



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

## Exchange Studies at BOKU

### Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, summer semester 2013/2014

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent summer semester 2013/2014 at BOKU. At the end of their stay, the students were given a questionnaire asking them what they liked/disliked about their stay and what could be improved upon. 54 questionnaires were returned.

#### 1. What students appreciate most at BOKU

Students most frequently commented on the quality and range of courses offered, and appreciated the freedom they were given in choosing their classes. 18 students mentioned the high quality of student life offered by Vienna, in particular the relaxed atmosphere found at BOKU and the proximity of the Türkenschanze campus to the park. The knowledge, helpfulness and professionalism of both the teaching staff and ZIB staff were praised respectively by a total of 29 students. Others appreciated the large range of field trips, events organised by the ESN and other international events e.g. Stammtisch, and the level of technical support provided by ZID. Language courses were also praised for their content and variety. See all highlights in Table 1.

Table 1. Things students appreciated the most at BOKU

	Reason for liking BOKU	Number of times mentioned
1	Courses; choice, content	19
2	Quality of Life; the campus, the city, overall atmosphere	18
3	International support ; ZIB, international community, ESN, buddy system	15
4	Teaching staff	14
5	Campus; buildings, Türkenschanzpark, TÜWI	14
6	Field trips	13
7	Events; Stammtisch, Welcome Days	12
8	Meeting new people	8
9	Technical Support; online system, software courses	5
10	Language Courses; English, German and other languages	3

#### 2. Things that BOKU could do better for international students

The area for improvement which was by far the most commonly mentioned was course organisation, as some students had difficulties with negotiating the process of creating their own schedule and achieving the required number of ECTS within one semester. The next criticism is that students struggled to understand the Viennese dialect used by some lecturers, or had language difficulties in general. Similarly to course organisation, students found that exam timetabling could have been improved to prevent clashes. More support from BOKU with finding accommodation would also have been appreciated. Some facilities could be improved, for instance, longer library hours, more ZIB office hours, and better food outlets on campus. All suggestions can be found in Table 2.



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**Table 2. Things students thought BOKU could do better for internationals**

	<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>1</b>	Courses; overlapping, little course information, disorganised, late timetable release	21
<b>2</b>	Language problems; dialect, in lectures, over email, language courses too expensive	12
<b>3</b>	Exams; overlapping, too late in the semester	12
<b>4</b>	Too much bureaucracy; simplify online systems	6
<b>5</b>	More Events; at the weekend, international events, ESN cooperation	5
<b>6</b>	Accommodation; OEAD	4
<b>7</b>	Courses should be given more ECTS	4
<b>8</b>	More ZIB Office Hours	4
<b>9</b>	Integration with Austrian students	3
<b>10</b>	Campus; more food outlets, more library spaces	3

### **3. Motivation, Information and Events**

#### **3.1 Activities at BOKU**

80% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 9% worked on a thesis or research project and 11% completed an internship. The host institutes for projects and internships were the Center for International Relations (ZIB), Department of Biotechnology, Department of Crop Sciences, Institute of Life and Food Science, Department of Applied Genetics and Cell Biology, Institute of Landscape Architecture, Recreation and Conversation Planning, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences, Food Technology, Institute for Water Management, and the Hydrology and Hydraulic Engineering Department.

#### **3.2 Factors of motivation**

The biggest motivation for coming to BOKU was to experience a different environment. Improving language proficiency was the second biggest factor, and meeting new people the third biggest factor. Cultural and academic reasons were also big motivators, with career plans being less highly regarded (see Figure 1).

7 students said their decision to come to BOKU was motivated by other reasons – these included the opportunity to visit bordering countries, the combination of studying at a small university whilst living in a large city, and the specialist subjects on offer at BOKU.



