



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2014/15

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students who spent the 2014/15 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 they felt could be improved upon. 70 questionnaires were returned.

1. The most appreciated things at BOKU

Students most frequently commented on the social events provided by ESN and the Center for International Relations – for example the weekly Stammtisch, and the Welcome days (which include many different fun events). 22 students mentioned that the teaching staff were helpful, welcoming, approachable and flexible. In addition, 21 students highlighted that the range of courses and interesting content was exceptional, and the ability to change exam dates was really appreciated by the international students. Something that was also commented on frequently was how well organised and supportive the team at ZIB were, and how efficient everything was. The atmosphere and location were also praised by many students, who noted more specifically how great a place Vienna is to study and how relaxed the atmosphere at the university was. The effectiveness of the Buddy system was also mentioned and students felt that having a contact who was already a student was a great advantage. Others valued the Online System and its user-friendly nature as well as the vast range of facilities offered at BOKU. See all highlights in Table 1.

Table 1 List of most appreciated things at BOKU

	Responses	Number of times
1	Social events (incl. welcome days, Stammtisch)	27
2	Teaching staff	22
3	Courses	21
4	Support staff incl. ZIB team	17
5	Atmosphere (open-minded, positive)	13
6	Location	7
7	Buddy System	4
8	Online systems (BOKUonline and Mobility Online)	4
9	TUWI and Student's Union	4
10	Facilities	3
11	International newsletter	3
12	Language courses	1

2. Things that BOKU could do better for international students

The most commonly mentioned area for improvement by far was the course organisation. Some students had difficulties with the process of creating their own schedule, which sometimes proved problematic due to course clashes. The second most mentioned area with



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room for improvement was the exam period and the lack of information provided before selecting a course. It was also highlighted that there were not enough social events as people really enjoyed the previous ones. Some students also suggested that it was very difficult to obtain all the required ECTS credits because modules at BOKU are not worth as many credits as the international student's home universities. All suggestions can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 List of difficulties

	Responses	Number of times mentioned
1	Course organisation	19
2	Exam period	10
3	Not enough social events	10
4	ECTS credit system	10
5	Online systems	9
6	Accommodation (help with housing)	5
7	Administration of exchange programmes (bureaucracy and recognition)	5
8	Number of English courses offered	5
9	Facilities	2
10	Opening hours at ZIB	2
11	Library	2
12	More language courses	2
13	ESN organisation	2
14	Buddy System	2
15	Teaching material	2

3. Motivation, Information and Events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

94% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 4% worked on a thesis or research project and 1% completed an internship. The host institutes were with the Erasmus Exchange Programme, the Department of Bodenkultur, the Department of Food Science and Technology and the Department of Structural Engineering.

3.2 Factors of motivation

The biggest motivations for coming to BOKU were the possibilities to experience a different environment and meet new people, learn a new language and for cultural reasons. Academic reasons and career plans were also considered (see Figure 1).



