

# EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU

## EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

### WINTER SEMESTER 2021/22

This document reports on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the winter semester 2021 at BOKU. At the end of their stay, the students were given a questionnaire asking them about issues they liked and disliked about their stay and what they felt could be improved upon. 60 questionnaires were returned.

#### 1. About the sample

In sample of 60 exchange students 73% were female and 27% were male. Most of them came from Germany (20%), Belgium (17%) and France (17%).

See all responses in Table 1.

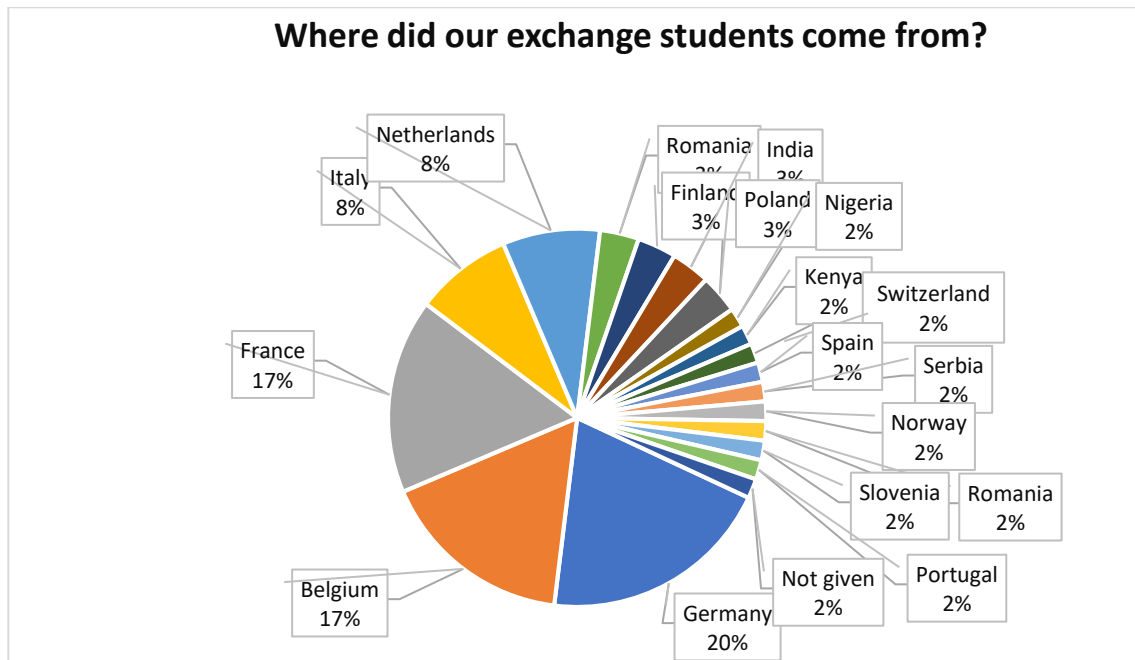


Figure 1. Exchange students' country of origin

## PERIOD OF STAY

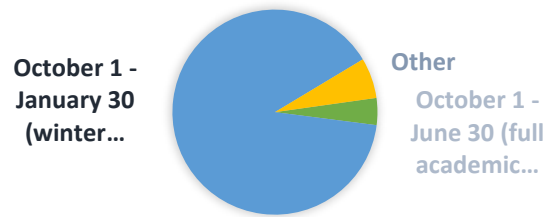


Figure 2. Period of stay

The vast majority of the exchange students stayed in Vienna for the winter semester only, 4 students chose to stay at BOKU for the full academic year and 7 of them chose other options (October-March; September 2021-April 2022).