## Which factors motivated you to come to BOKU?

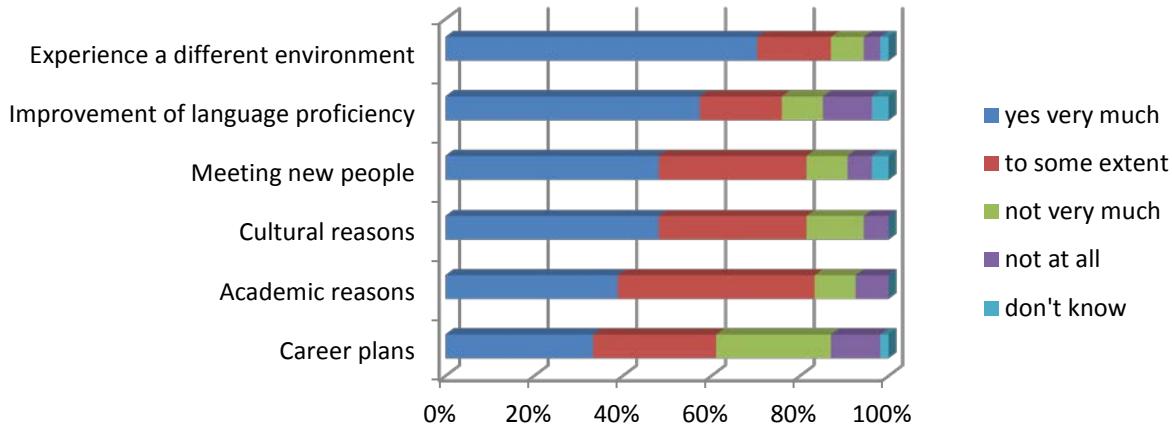


Figure 1. Importance of factors that motivated students to come to BOKU

### 3.3 Information before your stay

The BOKU website was the main source of information for students before they arrived at the university, and was used by 72% of respondents. Other students at home universities and the exchange coordinators from ZIB at BOKU were also widely used as sources of information. One student used blogs on the internet to find out about academic life at BOKU before their arrival. All sources of information can be found in Figure 2.

## Where did you find information about studying at BOKU before your stay?

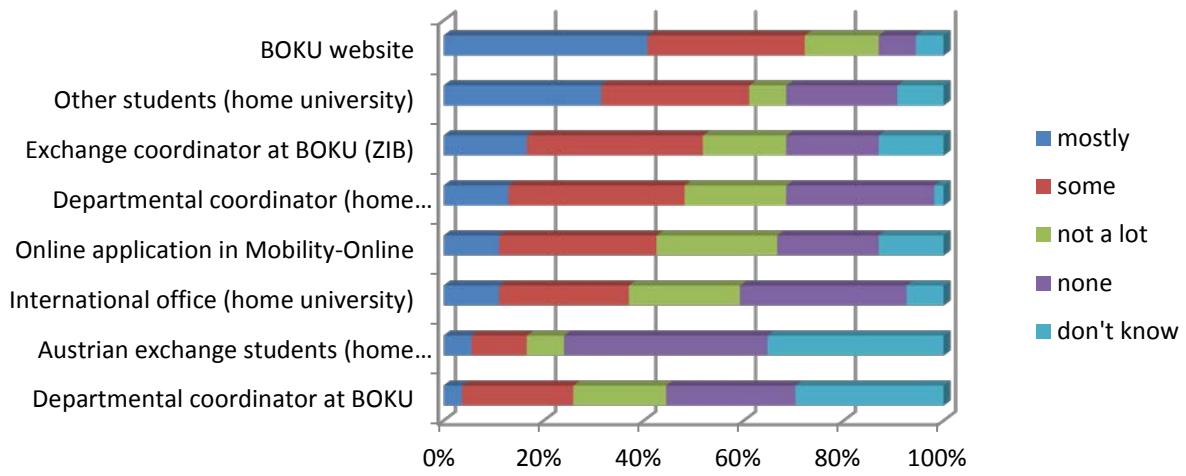


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

### 3.4 Information from BOKU

Many of the respondents had positive opinions about the information they received before or during their stay from ZIB. More than half of respondents thought that the information given



by their department or institution was good or very good. Less than half of students found information from other service departments useful, but 15% responded with “don’t know”, perhaps meaning there was some confusion as to what the service departments are. Students were very positive about the information they received from the ZIB when planning their stay (85%) and even more during their stay (89%). For a full breakdown, see Figure 3.