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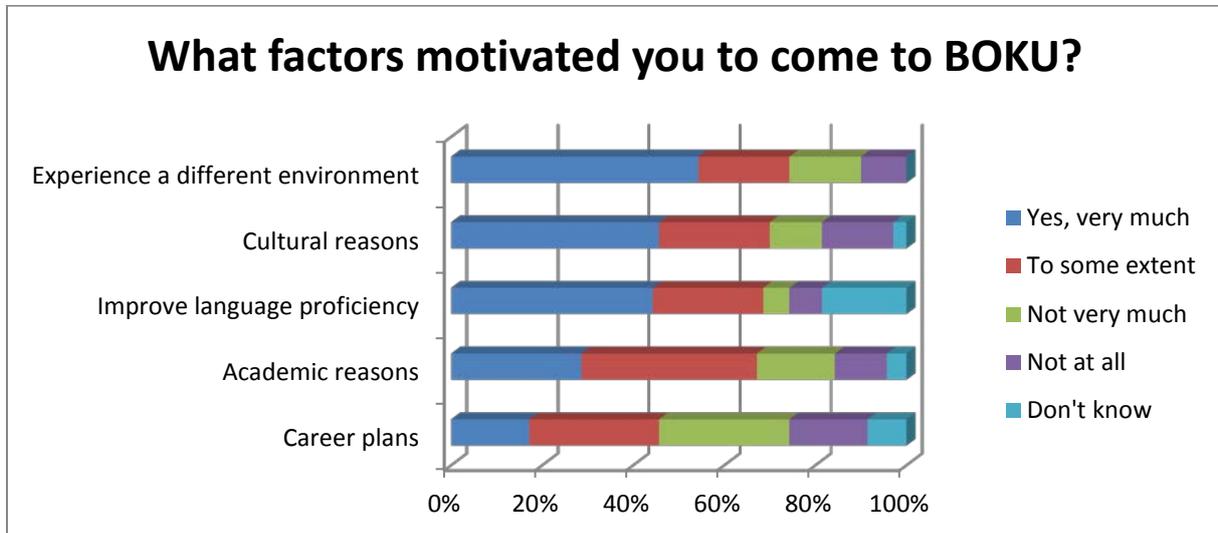


Figure 1 Reasons why international students choose to study at BOKU

3.3 Information before your stay

The BOKU website was the most popular source of information for students, and was used by 22% of the respondents. The exchange coordinator at the home university and the international office at the home university were also used as major sources of information. All responses can be found in Figure 2.

