



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, Summer semester 2019

This is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the summer semester 2019 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. 129 questionnaires were returned.

1. Things that students appreciated the most at BOKU

Many exchange students had a positive experience at BOKU. When asked to name three things that they had appreciated at BOKU. The most popular response was that students enjoyed the Welcome Days and the flexibility of the university (58 responses). The responses indicate that Erasmus events played a key role in welcoming exchange students to BOKU, and in helping them to settle in to student life in Vienna. Therefore, it is no surprise that students also valued BOKU's friendly atmosphere, the teaching staff and quality of education (60 responses). 21 responded that they appreciated meeting new people and 11 the Austrian culture. Other responses to the survey dealt with courses and university life in general. 16 respondents valued the university facilities and 9 campus and park. Others response to ZIB, online services, buddy programme, excursions, public transport and the fact that animal are allowed.

See responses in Table 1.

Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU (Answers with 10 or more responses)

Things appreciated by students	Answers	%
Welcome Days / Intro week	34	16%
Flexibility of the university (choice of course, exam dates)	24	11%
Quality of Education / high staff: student ratio	22	10%
Meeting new people	21	10%
Teaching staff	20	9%
Friendly atmosphere/ other students	18	8%

2. Things BOKU could do better for international students

Although most students were satisfied with their time at BOKU, some felt that there was room for improvement. 23 responses that the courses overlapping is a problem. They stated that course clashes had made it difficult to organise their timetable, and requested that BOKU make its course blocks smaller, to prevent this issue from reoccurring. Students felt that BOKU could better support its students by publishing exam dates earlier and inform



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about what is expected, which would make the process less stressful (17 responses). Also, the course registration could be improved (12 responses). Other responses indicated longer opening hours at the library, more language courses with more different levels, more advice on finding a room. The last responses were about the excursions – would appreciate more of this (also trips), more English advice and also cheaper *mensa*. Last but not least there is too much paperwork!

See Table 2 for responses.

Table 2. What students felt BOKU could improve upon (10 or more responses)

Overlapping and full courses. More help organizing	23	14%
More information about the exams and what is expected & campus/department info	17	13%
Improve course registration process e.g sign up for courses earlier and explain how to register course	12	13%
University facilities (<i>Mensa</i> , amount of group study space). Longer opening hours library	11	9%
Too much paperwork	11	8%
More language courses (namely English and German) with more levels and less expensive	10	7%
Too many different places for courses and more courses in English	9	6%

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% carried out an internship and 12% worked on a thesis or research project.

Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department of Biotechnology;
- Institute of Soil Research;
- Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Division of Livestock Sciences and Division of Agricultural Engineering;
- Centre for Development Research;
- Silviculture institute;
- Department of Applied Genetics and Cell Biology;
- Institute of Hydrobiology & water management;
- Institute of Organic Farming:

3.2 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. 92% of respondents had considered this to be important, followed by wanting to meet new people (83 %), and



cultural reasons (74 %). Also, academic reasons were important for many (84 %) Other aspects included the desire to improve language proficiency and career plans. Some students also noted that they wanted to discover Vienna, learn German, that Vienna is the center of Europe and that BOKU is specified in environmental topics, ecosystems and biodiversity.

See Figure 1 for all responses.

