



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

## **Exchange Studies at BOKU**

### **Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2019**

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the winter semester 2019-2020 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. 106 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 social events. Many students also mentioned that the quality of the education and the courses at BOKU was among the things they appreciated the most at the university, since the interactions with the teachers was appreciated. The teachers were being friendly towards the students and always ready to help whenever the students needed assistance. Also, the flexibility of the university was appreciated.

A lot of incoming students have mentioned that the administration of the university has been quite helpful and responsive, assisting them with registration matters and other administrative issues if those occurred. 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 high quality of education was also praised as one of the highlights of the BOKU University.

Many students wrote in their questionnaires that they enjoyed social life in BOKU very much, having met a lot of new friends here. 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 BOKUonline and Mobility online as things that they have appreciated. Some students responded that they have found informational support provided by BOKU quite useful. Last but not least, the buddy system, the ESN activities and the languages courses were also praised. See all responses in Table 1.

**Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU**

	<b>3 things appreciated by students</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>%</b>
1	Welcome Days and other events	46	15%
2	Friendly atmosphere and students	31	15%
3	Quality of Education/ lectures/ interaction with teachers	57	12%
4	Flexibility of the university (choice of course, exam dates)	10	11%



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5	Good administrative services/ information	12	8%
6	University facilities (labs, libraries, TÜWI etc.)	21	8%
7	Semesterticket	2	7%
8	Studoapp	2	4%
9	Campus and park	13	4%
10	ZIB staff/ newsletter	7	4%
11	Online services	3	1%
12	Vienna	6	2%
13	ESN activities	11	4%
14	Buddy and tandem system	5	2%
15	Language Accesibility	19	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 the administrative process to difficult and too long. They are asking for a more simplified administrative process.

Some students wished for more availability of ZIB and wished for longer opening hours. Also noted was there should be more possibilities for international students to take courses in English, as well as more affordable possibilities for them to learn foreign languages, especially German and more interactions with Austrian students. 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. Also, more nice places to study they missed and more reliable buddy's (some never showed up)

The rest of the issues voiced by the students concerned too expensive mensa, ticket to Tulln to expensive, more advice on finding accommodation, too long lectures (more breaks) and more practical courses.

See Table 2 for responses.

Table 2. What students felt could be improved at BOKU

Responses	Number of times mentioned
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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. 4% took an internship and 4% worked on a thesis or research project. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department für Wasser-Atmosphäre-Umwelt
- Institute of Biotechnology
- IGT
- ABF
- n/a
- Institute of viticulture and pomology
- Department of Applied Genetics and Cell Biology
- DIB
- BOKU - IR

#### 3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

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



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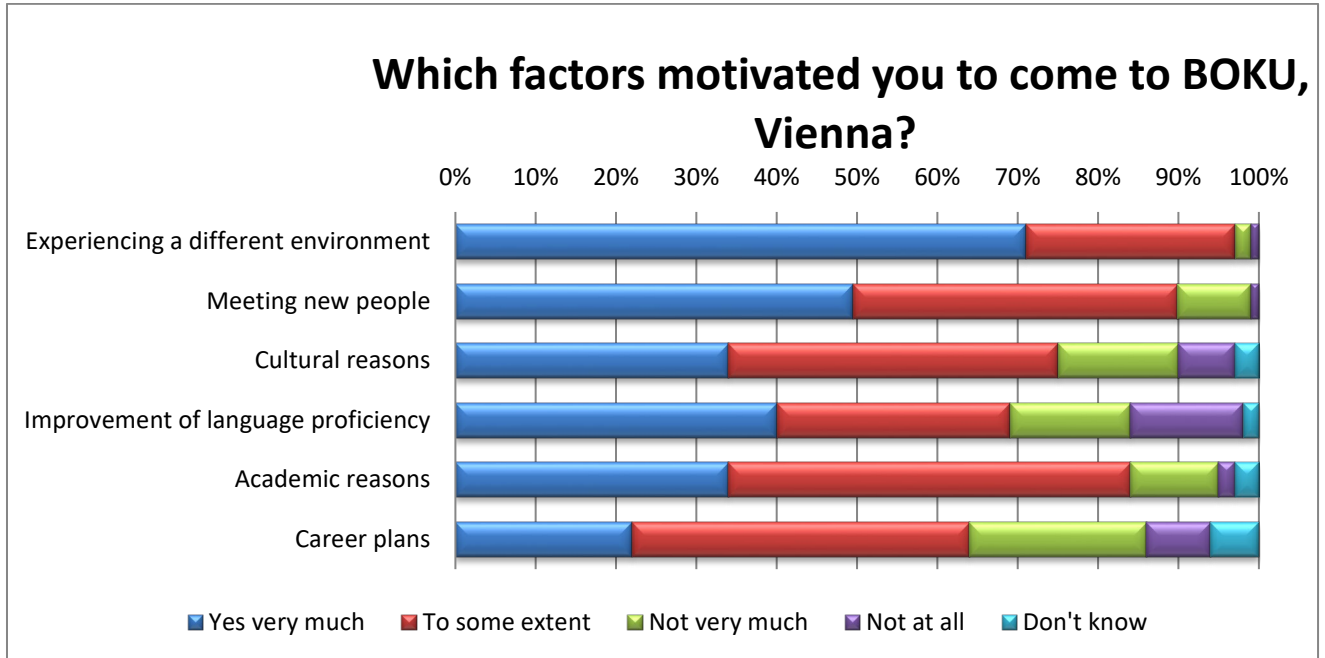


