

EXCHANGE STUDIES AT BOKU

EVALUATION OF INCOMING STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

WINTER SEMESTER 2020

This document reports on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the winter semester 2020 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. 47 questionnaires were returned.

I. ABOUT THE SAMPLE

In sample of 47 exchange students 66% were female and 34% were male. Most of them came from Germany (26%), Belgium (20%) and France (18%).

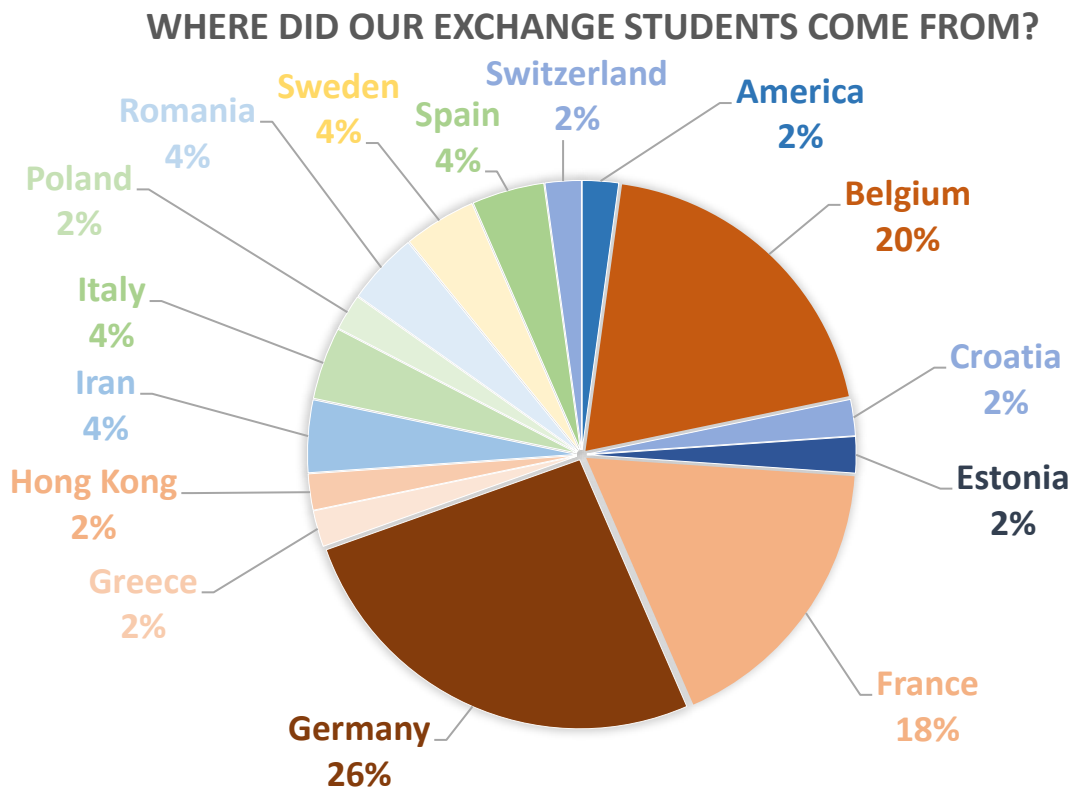


Figure 1. Exchange students' country of origin

PERIOD OF STAY

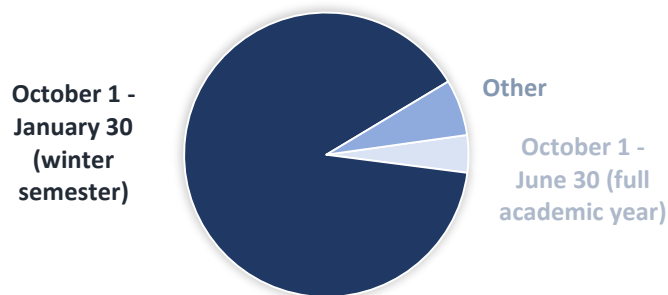


Figure 2. Period of stay

The vast majority of the exchange students stayed in Vienna for the winter semester only, 2 students chose to stay at BOKU for the full academic year and 3 of them chose other options (July-January; October-March; October 2020-September 2021).

