



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

Exchange Studies at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2015-16

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the winter semester 2015-16 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. 94 questionnaires were returned.

1. The most appreciated things at BOKU

The aspects of BOKU appreciated the most by students were the wide variety of courses, the social events organised for incoming students – such as the Welcome Days and the weekly Stammtisch – and the teaching staff. Students also appreciated BOKU support staff, especially the ZIB team. The welcoming, positive atmosphere at the university was commented on 22 times. The facilities on offer were praised 17 times by students, who also appreciated the organisation of the university in general, as well as the opportunities they had to meet new people from around the world. Several students cited the user-friendly nature and clear structure of online systems like BOKUonline and Mobility Online as positive parts of their stay. 5 students praised the language courses on offer. 4 felt the Buddy System was a highlight of their time at BOKU, as it helped them to get settled into life both in Vienna and at the university. See all responses in Table 1.

Table 1. What students appreciated most at BOKU

Responses	Number of times mentioned
1 Courses (range of courses on offer, ability to create own schedule)	53
2 Social events (incl. Welcome Days, Stammtisch)	45
3 Teaching staff	40
4 Support staff (incl. ZIB team)	31
5 Atmosphere (open-minded, positive)	22
6 Facilities (e.g. computer rooms, library, wifi)	17
7 Opportunity to meet new people	13
8 Location	10
9 Organisation in general	10
10 Online systems (BOKUonline, Mobility Online, BOKU learn)	9
11 TÜWI and Student Union	9
12 Language courses	5
13 Excursions	5
14 Buddy system	4
15 International newsletter	1

2. Things BOKU could do better for international students

Although the range of courses on offer at BOKU was the area most appreciated by respondents, they felt that the organisation of these courses needed the most improvement. Many students said they would have liked more information before their arrival on how the course registration process worked, and would have appreciated the ability to sign up for



classes earlier; by the time they arrived at BOKU many found that classes were already fully booked or there was a long waiting list for spaces. Some students also had difficulties creating their schedules because of clashes between classes.

The second most commonly mentioned topic was information – students said they would have appreciated more information in general, such as about events going on at BOKU and course and paperwork deadlines. 18 students felt the exam period could be better organised, suggesting that exam dates be published earlier, spread out more throughout the semester (instead of just during the last weeks of term), and that professors mark papers and give students their grades more quickly. The ECTS credit system was mentioned 9 times as an area for improvement – as well as struggling to sign up for classes and create a schedule without clashes, several students said that they also found it difficult to achieve the necessary number of ECTS credits during the semester and would have liked the university to allocate more credits per course. One respondent commented that even Austrian students thought the number of courses international students had to take to meet their credit requirements was extreme.

Students also felt that the opening hours of the ZIB office and the library should be extended, that there should be more information provided in English, and that the university's online systems needed to be improved – the most common suggestion here was that all BOKU application sites (including Mobility Online, BOKUonline and BOKU learn) should be combined into one website. 5 students would also have liked more help in finding accommodation (especially with providers other than the OeAD) and more information about the different housing options available.

All responses can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. What students felt could be improved at BOKU

	Responses	Number of times mentioned
1	Course organisation	33
2	Information (about events, deadlines, life at BOKU)	23
3	More social events	19
4	Exam period (publish exam dates earlier, spread them out more, grade papers quicker)	18
5	Facilities (classrooms, computer rooms, study areas, library)	12
6	More courses in English	9
7	ECTS credit system (more credits per course)	9
8	Opening hours at ZIB	8
9	Administration (registration process, documents to fill out)	7
10	Online systems	7
11	Accommodation	5
12	Teaching material	4
13	More language courses	4
14	More information in English	4
15	Buddy system	2
16	More excursions	2
17	Improve food supply (price, quality, availability)	1



3. Motivation, information and events

3.1 Activities at BOKU

91% of respondents participated in a regular course programme during their stay at BOKU. 5% carried out an internship and 3% worked on a thesis or research project. Students were hosted by the following institutions:

- Department of Food Science and Technology
- Institute of Food Technology
- Institute of Mountain Risk Engineering
- Institute of Structural Engineering
- Institute of Waste Management
- IFA-Tulln

3.2 Reasons for coming to BOKU

The main factors which motivated students to come to BOKU were to experience a different environment, meet new people and improve their language proficiency. Academic and cultural reasons also proved important for students (see Figure 1).

