Assessment of the Practicum by Students from the Perspective of the Induction Process

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Abstract:

This article shows the assessments made by students from the Carlos III University of Madrid of the induction period in the practicum they performed during their courses of study, and their perceptions of and attitudes towards it. The method used was a survey comprising 6 questions about the induction process, which was carried out among 359 students over six academic years from 2003/4 to 2008/9. The study demonstrates that the information centers receiving interns should place more emphasis on the induction process in order to achieve integration and correct the failings which this work has enabled us to detect. The employees from the information centers who act as supervisors of the students will be most aware of their interests and opinions. They will be able to take these into consideration when planning the work placements, particularly in order to provide a suitable welcome and orientation for the students, treating them in a similar way to new employees through the induction process. The students' observations should also be taken into account by the academics responsible for the internships, in order to establish proposals for action with a view to improving the practicum. This study will help to extend the very limited

literature existing on assessment of the practicum programs from the perspective of LIS students.

Keywords: Induction, assessment, survey students, practicum, LIS students' perceptions, LIS experiential learning, Higher Education.

Introduction

The term "induction" is generally used in a workplace context, and is considered to be an important aspect of personnel management. It is a process whereby employees adjust or acclimatize to their jobs and working environment. It helps new employees gain awareness of what the organization, company or institution expects from them, and so guides them and helps them find their place within it. Induction involves informing new recruits of aspects related to the organization and the post they are to hold: the organization's rules and values, its structure and the location of their post within it; their colleagues, hours, and breaks; the tasks they will be performing, and so forth. A good induction program helps to speed up the socialization of new employees and encourages them to make positive contributions to the organization.

Responsibility for this process, ranging from the most general to the most specific or particular, lies with the Human Resources department, the manager of the Information Center and the new employee's direct supervisor, respectively. Jo Bryson (2006, p. 90) considers that this initiation process is one of the most vital in the management of a

library or information center. This author extends its duration period to three months, depending on the characteristics of the post and the experience and training of the new employee. She complains that sometimes it is neglected, and that this may be the reason for the paucity of literature on this very particular phase within the sphere of libraries and information services.

The performance of professional tasks in a genuine working environment has been considered a key element in the training of future information and documentation professionals (Coleman, 1989; Banks & Lents, 1992). Several important benefits for students have been emphasized (Shotsberger, 2005): the identification of transferable skills, visualization and confidence, organizational awareness, professional terminology, networking and career direction. The aim behind the practicum is for the student to be integrated into a learning context set within real fields related to the hands-on, practical side of the professional role to be undertaken. Thus it is a question of enabling students to acquire the knowledge, information, skills and abilities needed for professional practice in a determined sphere of the labor market. Within the students' learning process, contact with the professional world has become increasingly highly valued (Lee, 2003). Furthermore, this kind of training is one of the best options for the professional integration of graduates, and a great recruitment channel. Many companies use internships to pre-select their future employees. Even in public administration there is a possibility of applying for grants after doing an internship in some departments.

Academic internships in information centers (libraries, archives and documentation centers, mostly, in addition to others like publishers and bookshops) represent a first step towards the tasks performed by professionals. At the same time, they allow students to apply and supplement the knowledge acquired from their academic training. In addition, students can become aware of the continuous changes in this professional environment, which helps avoid the gaps between their training and their future professional responsibilities identified in some works, like that of Westbrock and Fabian (2010). This is why academic internships are becoming extremely relevant and even necessary in today's globalized and highly competitive university environment.

The LIS Studies Practicum at the Carlos III University of Madrid (Spain)

On the syllabuses related to Information and Documentation at the Carlos III University of Madrid - previously called the *Diplomatura en Biblioteconomía y Documentación* ("Certificate in Librarianship and Documentation", a three-year course) and, from the academic year 2008/9 onwards, *Grado en Información y Documentación* ("Bachelor's Degree in Information and Documentation", a four-year course) - students had, and still have, a subject on management of the resources of an information center (human and financial resources, plus space and equipment). The change from one syllabus to another (from the *diplomatura* to the *grado*) is being made in all Spanish universities in order to adapt these to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). According to its official website, the EHEA was meant to ensure more comparable, compatible and

coherent systems of Higher Education in Europe. Between 1999 and 2010, all the efforts of the Bologna Process's twenty-seven members were targeted towards creating the European Higher Education Area, which became a reality with the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of March, 2010. This decade will be devoted to consolidating the EHEA. As the last report shows, the Bologna Process has achieved remarkable results over its first decade, driving positive change in European Higher Education (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2012). The Carlos III University was the first Spanish university to adapt all its courses to comply with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in the academic year 2008/2009. The courses on Information and Documentation have been taught at this university since the year 1990/1. Chain and Muñoz-Cañavate (2009) have analyzed the evolution of Information and Documentation courses in Spanish universities and the modifications these have undergone over the years.

Despite the changes introduced on implementing the new Degrees, there are subjects which remain on the syllabuses, with slight modifications and different orientations. This is the case of the subject mentioned above, Resource Management. This has always contained a module devoted to Human Resources Management, in which the Induction Process is studied, with emphasis on its importance to staff development.

