



Erasmus at BOKU

Evaluation of incoming student questionnaires, winter semester 2012/13

This paper is a report on the results of the survey conducted among the incoming students, who spent the 2012/13 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. 58 questionnaires were returned.

1. The most appreciated things at BOKU

In general, the positive and international atmosphere within the University was very much appreciated. The most positive comments were on the teaching staff (availability, helpfulness and willingness to accommodate international students) and the courses (wide variety of courses and interesting topics, course content, course organisation, possibility to pick their courses themselves) (see Table 1).

Table 1 List of most appreciated things at BOKU

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	Teaching staff (availability, helpfulness and willingness to accommodate international students)	28 times
2	Courses (wide variety of courses and interesting topics, course content, course organisation, picking of courses themselves)	25 times
3	Social events (Welcome days, Heurigen)	20 times
4	Support staff inc ZIB team	17 times
5	Atmosphere	15 times
6	Location, Vienna	15 times
7	Technology (BOKUonline)	9 times
8	TUWI and Students' Union	7 times
9	Facilities	4 times
10	Library	4 times
11	Language courses	3 times
12	Buddy-system	2 times

The organised social activities went down well and the Welcome Days and Heuriger event proved especially popular and were repeatedly commented upon.

The general organisation and support departments within the University including the Center for International Relations and other departments, such as the ZID, provided students with support and guidance, especially towards the beginning of the semester when the students felt they particularly needed it. There were also quite a lot of comments about the city and great location of the Türkenschanze campus.

The social side of BOKU was viewed positively by 7 students who commented on the ÖH and Tüwi's wide range of events. Facilities such as the classrooms, the libraries and the computers -which were available in great number-, were praised.

3 students pointed out the quality of the language courses and felt that they made for good opportunities to meet other international students. Only 2 students mentioned the Buddy-System but both were very positive about the scheme and found it helpful.



2. Things that BOKU could do better for international students

18 students were not entirely satisfied with the course organisation at BOKU. The most frequently mentioned issues were the difficulty in signing up for exams, the ECTS allocations for courses (some felt that the amount of work required was not fairly rewarded) and the number of cancelled lessons. Social events and BOKU’s social life were mentioned by 14 students who enjoyed the events they went to (such as the evening spend at a Heuriger) so much that they wanted more!

12 students felt that there was too much paperwork and found the process confusing. 3 of these students suggested improving communication between the home and the host universities and, additionally, 11 students felt that a lack of English (resources, emails, website pages, administration documents) made studying at BOKU and living in Vienna challenging.

The administration was criticised by 10 students who would have liked longer opening hours at the ZIB and more support when they first arrived, as they struggled to orientate themselves, meet people and settle in. However, it is not possible to know whether these students signed up to the buddy system or attended the Welcome Days.

The cost and number of spots in language classes were mentioned by 6 students who would have preferred the lessons to be offered at a lower cost but to more people. They did, however, say that the quality of the courses was high. 4 students struggled to use the online platforms and specifically mentioned BOKUonline, wishing that it were simpler to use. 1 student suggested ‘Studip’ as an alternative system. Only 2 students were not satisfied with BOKU’s facilities, mentioning the classrooms’ size as well as the availability of the teaching staff. A summary can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 List of difficulties

	Answers	Mentioned by students
1	Course organisation (difficulty in signing up for exams, the ECTS allocations for courses and the number of cancelled lessons)	18
2	Not enough social events	14
3	Administration	12
4	Lack of English availability (resources, emails, website pages, administration documents)	11
5	Support from ZIB (e.g. opening hours)	10
6	Language courses	6
7	Technology	4
8	Facilities	2
9	Availability of teaching staff	2

3. Motivation and information

3.1 Activities at BOKU

93% of the students who filled in this survey participated in a regular course programme, 3.5% worked on their thesis/research project and 3.5% did an internship. The host institutes were the Geotechnical Institute, the Institute of Food Technology, the Marketing Institute, the Institute of Biotechnology, the Institute of Food Science, the Institute of Agricultural Engineering and the Institute of Microbiology and Hygiene.

3.2 Factors of motivation

The main reasons pushing students to come to BOKU were to experience a different environment and to improve their language proficiency. Cultural and academic reasons were also taken into consideration. For exact results, see Figure 1.