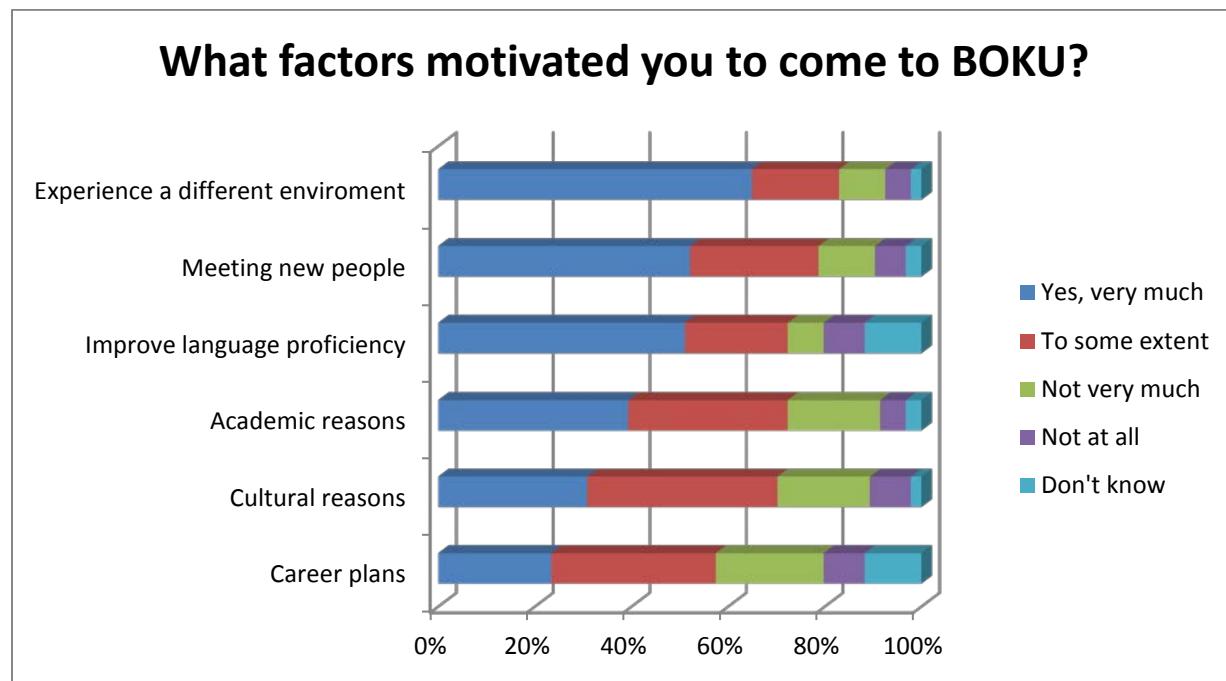


Figure 1. Reasons why international students chose to study at BOKU

Other factors which motivated students to come to BOKU included:

- The large range of courses offered in English
- Positive feedback from previous exchange students
- The university's positive reputation and good connections
- The opportunity to travel around Eastern Europe
- The chance to take part in winter sports like snowboarding and hiking in the Alps
- Vienna the city



3.3 Information before the stay

The BOKU website was the most popular source of information for students before they arrived at the university; it was used by 76% of students. Other major sources of information included departmental coordinators and fellow students at their home universities, and the exchange coordinator at BOKU (ZIB). See Figure 2 for all responses.