## 2. Most appreciated things at BOKU

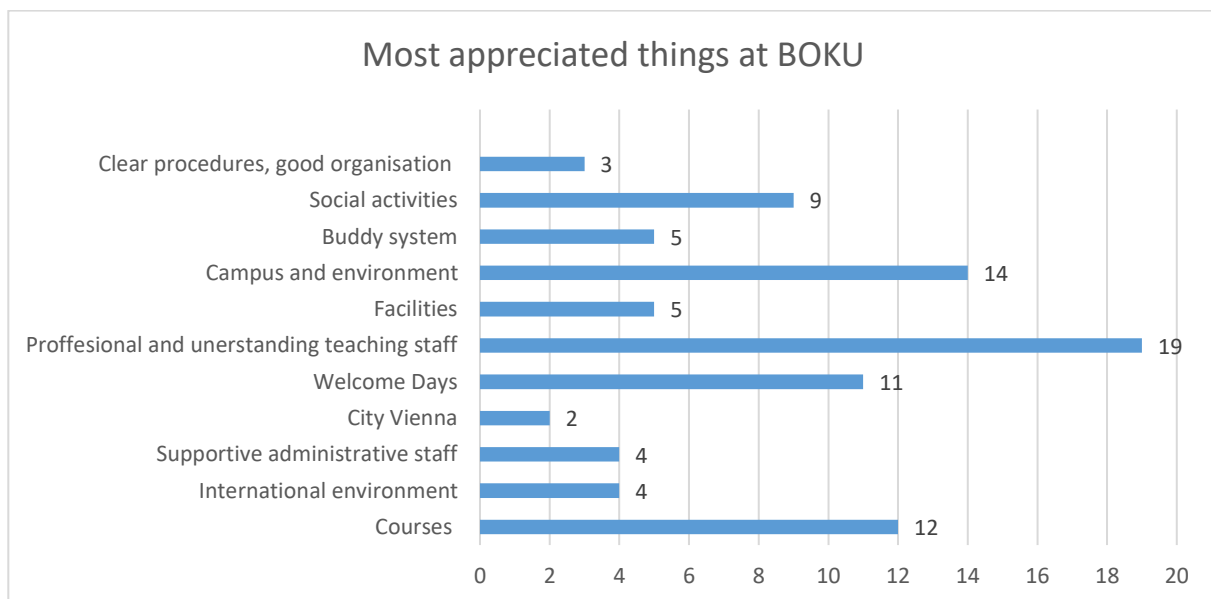


Figure 3. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

The survey shows that many exchange students had a positive experience at BOKU. When asked to name three things they particularly appreciated, the most popular response was that students appreciated the professionalism, helpfulness and understanding of the teaching staff even during the challenging pandemic time (19 responses). The usefulness of having many recorded lectures and being able to review them when necessary was also appreciated by several students. As can be seen in Figure 3, the BOKU campus (14) and its well-equipped facilities (5) were also highly rated. The answers indicate that the courses (interesting, offered in both German and English, wide range of courses, including practical ones such as field trips) and the administrative support staff (4) were also particularly appreciated (12). The Welcome Days (11) and socialising events organised during the semester, in particular the Stammtisch (7) and the Tandem Learning (2) were also greatly valued. Other important factors determining the positive

perception were the international environment and the variety of students at BOKU (4), the Buddy system (5) and, last but not least, the city of Vienna itself (2).

All data is shown in Table 3.

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

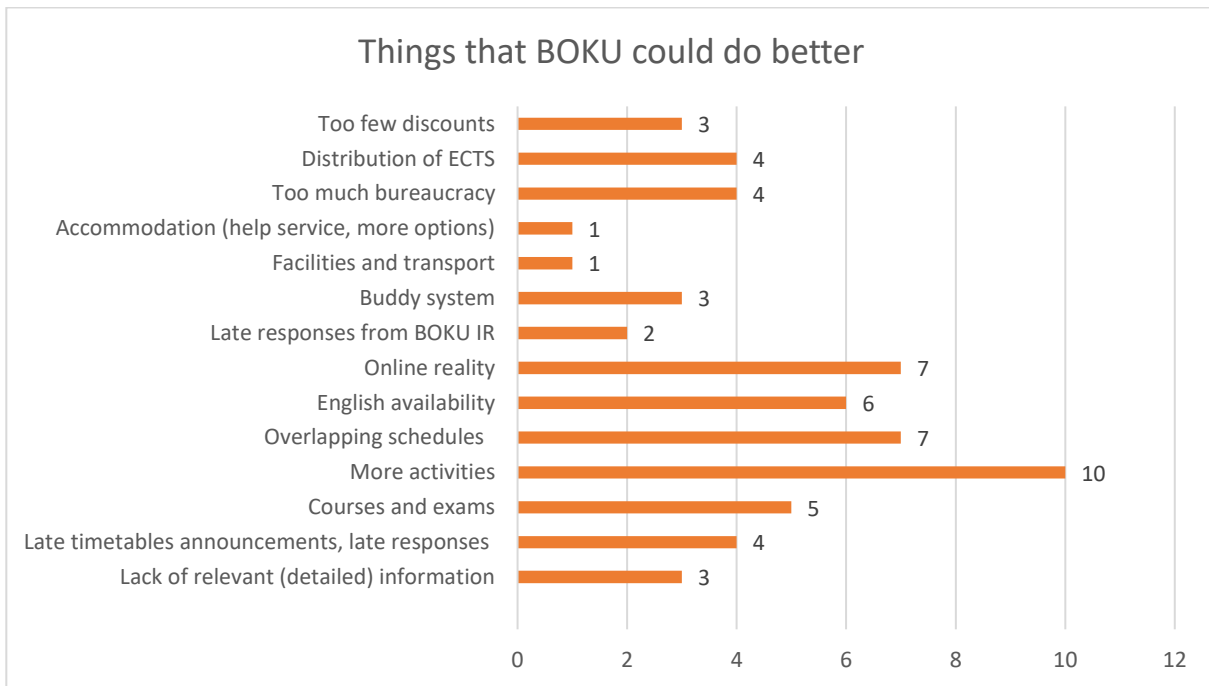


Figure 4. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

Although most students were satisfied with their time at BOKU, some felt that there still was some room for improvement. Many students understood that during COVID-19 pandemic it was simply impossible to organise everything as it used to be before it, but some (10) still regretted limited number of different activities and lamented the online reality (7), that is the reduced number of on-campus lectures. Also, 4 respondents pointed out problems in late timetables announcements and some noticed detailed information missing (8), mostly concerning course registrations and orientation on campus. Additionally, 2 students mentioned that they were expecting quicker responses, particularly from BOKU IR. 5 students pointed out that they experienced issues with courses and exams, while 7 complained about overlapping schedules during their stay in Vienna. According to 6 respondents, limited English availability was also an issue.