II. MOST APPRECIATED AT BOKU THINGS

There is no doubt that many exchange students had a positive experience at BOKU. When asked to name three particularly appreciated things, the most popular response was that students enjoyed the professional, helpful and understanding during hard pandemic times teaching staff (21 responses). As can be seen on the Figure 3, the responses indicate that also courses (interesting, easy to follow, in small groups, wide range of them) and supportive administrative staff were particularly appreciated. It is worth to highlight that students mentioned also that it was very helpful to have many lectures recorded and to be able to come back to them when needed. There is no surprise that, like every year, students also valued BOKU's campus and environment (12), city Vienna itself (6) and facilities (2). What may seem interesting, during predominantly virtual semester students appreciated also clear procedures and general good organisation (10), well designed and full of information BOKU websites (4) and smart Corona crisis management (3). Other important for positive perception factors were: friendly and open-minded students (10), well prepared Welcome Days (10), friendly atmosphere (5), Buddy system (4), concurrent scientific possibilities (2) and green & sustainable mindset (2).

Particularity appreciated at BOKU are:

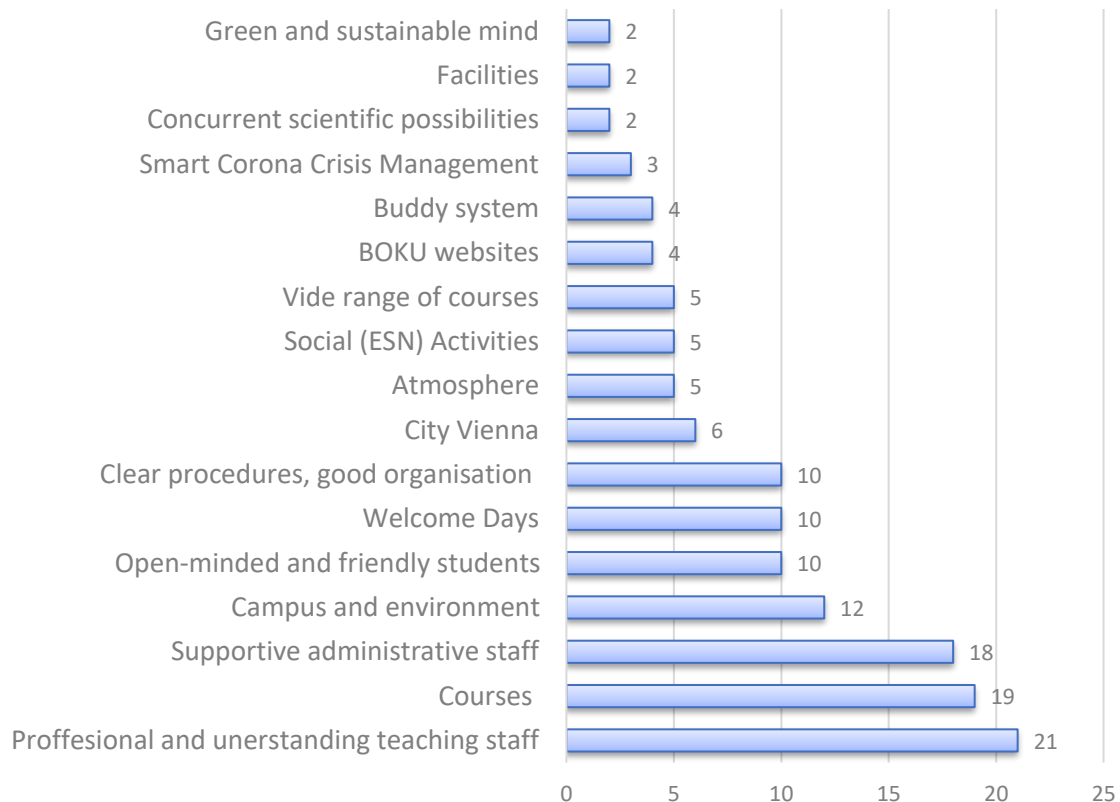
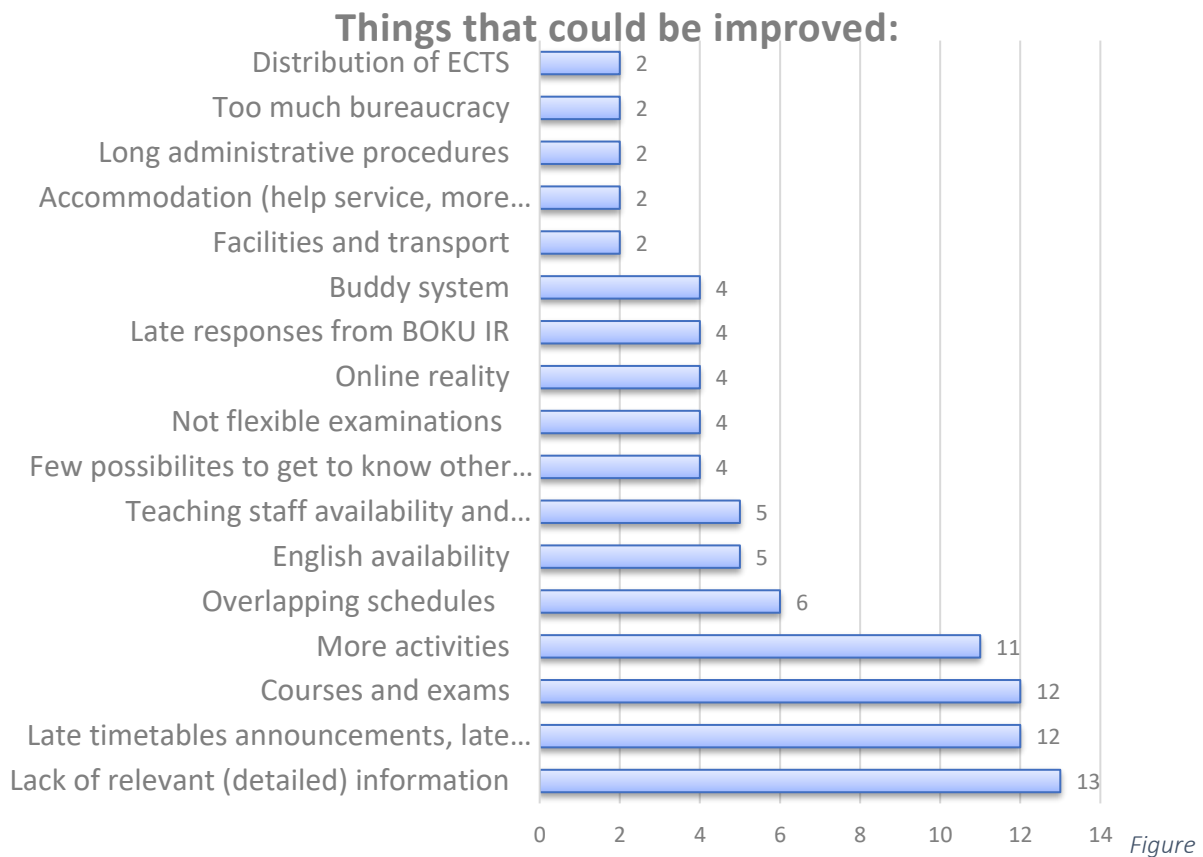