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

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 51% 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.

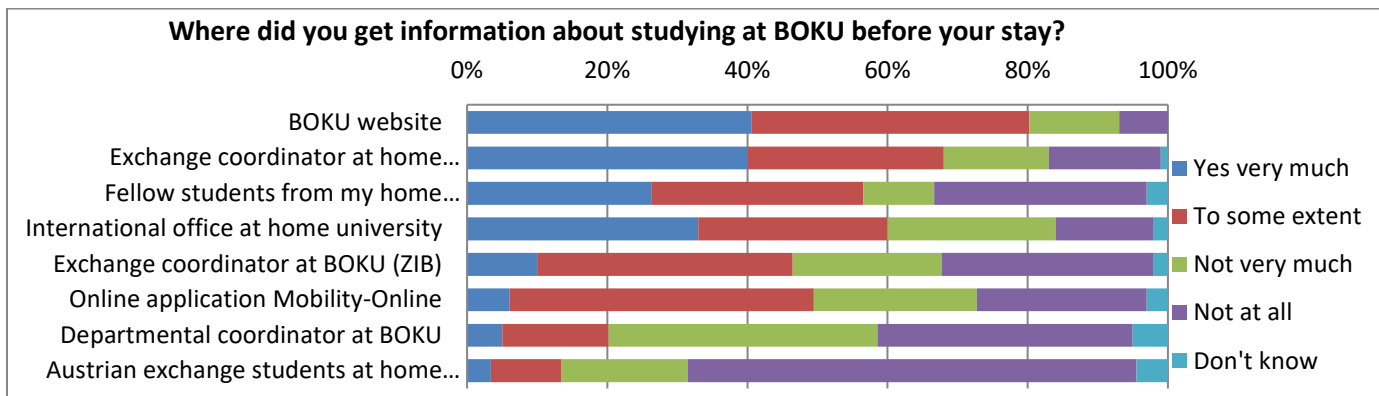


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay



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### 3.4 Information from BOKU

94% 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. 92% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 72% valued the information from their department or institute and 47% expressed positive opinions on the information from other service departments. All data can be seen in Figure 3.