Other respondents complained about excessive bureaucracy (4) and the distribution of ECTS (4). They also suggested improvement of facilities and transport (1) and more help with finding accommodation (1)

### 4. Motivation, information and events

#### 4.1 Activities at BOKU

95% of students participated in regular course programme and 5% worked on a thesis or research project. None of the students carried out an internship.

Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- *Institute of Wood Technology and Renewable Materials*
- *Institute of Molecular Biotechnology*
- *Institute of Forest Ecology (IFE)*

#### 4.2. 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. 65% of respondents considered this to be very much important, followed by the willingness to meet new people (62%) and academic reasons (47%). Other aspects included the desire to improve language proficiency, cultural reasons and career plans.

All responses are shown in table 5.

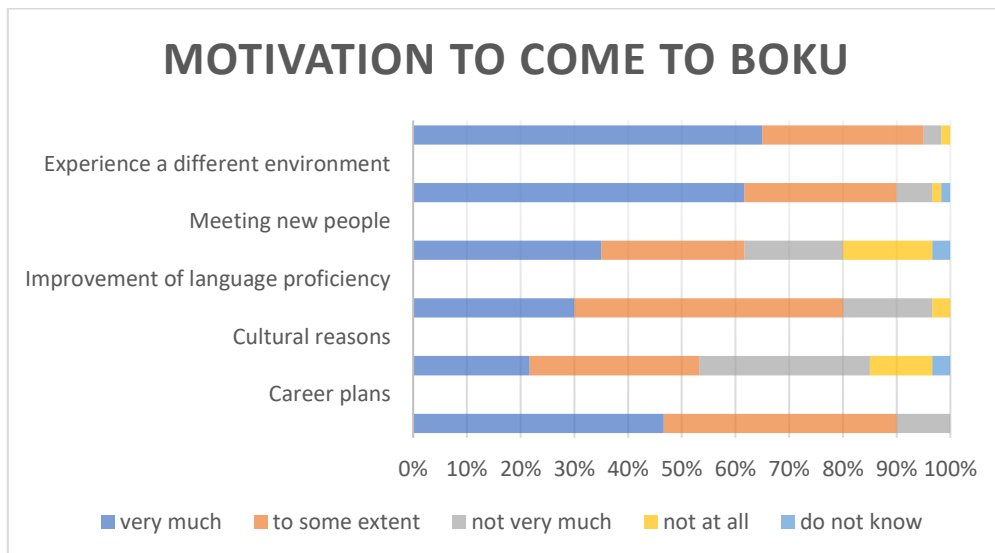


Figure 5. Motivation to come to BOKU

### 4.3. Information before the stay

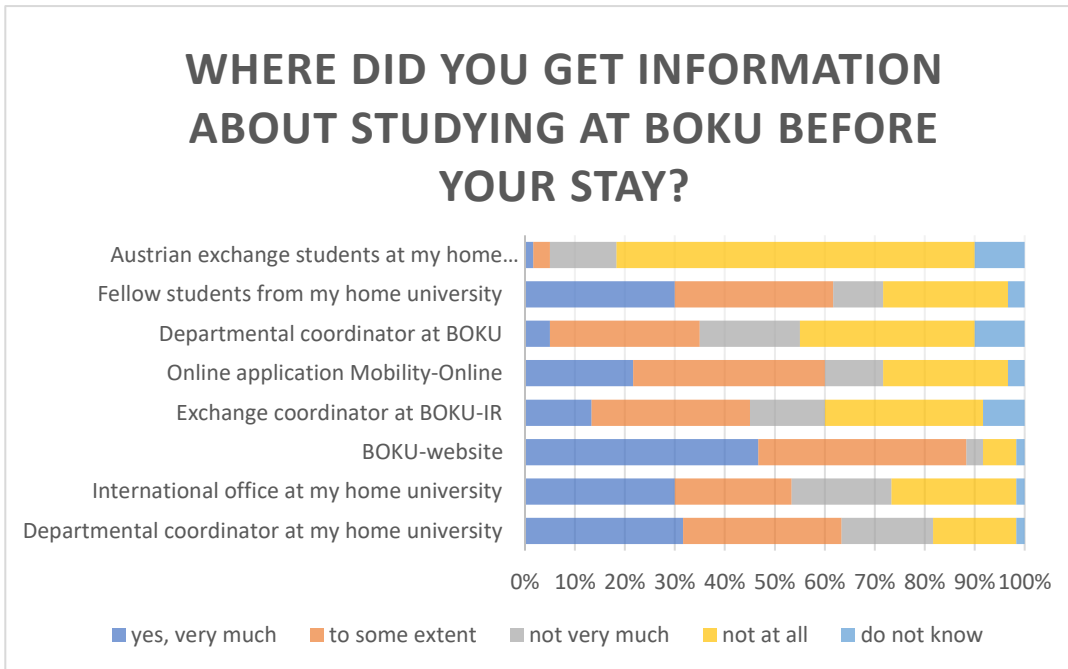


Figure 6. Sources of information used by students before their stay

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 47% of respondents had found this to be their most important source of information, with 32% stating that they were informed by the academic exchange coordinator at their home universities. Other sources included the following:

- Fellow student from home university (30%);
- Online application mobility online (22%);
- The exchange coordinators at ZIB (13%);
- Department coordinator at BOKU (5%);
- International office at home university (30%);
- Austrian exchange students at home universities (2%).

### 4.4. Information from BOKU

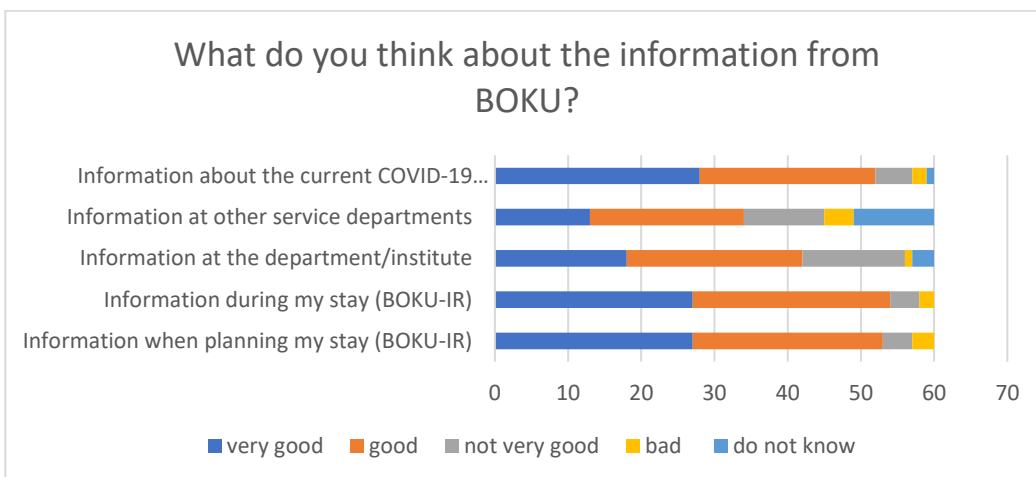


Figure 7. Evaluation of information from BOKU

As can be seen on the diagram above, when asked to comment on the information that they had been given by BOKU, students had a mostly positive response. For instance, 90% of responses showed satisfaction (high and very high) with the information from BOKU-IR they had received during their stay. Furthermore, 88% had appreciated the information given to them before their arrival, and 60% had received adequate information from their departments. Lastly, 53% of students were satisfied or rather satisfied with the information given to them by other service departments.

#### 4.5. Application Process – Mobility Online

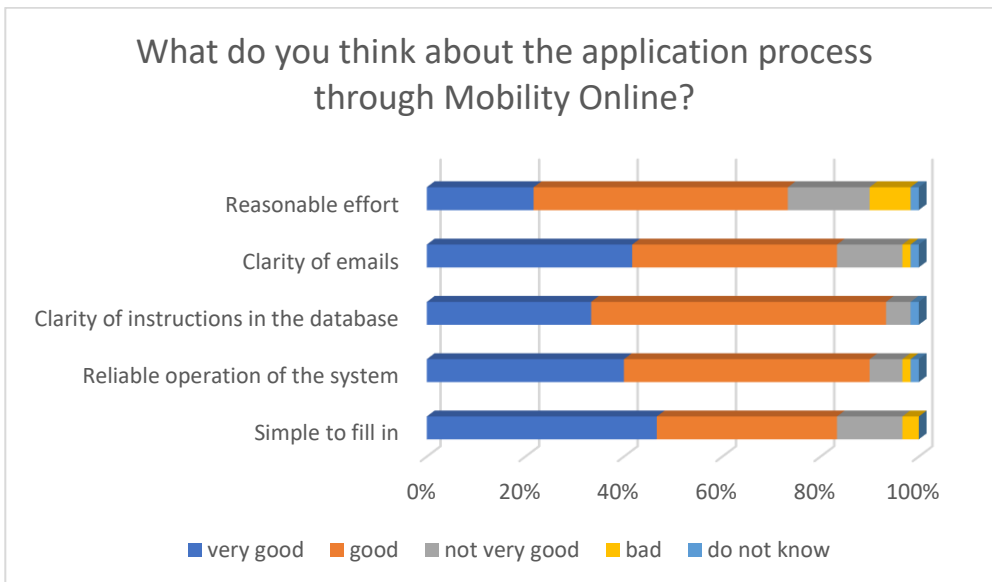


Figure 8. Evaluation of Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were mostly positive. 33% thought the instructions in the database very clear and 60% rather clear and easy to understand. 82% of the emails they received were either very or sufficiently clear. 90% of respondents were pleased or rather pleased with the reliable operation of the system and 80% stated that the application form was simple or very simple to fill in.