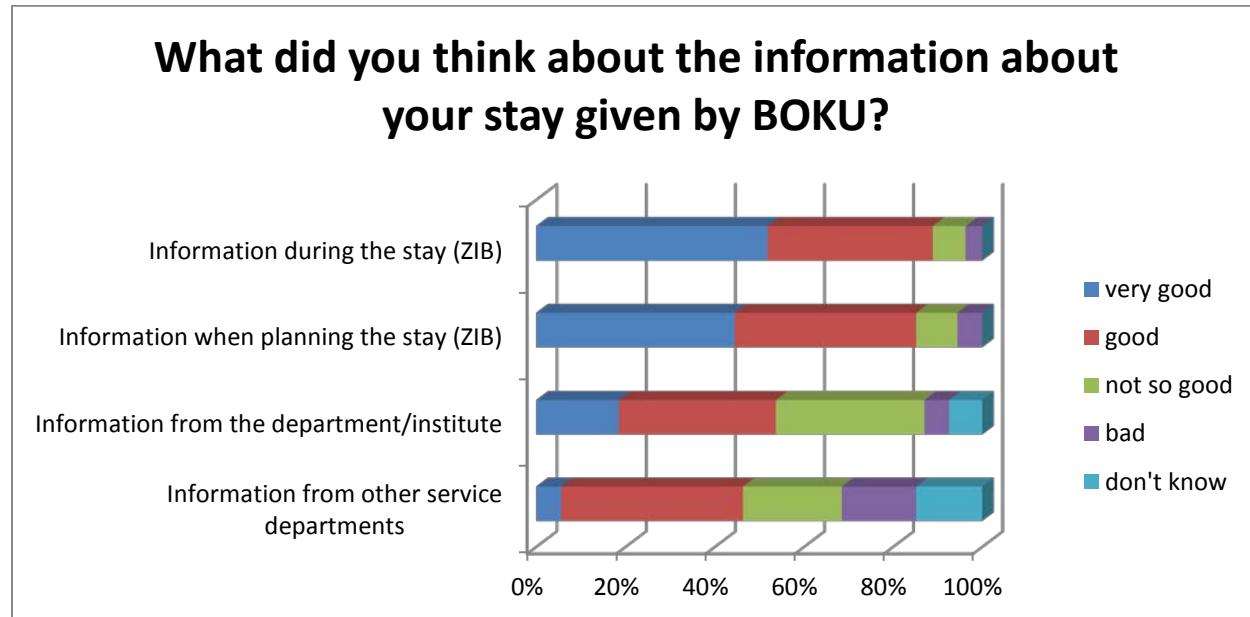


Figure 3. Evaluation of information

#### 3.4 Mobility-Online

An average of 76% of students agreed or strongly agreed that Mobility-Online was simple and reliable (see Figure 4.). Students also provided feedback and suggestions as to how Mobility-Online could be improved. These included:

- Simplifying the system (reduce the number of steps required and provide more instructions for each of the steps).
- Making the addition and deletion of courses clearer, as deleted courses remain in the same list as all other courses.
- Making the visual representation of the system clearer for users e.g. label ‘delete’ and ‘cancel’ buttons more clearly.