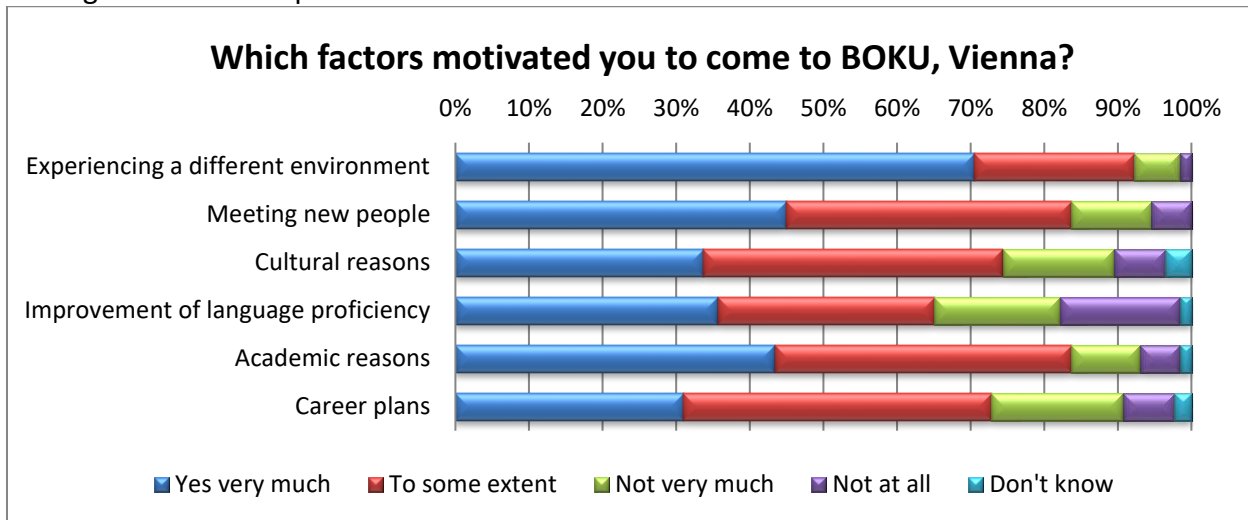


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

3.3 Information before the 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 78% of respondents had found this to be their most important source of information, with 60% stating that they were informed by the exchange coordinator at their home universities. Other sources included the following:

- International office at home;
- The exchange coordinators at ZIB;
- Online application mobility online;
- Department coordinator at BOKU;
- Fellow student from home university;
- Austrian exchange students at home universities.

Alternatively, some students had been informed by their professors/supervisors, their buddies and by the EnvEuro website.

See Figure 2 for all responses.

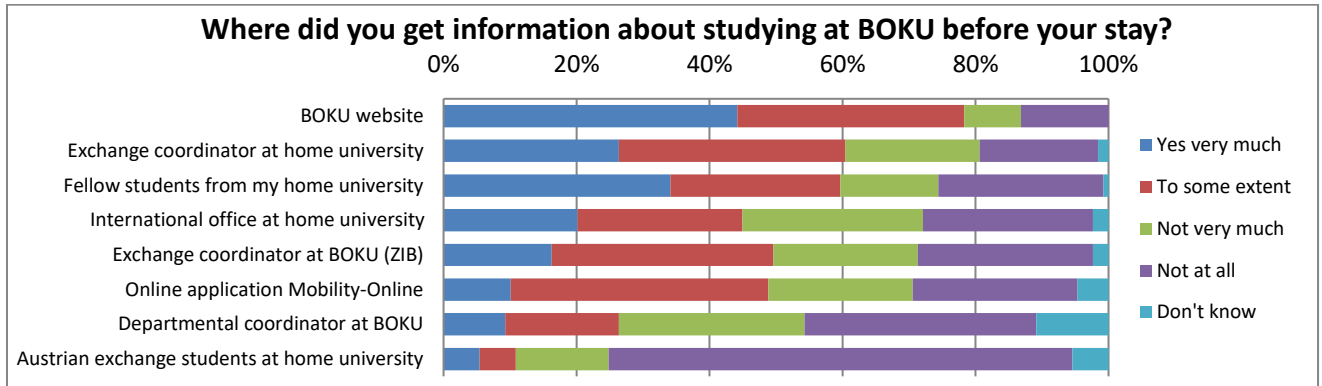


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

3.4 Information from BOKU

When asked to comment on the information that they had been given by BOKU, students had a mostly positive response. For instance, 85% of responses were satisfied with the information they had received during their stay. Furthermore, 86% had appreciated the information given to them before their arrival, and 62% had received adequate information from their departments. Lastly, 51% of students were satisfied with the information given to them by other service departments.