On the syllabus of the Carlos III University Degree in Librarianship and Documentation - withdrawn in 2007/8 to make way for the current Degree in Information and Documentation introduced in 2008/9 - were two obligatory modules of "Information

Center Work Experience"-, each carrying 6 credits, one to be done in the second year and one in the third (Practicum I and Practicum II). These modules were designed to ensure that students would apply and supplement the theoretical and practical knowledge that they acquired in each successive year, fostering the acquisition of competencies in order to prepare them for exercising their professional activity. The work experience took place over a 30-day period in May, from Monday to Thursday, with 5-hour working days, either in the morning or afternoon. Currently, on the new syllabus for the Degree in Information and Documentation, the practicum is a module taken in the fourth and last year of the course, during the second term, from February to May. It has a study load of 12 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits, and pursues the same objectives. The information centers open to students for their internships were - and still are - libraries, archives and documentation centers, primarily. There are also internships available in bookshops and publishing companies, but considerably fewer.

The organization and planning of the practicum modules involve a great deal of work for the faculty responsible. They require the establishment of agreements between the universities and the institutions, companies or organizations running the centers, and the centers themselves must be able to offer considerable commitment to and involvement in the students' training. For the practicum program to be successful it must be planned down to the last detail. The collaboration of the professionals responsible for monitoring the programs in the centers throughout their duration is indispensable, and without their supervision and guidance the internships would be far

less effective. This necessarily demands close collaboration between University and Company - or any other kind of organization or institution accepting students through educational cooperation programs and agreements.

When the student joins the center where he or she is to perform the internship, an induction process should be carried out, just as though they were a new employee. In this case guidance should be continuous throughout the entire placement, so that the students may become familiar with the professional environment in which they are to learn and put their knowledge into practice. Proper reception and acclimatization to the center guarantee the students' integration and immersion in the day-to-day life of the workplace, in the team, and in the real conditions of the environment in which they are to act (Freixa, Novella and Pérez-Escoda, 2012).

Research problem and objectives

As the teacher responsible for the practicum over several academic years, the author of this work received complaints from some students about the poor reception they had met with on their arrival at the centers (libraries, archives and documentation centers), and also about the paucity of the information they were given, both concerning the center and how to perform the tasks assigned to them. It was important to discover the extent of this problem and the details characterizing this inadequate induction:

- What was being done wrong?

- What were the weak points of the process?

- Which aspects needed to be improved?

Furthermore, taking advantage of the induction process theory the students were taught, it seemed appropriate that they themselves should evaluate their own experiences during the practicum period. This is why this study takes the form of an analysis and assessment of the induction process within the academic internships performed by the Information and Documentation students. The results may help supervisors/tutors and students to plan the practicum together in a more satisfactory way in the future, taking the students' opinions into consideration.

This study is designed to make known the students' assessment of the induction process within the academic internships they performed at an information center, as well as their observations and attitudes. This study was initially conceived as an academic activity aimed at the students, to help them grasp what the induction process is by applying it to their academic internships. In view of the comments and suggestions they made the first year the survey was performed, we decided to continue with this investigation over the next few academic years to see the coincidences and divergences over several different years, and until the syllabus came to an end. The data obtained were considered to be of interest in terms of contributing to the improvement of the practicum. The aim is that the centers and those responsible for them should take into consideration what the students consider to be the strong and weak points of the process, with a view to continuing and extending the improvements and innovations in the current internships included in the Information

and Documentation Degrees which have been taught for the first time this academic year, 2011/12. This information could be an important supplement to the internship evaluations carried out by the supervisors and students at the end of the placements; and, in particular, to the final paper or report which the students write, a common feature of the syllabus both in Spain and other countries (Van der Molen, 2007). In this the students examine, individually, guided by their academic tutor by means of questions, the tasks/activities performed, the professionals' functions, the competencies practiced and other issues regarding their experiences. The information which these reports provide is used by the academic institutions to improve the selection processes determining the centers which their students attend.

Literature review

Over the years practicums and internships, both curricular and extracurricular, have increasingly featured as a subject for research and debate. There are many studies on the topic, which examine their characteristics at certain universities and for certain courses, and also offer suggestions on how they should be organized and assessed (Banks & Lents, 1992; Brewer & Winston, 2001; Madway, 2011). Regarding evaluation, the most widespread recommendation – and this is how it is now done at many universities – is that assessment should be carried out from several different perspectives. Some guides offer proposals of interest along these lines (Baird, 2008). For the assessment to be as objective as possible, the interns themselves, their academic tutors, and the employees who receive them at the companies and

organizations and act as supervisors should all participate (Beard, 2007). There should be constant interaction and feedback between all the actors involved so that, with the data thus provided, analysis, discussion and action planning can be carried out accordingly. With this objective, for example, accounts of extra-curricular internship experiences have been presented in which technological tools, including videoconferencing, were used to foster communication between all those involved, and these were valued positively by students in their discussion groups (Wilkinson, 2008). The need for good communications between the students and their supervisors or tutors at the center is one of the themes which has been stressed most emphatically, to ensure that the latter are aware of the interests and concerns of the former and that the practicum is a success (Hu & Patrick, 2006).