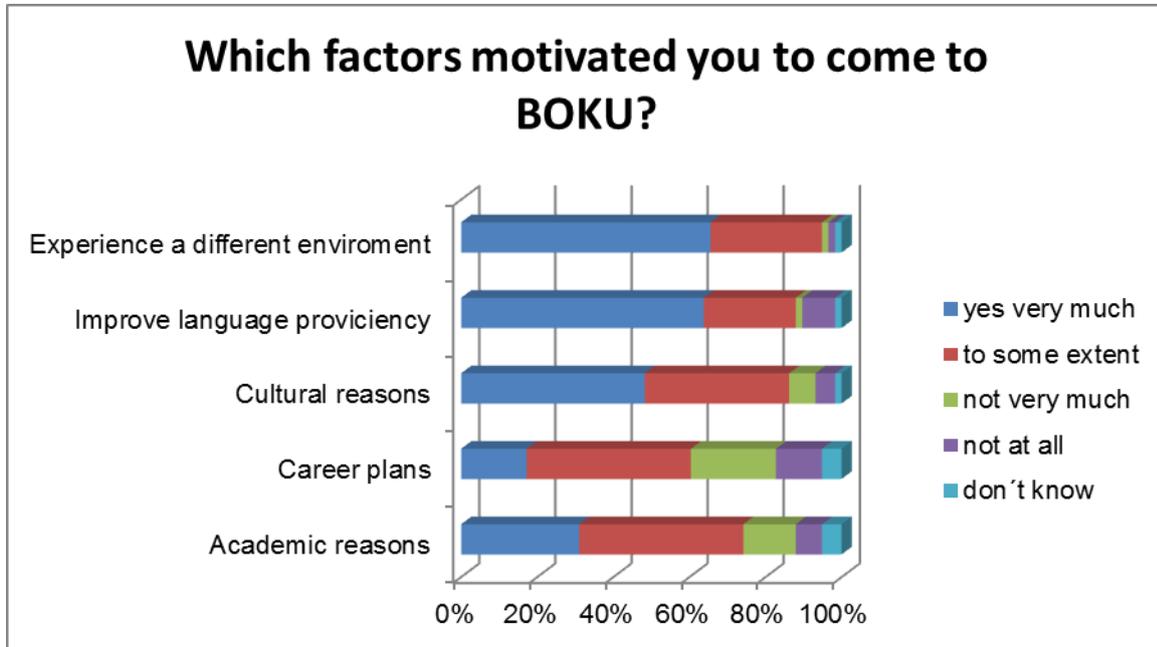


Figure 1 Importance of given factors to come to BOKU

3.3 Information before your stay

BOKU's website and departmental coordinators were the sources which provided the most information. The exchange coordinators at students' home universities, the Erasmus coordinator at BOKU (ZIB) and the International Office at home universities also provided much information. Students did not gain information from Austrian exchange students, possibly because some students did not meet any Austrians studying at their home university (see Figure 2).