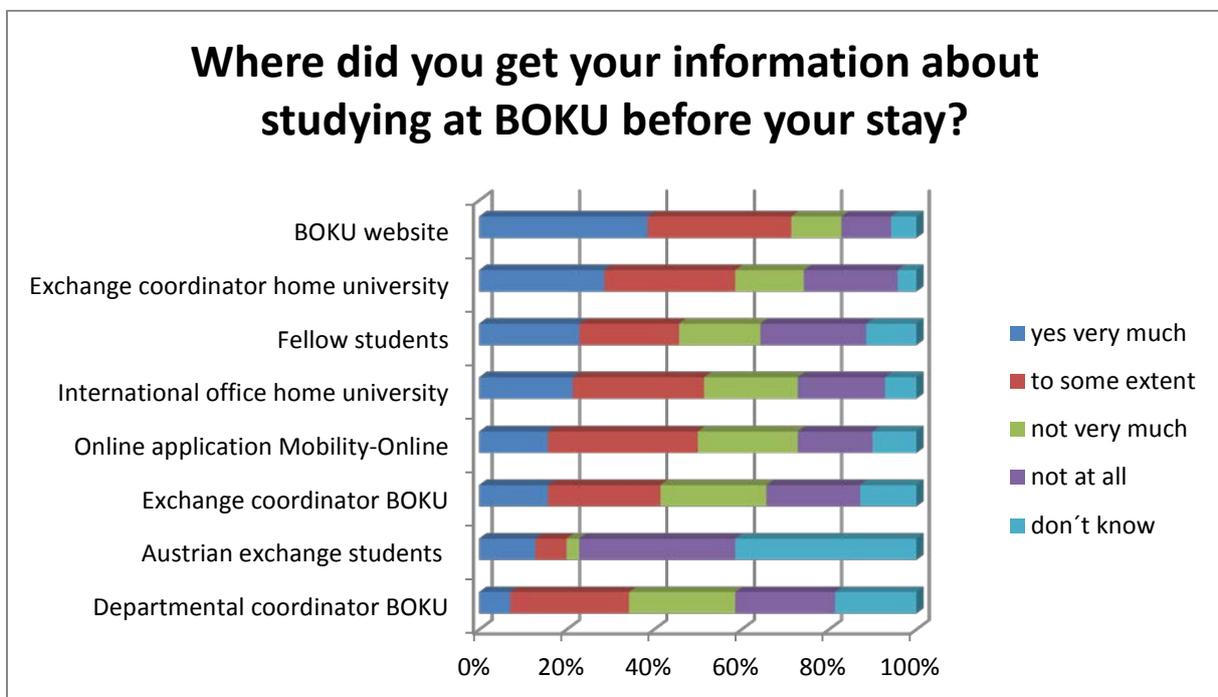


Figure 2 Sources of information used by students before their stay



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3.4 Information from BOKU

Over 80% of the respondents had positive opinions about information from the Center for International Relations regarding the planning of and what to do during their stay. They also expressed positive opinions about information received from their department. 43% of participants responded positively to information received from other service departments. However, over 20% entered “don’t know” for this section, perhaps implying some confusion as to what the service departments are. All responses can be found in Figure 3.

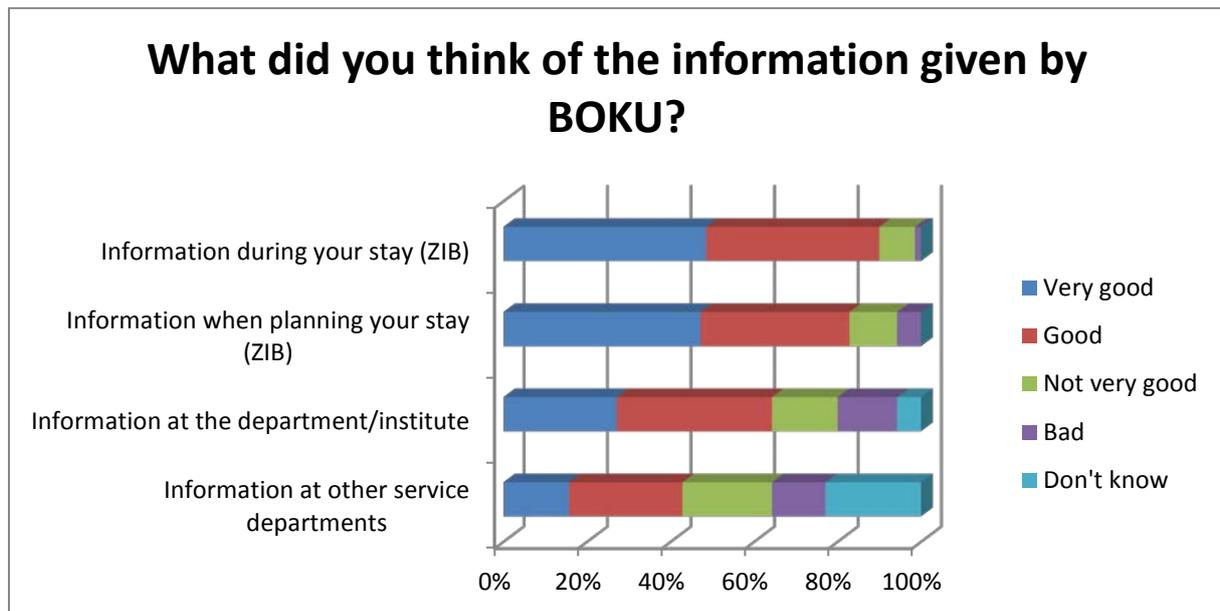


Figure 3 Evaluation of information

3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions of the Mobility Online system were very positive. Students found it simple to fill in information and were pleased with the reliable operation of the system, as well as the clarity of emails and instructions on the database. All responses can be seen in Figure 4.

