



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2013/14

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the 2013/14 winter semester 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. 38 questionnaires were returned.

1. The most appreciated things 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. 12 students mentioned the social events organised by the ESN and the Center for International Relations; in particular they mentioned the Welcome Days and the weekly Stammtisch. The knowledgeability, helpfulness and professionalism of both support staff (including the ZIB's) and the teaching staff were praised respectively by 10 students. Others appreciated the open-minded and positive atmosphere at BOKU, valued the facilities available, including the library and the university buildings. The international newsletter sent out by the ZIB tutor was specifically mentioned as a highlight as the ongoing advice and tips helped them make the most out of their stay. See all highlights in Table 1.

Table 1 List of most appreciated things at BOKU

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	Courses (offer, freedom of choice)	16 times
2	Social events (incl. welcome days, Stammtisch)	12 times
3	Support staff (incl. ZIB team)	10 times
4	Teaching staff	10 times
5	Atmosphere (open-minded, positive)	9 times
6	Facilities (library, university buildings)	9 times
7	International Newsletter	4 times
8	Online systems (BOKUonline and Mobility Online)	4 times
9	Language courses	2 times
10	Location	2 times
11	Buddy System	1 time
12	TUWI and Student's Union	1 time

2. Things that BOKU could do better for international students

The by far most commonly mentioned area for improvement was the 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 accentuates the popularity and success of the social events already observed above, as some students wished that there had been even more of them! Students also said that they would have appreciated more information from the university about the accommodation options available, and one respondent suggested that BOKU create their own service to allow students to search



for rooms or dormitories. Some facilities could be improved. For instance, longer opening hours at ZIB, more cafeteria facilities (or microwaves) and better WIFI coverage would have improved some students' experience. All suggestions can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 What students felt could be improved upon at BOKU

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	Course organisation	18
2	More help with and information about how to find accommodation	6
3	Not enough social events	6
4	Facilities	3
5	Number of courses offered in English	3
6	Administration of exchange programs (bureaucracy and recognition)	2
7	Opening hours at ZIB	2
8	Library	1
9	Buddy System	1
10	Online Systems (BOKU online too slow)	1

3. Motivation, Information and Events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

89% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 5% worked on a thesis or research project and 5% completed an internship. The host institutes were the Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences, the Department of Biotechnology (Institute of Applied Microbiology), the Division of Viticulture and Pomology and the Department of Applied Genetics and Cell Biology.

3.2 Factors of motivation

The biggest motivations for coming to BOKU were the possibility to improve language skills, academic reasons and the opportunity to experience a new environment. Cultural reasons and career plans were also considered (see Figure 1).

Which factors motivated you to come to BOKU?

