID-19 pandemic; recommendations for

BOKU and BOKU-IR

Students found it difficult to adapt to certain aspects of BOKU:

- Some students expressed frustration with the strict mask and 3G requirements. They preferred physical lectures over online ones and urged for more in-person classes.
- Others found the numerous restrictions to be annoying.
- One student highlighted the need for improved library accessibility and simplified printing processes, even beyond the pandemic.

Suggestions for improvement included:

- Less activities during the first semester that could have been organized in outdoor places.
- Providing timely and informative updates on the COVID-19 situation, which helped students navigate the challenges.
- No specific recommendations from some students as they felt everything was fine.
- COVID-19 had minimal impact on one student's summer semester, and they appreciated the opportunity for in-person experiences.
- Difficulty in making friends during the winter semester, but appreciation for BOKU's efforts in offering online courses and on-campus activities when possible.
- Disappointment over the cancellation of many extracurricular events at BOKU during the pandemic, while other institutions continued such activities.
- Some students felt that COVID-19 measures at BOKU were overly strict, making it difficult to socialize and form new connections.
- Getting COVID-19 restriction information through active groups like TU ESN.