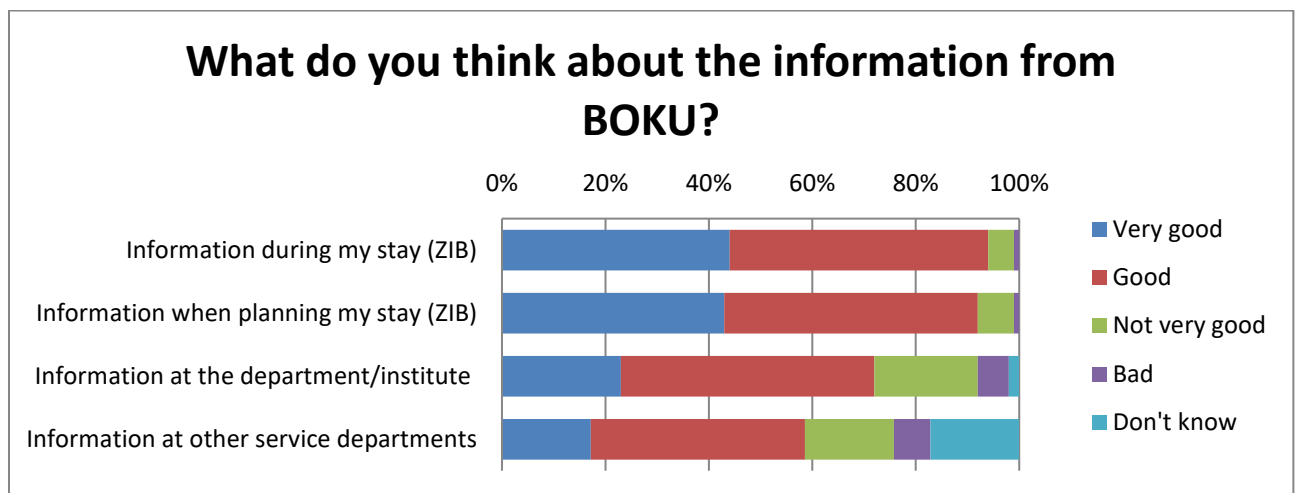


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

### 3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were largely positive. 86% of students were pleased with the clarity of the emails, and 82% believed that the operation of the system was reliable. 75% felt that the application form was simple to fill. 79% thought the instructions in the database were clear and easy to understand. All responses can be found in Figure 4.