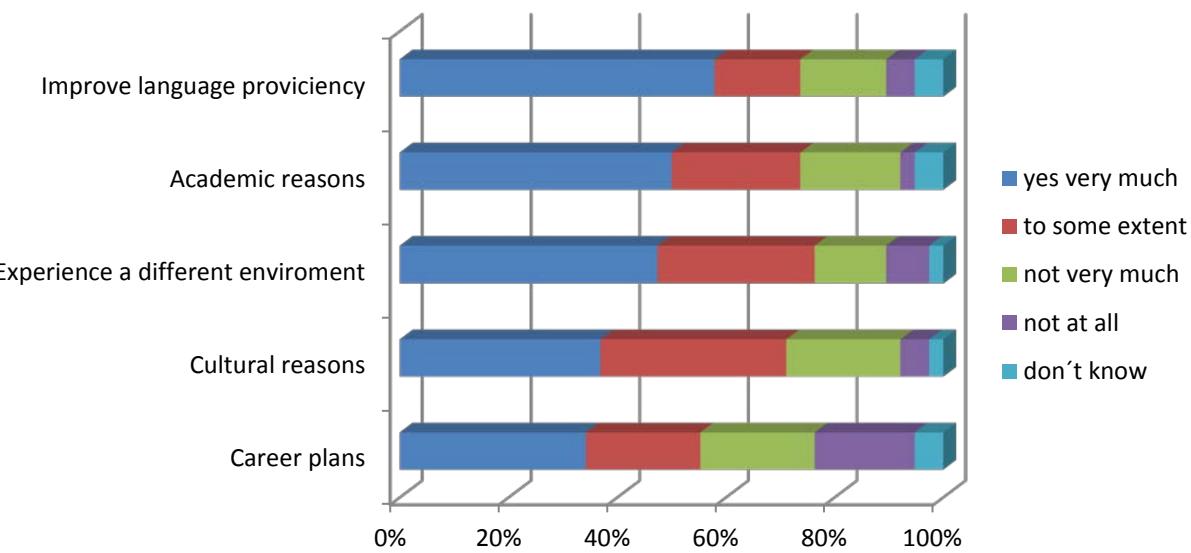


Figure 1 Importance of given factors to come to BOKU

3.3 Information before your stay

Most of the information was obtained from the BOKU website, which was used by more than half of the respondents. The ZIB exchange coordinator and the international office at their home university as well as the exchange coordinator at the home university were also used as sources of information. All sources of information can be found in Figure 2.

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

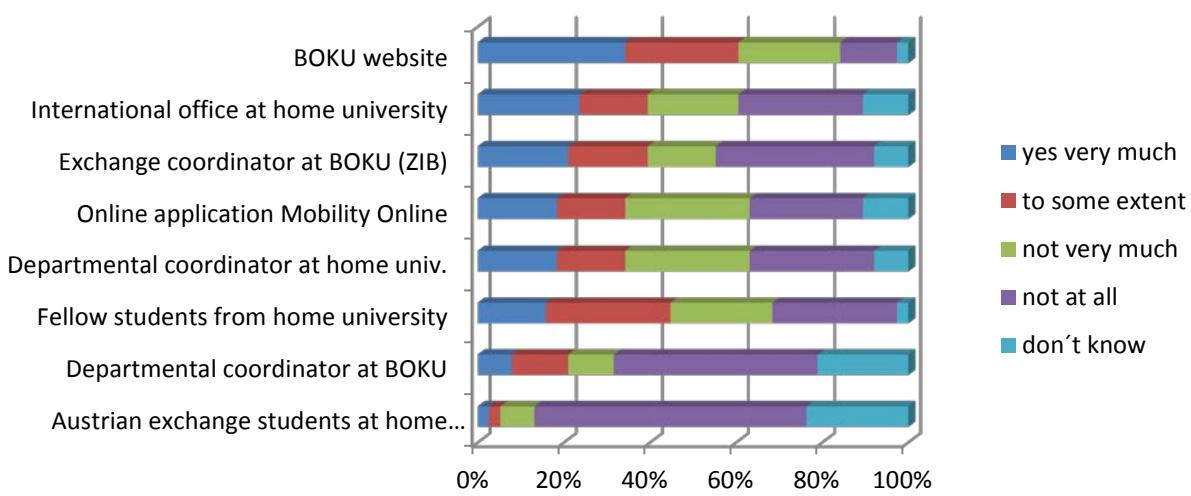


Figure 2 Ways of gaining information used by students



3.4 Information from BOKU

Almost half of the respondents had positive opinions about the information at their department or institute. 40% thought the information from other service departments (excluding the ZIB) was good or very good, but over 20% entered “don’t know”, perhaps implying some confusion as to what these service departments are. Students were very positive about the information they received from the ZIB when planning their stay (71%) and even more during their stay (89%) (see also Figure 3).