All data can be seen in Figure 3.

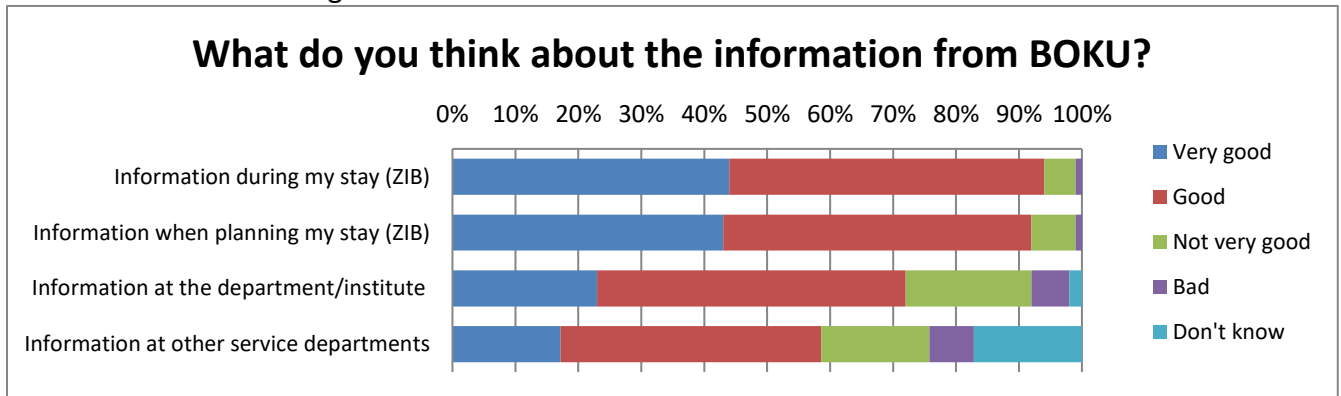


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

3.5 Mobility -Online

The survey was also used to collect student experiences of using Mobility-Online. It showed that the student response towards Mobility-Online was predominantly positive. The most common response was that the system sent out clear emails to students, clarifying the admissions procedure (69%). Moreover, 82% thought that the system was reliable, with 66% thinking that it was a reasonable effort. 69% of students were satisfied with the clarity of instructions in the data base, and 69% agreed that Mobility-Online was simple to fill in.

All responses are shown in Figure 4.