Figure 3. Things that students particularly appreciated during their stay at BOKU

III. THINGS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE BETTER IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' OPINION

Although most students were satisfied with their time at BOKU, some felt that there still was some room for improvement. 13 students stated that there were some relevant and detailed information missing. 12 respondents saw problem in late timetables announcements, late responses in general and 4 mentioned additionally that they were expecting quicker responses particularly from BOKU IR. Many students understood that during COVID-19 pandemic it was simply impossible to organise everything as it used to be before it, but some (11) still regretted limited number of different activities, possibilities to get to know other students (4) and online reality (4). 12 pointed out that they had some problems with courses and exams, 6 mentioned overlapping schedules as problematic during their stay in Vienna, 5 experienced lack or limited English availability and also 5 complained about teaching staff availability and friendliness. Students felt that BOKU could better support its students by publishing exam dates earlier and inform about what is expected (4), which would make the process less stressful.

Other responses indicated improvement of facilities and transport (2), accommodation (2), long administrative procedures (2), too much bureaucracy (2), distribution of ECTS (2).



4. Things which BOKU could do better for international students

IV. MOTIVATION, INFORMATION AND EVENTS

98% of students participated in regular course programme and 2% carried out an internship.

IV.I. 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. 70% of respondents had considered this to be important, followed by will to meet new people (62%) and cultural (47%) and academic reasons (47%). Other aspects included the desire to improve language proficiency and career plans.