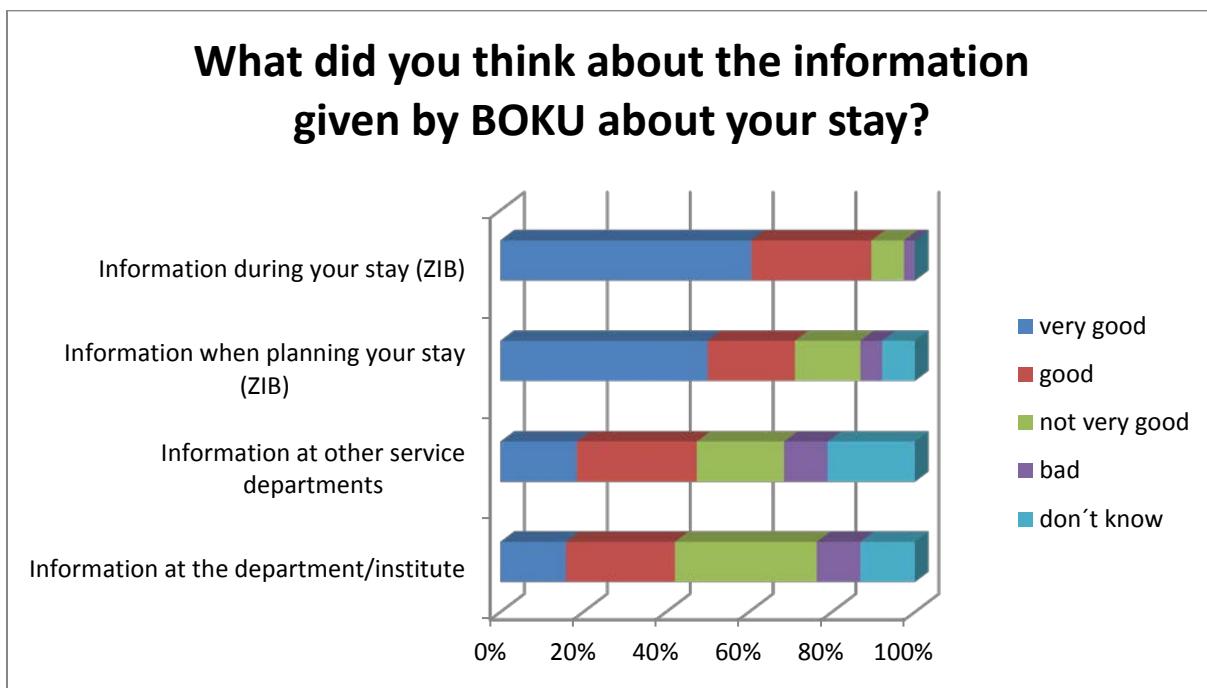


Figure 3 Evaluation of providers of information

3.5 Mobility Online

Student opinions of Mobility Online were overwhelmingly positive, with approximately 80% of students rating the system as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ in each of the five categories (see Figure 4).

How would you rate Mobility Online?

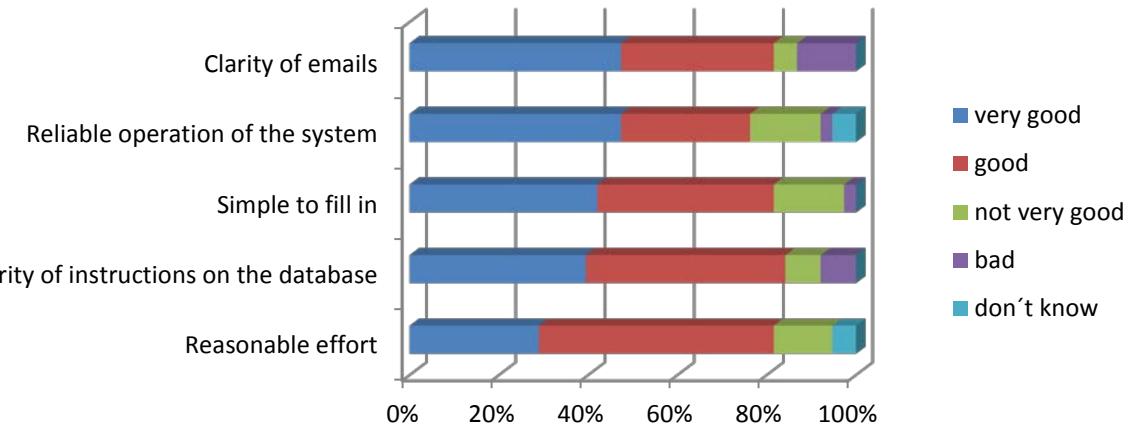


Figure 4 Opinions on the Mobility Online application process

Suggestions to improve Mobility Online were:

- Provide students with an alternative means of accessing the database because the email with the access link could easily be lost or buried in an inbox
- Incorrectly completed steps could be (e.g.) marked in red in the list of stages, when noted by staff.