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

- Improvement of the online interface’s design,
- Reducing waiting times before completing the application
- Connection between Mobility Online and BOKUonline;

#### 4.6. Welcome Days

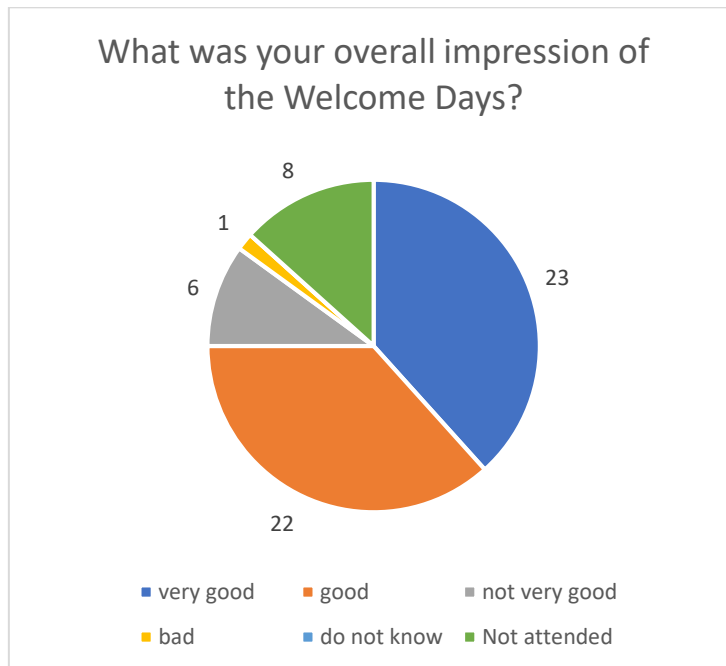


Figure 9. General impression of Welcome Days

87% of respondents attended Welcome Days, and 74% of them came away with a good or very good impression of the events. Students had the opportunity to comment on their experiences at the Welcome Days in the survey and most of them appreciated the fact that it was one of a few opportunities to meet other international students physically, make friends and visit the campus. In their opinion, what could have been improved is the amount of activities and accessibility of those, but at the same time, most of them highlighted that they understand the general situation and really appreciate the effort BOKU-IR made to make the best of those Welcome Days.

Other suggestions included:

- Make Info-session shorter and avoid repeating information
- Have a larger student capacity at certain events such as the Heuriger and organise events more often also during the semester
- Shorten the discovery tour of campus

#### 4.7. BOKU Info Session

The info-session about BOKUonline had also been offered as part of the Welcome Days. Out of the 60 students who answered the survey, 49 had attended this session. 72% of these students had found it rather helpful, as it had explained how to register for courses, and provided more information on individual professors and departments.

For the 18% 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.

#### 4.8. Buddy system

BOKU has implemented a Buddy system, to allow exchange students to meet and befriend their Austrian classmates. Such initiative enables new students to get help with administrative processes, and gain more of an insight into life in Vienna. In the 2021 winter semester survey, 48 respondents out of 60 stated that they had had a buddy. Out of these 48 students, 46% said their buddies had helped them with their first steps after their arrival and 38% had received help with getting used to academic life. 41% respondents had had buddies who had helped them adapt to social life in Vienna.

For those who were unsatisfied with their Buddies, the main issue was a lack of contact when the students arrived at BOKU. Some students said that they had exchanged emails with their Buddies before arriving in Vienna, but never actually met up with them or did not hear from them again once the semester started. Some students said their Buddy was not in Vienna when they arrived, and others commented that their Buddies arranged a meeting with them only once and then they stopped answering them. In short, some buddies simply did not have time to spare for their international student.

All data is shown in Table 10.

