

# EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU

## EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

### WINTER SEMESTER 2022/23

This report summarizes the results of a survey conducted among incoming students who attended BOKU during the winter semester of 2022/23. 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 77 questionnaires were returned.

#### 1. About the sample

In a sample of 77 exchange students, 60% were female, 39% were male, and 1% identified as diverse. The majority of these students originated from Germany (24%), France (22%), Belgium (14%), Italy (6%), Czech Republic (3%) and USA (1%).

See all responses in Table 1.

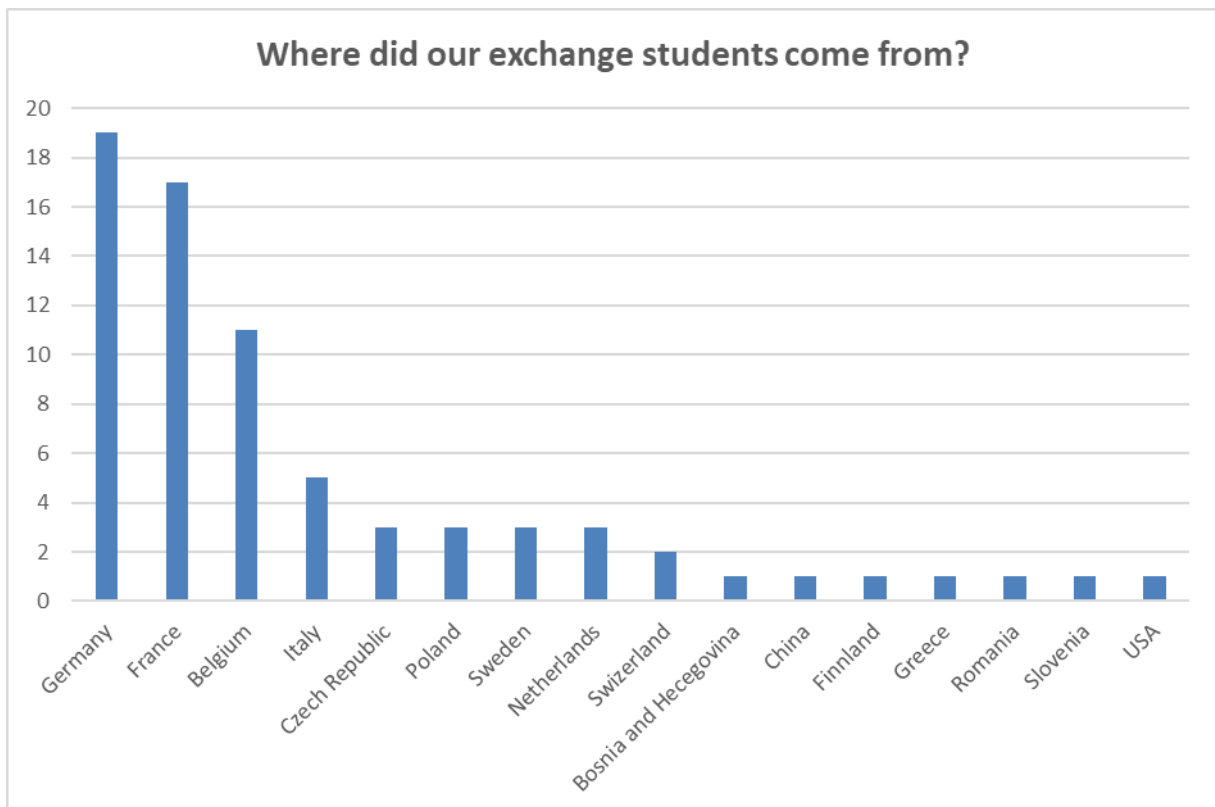


Figure 1. Exchange student's country of origin

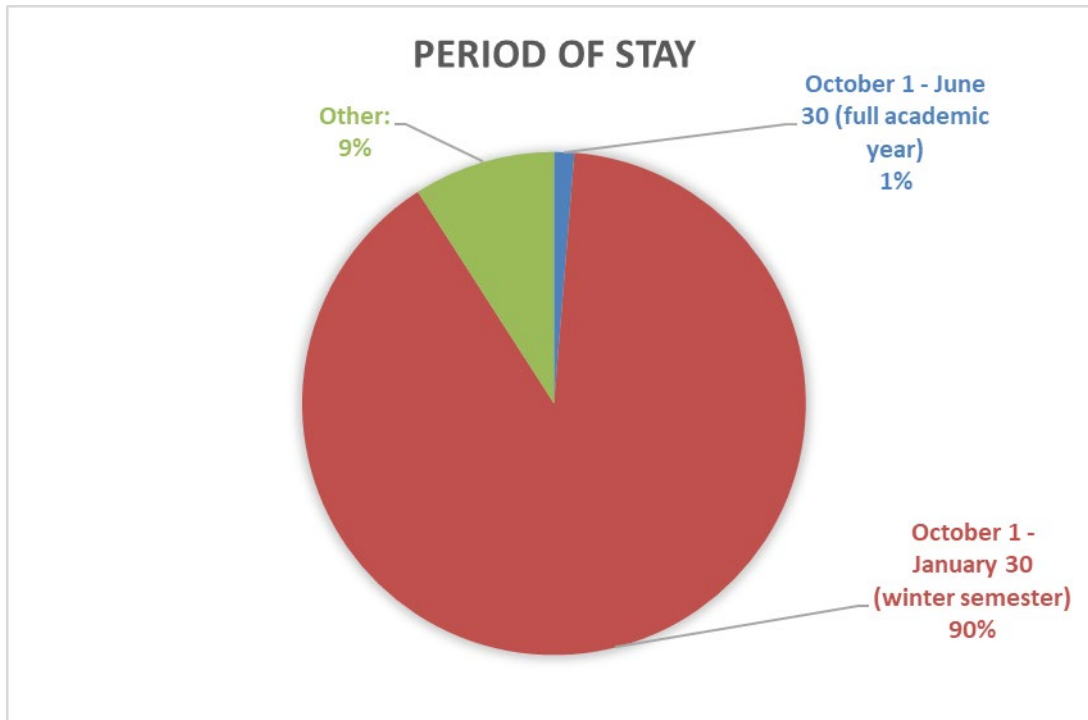


Figure 2. Period of stay

Of the exchange students, 69 stayed in Vienna from October to January 30th. One student stayed at BOKU for the full academic year. The remaining seven students selected different durations: September to February, October to February.

## 2. Most appreciated things at BOKU

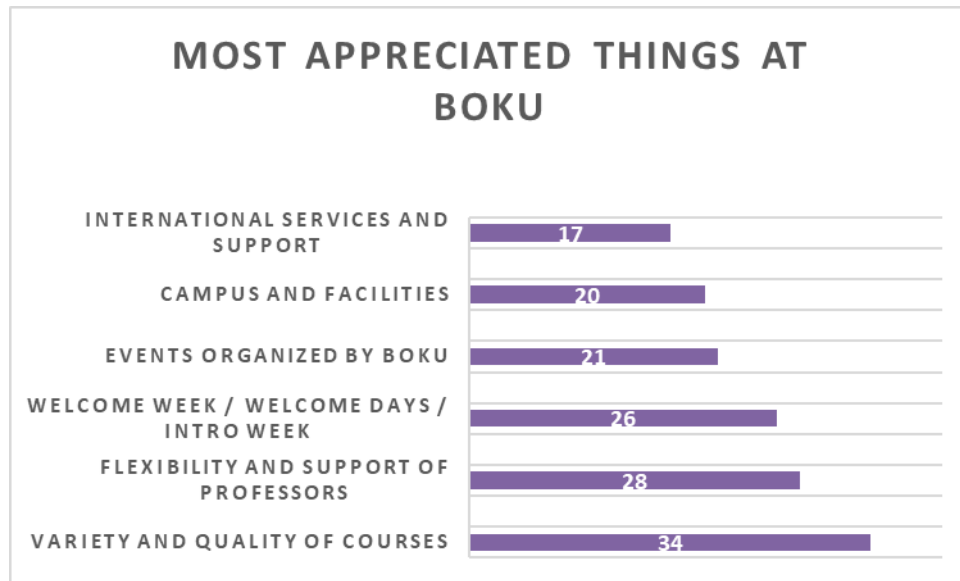


Figure 3. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

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 variety and quality of courses, which received 34 mentions. Closely following, the flexibility and support from professors gathered 28 responses, highlighting their professionalism and helpfulness, especially during the challenging pandemic period. The Welcome Week received 26 responses, indicating its importance to the students. Events organized by BOKU were mentioned by 21 students, reflecting their appreciation for these activities. Lastly, the BOKU campus and its facilities were highly valued, with 20 responses underscoring the importance of a well-equipped and conducive learning environment.

All data is shown in Table 3.