## What did you think of the application process using Mobility-Online?

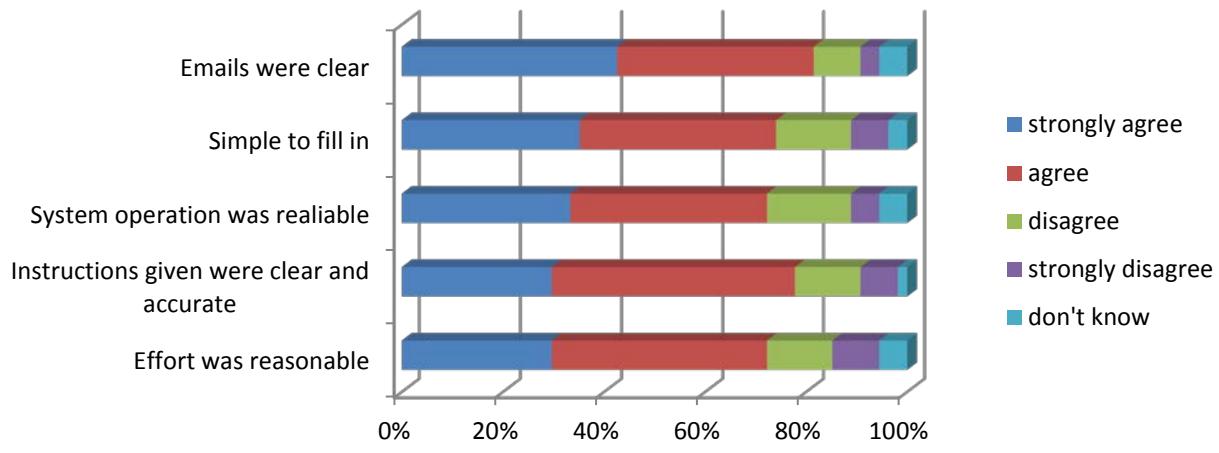


Figure 4. Students' opinions on the application process using Mobility Online

### 3.6 Welcome Days

72% of respondents attended the Welcome Days and 92% of those who attended rated them positively. Students were asked to provide feedback. Positive comments included:

- Lots of opportunities to meet other students.
- Good mix of activities e.g. guided tour of Vienna, treasure hunt, Heurigen.
- Clarity and quality of information given.

Students were also asked if there were ways that the Welcome Days could be improved.

Suggestions included:

- Longer breaks between information sessions, as there is a lot to take in.
- More detailed information on course selection, as there are so many courses.
- More places for students at the Heurigenabend.

### 3.7 BOKUonline information session

63% of respondents attended the BOKUonline information session and 79% of those who attended found the session useful. Students were asked to state why they were unable to attend the information session if they did not attend. Common reasons included:

- The student had not yet arrived at BOKU for various reasons e.g. still had exams at home university.
- The session was too long.
- Students sourced the information from elsewhere and didn't feel the need to go to the session.

The students who attended the information session were asked to state reasons why the information session was useful. Students highlighted details such as:

- Useful tips were given e.g. adding email aliases, choosing courses.
- Explanations were clear and concise.



### 3.8 Buddy

All exchange students had the opportunity to be assigned a Buddy, an Austrian student to help them with their arrival in Vienna and to get them settled into life at BOKU. 81% of respondents took this opportunity.

For 52% of these students, their Buddy helped them with their first steps after their arrival. 46% and 39% felt their Buddies had helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and social life in Vienna respectively (see Figure 5). Of the few students who were dissatisfied with their Buddy, the reasons for this included:

- Only meeting with their buddy once at the start of semester.
- Buddies not having enough time to meet their students.
- Buddies being on Erasmus themselves and not returning back to BOKU before their students arrived in Vienna, meaning they could not help with their first steps.