Assessment of practicums by the students, the central theme of this work, is carried out at the universities on the part of the faculty who organize them. However, these data, which are internal, are not usually disseminated and are used to modify and improve the internship programs. It is easy to find forms used by the universities for this purpose on the Internet. Some form a part of very comprehensive guides, drawn up with the aim of ensuring the practicum is of high quality and that students take full advantage of it (McCarthy & Caldwell, 2003).

In Spain, interest in the practicum has grown considerably over the last few years in view of the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), given that all the degrees (*Grados*) have a module devoted to work experience in the last year of

the course. During the academic year 2011-12 the practicum was implemented for the first time on the new courses adapted to the European framework. For this reason, Spanish faculty have spent some time over the last few years rethinking the practicum, contributing elements for reflection, action and decision-making in this context. These aspects can be seen in monographic issues (e.g. *Revista de Educación,* Enero-Abril 2011, n. 354, entitled "Practical training of university students: re-thinking Practicum". Retrieved from http://www.revistaeducacion.educacion.es/re354/re354.pdf), as well as at conferences and seminars where it has been one of the central themes for debate. Evidence of this is the recent "*Symposium Internacional sobre el Practicum*" (2011), the central theme of which was commitment to the quality of internships, and at which experiences and proposals concerning many different courses were exchanged. Regarding the Degree in Information and Documentation, the need to update the practicum and adapt it to the demands of the EHEA was emphasized (Osuna, 2008). The participation of the educational community (students, teachers, workplace supervisors, administrative resources and services, libraries, etc.) on the virtual campus was proposed as an indispensable feature to ensure that inter-institutional communications are maximized. Furthermore, the importance of having a computerized management application to manage everything (teachers' applications, program development, assessments, statistics, etc.) was also stressed.

In the framework of these forums, some empirical works of interest have been presented which report and analyze the students' satisfaction levels and the professional utility attributed to the practicum module. One such report, regarding a

different kind of course, shows a generally positive evaluation of the internship by the students, but also mentions the need to improve and update certain aspects, such as a greater degree of involvement on the part of the university teachers acting as tutors, strengthening and extending the inter-institutional communication channels and those between students and their tutors, and better selection of the internship centers, giving priority to those which really offer placements which are productive for students and constitute tried and tested learning spaces (González Riaño and Hevia Artime, 2011).

The literature on the evolution of undergraduate internships in libraries has been thoroughly reviewed recently by Sargent, Becher and Klingberg (2011) in a study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the San Jose State University Library internship program by gathering feedback from an intern focus group.

At the last IFLA conference various papers on the practical training of future information and documentation professionals were presented, in which the situations in different countries like Peru were examined (Jara de Súmar and Talavera Ibarra, 2011), or even broader territorial spheres like South America (Araki and de la Vega, 2011). All offered recommendations for ensuring that the placements help to train competent professionals and fulfill one of their objectives: the opportunity to break into the labor market at a difficult time, like the one we are now experiencing.

Literature on assessments of Information and Documentation internships from the point of view of the interns is rather scarce. As Ferrer-Vinent and Sobel observe (2011, p. 366) "at the present, the library literature contains very few examples of evaluation strategies for library practicum programs" and even fewer have been written from the students' point of view. In fact, not a single work focusing on the assessment of the induction process within the practicum has been found. In some studies based on extra-curricular internships, assessment by the students forms one part of the library practicum program evaluation. These works are of interest because they inform us about the problems the interns faced with regard to the countries and the corporate culture of the workplaces to which they were sent, as well as the special features of the programs. The evaluation experience of the practical program run by the East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS) of Makerere University (Magara, Bukirwa and Kayiri, 2011) shows, among other things, a very positive assessment by students of the welcome they received, as they considered that this was vital if they were to acclimatize to their workplaces properly. Another recent experience, involving practicum students at the Auraria Library (Denver, Colorado) (Ferrer-Vinent & Sobel, 2011) also shows high levels of satisfaction from students, although some mentioned significant ways in which the program could be improved: having more mentors; giving each participant more responsibilities; spending less time on subject-related orientation sessions provided by the reference department, etc. A different evaluation perspective is offered by the work of Westmoreland Gariepy (2012), which assesses the impact of the practicum on the careers of a group of

librarians. Two thirds of the respondents believed that their internship experiences had a strong or very strong impact on their careers.

The university syllabuses of the Spanish courses devoted to training professionals in information and documentation (previously called *Diplomaturas* and *Licenciaturas* and now *Grados*) have come to include obligatory curricular internships designed to complete students' university training and introduce them to the realities of the professional environment where they will be working after graduation. Some faculty involved in organizing the internships have written studies analyzing how they are approached and which methodology is followed in planning and assessing them, as well as the unique features they may acquire on each syllabus, depending on the university concerned, in addition to examining aspects like duration, characteristics, the kind of center chosen, and their value to the students. There are several examples of such works, like those of Moneda and Peis (1995), Carrizo Sainero (1997), Chain Navarro and others (2002; 2009), and, more recently, that of Espelt and Maña (2011). In all these, concern about how the practical training interrelated with the syllabus of which it formed a part is apparent. Others, like Fernández (1998), insist on giving the practicum a dominant role, underlining its value and the advantages it has for the university: opening new lines of research, reorientating the syllabuses, and channeling of the dialogue between society and the university.