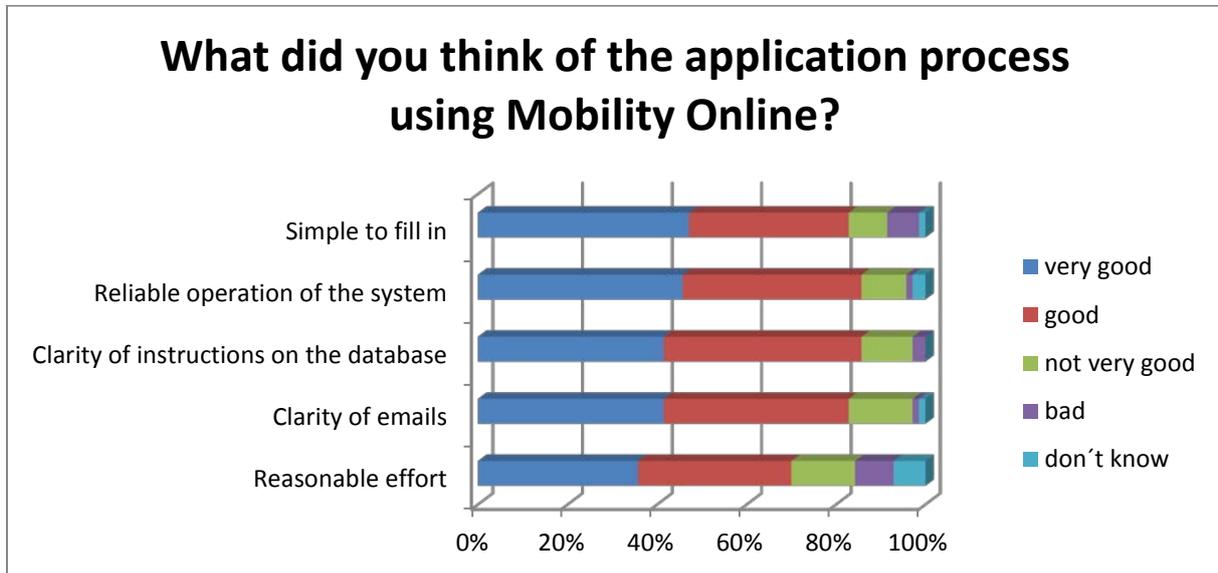


Figure 4 Opinions on the Mobility Online application process

Suggestions on how to improve Mobility Online included:

- Having an alternative website where all BOKU applications could be accessed (e.g. BOKUonline, Mobility Online, BOKUlearn)
- Having a universal website that all universities use for exchange programmes in order to spare time and for easy access to documents for both universities.

3.6 Welcome Days

81% of respondents attended the Welcome Days. 50% of those who attended had a very good impression; a further 20% had a positive impression to some extent.

Students were also asked to provide comments and suggestions for improvement. The chance to get to know fellow Erasmus students was praised, as were the campus tour and the overall organisation of the Welcome Days. One respondent commented that some parts were too long as some information was already explained in the Welcome Guide.

3.7 BOKUonline information session

69% of respondents found the BOKUonline information session 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 to get them settled into life at BOKU. 73% of respondents took this opportunity. 58% commented that their buddies helped them at least to some extent with the first steps after their arrival in Austria. 49% credited the Buddies with helping them to settle into academic life at BOKU and 42% were also helped in getting used to social life in Vienna (see also Figure 5).

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. It was also mentioned that perhaps it would be nice to have a Buddy in the same study field.