MOTIVATION TO COME TO BOKU

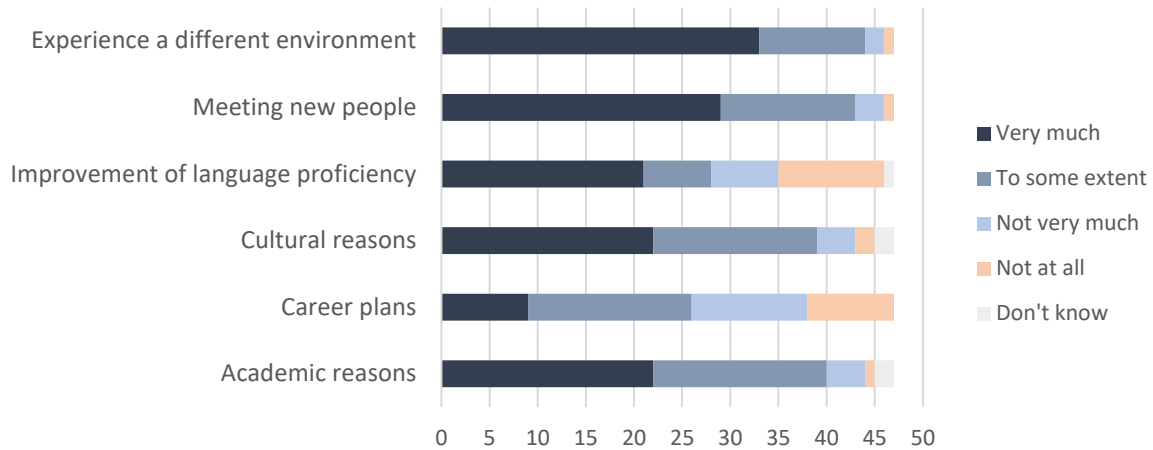


Figure 5. Motivation to come to BOKU

IV.II. 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 51% of respondents had found this to be their most important source of information, with 40% stating that they were informed by the exchange coordinator at their home universities. Other sources included the following:

- Fellow student from home university (30%);
- Online application mobility online (12%);
- The exchange coordinators at ZIB (10%);
- Department coordinator at BOKU (4%);
- Austrian exchange students at home universities (4%).



IV.III. Information from BOKU

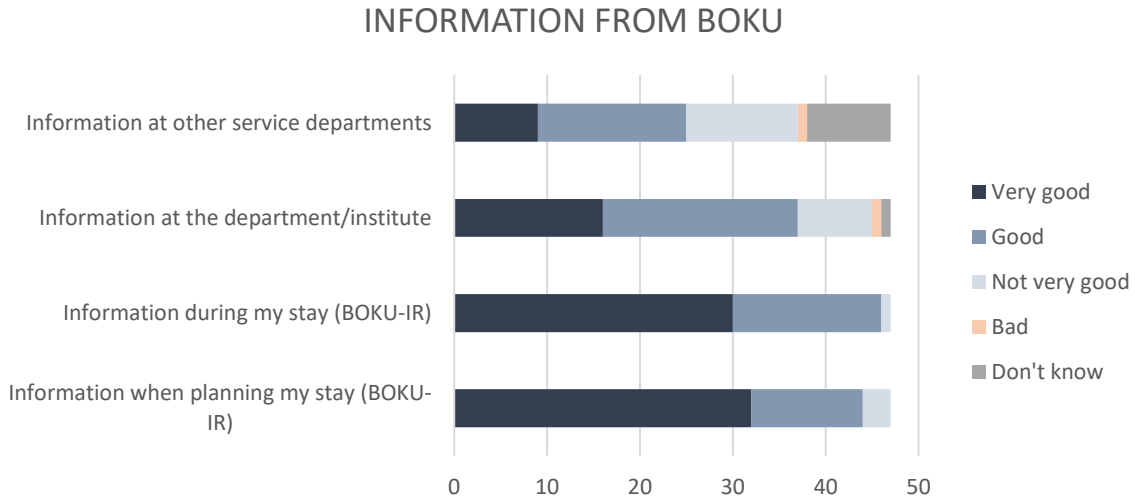


Figure 6. Evaluation of information from BOKU

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, 98% of responses showed satisfaction (high and very high) with the information from BOKU-IR they had received during their stay. Furthermore, 94% had appreciated the information given to them before their arrival, and 79% 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.

VI.VI. Application Process – Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were mostly positive. 51% thought the instructions in the database very clear and 40% rather clear and easy to understand. 95% of the emails they received were either very or sufficiently clear. 91% of respondents were pleased or rather pleased with the reliable operation of the system and 90% 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:

- Coordination with partner universities,
- Access only with the first e-mail (huge importance of the first e-mail),
- Connection between Mobility Online and BOKUonline,
- Some questions not translated into English.



IV.V. Welcome Days

IMPRESSION OF WELCOME DAYS

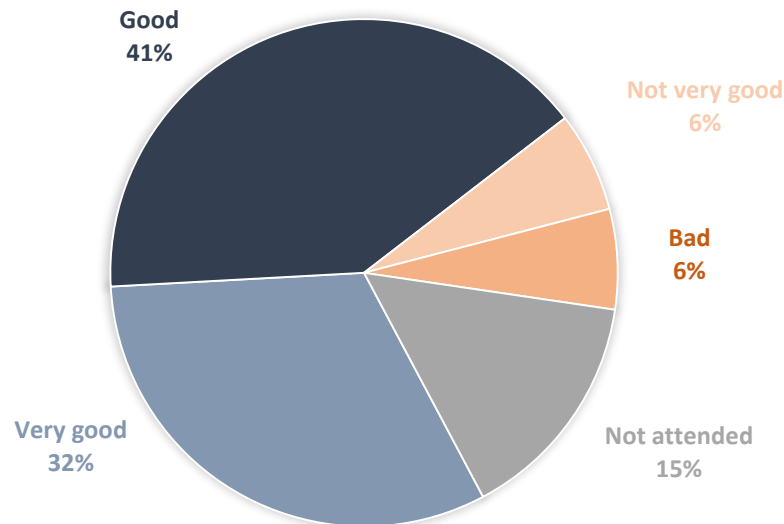


Figure 7. General impression of Welcome Days

85% of respondents attended Welcome Days, and 73% of them came away with a good or very good impression of the events. Students particularly 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.