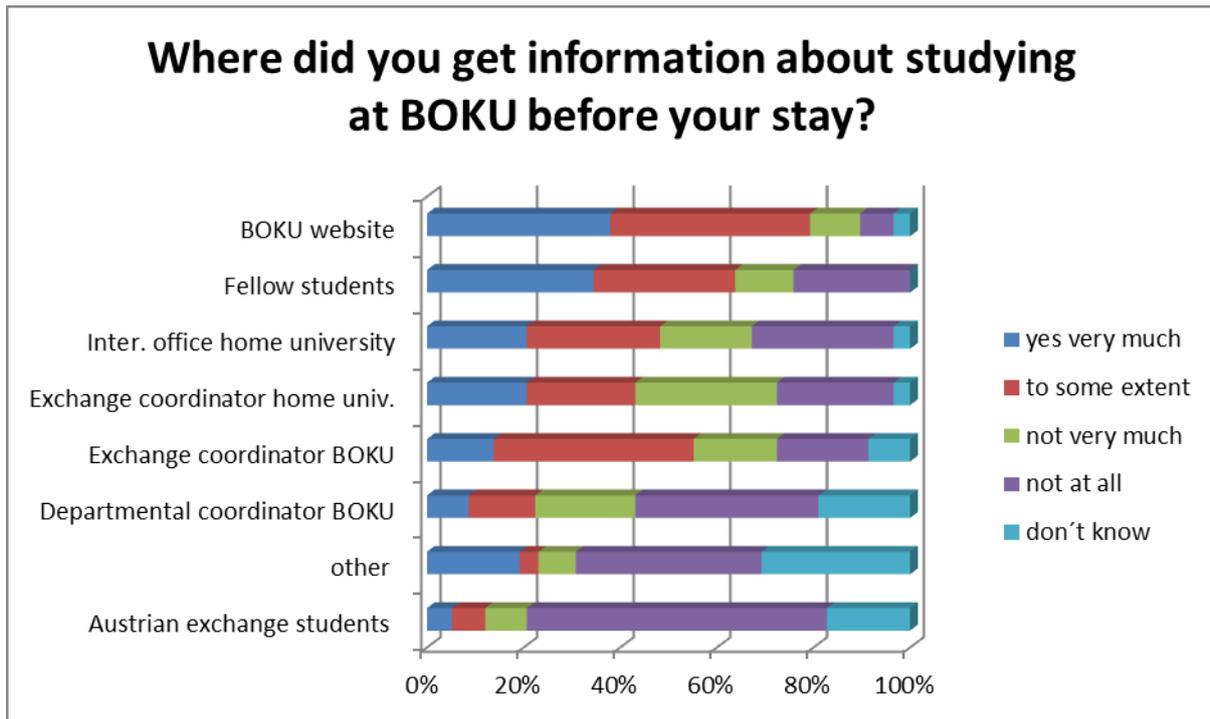


Figure 2 Ways of gaining information used by students

3.4 Information from BOKU

78% of answers were positive when it was asked if the information provided by BOKU (i.e. ZIB, all other service departments and institutions) was useful. As is evident in graph 5, students felt the information from the ZIB was particularly helpful to plan and handle their stay. A lot of students did not answer this question as far as the service departments were concerned or they chose the option “I do not know”.

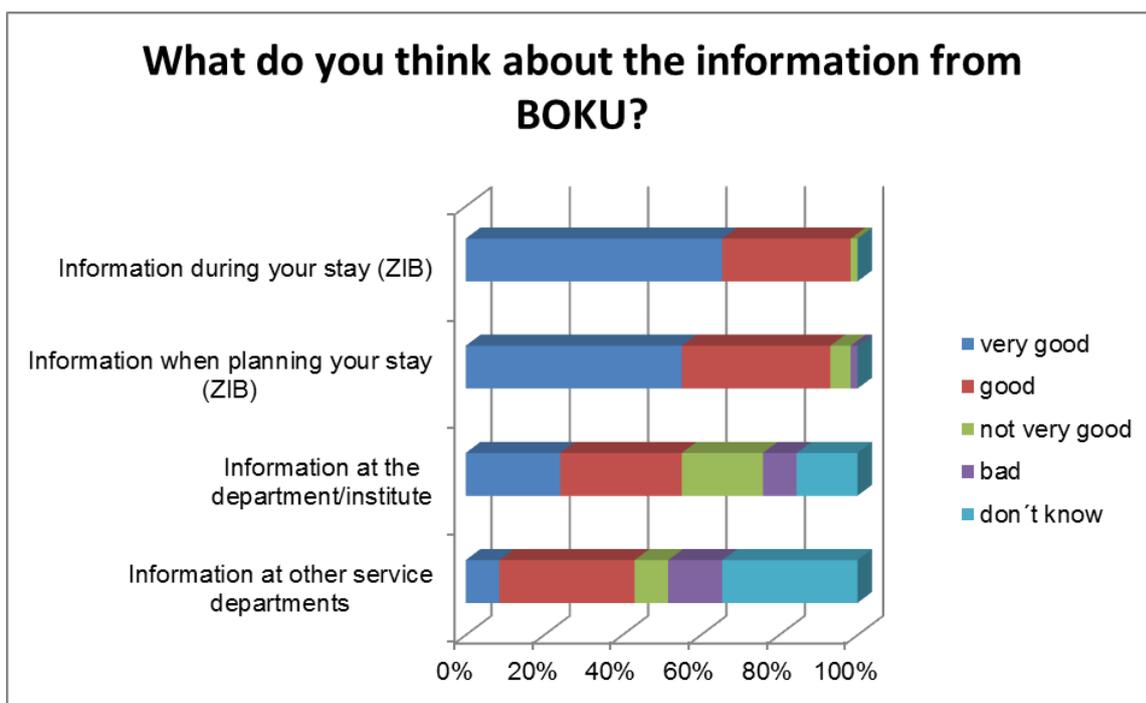


Figure 3 Evaluation of providers of information



3.5 Mobility Online

Mobility Online was seen very positively by students who rated each aspect of the system fairly similarly. 89% of results, regarding all aspects, were 'very good' or 'good'. The most positively viewed area was the clarity of instructions on the database showing that students found the system user-friendly. The survey asked students to suggest improvements for Mobility Online and four replied with the following comments:

- Link to access Mobility Online should be easier to access i.e. not just through an old email
- More information for students staying longer than one semester
- Colour coding system could highlight progress and/or problems
- Make it possible for students to upload documents in different orders for increased flexibility

3.6 Welcome Days

95% of the students who attended the Welcome Days regarded them positively. The main positive comments about the Welcome Days were that they allowed students to get to know new people and contained lots of useful information about issues such as registering in Vienna. The favourite parts of the events were the tour of the city and the evening spent in a traditional Austrian Heurigen. The only suggested improvements were that it should be compulsory for all students, that it could be longer and that it was at some points irritating that information was said both in German and English. However, other students said that they were grateful for the translation!

3.7 Information session about BOKUonline

41 out of the 58 students who answered this questionnaire attended the information session about BOKU online. 100% of those who attended rated the session positively.

3.8 Buddy

77% of respondents had a buddy and 23% did not. The reasons for not having a buddy were mainly that the students thought it was unnecessary or that it was thrilling to discover things on their own.

The buddies were especially useful within the first steps after arrival (see Figure 4).

Some students expressed dissatisfaction with their buddies: some of the buddies did not answer emails and many students said that their relationship with their buddy was only short; however, they still helped with the students' first steps when the buddy was really needed.

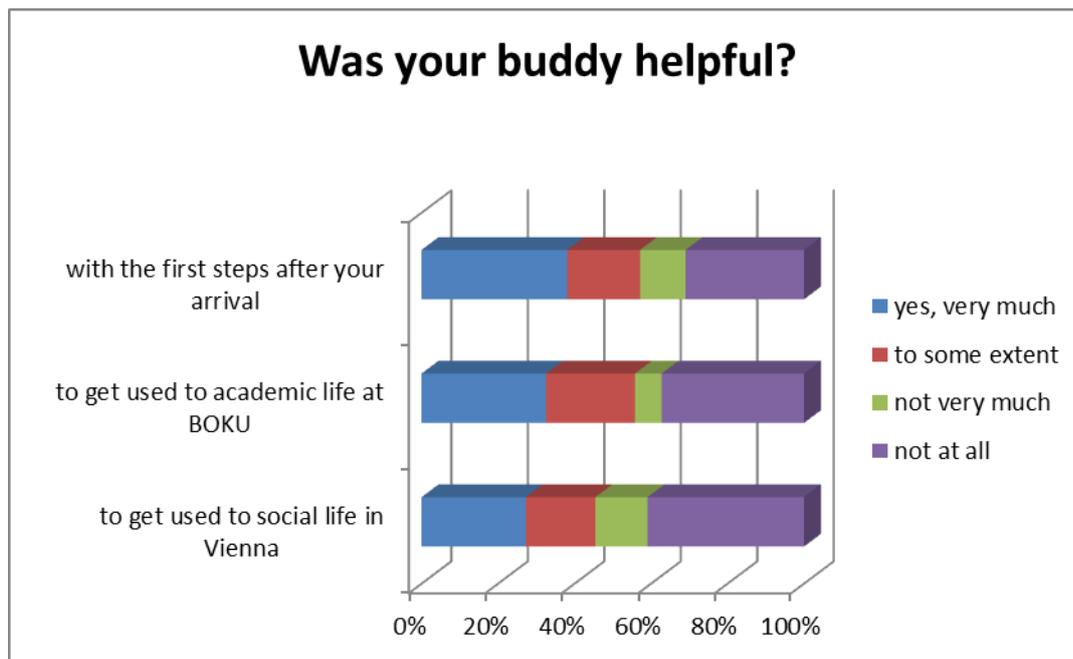


Figure 4 Helpfulness of buddy

3.9 Newsletter

More than 50% of the respondents read the newsletter regularly, 38% read it only now and then and 10% never read it. 86% of the respondents found the information in the newsletter very useful or useful to some extent. One student suggested including more information about academic activities and another about free cultural events in Vienna.

3.10 “Stammtisch”

The Stammtisch was attended regularly by 14% of the respondents and 53% visited it now and then. 33% of the students in the survey never attended the Stammtisch. Students suggested that there should be a change of location for the Stammtisch and that there should be more games and/or quizzes to help students to get to know one another.