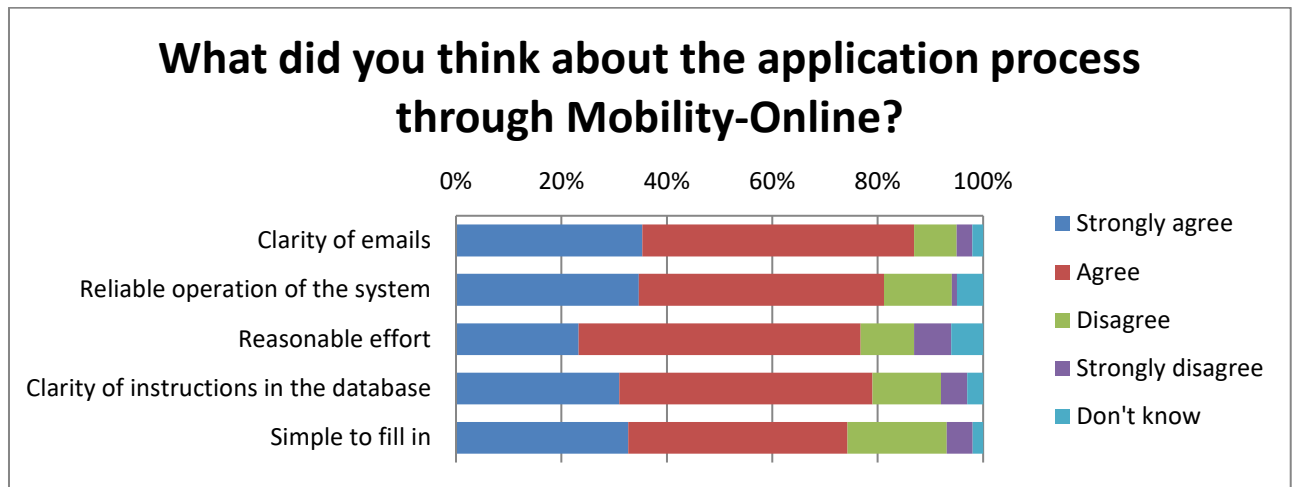


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility Online

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

- Es ist einfach komisch, dass man sich bei zwei mobility anmelden muss. Jetzt ist mir es auch wieder passiert, dass ich meine Log-in Daten vergessen habe. Könnte man ja irgendwie koppeln oder nicht?
- The demanded documents are very specific and i had to ask professors to custom-make one-off documents just to fulfill the requirements. (ex. my university's transcript doesn't register the "date of the final exam", only the date it was corrected).
- Too much paperwork in general. Must be an easier way to do this.
- It would be much better if we had had a chance to register for the courses before the arrival at BOKU. A lot of changes in the learning agreements could have been avoided if we had known that some courses weren't on offer in WS 2019, et
- We have to upload the documents on after the other, maybe it will be easier to be allowed to fill all we can at the same time.
- It should be possible to go to next steps without accomplishing a previous step.
- I remember that sometimes I had to fill in the same thing multiple times (examples include the registration of personal details like name, age, address etc. Also, having to fill in the pre-registration felt like doing a lot of work extra and over again. Also the fact we had to remember our pre-registration number was quite confusing. Maybe some repetitions in this process could be removed?
- Please allow the attachment of more than one document at a time, clarify once a modification has been made ( I was unaware that all I had to do was to press the "back" button) and allow various formats of documents otherwise for each one we have to go to anonline converter.
- When you make changes in Mobility online it does not automatically send you back to the main page.

### 3.6 Welcome Days



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84% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 78% 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 (20 students) chose meeting people and another amount (12 students) chose the Heurigen party and events (12 students). 14 students mentioned “die Entdeckungstour” /campus tours. Students also mentioned enjoying the ZIB welcome, the city tour, visiting the farm, info sessions and ESN activities.

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

- It would be nice to have more events or activities in small groups, so that we could get to know each other faster
- More places at the events (no limited tickets)
- Sometimes the information provided during the info session could be found online, so it was too long
- More “get to know each other” events

### **3.7 BOKUonline info session**

81% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 74% 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 20% of students who didn't attend the info session, the main reasons for their absence were that they spoke German already and therefore didn't think it could be useful, they didn't know about it, came to Vienna too late.

### **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. 79% of respondents took this opportunity. Reasons given by those who did not opt 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 neither before or after the arrival.

50% of students felt that their Buddies assisted them with the first steps after their arrival in Vienna. 51% said they helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and 35% appreciated that their Buddies helped them get used to social life in Vienna (see Figure 5).

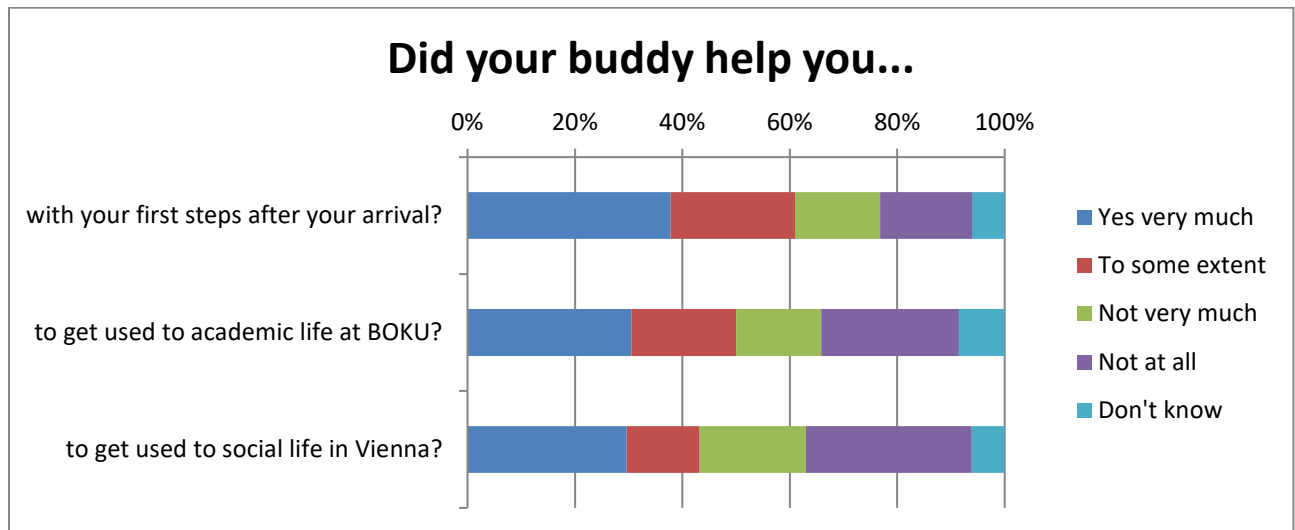


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

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 wasn't in Vienna when they arrived. Also, some figured most stuff out by themselves.