IV.VI. BOKUonline Info Session

The BOKUonline information session had also been offered as part of the Welcome Days. Out of the 47 students who answered the survey, 39 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.

WAS INFORMATION SESSION HELPFUL?

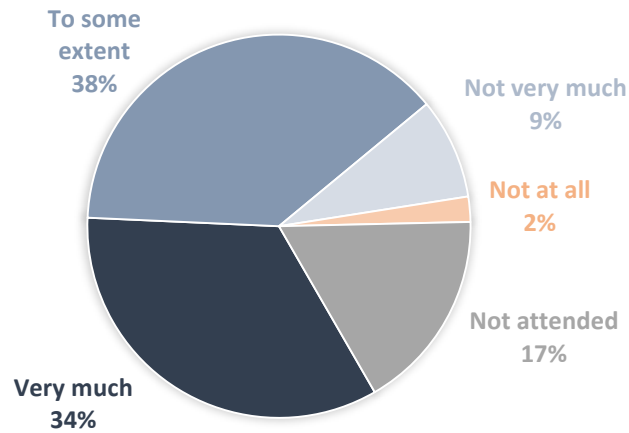


Figure 8. Helpfulness of information session about BOKUonline at the beginning of semester

IV.VII. 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 2020 winter semester survey, 32 respondents (out of 47) stated that they had had a buddy. Out of these 32 students, 46% said their buddies had helped them with their first steps after their arrival and 30% had received help with getting used to academic life. 36% respondents had had buddies who had helped them adapt to social life in Vienna.

It is worth mentioning that some Buddies in winter semester 2020 were not available or reachable, some were not responding their Mentees messages at all.

BUDDIES HELPED:

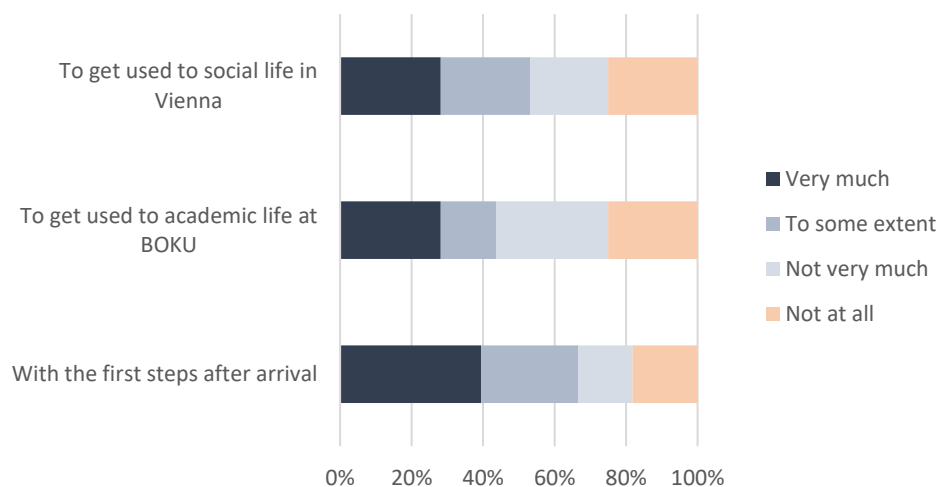


Figure 9. Areas in which Buddies helped incoming students

IV.IX. BOKU-IR newsletter

STUDENTS READING BOKU-IR NEWSLETTER

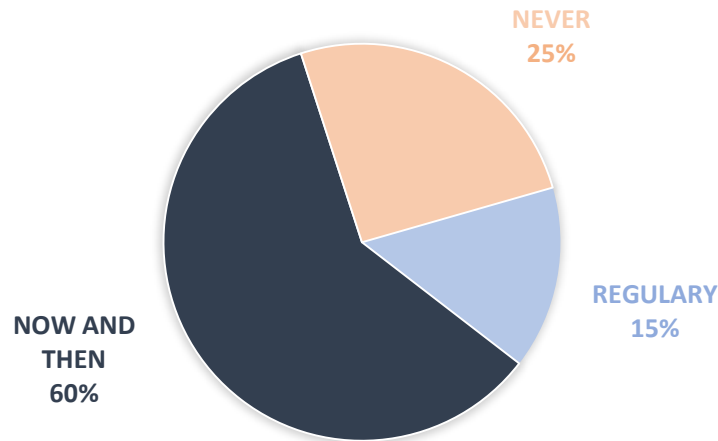


Figure 10. Frequency of reading BOKU-IR newsletter

As can be seen on the chart above, 75% of students were reading the newsletter regularly or are still reading it. Only 25% have never read any of BOKU-IR newsletters. There were no negative opinions regarding it, all students who filled the questionnaire had been positively surprised and really liked the e-mail. 15% had stated that it was very helpful for them, 46% had declared that it was helpful to some extent.

IV.X. Facebook Group *ESN BOKU Incomings*

81% of exchange students had decided to join official ESN BOKU Facebook group. 45% found it helpful, 21% very useful, especially when it comes to COVID-19 regulations and Erasmus preparations. Some students had had problems to join as they had not had Facebook (only WhatsApp or Instagram).

EXCHANGE STUDENTS JOINING FACEBOOK GROUP

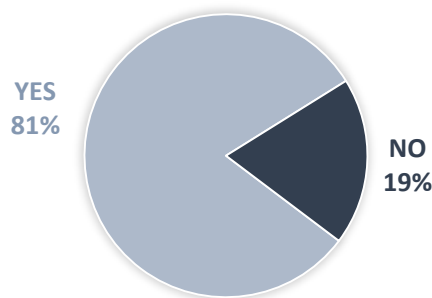


Figure 11. ESN BOKU Incomings Facebook Group



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IV.XI. Weekly Stammtisch and other activities

87% of respondents have never participated in weekly “Stammtisch”. All comments indicate, that the online form determined such state of affairs.

Most of exchange students (62% in case of “Pub Night”) did not participate in any of additional social activities organised by BOKU, but if they had they were very (21%) or rather (13%) satisfied.

IV.XII. 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 provided earlier;
- One period of registration for all;
- Possibility to register on courses earlier;
- Receiving the PowerPoint presentation earlier;
- More onsite meetings;
- Possibility to participate in activities for all (more participants allowed).

IV. 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 (26 out of 47), computers and media (25 out of 47) or food supply at BOKU in general (22 out of 47), as most of them had not had a chance to find out how does it look in the flesh. Many students had never or hardly ever been on campus in person. However, 94% of respondents had appreciated access to online services and online teaching, particularly during COVID-19 pandemic. 72% claim also that they had been satisfied with the facilities (e.g. classrooms) at BOKU in general.

V. LANGUAGES

V.I. Language Problems

Students were also asked to comment on any language difficulties they had faced, as most were not native German speakers. Out of 47 respondents, 27 reported that they had never had any problematic language experience. 3 students had had such problems regularly and 17 claim to still have them.

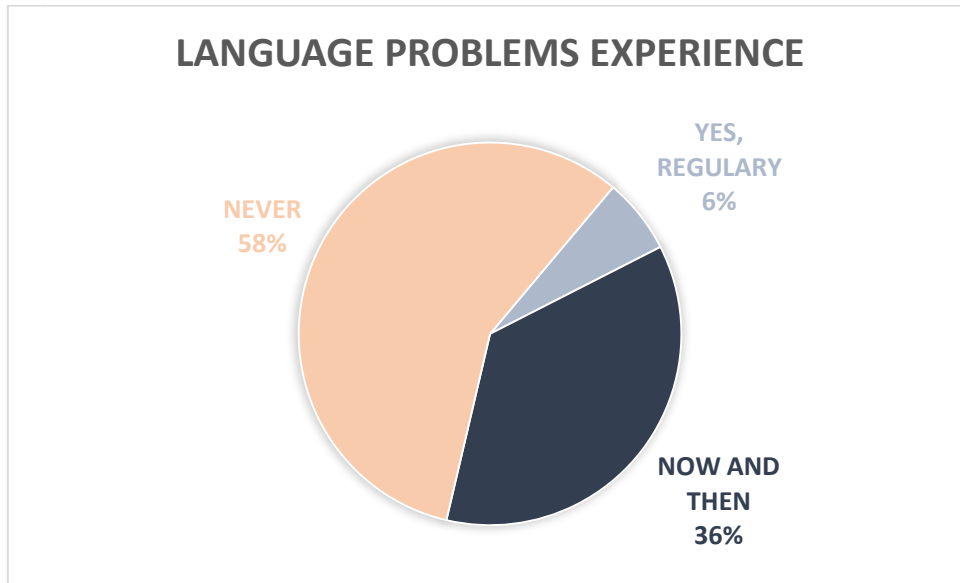


Figure 12. Fact if students experience language problems

Those who had had any (even not very big) problems stated that those had been in private life (15 students), in the classroom (14 students), in online classes and exams (11 students), with written assignments (10 students), with oral exams (10 students) and in contact with Austrian students (8 students). Worth to mention is that only one or two students indicated that they had had very big language problems, others had had them only to some extent or not very much. The data is illustrated on the chart below.