3.11 Other events

34 of the respondents attended the Heurigen Party. All of the students who participated rated the event as very good or good. The Advent party was attended by 23 of the students, 78% of whom enjoyed the event either very much or to some extent.

3.12 Suggestions for improvement at BOKU

In the survey, students suggested the following improvements:

- Simplify the application process by reducing the amount of paperwork
- Better course organisation and allow students to see full course list before arrival
- Help students with accommodation
- Make sure everything is also in English

4. Infrastructure at BOKU

The majority of students were either satisfied or very satisfied with the BOKU infrastructure in regards to the general study environment, the facilities, the access to computers and media and the access to libraries (see Figure 5).

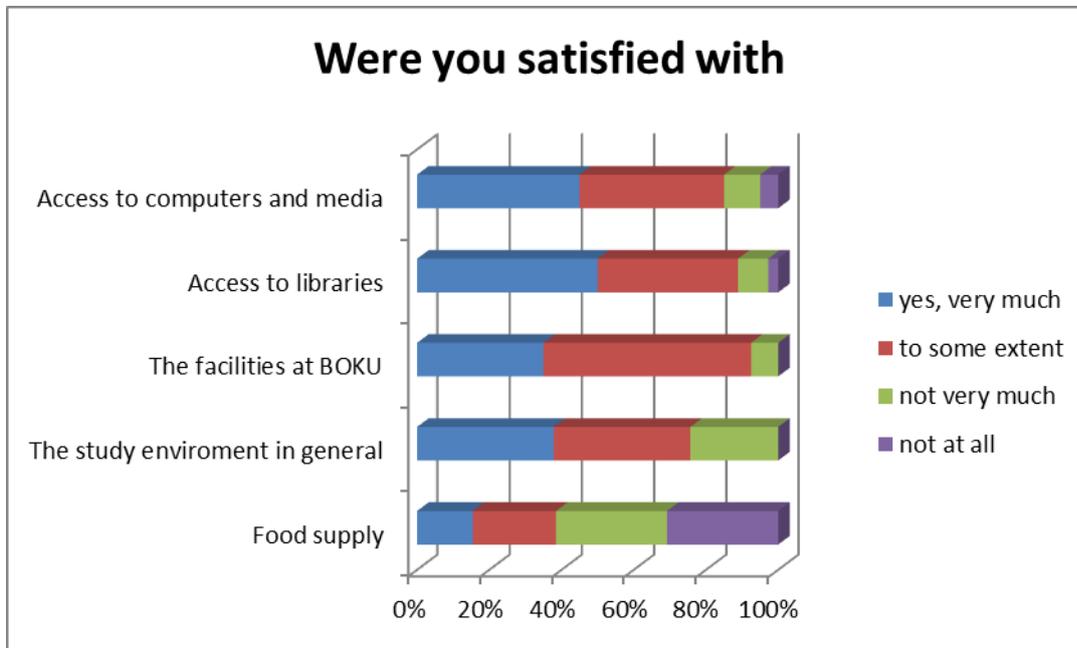


Figure 5 Satisfaction with infrastructure

For example, 93% of those who answered the question said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the facilities at BOKU. The only category which was disappointing was ‘Food supply’ with just 37% satisfied or very satisfied.

5. Language

5.1 Experiences with language problems

40% of the respondents experienced no language problems, 50% experienced them only now and then and 10% encountered language problems regularly.

5.2 German language course

7 out of 58 respondents attended the Intensive German course before the semester and all of those who participated were either very satisfied or satisfied with it. 15 of the respondents took part in the German course during the semester and all of them found it very good or good. 15 people participated in the Tandem learning, all but one student liked it very much or to some extent.

6. Accommodation

6.1 Kind of accommodation

51% of the students stayed in a student residence organised by the OeAD. See graph 9 for more information. 74% of students were satisfied or very satisfied with their accommodation. Among those dissatisfied, many complained about the OeAD, mainly its prices, organisation and inflexibility. Some students suggested that it was easier to get a better deal on the private market.

6.2 Important issues about accommodation during the exchange stay

The most important characteristic of accommodation is its price. Other very important aspects are the condition, proximity to BOKU, living together with other foreign students and also proximity to the city centre. The possibility of staying with Austrian students is also taken into account but does not play such an important role.

7. Academic and personal outcome

7.1 Outcome of the stay at BOKU

79% of the students judge the academic outcome of their stay as very good or good. 95% of respondents see the personal outcome as very good or good.