### 3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

38% of students who answered the feedback questionnaire said that they read the weekly International newsletter regularly, 53% saying they read it now and then. 76% found the included information useful. When asked what could be improved in the newsletter, students suggested providing information in English to all the international students (since some of them got it in German), as well as paying more attention to social media like Facebook, since not all the students read their e-mails and also social events.

### 3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group

85% of students joined the ESN BOKU incomings Facebook page. 80% 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

62% 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 56% of respondents, 6% attended the Apfelstrudel goes international event.





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### 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. 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:

- They could carry out an online survey with students and see when most have time for better planning
- Toll wäre, wenn man die Wartezeit für die Anmeldung beim Heuriger verkürzen könnte.
- The checklist of arriving could be made a bit clearer. Now it's easy to miss something since it is a quite long read.
- Show in an email or on the website on the BOKU a detailed step by step plan how to find all the courses given in a semester to choose make the choice to go to BOKU easier.
- Maybe our buddies should be informed more about the events and by talking to them just to remind us or tell us the events for the following week.
- BOKU Online übersichtlicher gestalten
- More spaces at the Heurigen event
- Let the students know that it is a good idea to come to Vienna sooner to already finish some of the bureaucratic stuff.

## 4. Infrastructure at BOKU

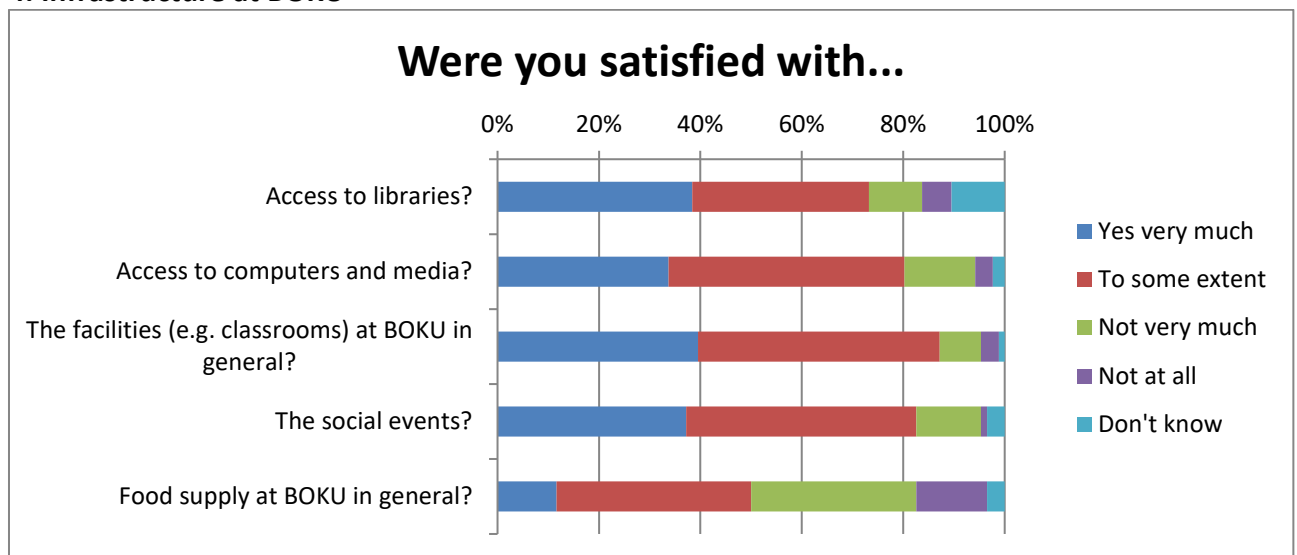


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

## 5. Languages

### 5.1 Language problems

8,73% of international students experienced language problems regularly, 37,30% now and then, and 38% never had any difficulties.