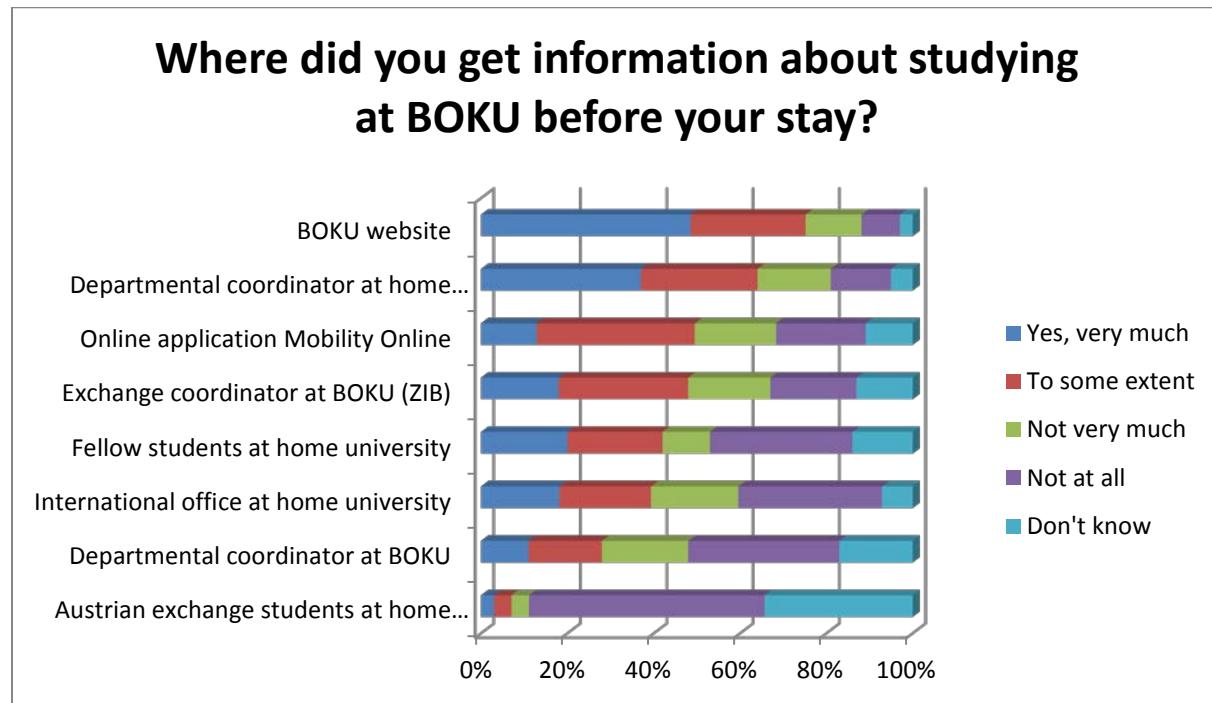


Figure 2. Sources of information used by students before their stay

For two students, their Buddies were the most helpful sources of information before they arrived. One student looked at blogs created by previous exchange students, and another learnt what they needed to know from a recap presentation at their home university about BOKU.

3.4 Information from BOKU

88% of students thought the information they received from the Center for International Relations (ZIB) during their stay was either good or very good. 83% thought the same of the information from ZIB when planning their stay. 59% valued the information from their department or institute and 44% expressed positive opinions on the information from other service departments. All figures can be seen in Figure 3.

What did you think about the information from BOKU?

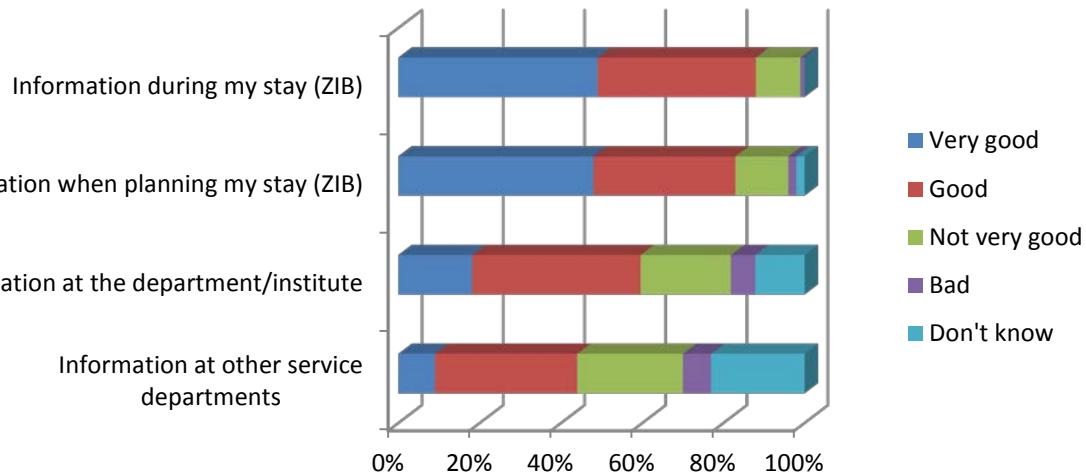


Figure 3. Evaluation of information from BOKU

3.5 Mobility Online

Opinions on Mobility Online were largely positive. 79 out of 94 students were pleased with the reliable operation of the system, and 82% thought the emails they received were clear and easy to understand. Around 70% felt that the application form was simple to fill in and that the instructions in the database were clear. All responses can be found in Figure 4.

What do you think about the application process through Mobility Online?