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

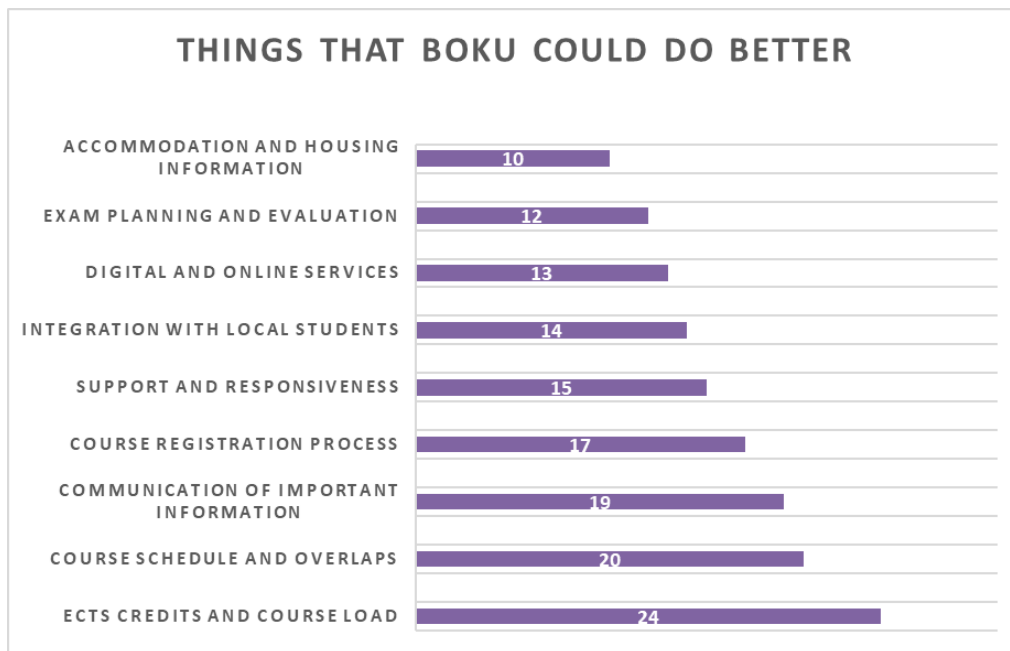


Figure 4. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

While the majority of students enjoyed their experience at BOKU, some believe there is still room for improvement. 24 students felt that BOKU could better manage ECTS credits and course loads. 20 students found the course schedules and overlaps challenging. 19 students indicated that communication of important information could be improved. 15 students mentioned that support and responsiveness were issues. Additionally, 14 students experienced difficulties with integration with local students.

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

##### **4.1 Activities at BOKU**

98% of students engaged in regular coursework, while one percent pursued internships to complement their academic pursuits.

##### **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 75% of respondents as highly significant. Following closely behind were the eagerness to meet new people (55%) and academic reasons (46%). 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.