3.6 Welcome Days

84% of respondents attended the Welcome Days and 76% rated them positively.

Students were also asked to provide comments and suggestions for improvement. The chance to get to know students from other academic disciplines was praised as positive, as well as the opportunity to meet new people generally and the provision of information (Tandem and ZID were specified). Group work and campus exploration through games were popular, as confirmed by a suggestion to include more “getting to know you” games. One respondent commented that the other BOKU campuses (apart from Türkenschanze) should be better introduced, as many students are based primarily at Muthgasse. Another felt the information was not new for him personally as it had already been covered by the ZIB Welcome Guides, info package and website.

3.7 BOKUonline information session

66% of respondents attended the BOKUonline information session, and 76% of them found it helpful.

3.8 Buddy

All exchange students had the opportunity to be assigned a Buddy, an Austrian student who could help them with their arrival in Vienna and getting settled into life at BOKU. 76% of students took this opportunity. The majority of these had a positive experience of the system. 58% commented positively that their buddies helped them with the first steps after their arrival in Austria. 55% credited the Buddies with helping them to settle into academic life at BOKU and 57% were also helped in getting used to social life in Vienna (see also Figure 5).



The effects of the system were clearly visible, as one student without a Buddy commented that in retrospect it would have been nice to have one.

For those who were dissatisfied with their Buddies, the main issue was a lack of time or coordination during the key arrival phase, confirming the importance of this stage in the buddy relationship.

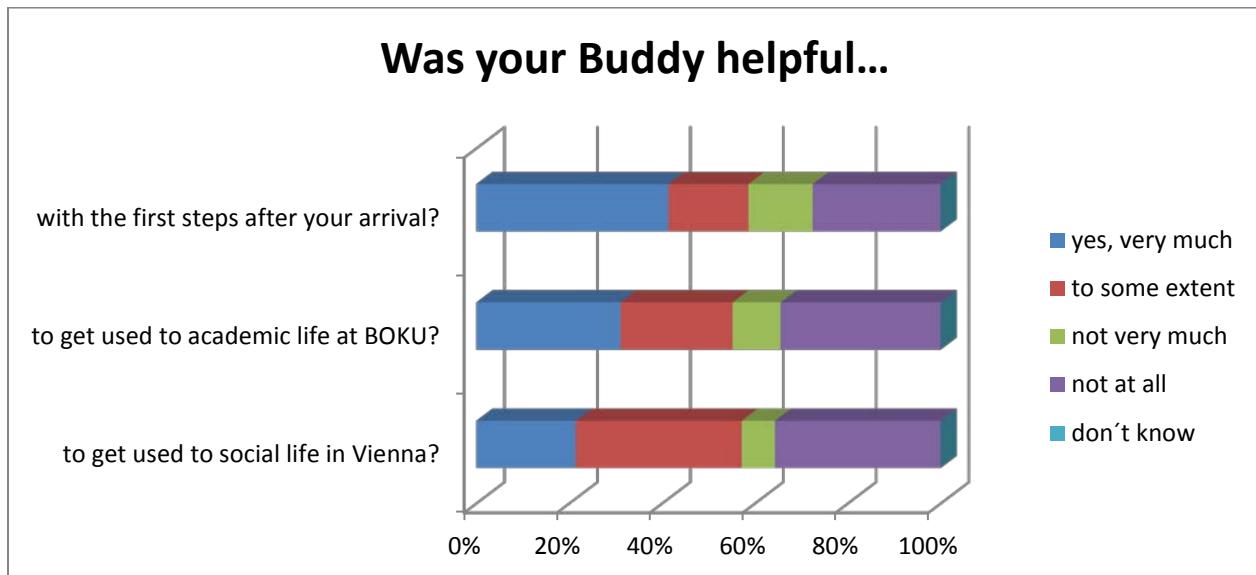


Figure 5 Helpfulness of Buddy

3.9 Newsletter sent out by ZIB (Heidi Leonhardt)

Almost 80% of the respondents read the weekly International Newsletter regularly. 89% found the information very useful or useful to some extent. Suggestions for additional content included more recommendations for places to eat, more cultural information and more academic information – essentially, more of everything in what has proved a popular mix.