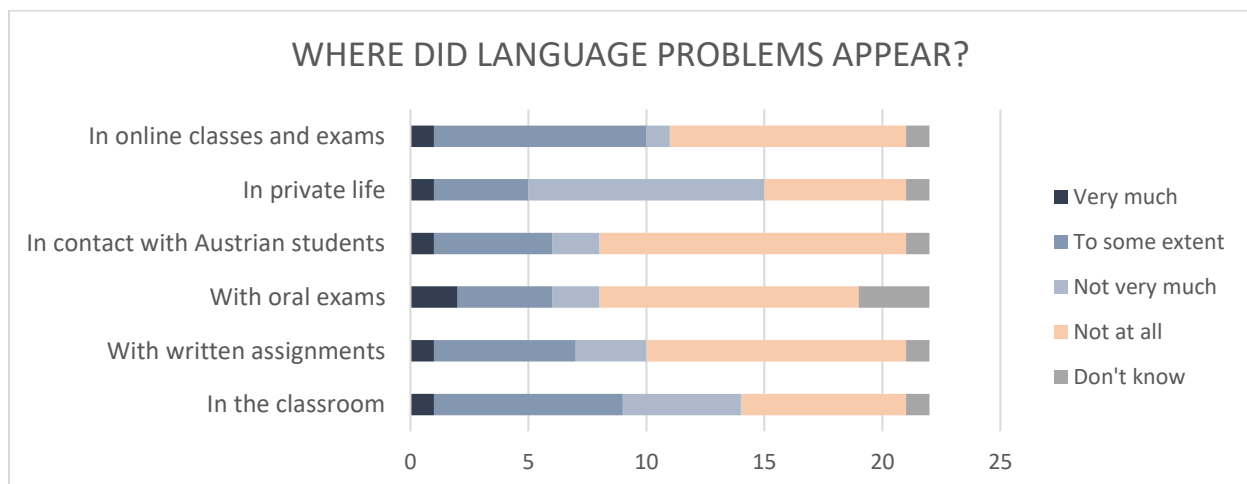


Figure 13. Places where did language problems appear

V.II. German language course

Students had the option to take a German course both before and during the semester. 7 students who responded to the survey had had enrolled on an intensive German course before the semester started and 10 students had taken a German course during the semester at BOKU. 3 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 5 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 (at least 37 out of 47 (79%)) had not participated in German language course, no matter if Tandem or Intensive German Course is considered.

VI. ACCOMODATION

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%).

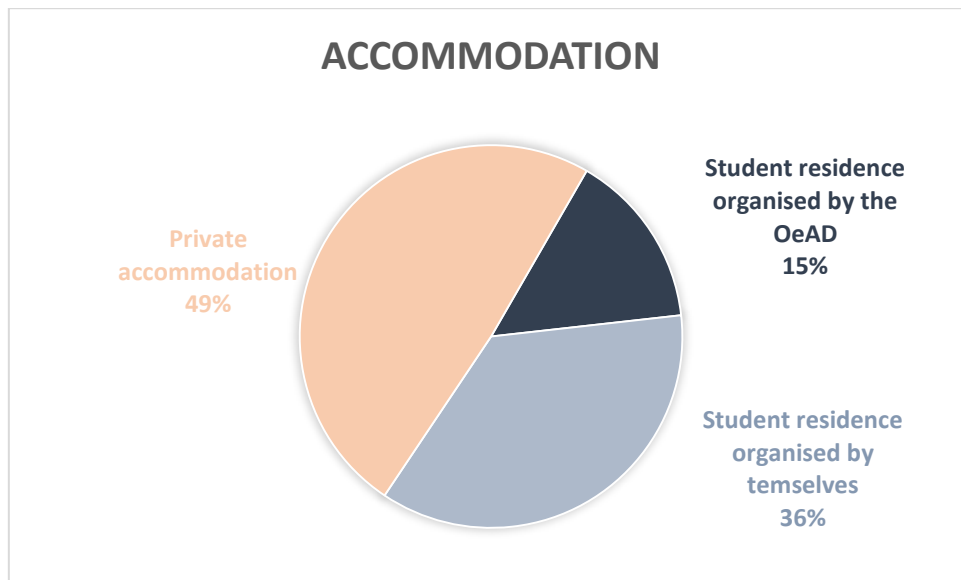


Figure 14. Chosen accommodation

VI.I. Satisfaction with accommodation

6 respondents (86%) reported that they had been satisfied with OeAD accommodation, 15 (88%) had been pleased with the residences that they had chosen themselves. The majority of students (87%) had valued also their private accommodation.