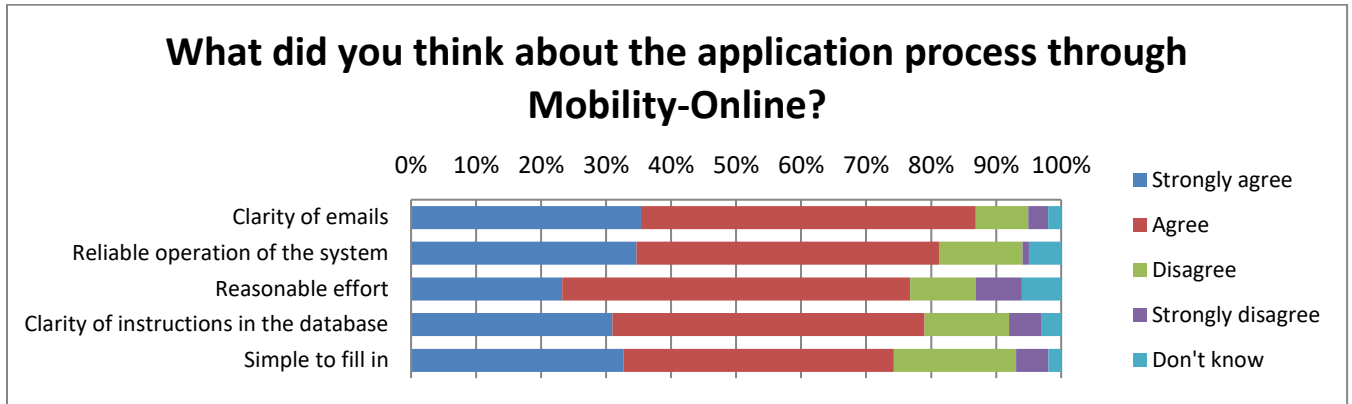


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility-Online

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 were any misunderstandings, it was made very clear that the student was wrong, and causing the misunderstanding, instead of trying to help;
- The information through mobility online about the same student should be shared between both universities;
- Better translation into English;
- More overview about what is done and what to do. The outlook is horrible!
- Better description of how to fill out "Changes during mobility" and where coordinator should sign it etc;
- I would have loved to just fill the learning agreement online instead of having to change it considering the first courses I had chosen before coming at BOKU. It would be way easier to have one document that we can change directly online (with your approval of course);
- Shorter the emails, or write them as bullet points or steps!
- Way too much paperwork.

3.6 Welcome Days

81% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 73% of these students came away with a good or very good impression of the events. ZIB ran a wide variety of events, including a visit to a *Heurigen* (a traditional Viennese wine bar) and tours of campus and Vienna. Out of 65 responses, the most common answer was that students had enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people the most (18 responses). The *Heurigen*, meeting new people and getting to know campus also proved to be popular, both receiving 34 responses. Students had also enjoyed participating in the other Welcome Days events, and appreciated the general information that they had been given.

Students also provided suggestions on how to improve the Welcome Days. The most common suggestions were offering a wider variety of events, and holding events in different



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parts of Vienna. Students felt this would allow them to meet more people, and to get better acquainted with their new city.

Other suggestions included:

- Placing students into smaller groups, or grouping together students from the same degree;
- Allowing more time for registration, and simplifying the registration process;
- Holding more 'get to know people' events.

3.7 BOKUonline info session

A BOKUonline information session had also been offered as part of the Welcome Days. Out of the 129 students who had answered the survey, 101 had attended this session. 69% of these students had found it helpful, as it had explained how to register for courses, and provided more information on individual professors and departments.

Although the response was largely positive, some students felt that the information session could be improved.

Feedback included:

- Too much information when you haven't seen BOKUonline yet, you should be able to do it on your own computer at the same time as the explanation (was not possible because I didn't have my number yet);
- Why do it in German? Just took too long.

3.8 Buddy system

BOKU has implemented a Buddy system, to allow exchange students to meet and befriend their Austrian classmates. This enables new students to get help with administrative processes, and gain more of an insight into life in Vienna. In the 2019 summer semester survey, 92 respondents stated that they had had a buddy. Out of these 92 students, 58% said their buddies had helped them with their first steps after their arrival, and 43% received help with getting used to academic life. 45% respondents also had buddies who could help them adapt to social life in Vienna.

Those who had decided not to get a Buddy did so for different reasons. These included being a native German speaker who felt that they would not have any difficulties in adjusting to life in Austria. Several students also noted that their Buddy never contacted them, or never had time to meet.

All responses are noted in Figure 5.