3.10 “Stammtisch”

About 70% of respondents attended the Stammtisch now and then, and the rest had never been. Students offered some ideas for making the event even more attractive, suggesting more games (including language games), one-off events such as an international dinner or Stammtisch party, and raising the possibility of organising the Stammtisch on weekends. The first Stammtisch of the semester was so popular that the room proved somewhat small for the group, which several respondents commented on.



3.11 Other events

The Heurigen Welcome Party was attended by more than half of the respondents and 45% of students said they had attended the Advent party. Both events were enjoyed by almost everyone.

3.12 Suggestions for improvement at BOKU

Following responses were given:

- Send easier to comprehend and shorter pieces of information
- Provide some clear information on the website about the registering system
- Monitor the buddies
- Organise an event where students can present their country and teach each other words
- Assign a teacher or professor in each department as an appointed contact person/help for negotiating and rearranging courses

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

Students were particularly satisfied with the access to computer and media and the general facilities (e.g. classrooms). The study environment in general (e.g. social events, student clubs, sport facilities) was well-viewed by 81% of respondents, and almost 70% were happy with the food available. Library access was the aspect of the infrastructure which was less positively evaluated, but two thirds of the respondents were still satisfied (see Figure 6).

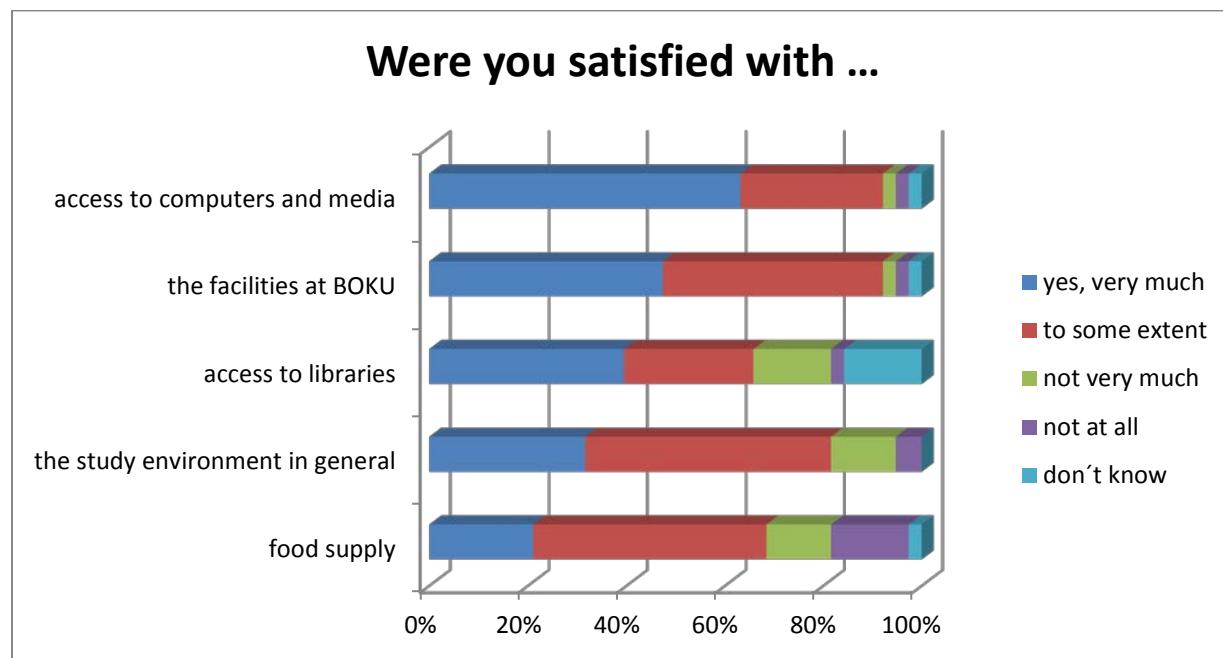


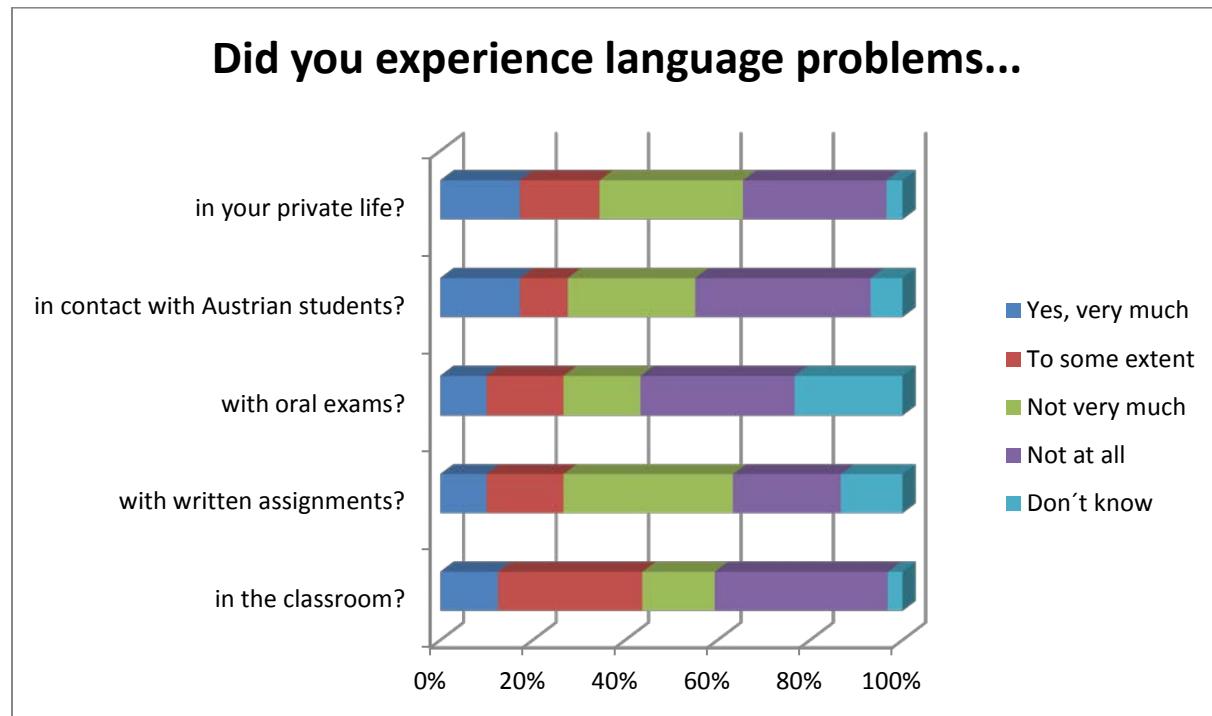
Figure 6 Satisfaction with infrastructure

5. Language

5.1 Experience with language problems

21% of the respondents never experienced language problems, 55% experienced them now and then, and 24% had problems regularly. Students who experienced language problems had

them mainly in the classroom. 10 respondents said they faced language problems in their private lives, and 8 felt they had difficulties when in contact with Austrian students.



5.2 German language course

A quarter of respondents took an intensive German course before the semester. 45% attended a course during the semester. In both cases, the majority (66% and 88% respectively) were satisfied with the courses. 15 students participated in the Tandem programme and 60% were satisfied with it.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Kind of accommodation

Over half of the respondents stayed in a private accommodation which they organised themselves. 18% stayed in student residences managed by the OeAD, and the final 18% lived in other student residences. 55% of students were satisfied with their accommodation. Of those dissatisfied, the main issues mentioned were commuting distance, relationships with roommates, price of the OeAD residences (compared to other alternatives) and a failure to deal with complaints adequately.

6.2 Important issues about accommodation during the exchange stay

The most important factors in accommodation were clearly price and condition. Proximity to the university and the centre were also widely valued to some extent by over half of the respondents. Preferences for living with Austrian students or other foreign students were almost equivalent. An important factor to determine this preference is probably the language ability.