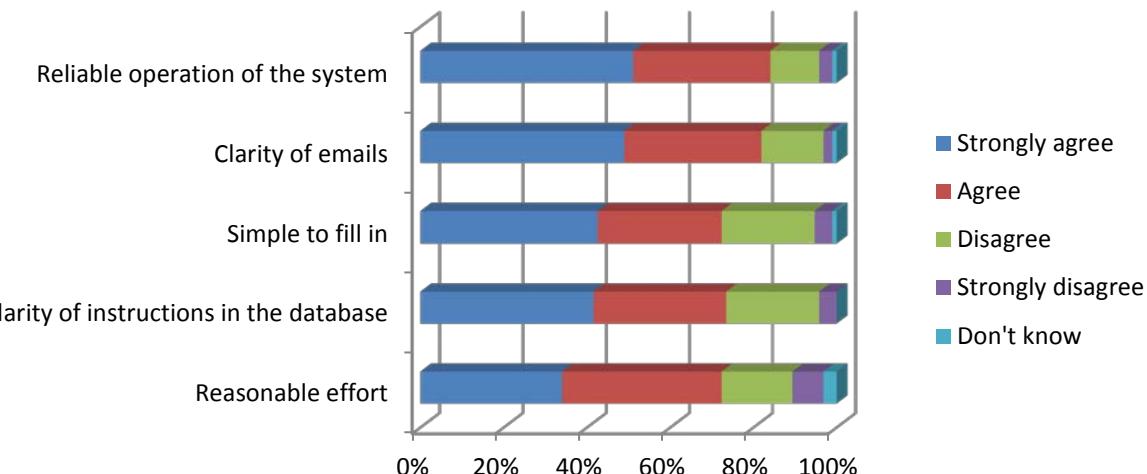


Figure 4. Evaluation of Mobility Online



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Students were also asked to leave comments on how the system could be improved. These included:

- Provide students with an alternative means of accessing the database, as the original email with the access link could easily be lost, accidentally deleted or buried in an inbox
- Reduce paperwork required and make it more clear what the necessary documents are
- Insert a link from Mobility Online to BOKUonline and vice versa
- Allow students to upload documents in formats other than PDF
- Create one website which all universities use for exchange programmes, instead of having two different systems for the home and host universities and therefore double the paperwork
- Send a confirmation of stay email sooner (current waiting time is around 3 or 4 weeks)
- Keep emails clear and concise

3.6 Welcome Days

77% of respondents attended the Welcome Days, and 78% of these students came away with a good or very good impression.

Students had the chance to provide comments on their experiences at the Welcome Days. 19 picked out the Türkenschanz campus discovery game as a highlight of these events, and 18 said the information they were given during these days was excellent, finding it useful and comprehensive. Many also praised the opportunities they had to make new friends, the Heurigen party and the events organised by the ESN. 6 students mentioned that they were pleased to meet the ZIB team, 6 felt the city tour was especially good and 4 commented that the Welcome Days had been very well organised.

When asked how they thought the Welcome Days could be improved, the majority of students suggested more group activities, or more activities focused on getting to know people. 2 students thought there should be more Welcome Days, while 1 student thought there should be fewer! Other suggestions included:

- More tours of Vienna
- Earlier information about course registration
- Give only one presentation (instead of one in English and then one in German)
- Instead of just sitting in the lab during the Muthgasse tour, give students more information about the rooms and facilities available
- Upload an online guide of all information for those who were unable to attend

3.7 BOKUonline info session

81% of respondents attended the BOKUonline info session, and 64% of them found it helpful. Students appreciated the detailed explanations of the system and the information given about the different BOKU campuses, lectures and course types. Several respondents commented that they found the presentations easy to understand, clear and useful.

For the 19% of students who didn't attend the info session, the main reasons for their absence were that they felt they knew the information already, their home university used the same software, or they had already been shown the system by their Buddies or friends.

3.8 Buddy system

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 used to life at BOKU. 69% of respondents took this opportunity. Out of those who did not, 7 felt they didn't need one (because they already spoke German or had friends to help them) and 1 student asked for a Buddy but didn't receive one; others applied too late or didn't really understand the system.

51% of students felt that their Buddies assisted them with the first steps after their arrival in Vienna. 43% said they helped them get used to academic life at BOKU and 38% credited their Buddies with helping them get used to social life in Vienna (see Figure 5).