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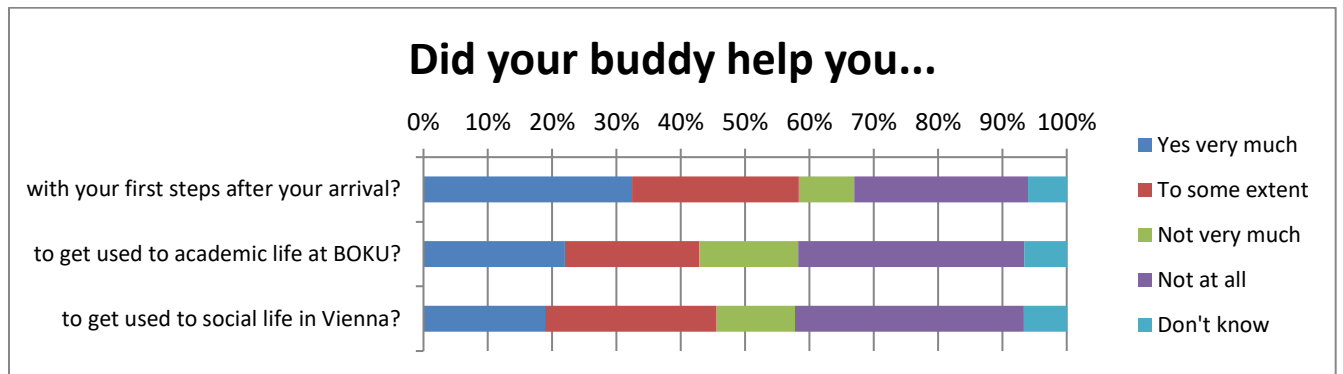


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

Over the course of the semester, ZIB sent out an international newsletter to students, informing them about different events at the university. 77 students who responded to the survey either read this newsletter regularly (36%) or now and then (54%). 76% of respondents (65 students) found the information it provided useful, and other students offered suggestions on how to improve the newsletter. One student requested 'mountain trips for students every month,' with another commenting that most of the information was already available on Facebook.

3.10 ESN BOKU incomings Facebook group

108 survey respondents (84%) had joined the 'ESN BOKU Incomings' Facebook group, and 74 % students had found it useful. When asked why they had not joined the group, the only response given by students was that they did not have a Facebook account.

3.11 Stammtisch

BOKU held a weekly *Stammtisch*, encouraging students to meet new people. Out of 129 survey responses, 93 stated that students had either attended the *Stammtisch* regularly or every now and then. Student suggestions on how to improve the event included the following:

- Organise more games and activities;
- Hold the Stammtisch in different venues;
- Have some Stammtisch events outside;
- Hold the events in non-smoking bars or cafes;
- Change of location from Polka Dot as this place was extremely hot!

3.12 Other events

Two of the main events held during the Welcome Days were the *Willkommens-Heuriger* and the *Apfelstrudel goes international* for International Students. 63% of the students attended the *Heuriger*. The *Apfelstrudel goes international* was attended by 11%.

3.13 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students



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When asked to provide feedback for these two events, students wrote the following:

- The *Heuriger* had been a very popular event;
- Some students didn't hear about the *Apfelstrudel* event, and that was the reason they did not attend;
- Students wanted more evening events (such as Biermittwoch);
- Sometimes the tickets for the events were fully booked.

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

The survey included questions about the infrastructure at BOKU, ranging from library access to the food supply. 80% were happy with the facilities at BOKU in general. Additionally, 75% respondents were pleased with the access to computers and media, and 68% appreciated the access that they had had to libraries. The food supply at BOKU was the area where most students indicated there was room for improvement, namely by selling cheaper food in the Mensa.

Other suggestions for improvement included:

- Allowing students to take their things into the library and longer opening hours
- Opening the library at weekends
- Make the *mensa* food cheaper
- Reducing the price of sports activities for exchange students.
- Upgrade the computer rooms.
- Make events available in English as well.

All responses are noted in Figure 6.