While in Spain the practicum has been analyzed from different perspectives, just as it has in the Anglo-Saxon literature, there is a distinct lack of assessments performed by

students. In the few accounts which have been published, students awarded it a high score (Mendo et. al, 2001), given that no aspect was rated below 5 on average. Among the most highly valued aspects, the importance given to the practicum within the syllabus, and the students' interest in the centers available stood out. With regard to the tasks performed, although 79.9% claimed that these were specific to information centers, those who held a contrary opinion stated that they were given tasks which were not related to the profession, had little to do with the knowledge they had acquired or were extremely repetitive.

In neither the Anglo-Saxon nor the Spanish literature have we found any studies presenting an assessment of the internship from the perspective of the induction. This may be because this process is only associated with the incorporation of new employees, and it has not occurred to anyone that interns should be accorded similar treatment and importance. The originality of this work lies precisely in the fact that it provides an example which could be used to place greater emphasis on the design of this reception phase or incorporation of the students into the center where they will be doing their internships, by taking into account the findings presented here.

Method

In order to obtain the target information a questionnaire was designed, which the students taking the "Diplomatura in Librarianship and Documentation" had to fill in as

an obligatory part of the "Resource Management" subject set in the third year of the course. It was proposed as a practical activity after seeing the topic corresponding to the induction process in the thematic module on Human Resources Management. The survey, short and simple, asks the students to evaluate the induction process of their one-month internship during the previous academic year. The comments made by the students were used both quantitatively and qualitatively. The 6 questions the survey contained are shown below:

1- Do you consider that you had an induction process?

2- Do you think your induction process was of a suitable duration in relation to the length of the practicum?

3- Taking into account the theory discussed in class with regard to this and the duration of the practicum (1 month), how long do you think should be devoted to the induction process?

4- On a scale of 1 to 10, indicate the score you would give your induction process

5- Describe the main failings you consider your induction period had

6- Describe the positive characteristics you observed in the process

In addition, the students were asked to indicate the kind of information center they had done their internship at. 359 students responded to the questionnaire over six academic years, from 2003/4 to 2008/9, the year the Degree was withdrawn and the new Bachelor Degree course was introduced. During the years 2009/10 and 2010/11 the subjects from the old syllabus were maintained, where there were students who

still had to pass them or because they had not signed up for the corresponding course.

In the case of the practicum so few students enrolled during those two academic years that the data were not significant. Furthermore, in all cases, the subjects turned out to be students doing their second year of practical work, whereas the survey was designed to be given to those who had just completed their first experience of the practicum.

The data on the percentage of students who did their internships in each kind of information center over these years appear below in Fig. 1. As can be seen, libraries were the most frequently chosen, and also the number of places available was the greatest in this kind of information center.
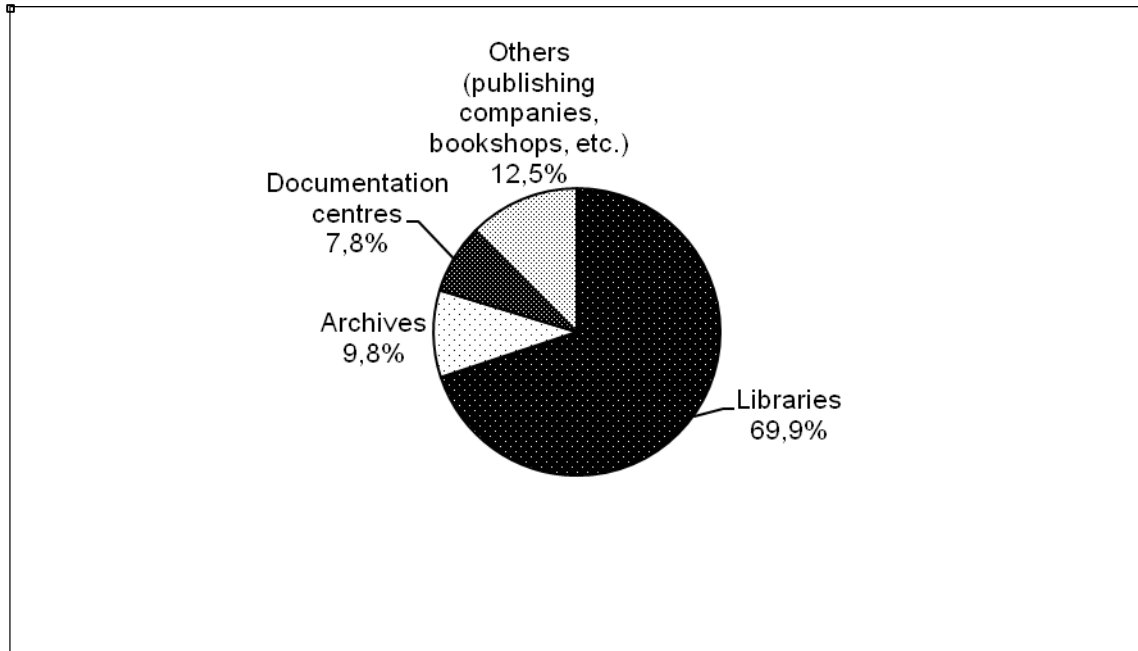
Fig. 1 – Establishments in which the internships were performed over six academic years (as percentages)

Survey results

The data obtained from the answers given to each question on the questionnaire are presented below.