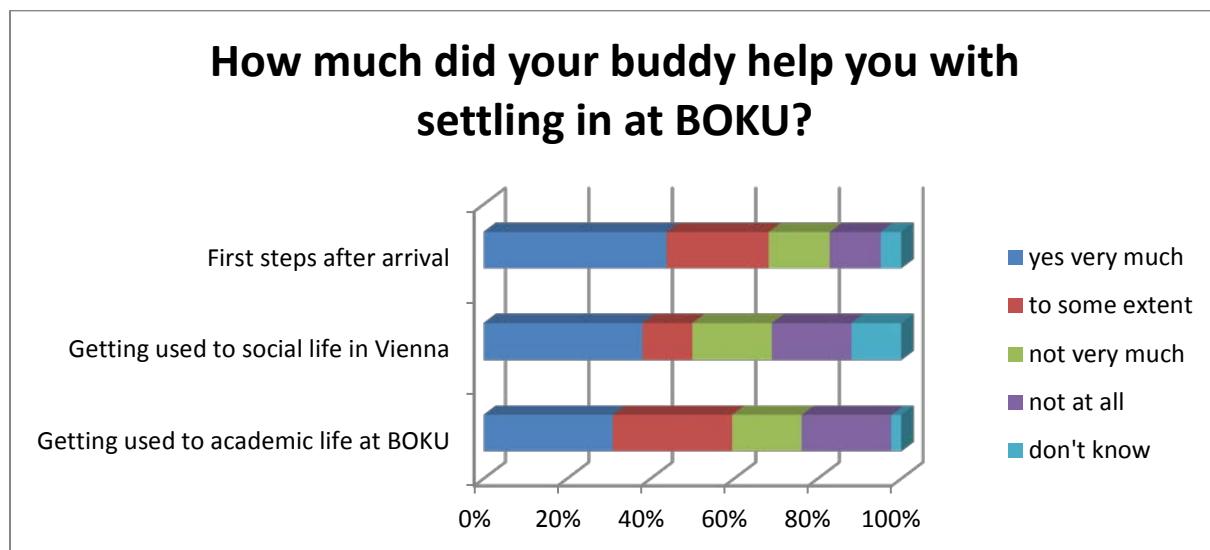


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their buddy

### 3.9 Newsletter sent out by ZIB (Heidi Leonhardt)

94% of respondents read the weekly newsletter, and 61% of respondents said that they read the newsletter regularly. 78% of respondents found the information either very useful or useful to some extent. Students were asked if there was anything they would like to see included in the newsletter, and the following answers were suggested:

- Part time job opportunities.
- Conferences or field trips related to professions.
- Practical information e.g. public transport tickets.

### 3.10 Stammtisch and other events

71% of respondents attended the Stammtisch at least every now and again, 19% of respondents said they attended regularly. Suggestions on how to make the Stammtisch more appealing included:

- Making everyone switch seats during the evening, so that students can mingle more.
- Changing the venue more often, preferably to somewhere bigger.
- Making the atmosphere more relaxed and have some activities e.g. board games.



The Heurigen Welcome Party was attended by 50% of the respondents and 27% of respondents attended the Apfelstrudel Event.

### 3.11 Suggestions for improvement at BOKU

Students suggested the following improvements:

- Provide more information in English, especially emails.
- Provide clearer information about course dates and content.
- Provide more information about accommodation and alternatives to OEAD

## 4. Infrastructure at BOKU

Students were particularly satisfied with the facilities at BOKU, with 85% of respondents saying they were satisfied. General study environment came in second, with 79% saying they were satisfied. 66% were satisfied with the access to libraries, and 76% were satisfied with the access to computers and media. Food supply was the area students were least satisfied with, with only 46% stating they were satisfied (see Figure 6).