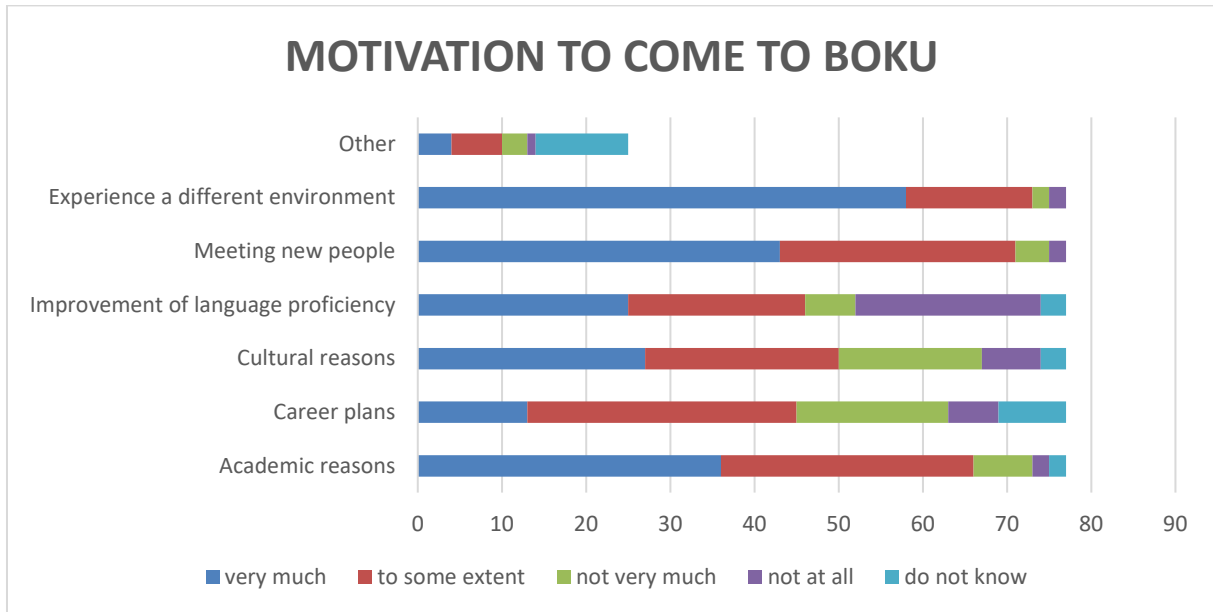


Figure 5. Motivation to come to BOKU

#### 4.3. Information before the stay

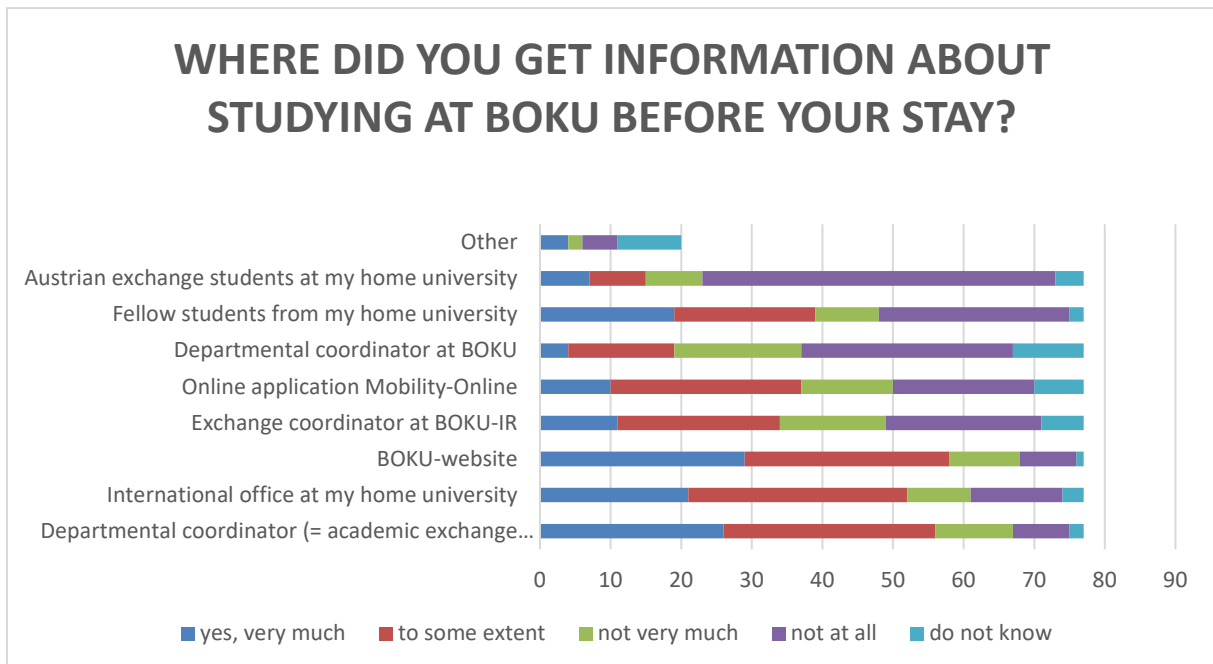


Figure 6. Sources of information used by students before their stay

The primary source of information for students about studying at BOKU was the university's website, with approximately 37% of respondents identifying it as their main resource. Other significant sources included:

- The departmental coordinator (33%);
- The international office at their home university (27%);
- Fellow students from their home university (24%).

#### 4.4. Information from BOKU

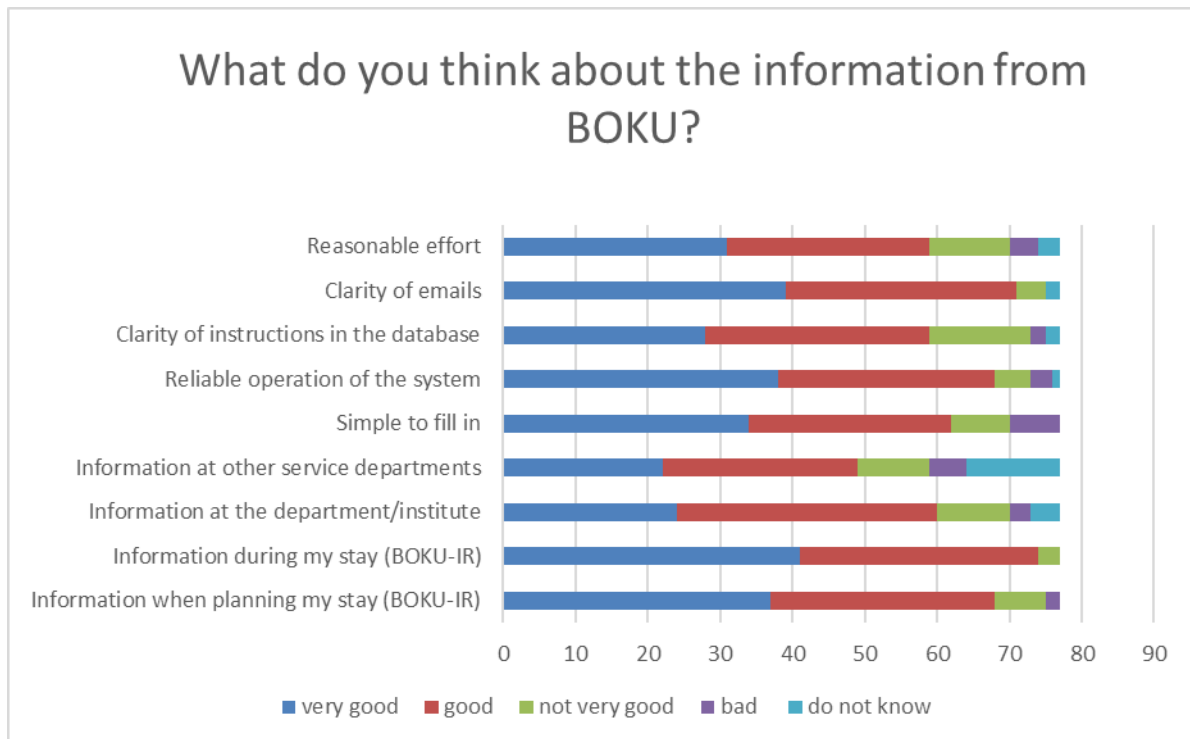


Figure 7. Evaluation of information from BOKU

The clarity of emails, the instructions in the database, and the reliability of the system received high marks, indicating that BOKU effectively communicates and maintains reliable systems. Although a small percentage of respondents rated certain aspects as "not very good" or "bad," these negative ratings are minimal compared to the overwhelmingly positive feedback. Overall, the data suggests that BOKU's efforts in providing information are well-received by most respondents. This reflects a general satisfaction with the clarity, reliability, and accessibility of the information provided by BOKU.