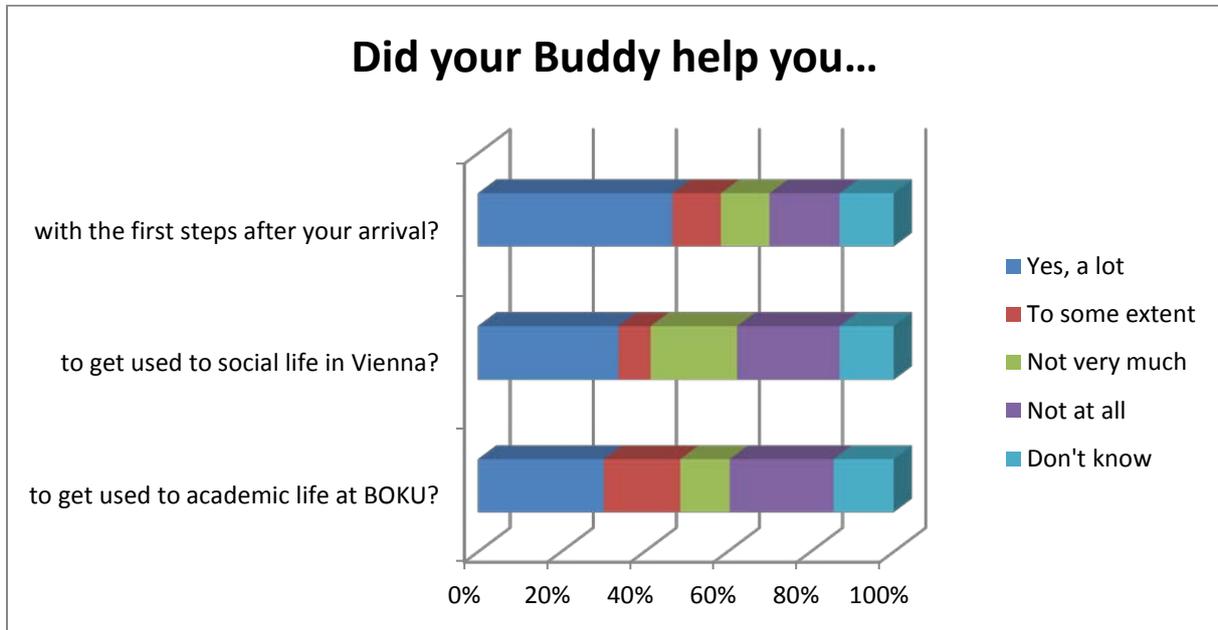


Figure 5 Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

3.9 Newsletter sent out by ZIB (Heidi Leonhardt)

Almost 50% of the respondents read the weekly International Newsletter regularly. 70% found the information very useful or useful to some extent. There were no additional suggestions to add to the international newsletter, which suggests that it was very well coordinated by Heidi.

3.10 "Stammtisch"

About 75% of respondents attended the Stammtisch events regularly or now and then. Students offered some ideas for making the Stammtisch even more attractive, suggesting that groups be mixed regularly to allow everyone to get to know one another, and that a change of location be considered, as sometimes it became too crowded.

3.11 Other events

The Heurigen Welcome Party was attended by 76% of the respondents and 37% of students said they had attended the Advent party. Both events were enjoyed by almost everyone.

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

Over 70% of students were satisfied at least to some extent with the access to computer and media as well as access to the libraries. The study environment in general (e.g. social events, student clubs, sport facilities) was well-viewed by 76% of respondents, and 50% were at least satisfied to some extent with the food available. (see Figure 6). For those who were dissatisfied, the main issues were that the computer rooms and printers were often crowded and that the library opening times were not long enough.