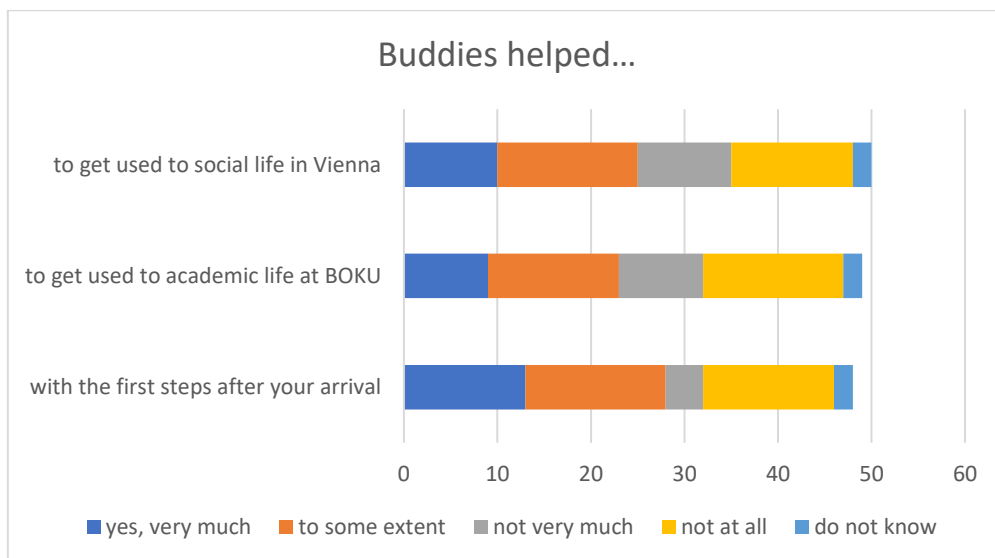


Figure 10. Areas in which Buddies helped incoming students

#### 4.9. BOKU-IR newsletter

According to the survey responses, 76% of students were reading the newsletter regularly or are still reading it. Only 23% have never read any of BOKU-IR newsletters. Some students suggested that a broader variety of events should be promoted. 22% have stated that the BOKU-IR newsletter was very helpful for them, 42% declared that it was helpful to some extent.

#### 4.10. Facebook Group *ESN BOKU Incomings* and Signal group

76% of the exchange students who took part in the survey decided to join the official ESN BOKU Facebook group. 53% found it helpful.



As for the Signal group, it was considerably popular among students. In fact, 77% of the respondents stated that they had joined it. Also, 61% of them found this way of exchanging information useful. However, it is worth mentioning that 65% of respondents when confronted with the question "Would you have preferred a whatsapp group instead of the signal group?" expressed a preference for Whatsapp.

#### 4.11 Goin' Connect platform for incoming students

Among the respondents, 34% decided to join the Goin' connect platform. Since a high percentage of people did not join, only 8% of the respondents actually answered that it was useful. 50% of the respondents stated that they did not know whether the platform had been useful or not.

#### 4.11. Weekly Stammtisch and other activities

53% of respondents never attended a weekly "Stammtisch". All comments indicate, that their choice not to go was highly influenced by the fact that at the beginning the event took place online due to Corona pandemic.

The students were also asked to give some suggestions to make the Stammtisch more attractive and they suggested the following:

- hold stammtisch on site and not online
- hold themed stammtisch (e.g. boardgame stammtisch, pool stammtisch) to make them more interactive
- ask students to give a feedback after every Stammtisch session

#### 4.12. Improvements that can be made to information and planning

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. They suggested the following:

- All relevant information concerning courses provided earlier;
- Possibility to register on courses earlier;
- Provide less information but more concise (for example with a 5-10 minutes demo clip);
- Combine the online platforms (Boku learn, Boku online)

### 5. INFRASTRUCTURE AT BOKU

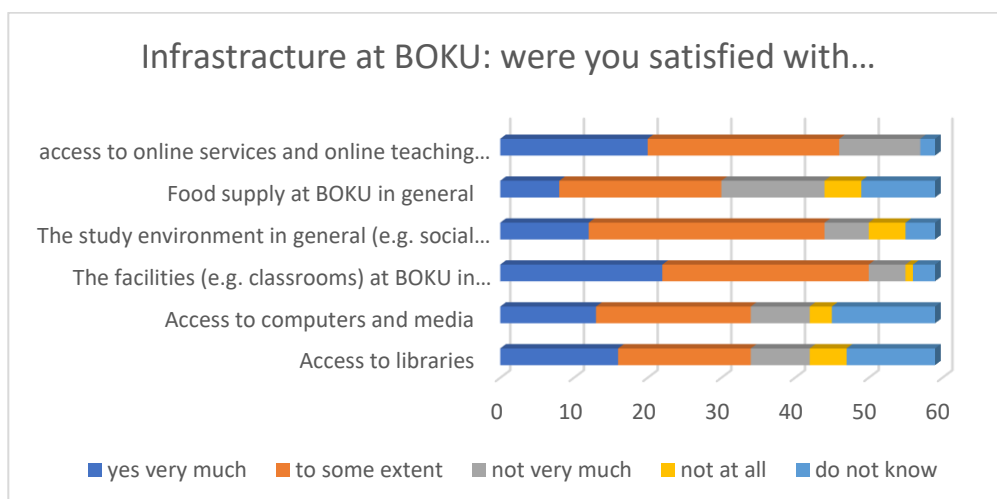


Figure 11. Students' satisfaction with infrastructure at BOKU.