Of the 46% 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).

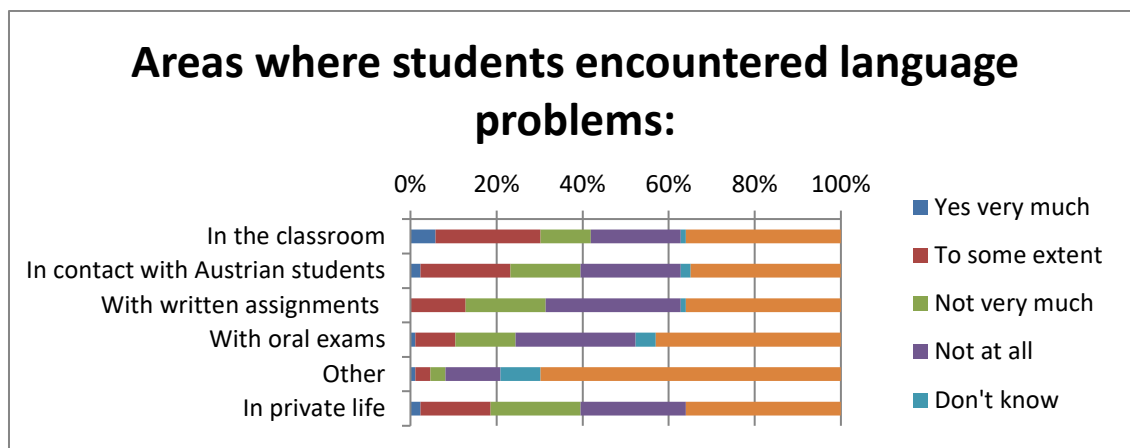


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

## 5.2 German language courses and Tandem

14% of respondents took part in an intensive German language course before the semester 18% took one during the semester and 7% participated in the Tandem programme.

## 6. Accommodation

### 6.1 Accommodation type

Around 53% of the students who submitted the questionnaire lived in student residences during their stay in Vienna – 27,36% in student residences organised by the OeAD and 25,47% in those they had organised themselves. 50% lived in private accommodation (such as a shared flat).

Commenting on their accommodation, 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 concern expressed was that the accommodation in Vienna is expensive for students. Also, one mentioned that there was a lack in management by WIHAST.

### 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 85% of students and the city center (73%).



Living with other international students was a priority to 56 %, and 38% saying that living with Austrian students was important to them.

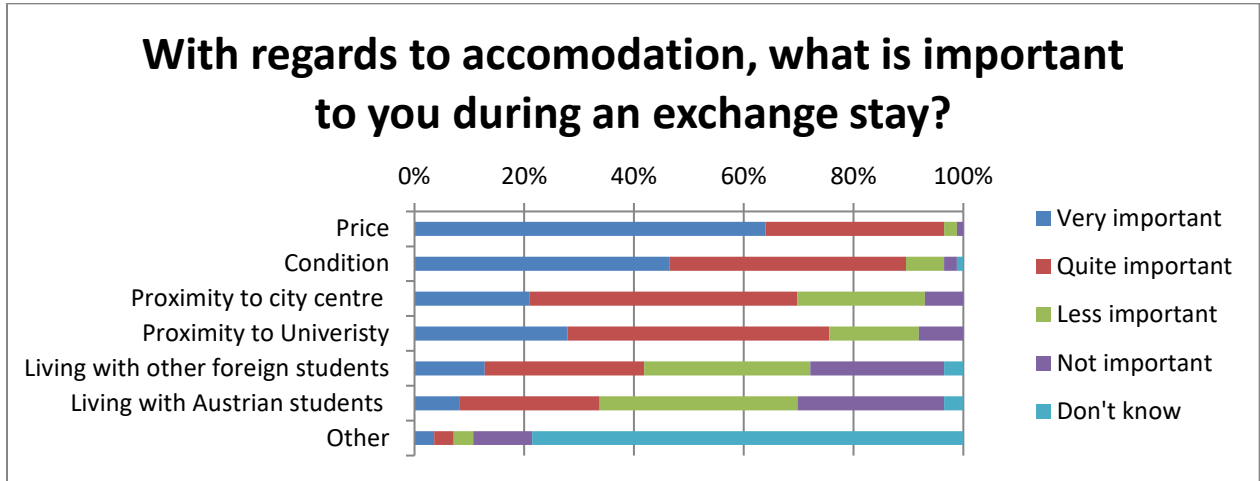


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

## 7. Academic and personal outcomes

### 7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

97% of the students believed the personal outcome of their stay at BOKU to be good or very good. 88% thought the academic outcome was also good or very good.