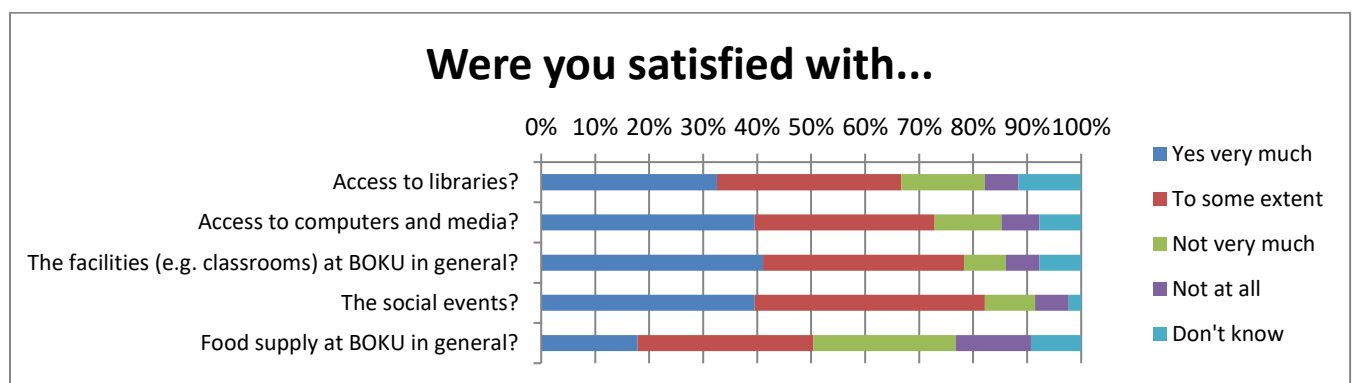


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

5. Languages

5.1 Language problems

Students were also asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, as most were not native German speakers. Out of 129 respondents, 50 reported that they had not regularly any problems with the language. Those who had had problems stated that those



had been in the classroom (23 students), in contact with Austrian students (16 students) and in private life (33 students). Other responses indicated that some students had encountered issues with oral and written exams, or when dealing with professors or in the E-mails receiving from BOKU.

Data can be seen in Figure 7.

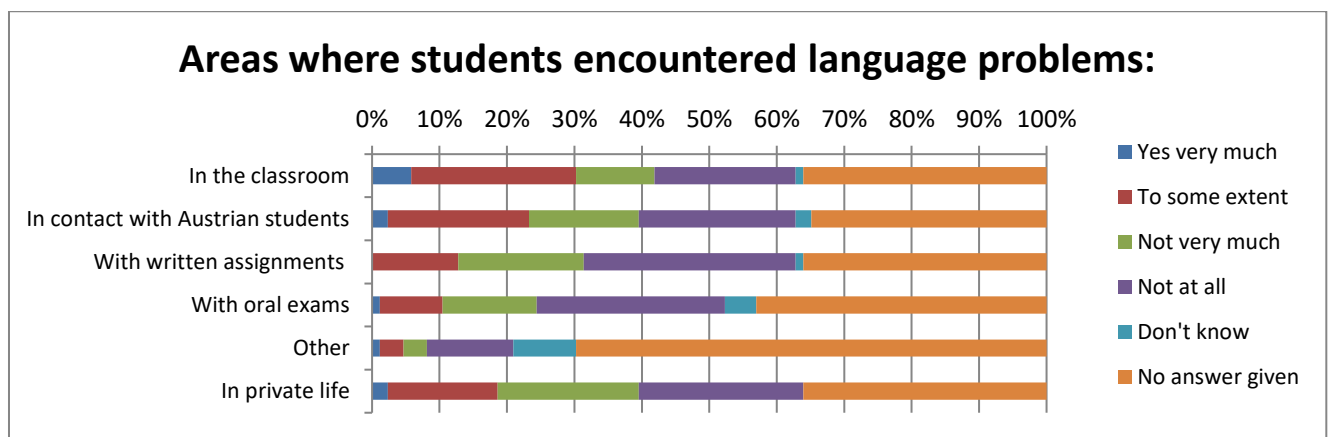


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

5.2 German language courses

Students had the option to take a German course both before and during the semester. 22 students who responded to the survey had enrolled on an intensive German course before the semester started, and 22 students took a German course during the semester at BOKU. Students were also able to participate in the Tandem scheme, where they could both teach and learn from another student in a different language. 17 students who responded to the survey took part in this scheme.