#### 4.5. Application Process – Mobility Online

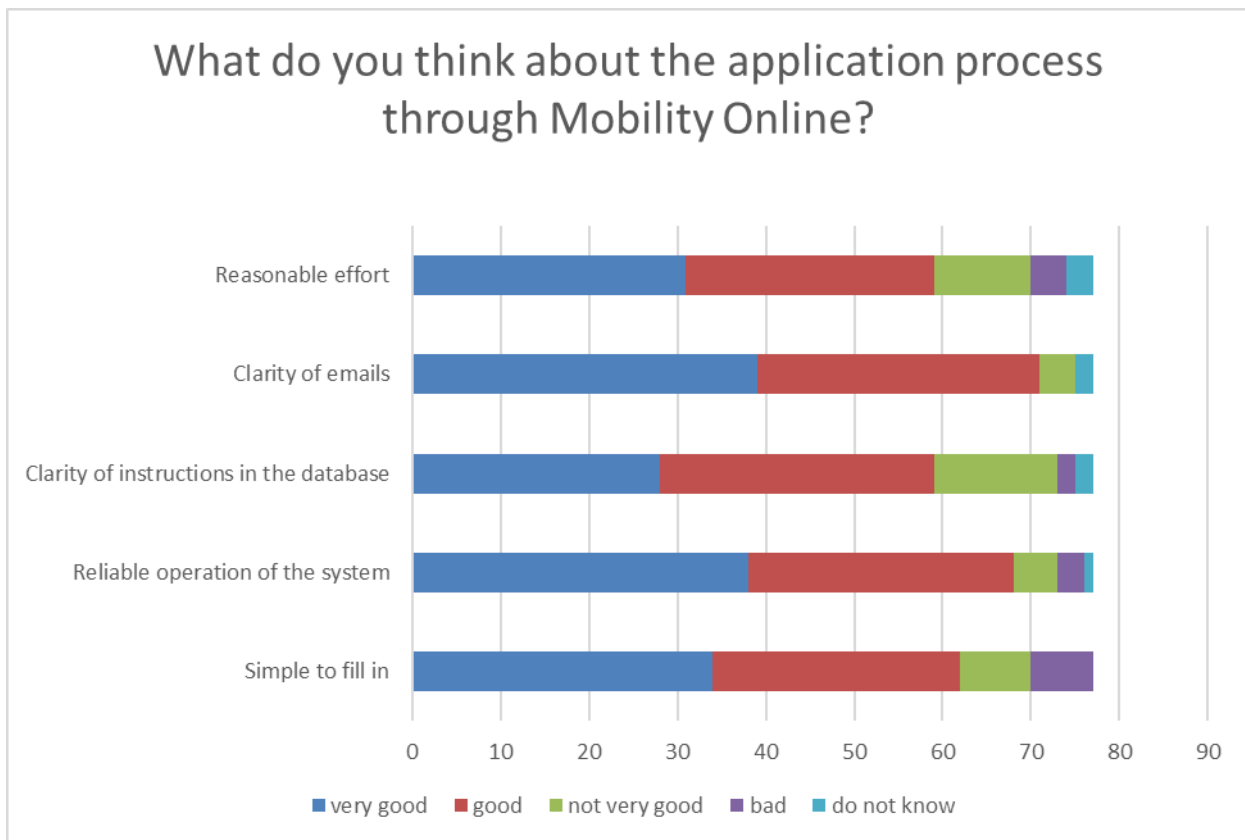


Figure 8. Evaluation of Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were mostly positive. The ratings for reasonable effort, clarity of emails, clarity of instructions in the database, reliable operation of the system, and simplicity of filling in forms are positive. Each of these aspects received approximately 74% combined "very good" and "good" ratings. A smaller percentage of respondents rated these aspects as "not very good" or "bad," with these negative ratings ranging between 5% and 15%. A minimal number of respondents selected "do not know."

The data suggests that the application process through mobility online is well-received by the majority of respondents. The overall high ratings indicate satisfaction with the clarity, reliability, and ease of the application process. The few negative responses are relatively insignificant compared to the overwhelming positive feedback.