### 7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

80% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 50% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU, 56% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies and 43% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies (see Figure 9).

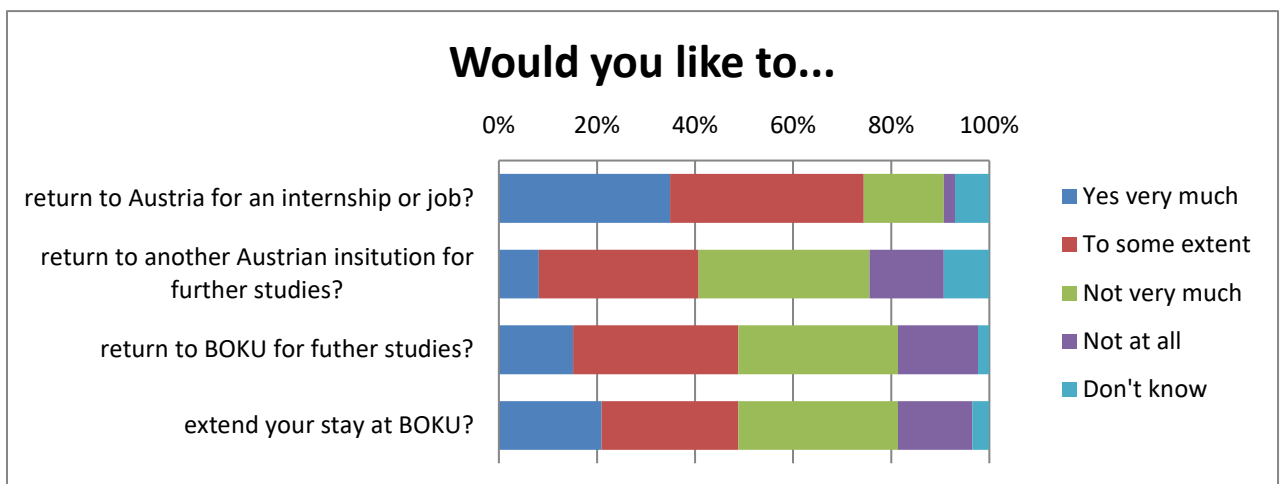


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria



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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, things mentioned included some students complaining about that it was a bit chaotic with the courses and the ECTS system – some courses were even more difficult than the amount of ECTS receiving from it and the amount of exams. Also, for a non-EU student the financial burden was high.

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

The following responses were suggested:

- More cultural activities in the city or more information about nice places made by students.
- Improving the availability of the staff for the international incoming exchange of answering to foreign incoming student's doubts and requests.
- Some really cool movie about BOKU to show the uniqueness - to show awesome study programmes, student club in Tüwi, new sustainable buildings, bio products selling at BOKU and making dishes



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## 8. Background information

65% of the respondents were female and 37% male. 87 students spent the winter semester at BOKU, 5 students stayed for the whole academic year and 9 had alternative arrival and departure dates.

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

Nationality	Answer	%
French	15	14%
German	21	20%
Belgium	11	10%
Italian	9	8%
Dutch	9	8%
Finnish	1	1%
Slovenian	1	1%
Spanish	3	3%
Croatian	5	5%
Norway	2	2%
Swiss	4	4%
Czech	7	7%
Polish	2	2%
China	2	2%
Sweden	1	1%
European	1	1%
Russian	1	1%
Denmark	1	1%
English	1	1%
Romania	2	2%
Chile	1	1%
Canadian	1	1%
Hungarian	1	1%
Nicaraguan	1	1%
Lithuanian	1	1%
Cameroon	1	1%
Iran	1	1%
SUM	106	100%