Question 1 – On whether or not there was an induction process in the academic internship

Most students responded in the affirmative to this first question, stating that they had completed an induction process. The data can be seen in Fig. 2:
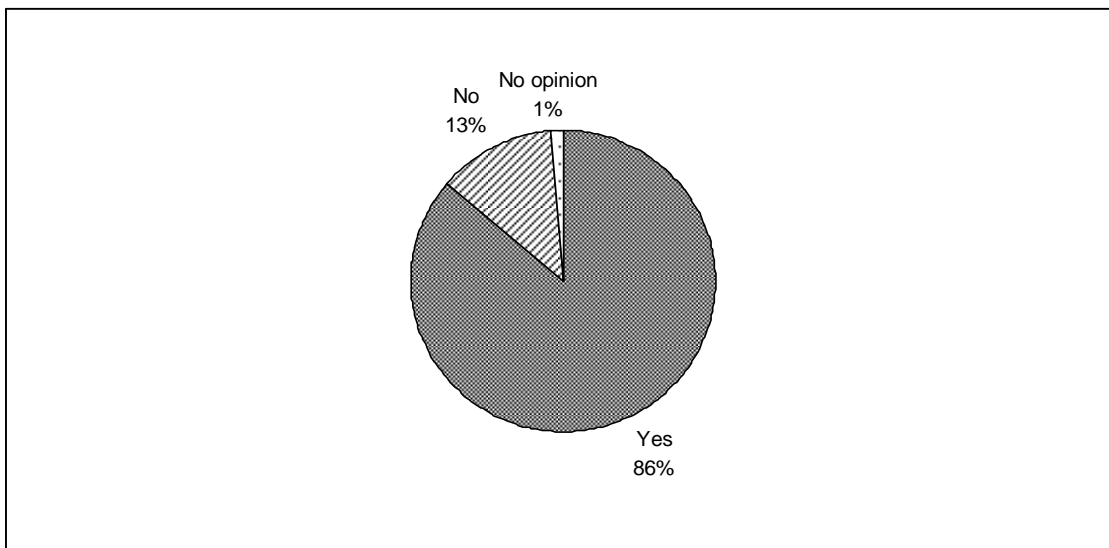
Fig. 2 – Students' opinions on whether or not there was an induction process in the academic internships they performed

The percentage of affirmative responses per year shows a slight increase as the academic years go by, reaching its highest levels in the last two: 88.4% in 2008 and 92.3% in 2009. These results show that the planning of the internships and in particular of the induction process has gradually improved with each academic year. The assessments of the centers made by the students in their final reports by means of questions designed for this purpose by their academic tutors have contributed significantly to this trend. These make it possible to evaluate the suitability of the information centers for accommodating students during their training period. This activity, common to many syllabuses of different kinds, like that analyzed by Ruiz Callado (2011), demonstrates that it has allowed the centers to improve gradually and become better adjusted to the objectives of the internships.

Question 2 – Suitability of the length of the induction period for the practicum period

The purpose of this question was to have the students assess whether the time devoted to the induction period at the center where they did their internship was appropriate, given the length of the placement (1 month). The data obtained from their responses to this question can be seen in Fig. 3:
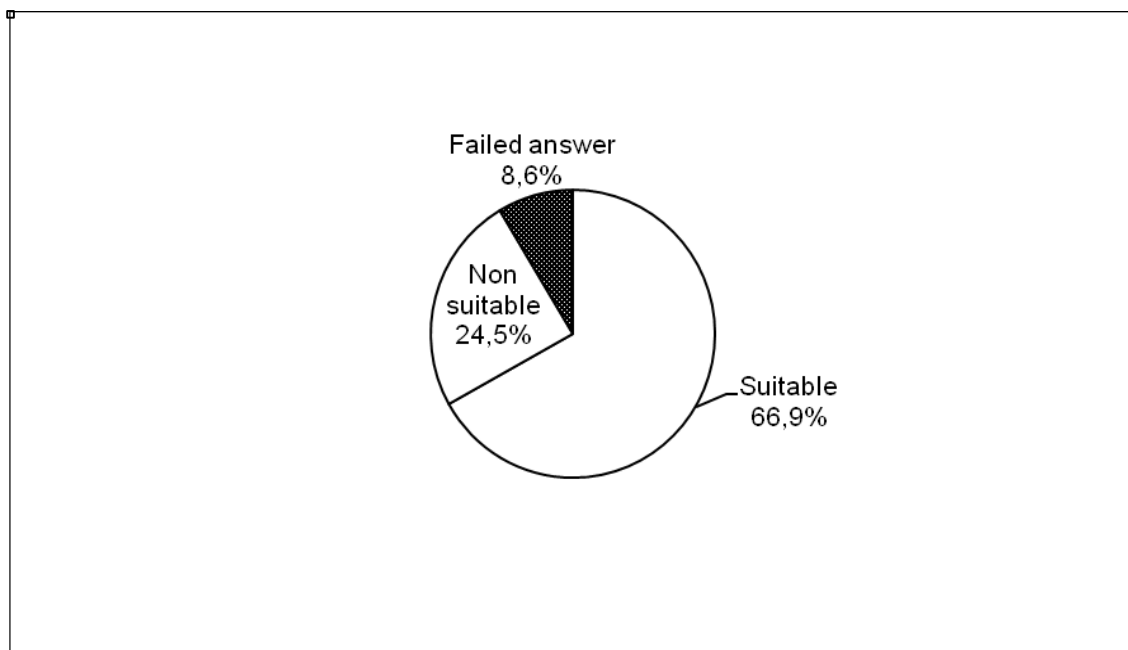