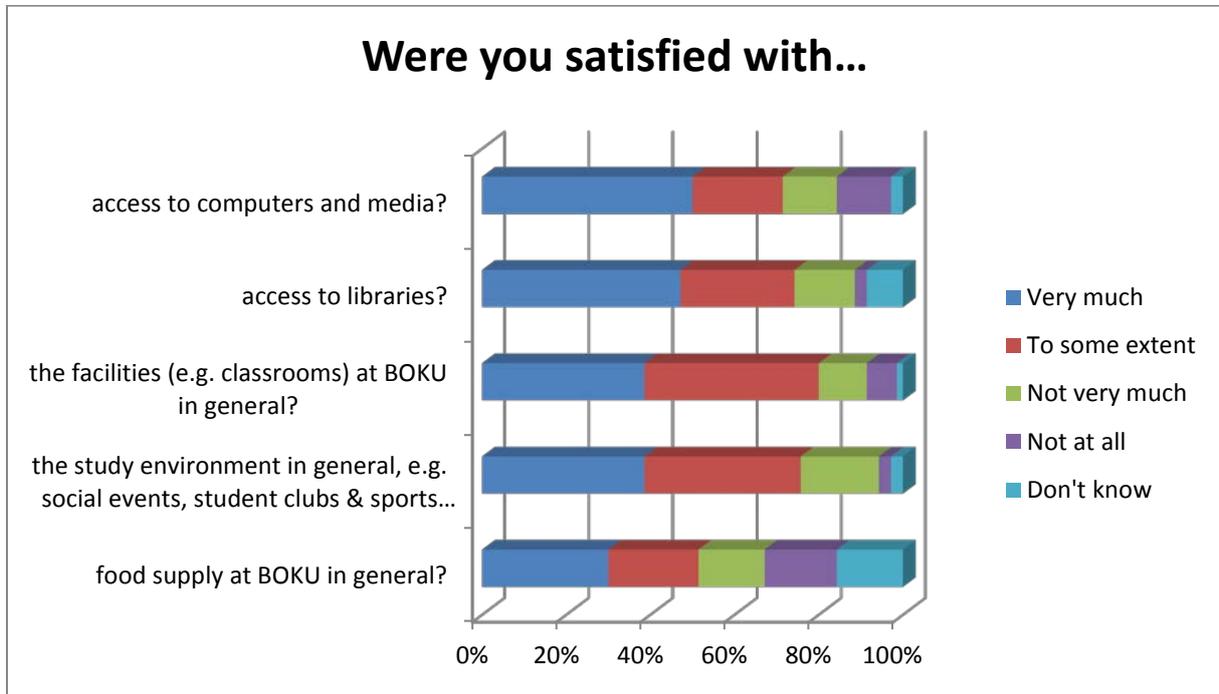


Figure 6 Student satisfaction with life at BOKU

5. Language

5.1 Experience with language problems

40% of the respondents never experienced language problems, 54% experienced them now and then, and only the remaining 6% had problems regularly. Of the 60% of students who did experience language problems, the majority had them in the classroom. Sometimes students also faced language problems in their private life, written assignments or when in contact with Austrian students. For the full breakdown of responses, see Figure 7.

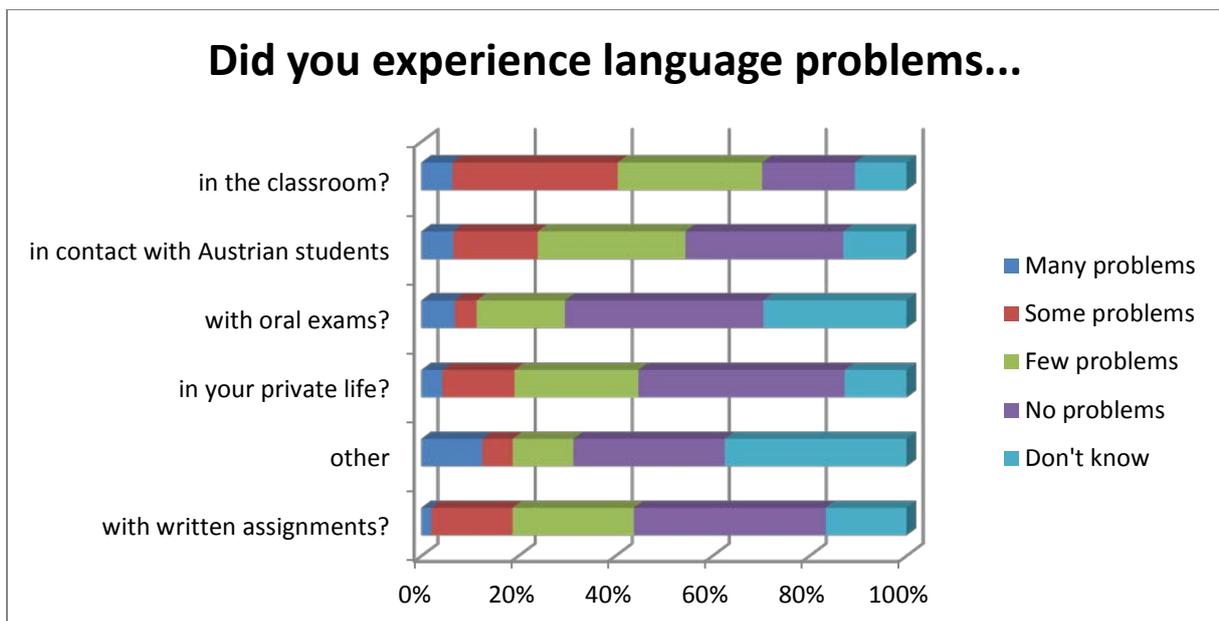


Figure 7 Where students experienced language problems



5.2 German language course

11% of respondents took an intensive German course before the semester. 20% attended a course during the semester. In both cases, the majority were satisfied with the courses. 25% of students participated in the Tandem programme.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Kind of accommodation