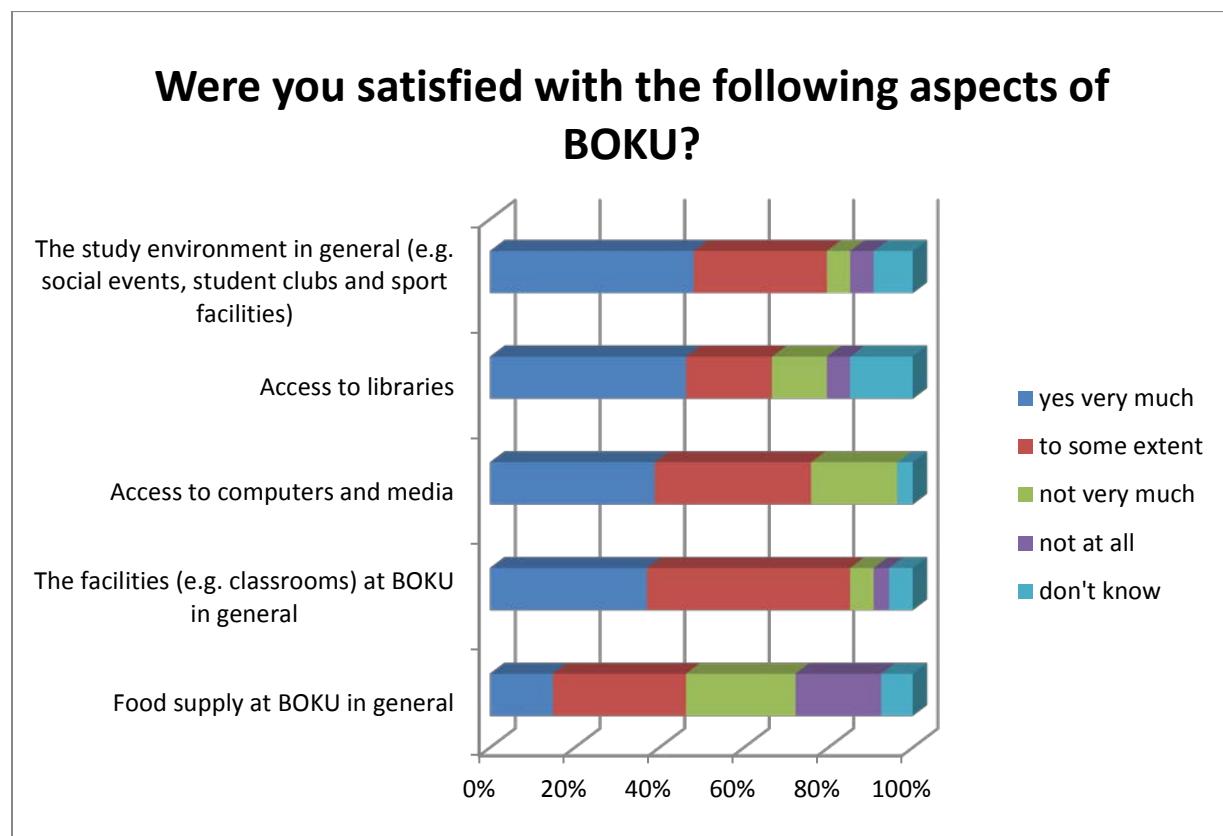


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with life at BOKU

## 5. Language

### 5.1 Experience with language problems

44% of respondents experienced no language issues. However, 50% said that they had issues now and again, and 6% said that they regularly had issues. Of those who had issues, most of them were in the classroom at 30%, and the least problems were had during oral exams at 11%. Students mentioned that they also experienced language difficulties when dealing with



official paperwork, such as the Meldezettel and Anmeldebescheinigung. For the full breakdown, see Figure 7.