Fig. 3 - Students' opinions on the suitability of the length of the induction period for the practicum period

An interesting result here is that 32.3% of the students took advantage of this question to complain about the duration of the internship; they all felt that one month was insufficient. They claimed that as soon as they had managed to settle down at the information center and get used to their tasks, it was time to leave. This complaint can be said to have been resolved, as, on the new Information and Documentation syllabuses, the internship lasts four months (an entire term).

Question 3 – The amount of time which should be devoted to the induction process given the duration of the practicum (one month)

The aim of this question was to have the students assess the ideal length of time which should be devoted to the induction period, taking into account the internship duration (1 month) and their knowledge. At the beginning of the questionnaire, students were advised to consult the chapter in Bryson (2006) devoted to this process. From their reading, they were supposed to infer that their induction process should continue throughout the entire month, given that this was their first experience of professional life and they still had another year to go before graduation, and so had not yet acquired the knowledge needed to contend with professional life. The data from this question can be seen in Fig. 4:
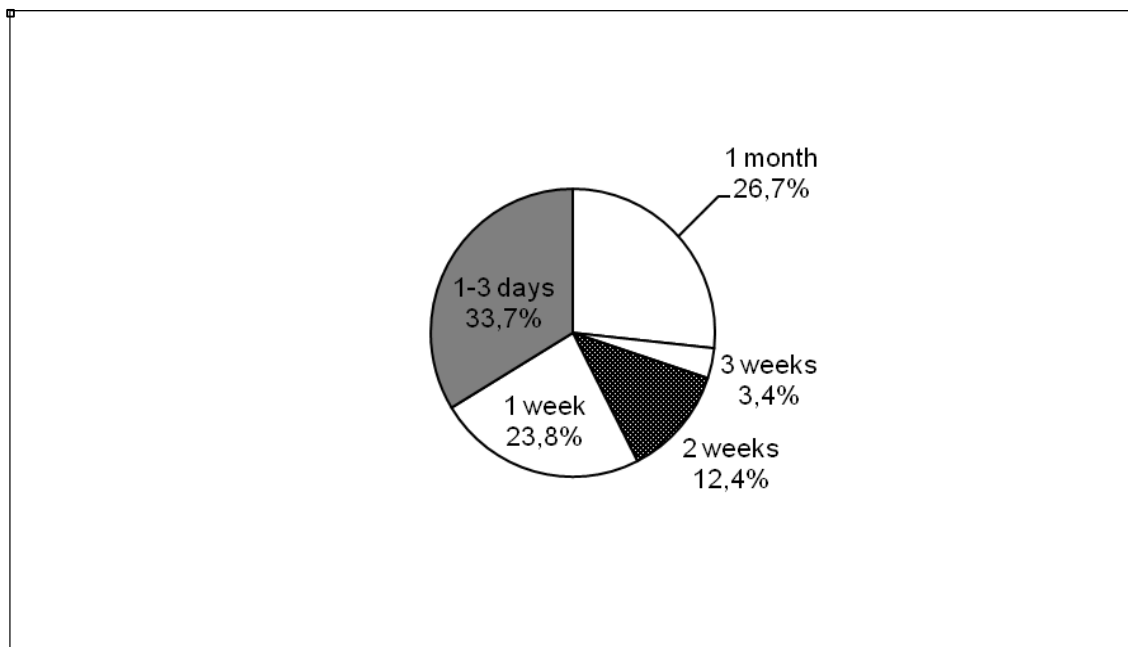

Fig. 4 - Students' opinions on the amount of time which should be devoted to the induction process during the month of practicum

The variety of lengths of time indicated for this question may perhaps be related to the kind of tasks performed. If the highest percentage envisaged an induction process lasting between 1 and 3 days, this suggests that many of the tasks assigned them were simple and did not require very specialized professional knowledge. Furthermore, this claim is directly related to one of the weak points identified in question 5: repetitive, very traditional tasks, which did not require highly qualified staff to perform them. A study carried out on the tasks which students in Spain perform (Chain Navarro et al., 2009) has already stressed that the majority of the institutions offering internships are those in which the classic, traditional tasks of the profession are carried out: libraries and archives, and that the tasks generated by the new professions, for example web content manager, hardly figured at all.

Question 4 – Satisfaction with the induction process of the internship done

Using a scale of 1 to 10, the students had to give their evaluation of the induction process. The results of this question are as follows:

- The average satisfaction rate obtained over the six academic years is of 6.9.

- The average rates per academic year fluctuate between 4.8 and 8.1, with a median of 7.1.