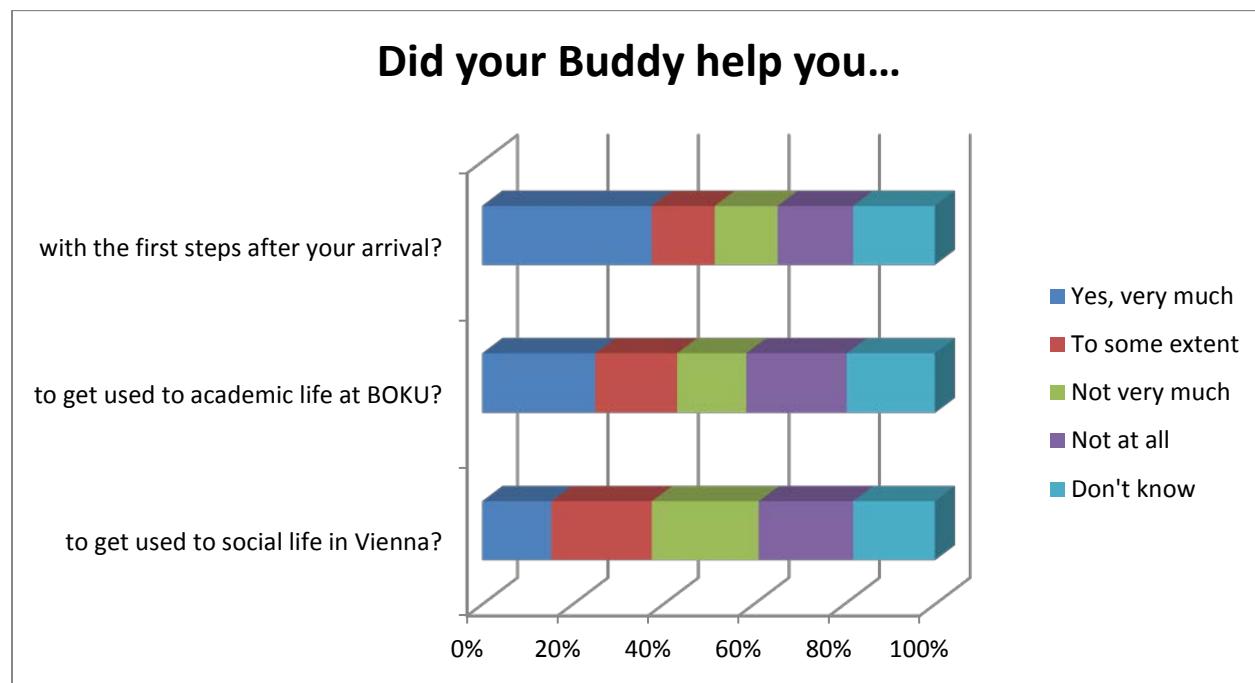


Figure 5. Student satisfaction with the support they received from their Buddy

For those who were unsatisfied with their Buddies, the main issue was a lack of contact when the students arrived at BOKU – several students said that they had exchanged emails with their Buddies before arriving in Vienna, but never actually met up with them or didn't hear from them again once the semester started. Some students said their Buddy wasn't in Vienna when they arrived, and others commented that their Buddies were too busy during the semester with their own work to help out. One student suggested that ZIB could organise a 'Buddy evening' before the semester starts to allow all students and their Buddies to meet¹.

3.9 International newsletter sent by ZIB

54% of students who answered the feedback questionnaire said that they read the weekly International newsletter regularly. 63% found the included information useful. When asked what other things they would like to read about in the newsletter, students suggested:

- More information about events going on around Vienna (concerts, festivals, etc.)

¹ Comment by BOKU: A Buddy meeting at the beginning of the semester is organised.



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- A calendar of seminars
- More ESN and social events

3.10 Stammtisch

68% of students attended the weekly Stammtisch either regularly or every now and then. The most common suggestions for ways to make the event more attractive were either to change the location of the Stammtisch regularly, or to choose a larger or non-smoking bar. Several students also suggested that the event could be combined with another activity, such as beer pong, a quiz night, or a themed party.

3.11 Other events

The Willkommens-Heuriger (Viennese Wine Bar) was attended by 59% of respondents, and 53% went to the Advent party for international students.

3.12 Improvements to information and planning for exchange students

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:

- Provide more information about the course registration process, important dates and deadlines
- Help students to find accommodation
- Simplify BOKUonline and reduce the number of administrative steps/amount of paperwork required
- Make sure students who want to take courses in German have a certain language level before they arrive
- Combine all BOKU application sites (BOKUonline, Mobility Online, BOKU learn) into one website
- Provide more information about public transport and registering in Vienna

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

78% of students were very satisfied or satisfied to some extent with the access to computers and media at BOKU. 77% were pleased with the access to libraries and 76% were satisfied with both the facilities, such as classrooms, at BOKU in general and the study environment in general (which included social events, student clubs and sports facilities). The area with which students were least satisfied was the food supply (see Figure 6) – they found it too limited, too expensive or not good quality.

Students also had the opportunity to leave comments about the infrastructure at BOKU. These included:

- Not enough study spaces / group work rooms / space in the library / computer rooms
- The university and library opening hours are too short (not open late or on weekends)
- Muthgasse and Augasse campuses are unattractive
- Not enough places to sit and eat
- Printing costs are too high
- The heating and air-conditioning in classrooms doesn't always work



- Transportation costs are high / students have to travel a lot for classes (especially to and from the Tulln campus)