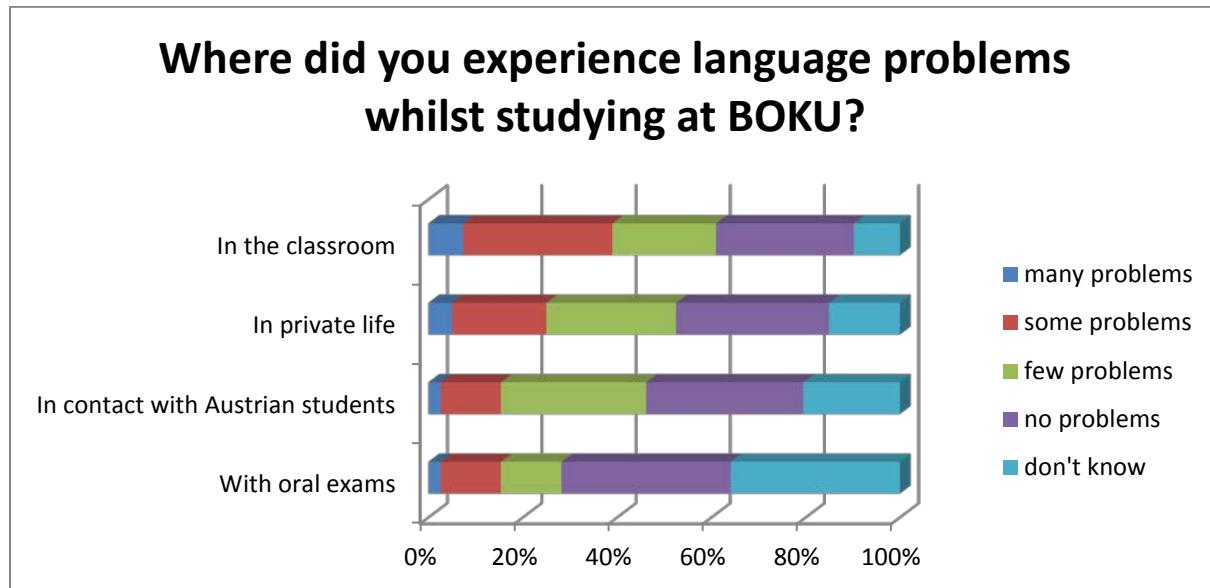


Figure 7. The most common places that students experienced language problems at BOKU

## 5.2 German language course

19% of respondents took the intensive German course before the start of the semester. 35% took part in a German course during the semester. 9% had tandem learning sessions with a German native speaker, and 6% participated in German courses outside of BOKU.

## 6. Accommodation

### 6.1 Type of accommodation

Half of respondents stayed in private accommodation which they organised themselves. 33% stayed in student residences managed by OeAD, and 17% lived in student residences which they organised by themselves. 74% of respondents were satisfied with their accommodation, 22% were dissatisfied, and 4% were unsure. The majority of reasons for dissatisfaction included OeAD and their high rental and maintenance fees, their mishandling of student complaints, and the distance of some of their halls from BOKU.

### 6.2 Importance of factors affecting accommodation during the exchange stay

The most important factors when searching for accommodation were the price (91% found this to be at least quite important), the condition of the accommodation (76%), and living somewhere close to the university (66%). For a full breakdown, see Figure 8.

## Which factors were the most important when choosing accommodation?

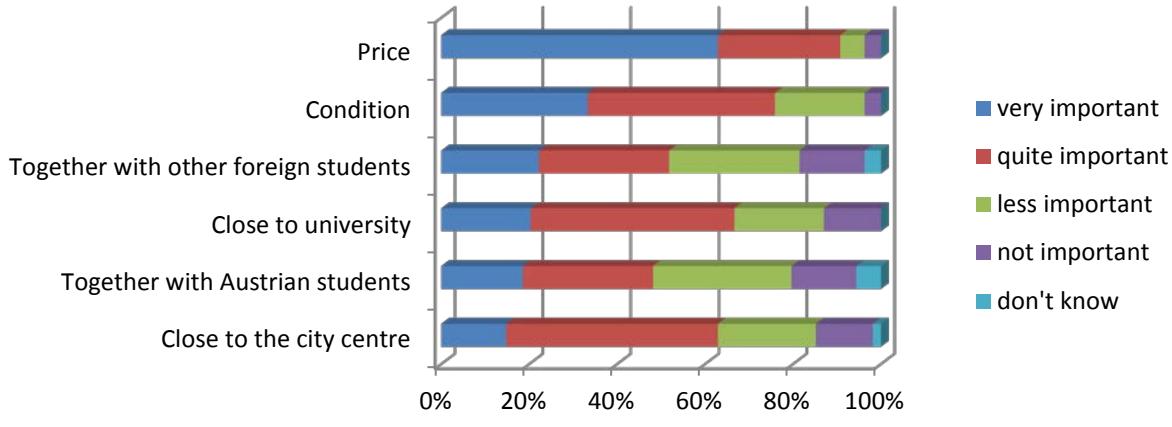


Figure 8. The most important factors for students when choosing accommodation

## 7. Academic and personal outcome

### 7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

71% of respondents considered their academic outcome to be good or very good. 91% of respondents perceived the personal outcome of the stay to be good or very good.