- The information centers in which the induction process was most highly rated were archives, reaching a score of 9 in 2007. Paradoxically, it was also archives which got the worst score, 2, in 2005. This poor rating is related to the

unusually high number of students working in the archives that year, and the limited attention they received.

Question 5 – Weak points of the induction process

As this was an open question, the responses were extremely varied. In order to provide a clear, coherent result, various categories were created to cover the students' observations on the different weak points they identified. The categories created and the weak points referred to in each are listed below:

1. *Planning of the induction process*: the staff at the center were not aware that interns were due to arrive; no supervisor or any other person had been assigned to them; the staff were not familiar with their academic profiles or, therefore, their training; there were too many interns at the same time; lack of assessment of the period.

2. *Reception stage*: unpunctuality; there was no-one to receive them.

3. *Introduction to the organization to which the information center belonged*: no information was provided at all, or it was extremely inadequate.

4. *Introduction to the information center*: no information, or insufficient information was given about the library, archive or documentation center regarding hours, breaks, operation, services, departments, security measures, or facilities; no introduction of the employees they would be working with.

5. *Application of competencies and the learning process:* not enough information to perform tasks; lack of coordination between those showing interns how to

do them, resulting in different explanations and methods and even contradictions; poor explanations; too much information per session; lack of monitoring of evolution and progress; too closely supervised; lack of written procedures; very repetitive, low-skill tasks, some of which were considered useless for training purposes; supervision withdrawn too soon; constant interruptions.

6. *Colleagues*: lack of interest; total lack of or poor communication; difficulty in integrating; unsuitable treatment; lack of involvement; low motivation; poorly qualified.

7. *Director, manager or direct supervisor who acted as tutor*: little or no commitment; no welcome, lack of contact, lack of interest, lack of knowledge.

8. *Infrastructure and resources available*: lack of material resources, lack of personnel.

9. *No weak points*

Without distinguishing between types of information center or year, the following data were obtained from the answers to this question:

- The highest percentage identified with the concept of not having detected any weak points in the induction process (16%). However, this is really a very low percentage and numerous weak points were described by other students.

- The seven weak points identified by the students (over 1%) can be seen in Fig. 5. in order of importance according to the percentage obtained.
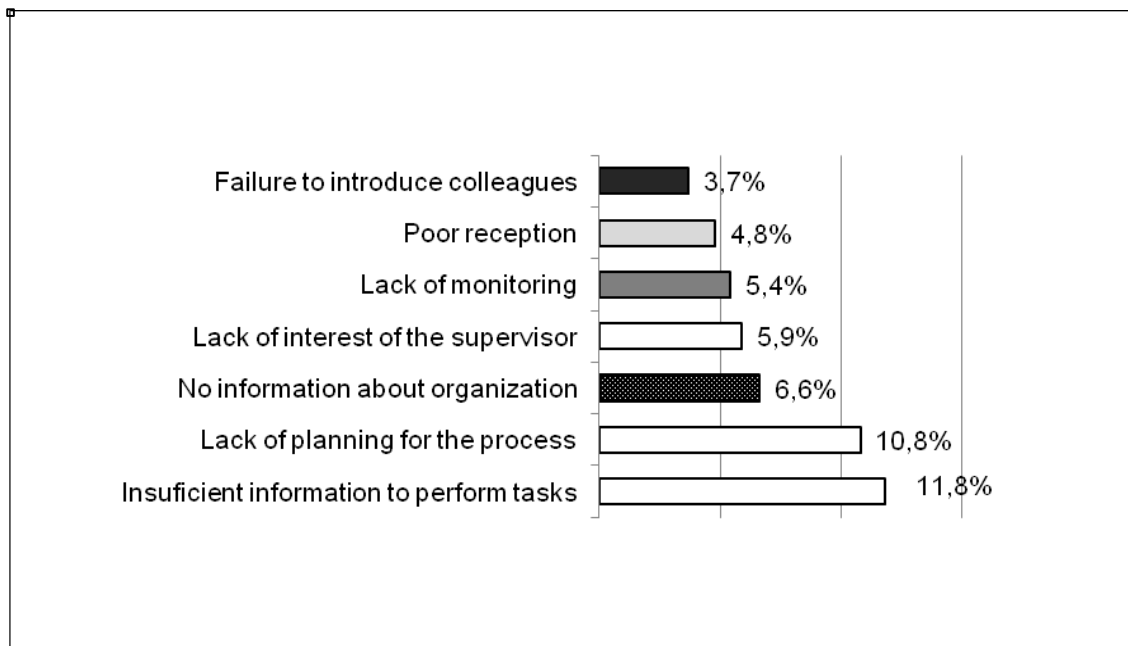
Fig. 5 – Students' opinions on the weaknesses of the induction process

Regarding lack of planning for the process (10.75%), students stressed several different aspects of this: on arrival they were not expected; they had no supervisor or other employee assigned to them; no-one knew their academic profile; they didn't know where to place them.

If we take the type of center into consideration, the weak points mentioned most often for each were:

> **Archives**: the highest percentage refers to shortcomings in the way students were shown how to perform tasks (26%); the second highest to the planning of the process, as students complained of there being too many interns at the same archive, which prevented them from receiving

individual attention (16%), and in third place is the percentage of responses claiming they observed no weak points during the process (14%).