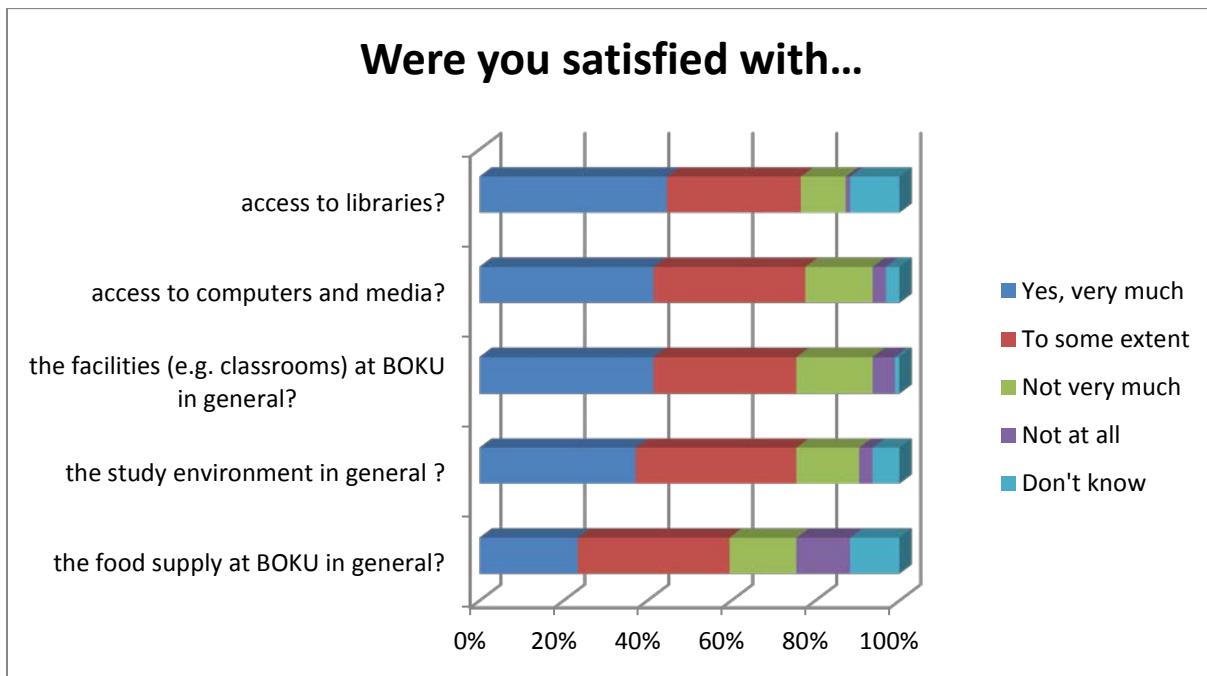


Figure 6. Student satisfaction with the facilities at BOKU

5. Languages

5.1 Language problems

6% of international students experienced language problems regularly, 53% now and then, and 41% never had any difficulties.

Of the 59% of students who did have language problems, the majority occurred in the classroom, when students came into contact with Austrian students, and in their private lives. Some students also found it difficult to understand automated emails from BOKU, which were always in German, and a few had problems with the exams they took in German (see Figure 7) ².

² Comment by BOKU: Automated emails sent by BOKU are bilingual; sometimes emails sent by the student union (ÖH) are in German only.

Did you experience language problems...

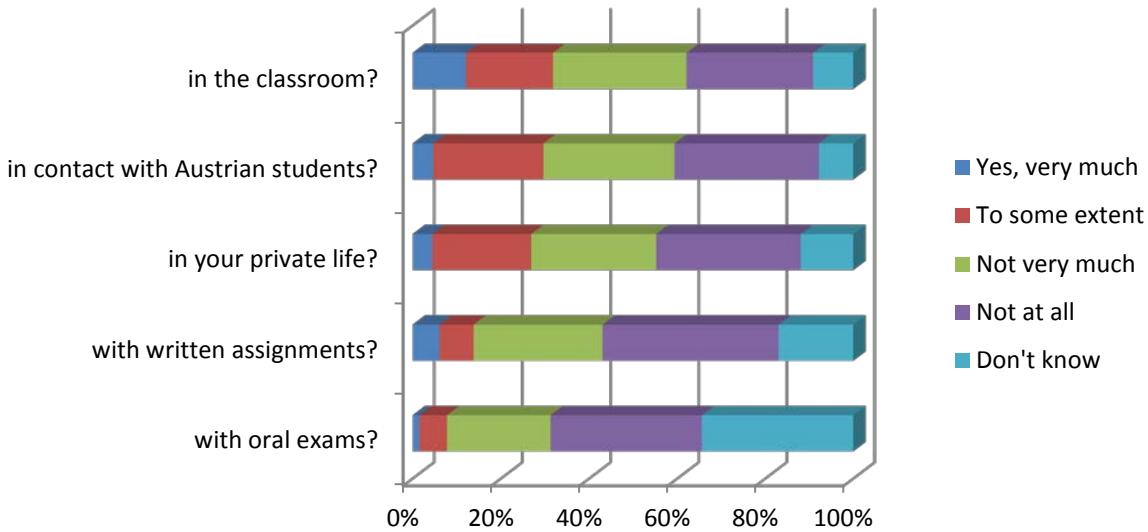


Figure 7. Where students experienced language problems

5.2 German language courses

16% of respondents took part in an intensive German language course before the semester 24% took one during the semester and 13% participated in the Tandem programme. One student took a German course at the Diplomatische Akademie Wien and another did one online.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Accommodation type