Over half of the respondents stayed in private accommodation which they organised themselves. 31% stayed in student residences managed by the OeAD, and 14% lived in other student residences. 66% of students were satisfied with their accommodation. Students who were dissatisfied cited long commutes, small room sizes, expensive deposits, the price of OeAD residences and difficulties in finding accommodation as reasons for this.

6.2 Important issues about accommodation during the exchange stay

The most important factors for students about their accommodation were clearly price and condition. Proximity to the university and the city centre were also valued to at least some extent by over half of respondents. Students did not find living with Austrian students or with other foreign students to be an important issue during their stay – only 17% and 15% of respondents respectively rated these factors as highly important. This could be influenced by language barriers. For a full breakdown of results, see Figure 8 .

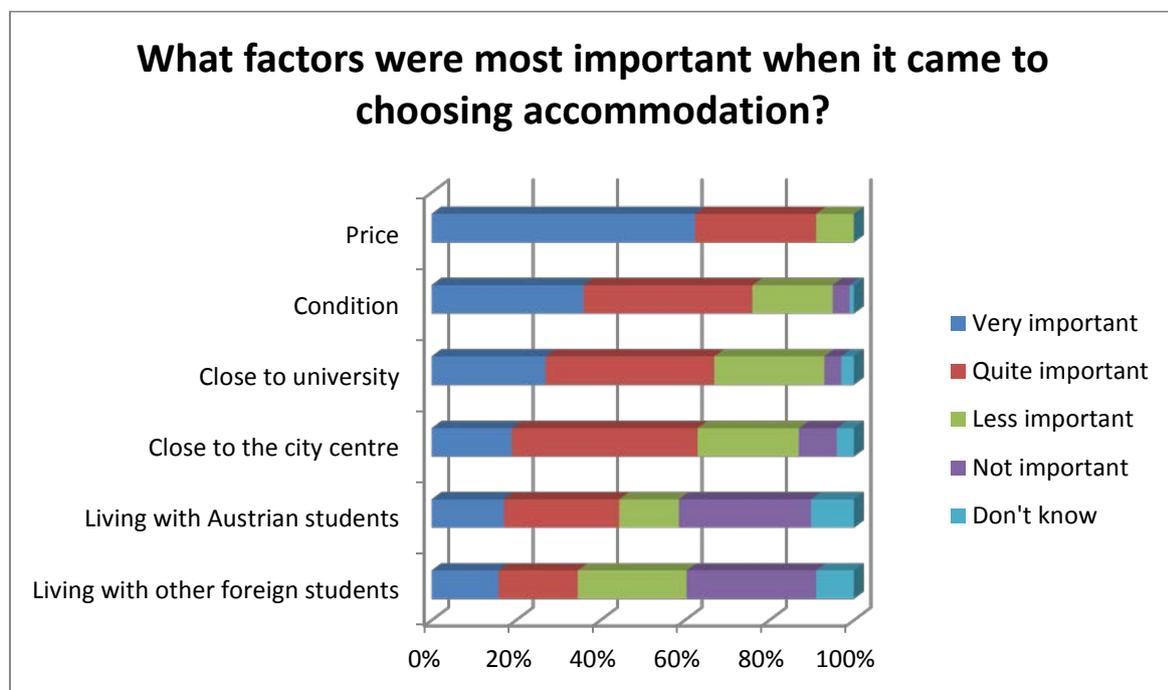


Figure 8 Most important factors for students when choosing accommodation



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7. Academic and personal outcome

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

71% of the students judged the academic outcome of their stay as very good or good. 85% of respondents perceived the personal outcome for them as very good or good.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

65% of the respondents would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 43% would like to return to BOKU for further studies, 39% would study elsewhere in Austria and 43% would like to extend their stay at BOKU (see Figure 9).