The survey included also questions about the infrastructure at BOKU, ranging from library access to the food supply. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, many students could not answer how much were they satisfied with access to libraries (12 out of 60), computers and media (14 out of 60) or food supply at BOKU in general (10 out of 60), as facilities had reduced opening hours during pandemic time. By some students pricing at mensa was criticized of being too expensive. 76% of respondents had appreciated access to online services and online teaching. 83% claim also that they had been satisfied with the facilities (e.g. classrooms) at BOKU in general.

## 6. LANGUAGES

### 6.1. Language Problems

Students were also asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, as most were not native German speakers. Out of 60 respondents, 26 reported that they had never had any problematic language experience. 32 students claim to have language problems now and then, only 1 student complained about regularly facing language problems.

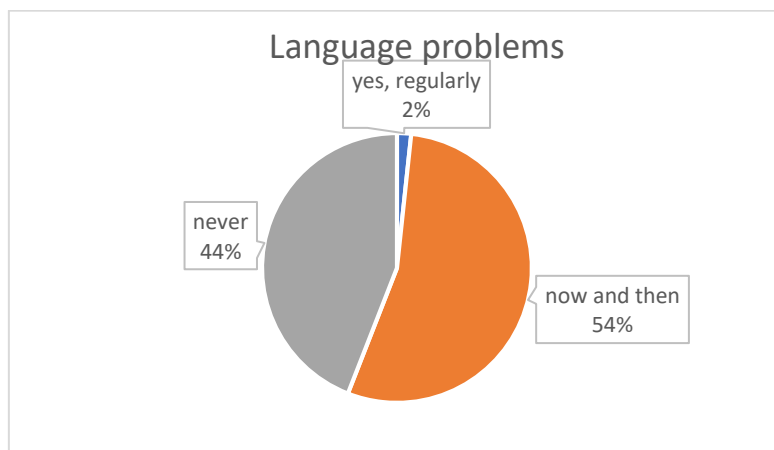


Figure 13. Occurrence of language problems.

Most often language problems were perceived in private life and in contact with Austrian students. Sometimes also in during lectures in classrooms or online classes. In exam settings, language problems occurred only to a smaller extent.

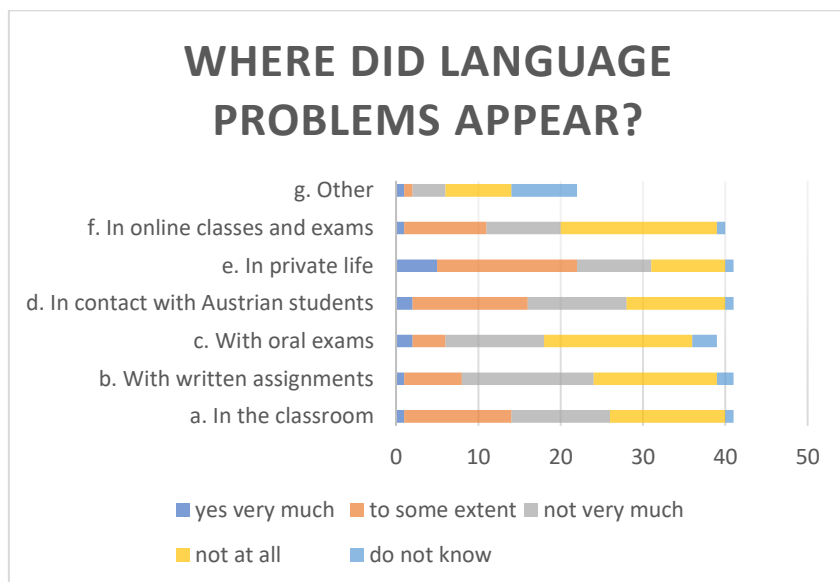


Figure 6. Settings in which language problems appeared.

## 6.2. German language course

Students had the option to take a German course both before and during the semester. 16 students who responded to the survey had had enrolled on an intensive German course before the semester started and 17 students had taken a German course during the semester at BOKU. 12 students had chosen to follow an external German course during the semester. Students had been also able to participate in the Tandem scheme, where they could have both – teach and learn from another student in a different language and 15 students who responded to the survey had taken the opportunity. Vast majority of students who had decided to take part in any of courses had been satisfied with them.

However, in all 4 cases most respondents (more than 70%) had not participated in German language course, no matter if Tandem or Intensive German Course is considered.

## 7. ACCOMMODATION

Students had the option of either living in a student residence organised by the OeAD, finding their own room in a student residence or moving into private accommodation, such as a shared flat. As illustrated on the chart below, the latter had been the most common type of accommodation amongst the survey respondents, chosen by 23 students (49%). 7 students had decided upon the first option (15%), and 17 students had chosen to find a room in a student residence themselves (36%).