7.2 Extension of stay at BOKU

81% wish to return to Austria for study at another institution or for an internship or work and 47% to study at another Austrian institution. Just over half of the respondents would like to come back to BOKU for further study. 64% of the respondents would like to extend their stay at BOKU (see Figure 6).

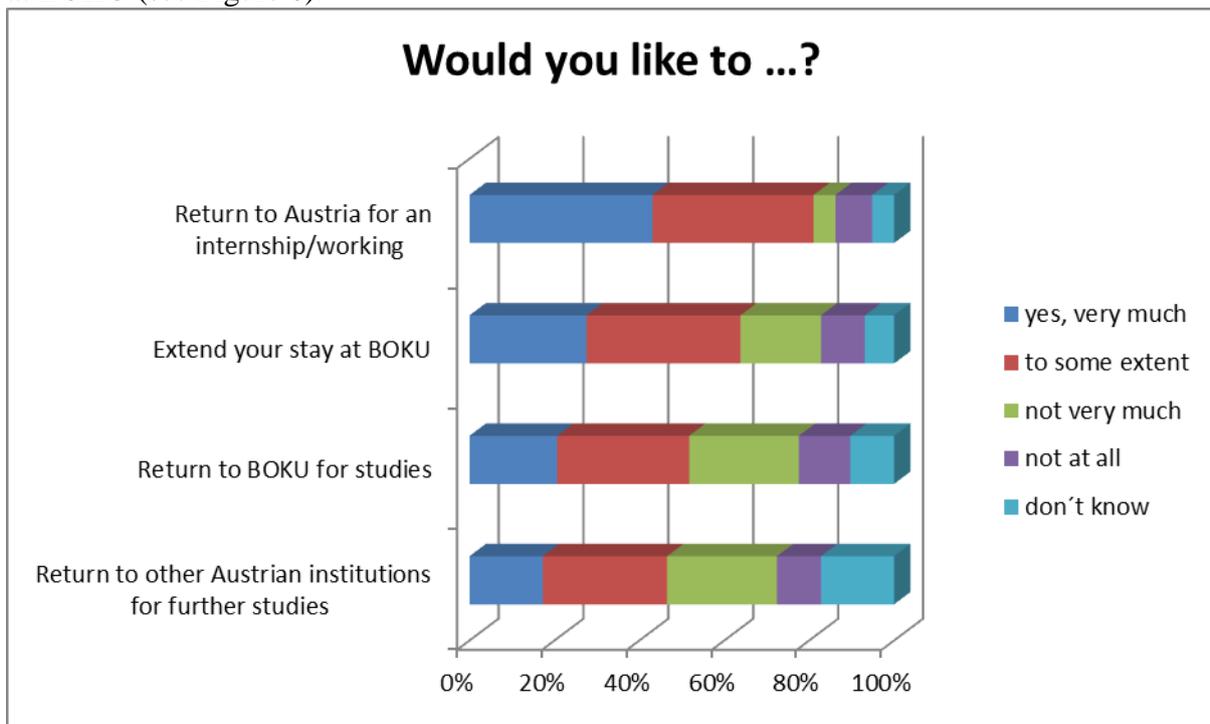


Figure 6 Future plans

7.3 Situations that needed special attention

One student needed to find a doctor and communicated with the police. One was ill and missed exams, however, one professor allowed the student to write a paper instead. One student mentioned having difficulties with finding an accommodation and another problems with her flatmates.

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

The majority of the students either didn't answer the questions or provided positive answers such as "there is a lot of information already available. You're great". The suggestions that were provided were as follows:

- Create a website or webpage where incoming students can write a paragraph of their mementos at the end of their stay as a piece of advice to others
- Help students to make sure that they can take the courses they want to take
- More exams earlier in the semester
- More help to find accommodation
- More trips

8. Background information

62% of the respondents were female and 38% were male. 78% of the respondents stayed at BOKU for the winter semester and 16% for the full academic year. Table 3 gives an overview of the countries of origin from the incoming students.

Table 3 Country of origin

Nationality	Answers	%
France	8	13,79
Belgium	8	13,79
Germany	7	12,07
Poland	6	10,34
Slovakia	5	8,62
Spain	4	6,90
Czech Republic	4	6,90
Italy	4	6,90
Turkey	3	5,17
Finland	2	3,45
Estonia	2	3,45
The Netherlands	2	3,45
Croatia	1	1,72
Portugal	1	1,72
Sweden	1	1,72
SUM	58	100