7. Academic and personal outcome

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

77% of the students judged the academic outcome of their stay as very good or good. 86% of respondents perceived the personal outcome for them as very good or good.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

A considerable 71% of the respondents would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 55% would like to return to BOKU for further studies, 45% would study elsewhere in Austria and 42% would like to extend their stay at BOKU (see Figure 7).

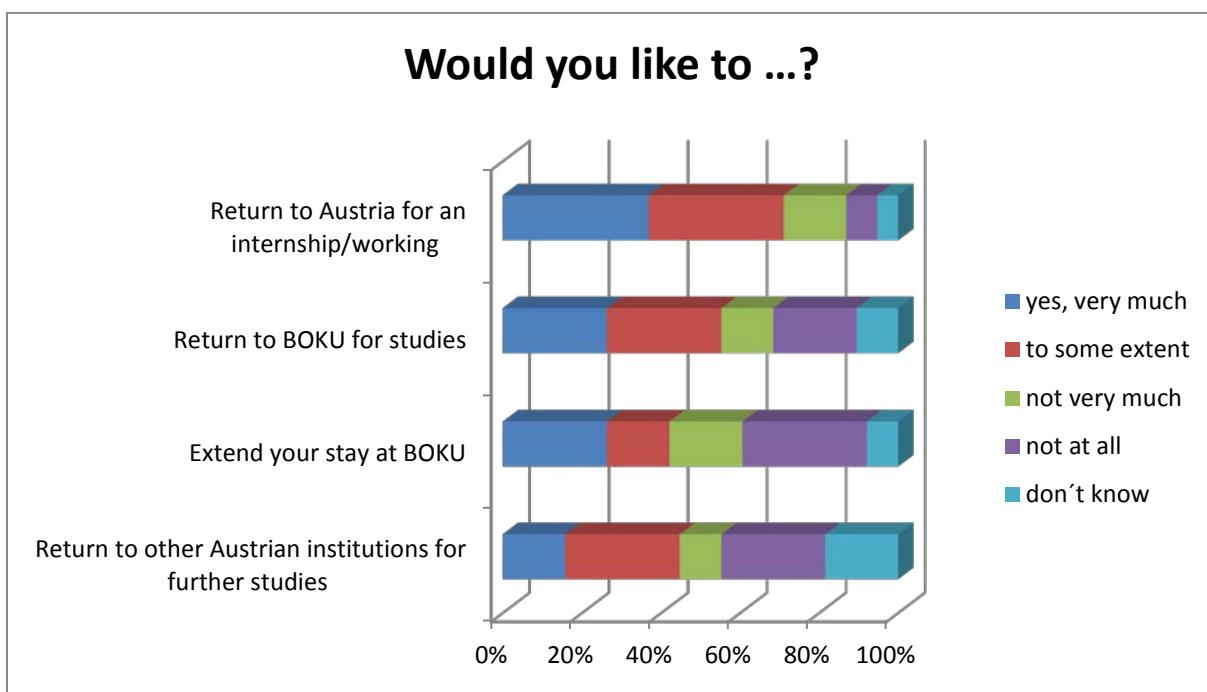


Figure 7 Future plans

7.3 Situations that needed special attention

Students required special attention for the following reasons:

- Finding a part-time job
- Budgeting – Vienna is an expensive city

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 (e.g. "You do the best!"). Specific suggestions were as follows:

- Concert or Christmas party, international dinner (perhaps in separate groups as part of the Welcome Days)
- More trips out of Vienna
- Facilitate access to part-time work for those who need/want it
- Provide more support in finding accommodation (OeAD too expensive, other options were considered inaccessible from abroad)
- Improve email response time at ZIB



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8. Background information

39% of the respondents were female and 61% were male. 34 of the respondents spent the winter semester at BOKU, 3 stayed for the whole academic year and 1 stayed from September 2013 to April 2014.

Nationality	Answers	%
Czech Republic	7	18
France	6	16
Germany	5	13
Poland	5	13
Croatia	3	8
Belgium	3	8
Spain	2	5
Greece	1	3
Finland	1	3
Rwanda	1	3
Italy	1	3
Romania	1	3
Hungary	1	3
No answer	1	3
SUM	38	100