#### 4.6. Welcome Days

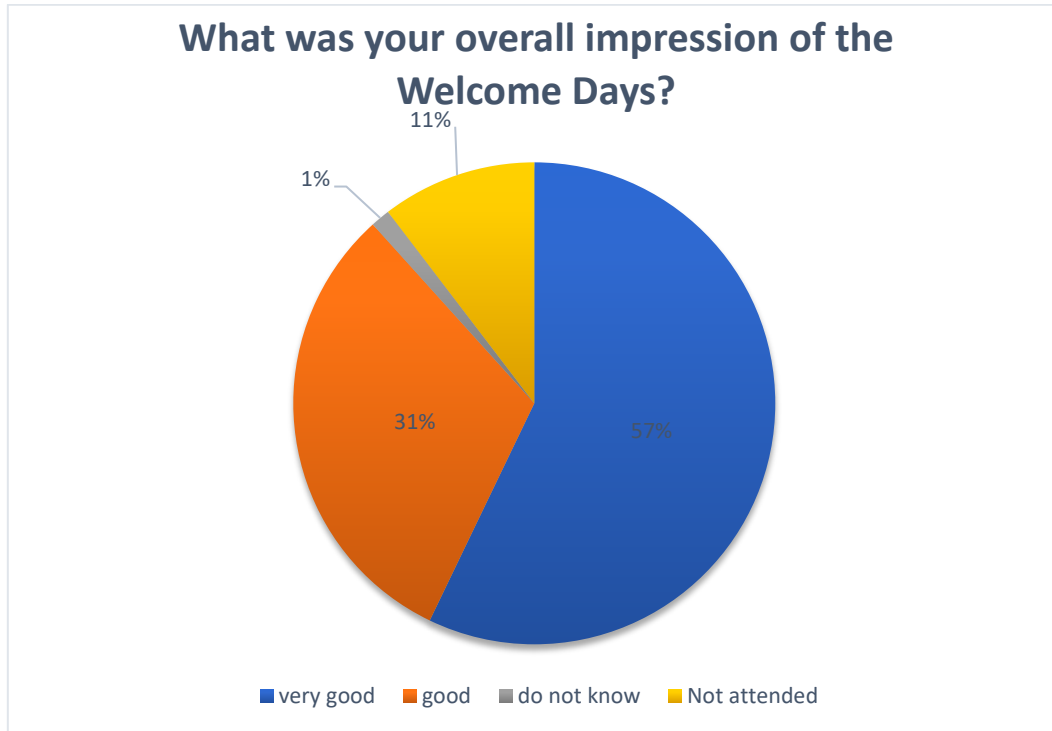


Figure 9. General impression of Welcome Days

Figure nine illustrates the overall impressions of participants regarding the Welcome Days event. A majority, 57%, rated the event as "very good," indicating a high level of satisfaction among attendees. Additionally, 31% of participants found the event "good," showing that a significant portion was satisfied, though not as highly impressed. A small fraction, 1%, indicated that they "do not know" their impression of the event. Finally, 11% of participants did not attend the event and therefore did not provide an impression. Overall, the chart reflects that the majority of participants had a positive experience, with 88% rating it as either "very good" or "good."

Participants enjoyed meeting new people and appreciated the group activities. They valued the opportunity to get to know others in similar situations and found the tour around the campus and guided walk to be well-liked. The "Beisl Abend" was highlighted as a positive experience, along with the good overview of important things provided. Meeting people and getting to know BOKU, along with the big explanation to international students, were described as lifesavers. The trip to the Heurigen and the concerts were also positively mentioned.

#### **4.7. BOKU Info Session**

The BOKUonline info session was included in the Welcome Days activities. Out of 77 students who responded to the survey, 56 attended the session. Among those attendees, 87% found it helpful. The session explained how to register for courses and provided detailed information about individual professors and departments.

For the 27% 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 winter semester of 2022/23, 58 out of 76 respondents reported having a buddy. Among these 58 students, 75% said their buddies helped them with their initial steps upon arrival.

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.

#### **4.9. BOKU-IR newsletter**

According to the survey, 36% of students regularly read the BOKU-IR newsletter, while only 2% have never read it. Some students suggested that the newsletter could promote a broader variety of events. Additionally, 29% of respondents found the newsletter very helpful, and 33% found it somewhat helpful.

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

According to the survey, 74% of the exchange students joined the official ESN BOKU Facebook group, with 55% finding it helpful.

#### **4.11. Weekly *Stammtisch* and other activities**

According to the survey, 33% of respondents never attended the weekly "Stammtisch," while 10% 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.
- Maybe doing some activities, like quiz, karaoke, and special offers for drinks (happy hours)

#### **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:

- Help more with finding accommodation
- some of sites on BOKU website do not have an English option- or rather if you click on the English alternative, only the title change, but rest of the text is still in German
- Maybe an email where the links to the website are linked per subject, e.g. "Housing LINK, Public transport LINK"