Over half of the 94 students who took the questionnaire lived in student residences during their stay in Vienna - 28% in student residences organised by the OeAD and 36% in those they had organised themselves. 36% lived in private accommodation (such as a shared flat).

70% of students were satisfied with their accommodation; the main problem for those who were not was the expensive rent. 4 students were unhappy with the way the OeAD treated its residents. One student had problems with their roommate, another had difficulty getting in contact with their housing provider, and one said it was challenging to find a WG that was willing to take students for just one semester. One respondent also commented that they would have appreciated more information from BOKU about the different housing options available.

6.2 Important factors in choosing accommodation

The most important factor for students when choosing their accommodation was the price – 92 out of 94 respondents rated this as quite or very important. Condition was the second biggest factor (a priority for 80% of students), followed closely by proximity to the university; this was important for 79% of students.

Students did not seem to be as concerned about who they would be living with when choosing their accommodation – only 15% thought living with other foreign students was “very important”, and 13% said living with Austrian students was a top priority. All responses can be found in Figure 8.

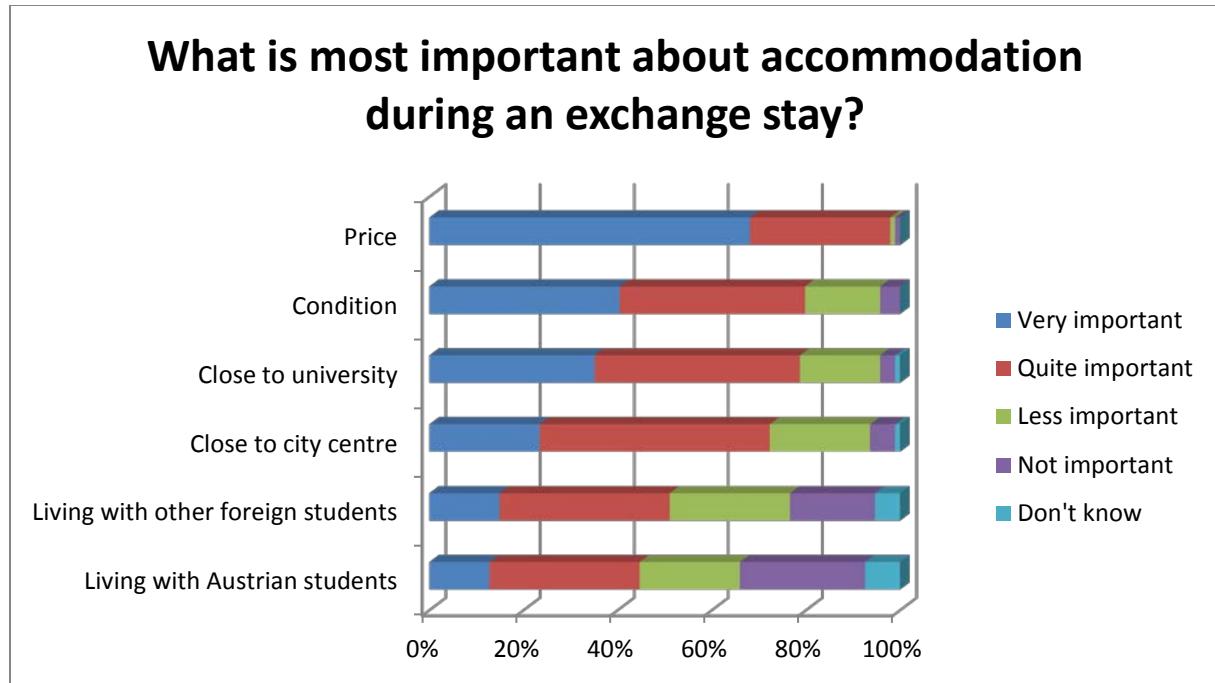


Figure 8. Most important factors for students when choosing their accommodation

7. Academic and personal outcomes

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

87% of the students judged the personal outcome of their stay at BOKU as good or very good. 69% thought the academic outcome was also good or very good.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

66% of respondents said they would like to return to Austria to do an internship or to work. 44% wanted to extend their stay at BOKU, 41% wanted to return to BOKU for further studies and 38% said they would like to return to another Austrian institution for further studies (see Figure 9).