6. Accommodation

Students had the option of either living in a student residence organised by the OeAD, of finding their own room in a student residence or moving into private accommodation, such as a flat share. Student residence in a private accommodation or shared flat was the most common accommodation with 46%. Also, student residence organising by themselves was popular (34%). 20% got a student residence organised by the OeAD.

6.1 Satisfaction with accommodation

20 respondents (16%) reported that they were satisfied with OeAD accommodation, and 36 (28%) were pleased with the residences that they had chosen themselves. The majority of students (42%) valued their private accommodation.

Many students had experienced difficulties in finding accommodation. Comments included:

- Students having difficulties in finding accommodation in Vienna;
- Communication issued with landlord;



- The OeAD asking for an expensive deposit.

6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

When asked to list important factors in choosing accommodation, students revealed that price was their biggest consideration. 83 out of 86 respondents said it was the most decisive factor, followed by the condition of the property (77 students), proximity to the university (65 students) and proximity to the city centre (60 students). Other factors were living with other foreign students or exchange students.

All responses are recorded in Figure 8.

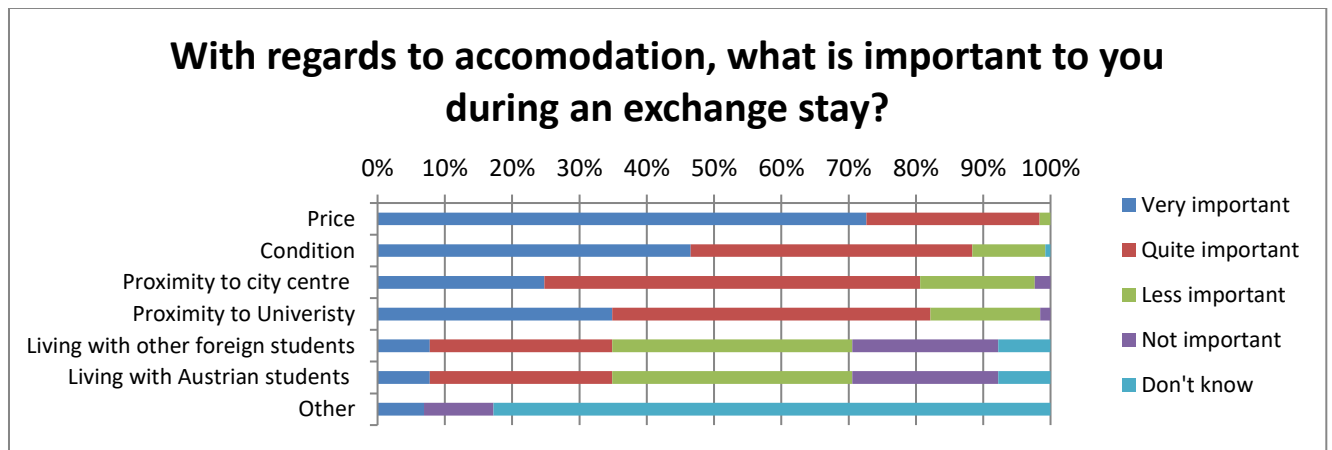


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

7. Academic and personal outcomes

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

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 121 students satisfied with the personal outcome and 105 students satisfied with the academic outcome of their stay.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

64 out of 129 respondents would be happy to extend their stay at BOKU. Moreover, 93 students would consider returning to Austria for a job or an internship, 56 would return to BOKU for further study and 51 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.

All responses can be found in Figure 9.