### **5. INFRASTRUCTURE AT BOKU**

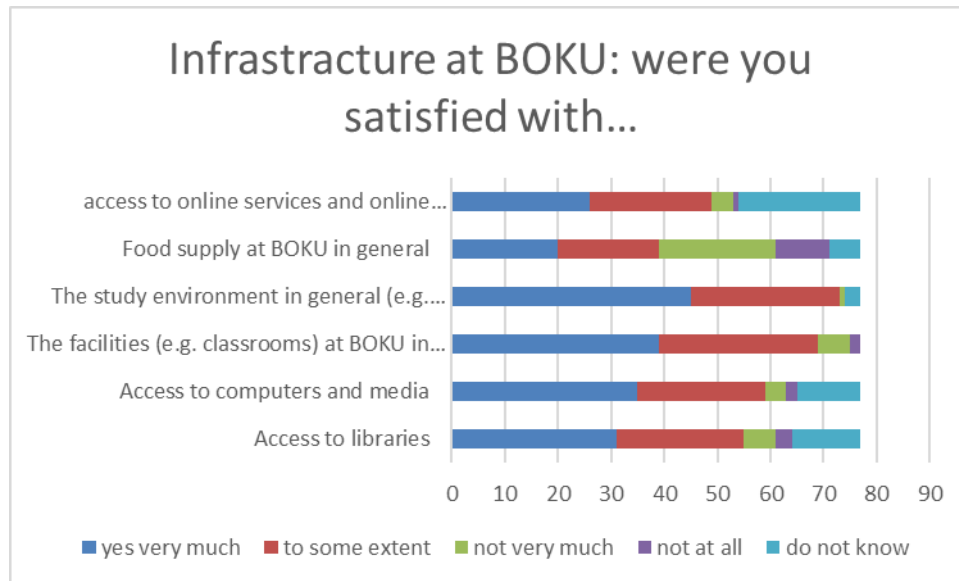


Figure 10. Students' satisfaction with infrastructure at BOKU

The survey also covered various aspects of BOKU's infrastructure, including library access and food services. Here are some of the comments:

- I find the need to register for a study place in the library somewhat inconvenient, as I would prefer the flexibility to visit spontaneously. Although I understand that Covid-19 influenced these changes, it would be great if there could be more opportunities for spontaneous access.
- The infrastructure and services at BOKU are overall extremely positive. The well-organized spaces and recent renovations reflect a high standard, making BOKU one of the best places to be a student.
- I encountered significant audio issues during a lecture by the professor from Post-Harvest Technology, which affected my experience with online teaching.
- There is a need for more study spaces that can accommodate various activities such as individual study, online classes, group work, and practice presentations. Currently, doing these activities in hallways is less than ideal. Additionally, having areas where students can relax and enjoy snacks between classes would be beneficial.
- I found the information about sports courses on the website to be solely in German, which posed a challenge for me. It would be helpful to have this information available in multiple languages.

## 6. LANGUAGES

### 6.1. Language Problem

Students were also asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, as most were not native German speakers. Out of 76 respondents, 44 reported that they had never encountered any problematic language experiences. However, 27 students admitted to occasionally facing language barriers, while only 6 students complained about regularly encountering language problem.

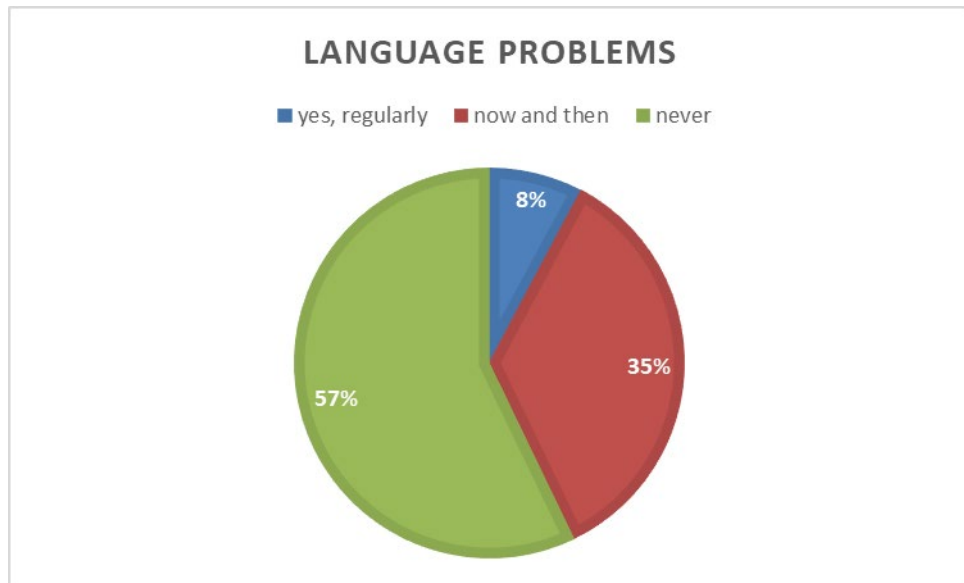


Figure 11. Occurrence of language problems.