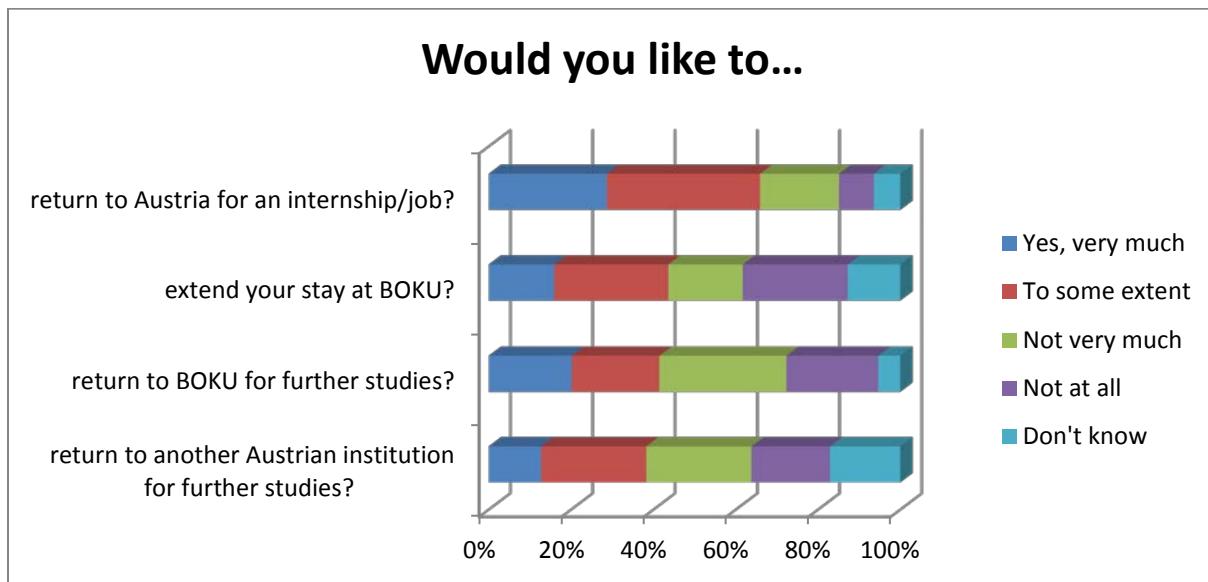


Figure 9. Students' future plans in Austria

7.3 Situations requiring special attention

Students were asked if they experienced any situations during their study abroad which required special attention. For most people, this was not the case. However, two students mentioned that they had had issues with safety and security around the city. One student faced difficulties with their bank account, and another was ill during their stay. One student said they felt discriminated against by others because of their nationality.

7.4 Recommendations for ZIB or BOKU to support exchange students

The following responses were suggested:

- Organise something similar to the Welcome Days during the first few weeks of the semester (for students who couldn't attend the original events)
- Hold more activities during the Welcome Days
- Organise a get-together at the beginning of the semester for exchange students and their Buddies to allow them to get to know each other
- Help students find a part-time job
- Organise more trips out of Vienna (e.g. a hiking trip in the countryside)
- Help students find accommodation
- Offer more German language courses
- Improve the food options on offer around the BOKU campuses
- Provide more computers for Computer Aided Design, as only a few computers on the campus have it and are always in use by other students
- Allow students to access computer rooms over the weekend
- Explain to students how studying at BOKU works and the level required of them (because “BOKU is not as the cliché of Erasmus where nobody has to study and just holidays”)
- Provide an overview of the available field trips, or let students know how they can find this information
- Hold an International Dinner



8. Background information

65% of the respondents were female and 35% male. 89% spent the winter semester at BOKU, 4% stayed for the whole academic year and 6% had alternative arrival and departure dates.

Table 3. Nationalities of students who took part in the evaluation questionnaire

Nationality	Answers	%
German	15	16%
French	12	13%
Belgian	10	11%
Hungarian	8	9%
Czech	7	8%
Finnish	6	6%
Polish	5	5%
Italian	4	4%
Swedish	4	4%
Croatian	3	3%
Dutch	3	3%
Spanish	3	3%
Romanian	2	2%
Slovenian	2	2%
Australian	1	1%
Egyptian	1	1%
Ethiopian	1	1%
Indian	1	1%
Lithuanian	1	1%
Norwegian	1	1%
South African	1	1%
Swiss	1	1%
Turkish	1	1%
SUM	93	