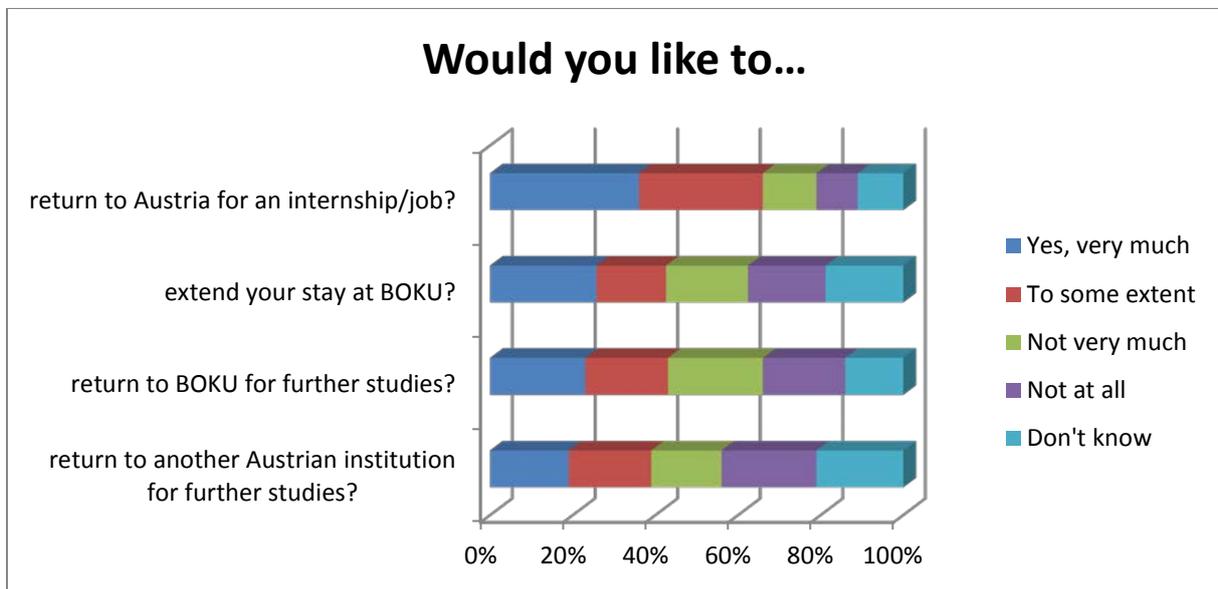


Figure 9 Students' future plans in Austria

7.3 Situations that needed special attention

Students required special attention in the following situations:

- Having problems with landlords – advice was required
- When going to the doctor or dentist – some students found that the secretaries at doctor's practices did not speak English.
- Finding cheap supermarkets

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

The following responses were suggested:

- Highlight the fact that as an Erasmus student, you can choose whichever courses interest you.
- Give students more information about accommodation
- Do more activities to help students get to know other international and Austrian students



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8. Background Information

61% of the respondents were female and 39% were male. 95% of the respondents spent the winter semester at BOKU and 4 stayed for the whole academic year. One student had different dates of arrival and departure – they stayed at BOKU from 1st September to 13th February.

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Answers</u>	<u>%</u>
German	18	26
Belgian	13	19
French	11	16
Czech	6	9
Polish	5	7
Spanish	3	4
Danish	2	3
Italian	2	3
Australian	1	1
Dutch	1	1
Finnish	1	1
Greek	1	1
Lithuanian	1	1
Portuguese	1	1
Russian	1	1
Slovakian	1	1
Swedish	1	1
Swiss	1	1
SUM	70	