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

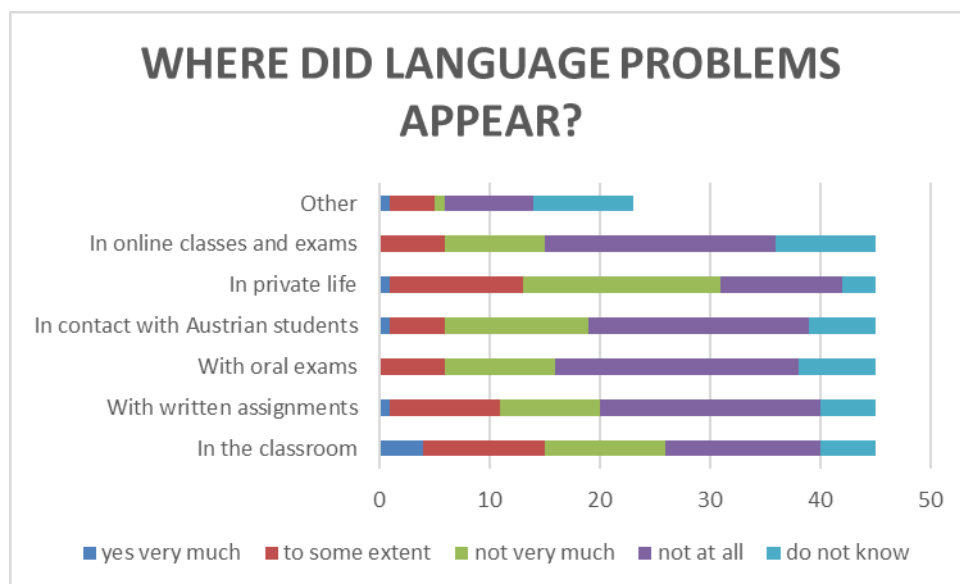


Figure 12. Settings in which language problems appeared

## 6.2. German language course

Students had the opportunity to enrol in German language courses both before and during the semester. According to the survey, 14 students participated in an intensive German course prior to the start of the semester, while 11 students chose to take a German course during the semester at BOKU. Additionally, students could engage in the Tandem scheme, which allows them to both teach and learn from another student in a different language. Of the respondents, 10 students took advantage of this scheme. The majority of students who participated in any of these language courses reported high levels of satisfaction with their experiences.

## 7. ACCOMODATION

Among the survey respondents, the most common type of housing was private accommodation (e.g., in a shared flat), chosen by 35 students, which represents 45% of the respondents. The second most common type was student residences organized by the students themselves, selected by 16 students (20%). Additionally, 12 students (18%) opted for student residences organized by the OeAD.

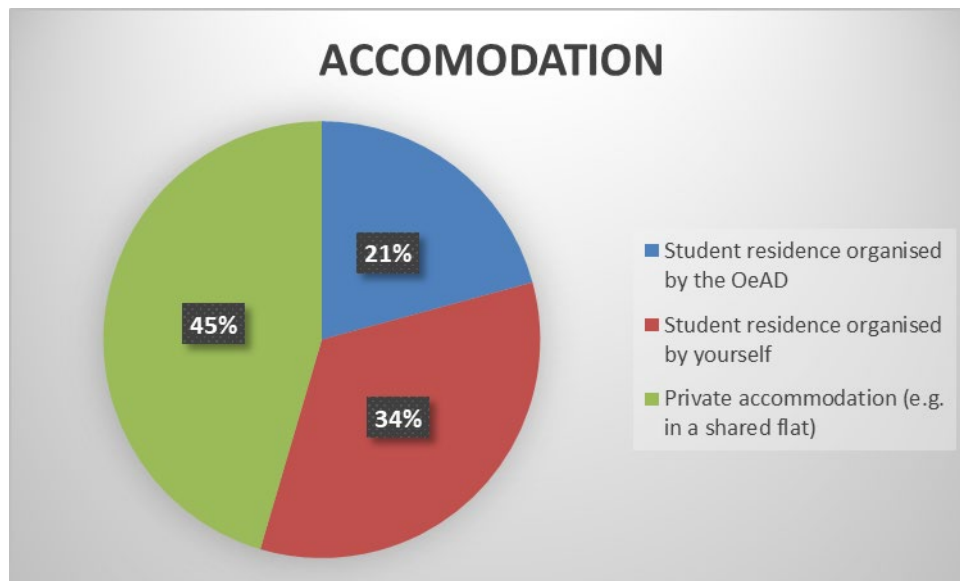


Figure 15. Chosen accommodation

### 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 54% of respondents declaring it as the most decisive factor. Following closely behind, 35% considered the condition of the property, while 36% prioritized proximity to the university. Additionally, 15% 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 7% 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 more information on events in Vienna
- Improve the availability of ZIB staff
- Ask professors to provide more detailed course descriptions

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

This semester, without Covid-19 restrictions, was generally well-received by students. Many appreciated the possibility of bi-modal learning offered by some teachers. Students typically prefer in-person lectures and seminars, but find online courses and recorded lectures helpful for managing travel, appointments, and work. A hybrid system is suggested to balance academic and personal life. Several students mentioned that they experienced no significant changes or disruptions, and found their stay normal and pleasant.