Some students had experienced some difficulties in finding accommodation, others had emphasized that the prices in dorms were very high, sometimes too high in comparison with room sizes. Comments included also that a chance to live in one place together with other people had been great for them, especially when it comes to the multiple lockdowns they had had to face.

VI.I. 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 (91%), proximity to the city centre (91%), living together with other foreign students (70%), proximity to the university (66%). The less important for exchange students in WS 2020 factor when it comes to choosing accommodation had been possibility to live together with Austrian students (43%). Comments indicate also that not without significance had been accessibility of public transport.

VI. 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 42 students being satisfied with the personal outcome and 43 students being satisfied with the academic outcome of their stay.

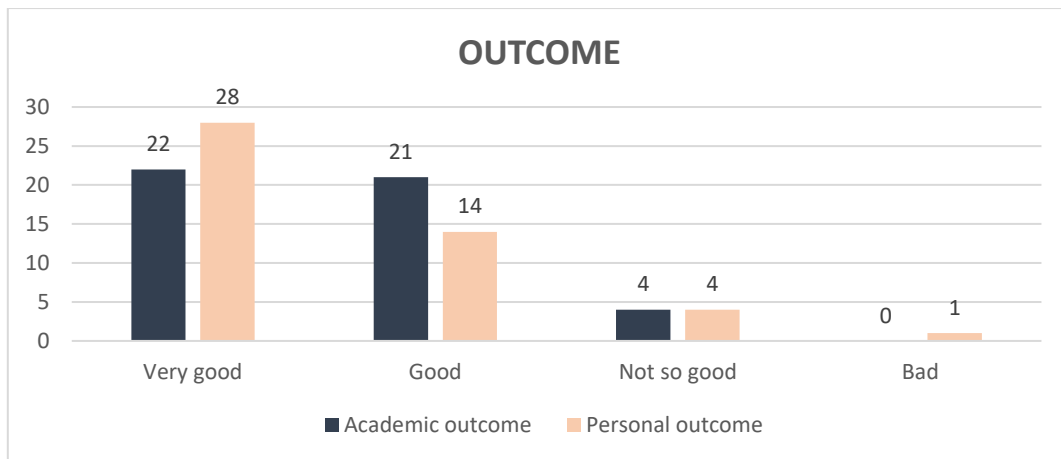


Figure 15. Personal and academic outcome of the stay at BOKU

22 out of 47 respondents would be happy to extend their stay at BOKU. Moreover, 39 would consider returning to Austria for a job or an internship, 29 would like to return to BOKU for further study and 25 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.

VII.I. 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:

- Lack of preparation for online exams;
- Problems with BOKUonline Account (especially when it comes to exams registrations);
- Problems to navigate the lockdown situation by themselves (here also appreciation of the work BOKU did to keep exchange students up to date);
- Lack of platform/place where all events and activities are announced;
- Whole COVID-19 situation.



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VII.II. Recommendations for BOKU-IR or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Creating a place where all students playing some instruments could meet and create something together,
- More planned activities with Buddies,
- More content in Social Media,
- More advertisement of Social Media channels,
- Long format of lectures is not helping to improve attention of the students.

Besides, what needs to be mentioned is that in comments many students really did appreciate what BOKU and BOKU-IR had done during this challenging year to help them make the best possible of their stay in Vienna.

VII.III. Experience of changes due to COVID-19 pandemic; recommendations for BOKU and BOKU-IR

Students found it difficult to:

- Keep up with all news and new regulations,
- Cope with limitations for some facilities (e.g. computer room or library),
- Study only online.

What can be improved:

- More frequent communication on WhatsApp group regarding the rules that changed or important things that were in the news;
- Teachers could upload documents on BOKUonline earlier;
- Zoom links for the courses could be located in one, more prominent place (sometimes there were hidden in BOKUonline course page, sometimes not but only in BOKUlearn, and some were just emailed);
- More (any) ESN activities;
- More chances to meet people online;
- More activities organised online (e.g. via ZOOM);
- More on-site meetings;
- Organising workshops how to deal with the mental health.

Other comments:

- General appreciation for keeping students updated;
- Words of thanks for being informed and supported all the time;
- Services were well organised;
- Great management of the crisis situation.