### 7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

87% of respondents said they would return to Austria to do an internship or for work. 60% said they would consider further study in Austria, with 63% saying they would extend their stay at BOKU specifically, and 57% said they would consider studying at another Austrian institution. For a full breakdown, see Figure 9.



## If you were to consider extending your stay at BOKU/in Austria, what would be preferable?

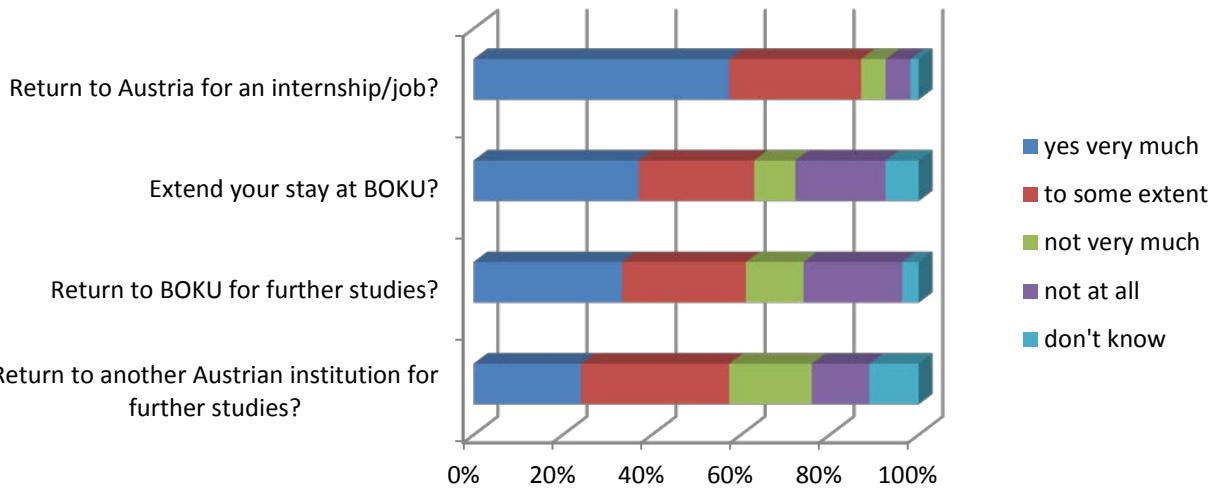


Figure 9. Future plans in Austria

### 7.3 Situations that needed special attention

Students required special attention for the following reasons:

- Understanding German, and more specifically the Viennese dialect.
- Dealing with courses overlapping and other administrative issues.

### 7.4 Recommendations for the ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students coming to BOKU

Several responses to this open question simply complimented the current arrangements, though specific suggestions were as follows:

- Offering a more fixed course programme/announcing exam dates sooner.
- More information about local administration and the local area.
- Longer office hours in ZIB, especially at peak times of year.
- More opportunities to make friends with local students.



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## 8. Background information

70% of respondents were female and 30% were male. 67% were at BOKU during the summer semester 2014, 20% for the full Academic year 2013/2014, and the remaining 13% had various arrival and departure dates due to flexible internships. See for details of the nationalities of respondents.

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Answers</u>	<u>%</u>
French	10	19%
German	6	11%
Italian	5	9%
Polish	5	9%
Croatian	4	7%
Finnish	3	6%
Belgian	3	6%
Swedish	3	6%
Swiss	2	4%
Czech	2	4%
Hungarian	2	4%
Slovak	2	4%
Spanish	2	4%
British	1	2%
Bulgarian	1	2%
Canadian	1	2%
Greek	1	2%
Romanian	1	2%
<b>SUM</b>	<b>54</b>	