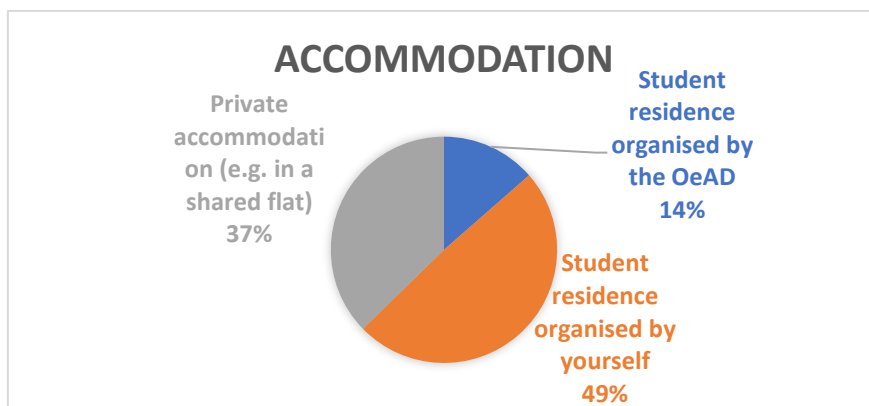


Figure 7. Chosen accommodation

### 7.1. Satisfaction with accommodation

9 respondents (75%) reported that they had been satisfied with OeAD accommodation, 24 (80%) had been pleased with the residences that they had chosen themselves. The majority of students (88%) had valued also their private accommodation.

### 7.2. Important factors in choosing accommodation

When asked to list important factors in choosing accommodation, students had revealed that price had been their biggest consideration. 96% of respondents had declared it had been the most decisive factor, followed by the condition of the property (90%), proximity to the university (81%), proximity to the city centre (78%), living together with other foreign students (59%),. The less important factor for exchange students in WS 21/22 when it comes to choosing accommodation had been the possibility to live together with Austrian students (44%).

## 8. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL OUTCOME

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 55 students being satisfied with the personal outcome and 48 students being satisfied with the academic outcome of their stay.

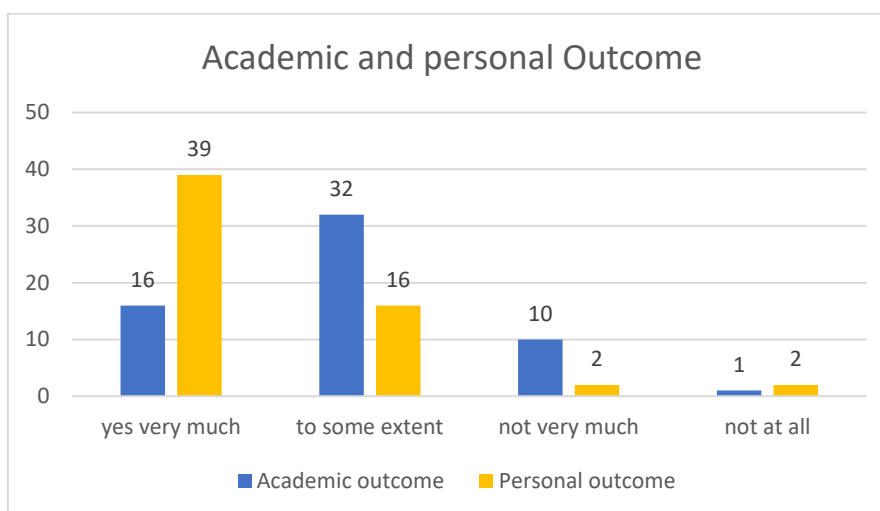


Figure 8. Personal and academic outcome of the stay at BOKU

28 out of 60 respondents would be happy to extend their stay at BOKU. Moreover, 44 would consider returning to Austria for a job or an internship, 33 would like to return to BOKU for further study and 24 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.

### 8.1. Situations requiring special attention

The majority of students did not encounter any problems during their time at BOKU. Some however found themselves in situations requiring special attention. Those were:

- Difficult time management due to individual course settings and time tables
- Health issues.
- Whole COVID-19 situation.

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

The following responses were suggested:

- More information on options for “cheaper living” (e.g. TicketGretchen)
- More sport offers (not only USI)
- Recommendation to search for a hobby with Austrian students, also helps a lot to learn German.
- More insight into research activities at BOKU, guided tours on research/experiments/field trials.

Besides, what needs to be mentioned is that in comments many students really did appreciate what BOKU and BOKU-IR had done and limitation due to pandemic were not their fault.

## **8.3. Experience of changes due to COVID-19 pandemic; recommendations for BOKU and BOKU-IR**

Students found it difficult:

- Studying only/majorily online.
- Cope with limitations for some facilities (e.g. computer room or library),
- Few activities (e.g. with ESN or at university), as BOKU regulations stricter than other universities.

What can be improved:

- Better online services and teachers should be familiar with these;
- Earlier information if courses take place online or in presence
- More ESN activities;
- More chances to meet people and more on-site meetings;

Other comments:

- Clear and prompt communication on BOKU regulations;
- Words of thanks for being informed and supported all the time;
- Good management under given circumstances of pandemic.