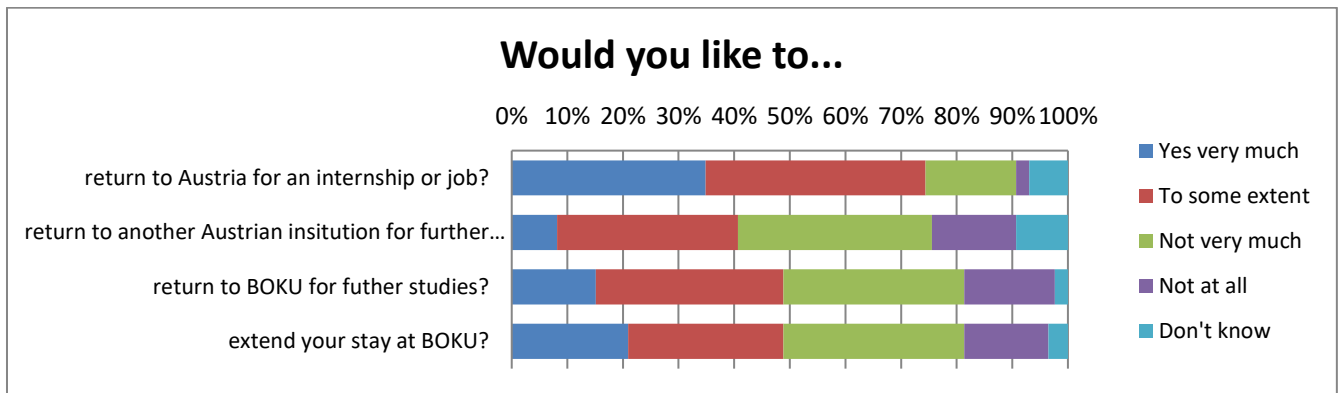


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

7.3 Situations requiring special attention

The majority of students did not encounter many problems during their time at BOKU. Some students did, however, find themselves in situations requiring special attention. These situations ranged from a trip to the doctors to issues with course management, failing an exam and private issues. Many had the feeling that the administrative part took way too much energy.

On the negative side one student wrote: "My situation as being a student of Eur-Organic and having to deal with Erasmus papers was difficult. I'm still not figuring out what to do with the prolonged writing of my thesis. And the Erasmus office won't prolong my departure date. I think this should be addressed more: Students at BOKU are writing their thesis longer and we shouldn't act like it is not the case. In a program like Eur-Organic, we should have more coordination between the regulations of the universities. Coming from Hohenheim, I now still don't know if I can count on the grant or not. And it was not possible for me to finish my thesis earlier nor to start it in the winter. Because everything takes a longer time at BOKU."

One student also did not consider coming back to Austria because of the difficulties getting a legal status to stay in Austria.

7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Provide more information on events in Vienna and cultural activities;
- More breaks between the courses;
- German courses on the same level: don't make the gap too big between the levels;
- More administration based more on trust instead of paperwork;
- Meeting at the end of the semester;
- Help students before their arrival;
- Improve the availability of ZIB staff (longer opening hours).



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8. Background information

93 survey respondents were female and 36 were male. The majority of respondents (86) were at BOKU for the summer semester, 32 were there for the full academic year and 11 had alternative arrival and departure dates.

Exchange students came to BOKU from various countries. The most common nationalities were French (25 survey respondents) and German (17 survey respondents).

All nationalities are listed in the table below:

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

Nationality	Answers	%
French	25	19%
German	17	13%
Belgian	5	4%
Colombian	1	1%
Italian	10	8%
Dutch	5	4%
Finnish	3	2%
Slovakian	2	2%
Slovenian	5	4%
Croatian	8	6%
Norway	5	4%
Turkish	3	2%
Czech	3	2%
British	3	2%
New Zealand	1	1%
Swiss	1	1%
Chinese	2	2%
Greek	3	2%
Indian	1	1%
Danish	1	1%
European	10	8%
Sweden	9	7%
Hungarian	1	1%
Cambodia	1	1%
Jamaican	1	1%
Montenegrin	1	1%
Spanish	2	2%
USA	3	2%
Canadian	3	2%



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Portuguese	2	2%
Romanian	1	1%
Polish	1	1%
Türk	2	2%
Anonymous	3	2%
Brazilian	1	1%
SUM	129	100%