Libraries: the weak point most quoted is the kind of task assigned - many students considered that these were repetitive and contributed little to their training (29.2%); in second place is the percentage corresponding to the students who found no weak points in the process (19%) and, in third place, we find lack of planning for the process (13.9%).

Documentation centers: as in the case of the libraries, scoring highest is the kind of task assigned (28.8%); secondly, little commitment on the part of the supervisor or employee responsible (16.3%) and thirdly, lack of planning for the process (15%).

Other kinds of information units: of the students who did their internship in centers other than the traditional ones - such as publishing companies, bookshops, etc. – 37.5 % observed that they found no weak points in the process and another 37.5% noted lack of dedication on the part of the employee in charge of them. In second place, and again with the same percentage for each (12.5%), they complained of lack of information being provided about the organization on their arrival, and lack of knowledge of their academic profiles, which suggested poor or non-existent planning for the process.

Question 6 – Strong points of the induction process

As with the previous question, due to the great variety of responses we decided to classify them in categories - the same used for the weak points but in a positive sense, as these were the aspects valued by the students.

An analysis of all the answers - without distinguishing between years or types of center - makes it possible to identify the aspects most valued by the students during the induction period, and which exceeded the rate of 1% (Fig. 6).
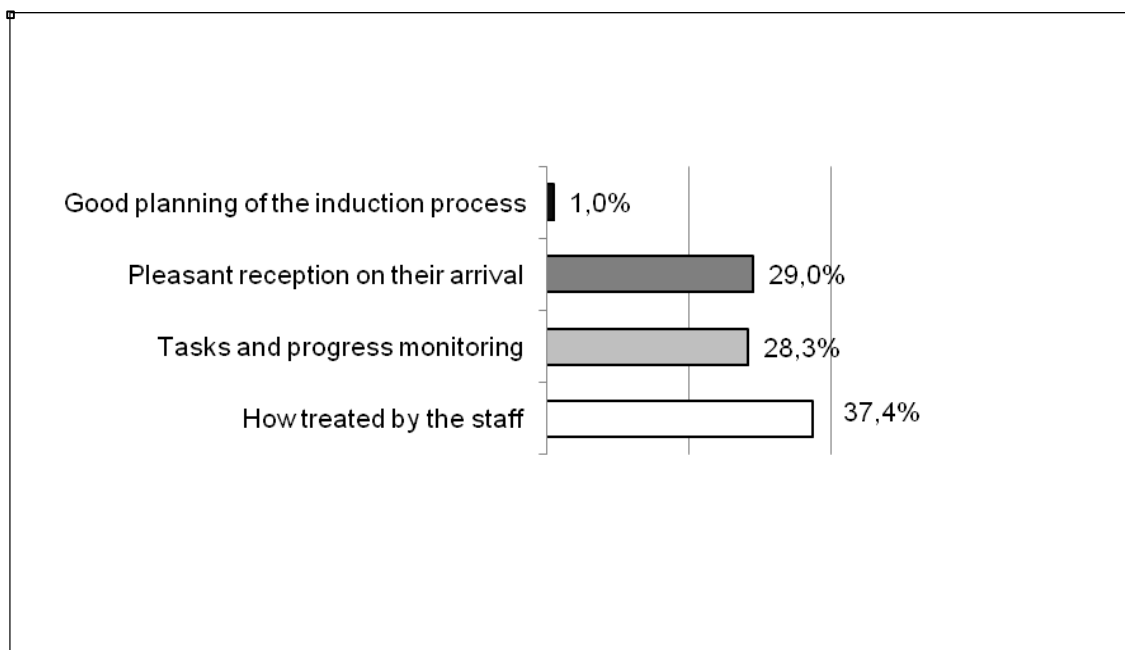

Fig. 6 - Students' opinions on the strengths of the induction process

Regarding the pleasant reception experienced by students on arrival, various different circumstances were emphasized: the fact that the director or head of the center was present (14.9%); an introduction to the institution or organization to which the

information center belonged was given (4.1%); introduction to their new colleagues for the period (10%). And good planning of the induction process was reflected in aspects like awareness of their profiles, and the assignment of suitable tasks in line with these (1%).

If the type of information center is taken into account, the most valued strong point is fairly equally distributed among libraries, archives, documentation centers and other kinds of centers at which internships were done: how they were treated (archives 35.7%, libraries 36%, documentation centers 33.9% and other kinds of center 49.3%). With the strong point in second place, the monitoring of their tasks and progress, the same thing happens; the different kinds of information center deliver similar results: archives 24%, libraries 30%, documentation centers 25% and other kinds of center 30%. Finally, the strong point in third place is shared in some cases: support from management in the case of archives (20%) and documentation centers (16%); and a good reception was reported for libraries (14.4%) and for other types of center (9.3%).

If the strong points are compared with the weak points some coincidences can be observed. What represented a strong point for some students was cited as a weak point by others, for example in the case of the monitoring performed of their tasks and progress. This reveals the differences in the approaches adopted by the different kinds of center in which the students did their work experience, despite the indications the centers receive from the University.

Conclusion and recommendations

Evaluation of the induction process by the students in practice, as though they were new employees, makes it possible to identify its strengths and weaknesses. The latter should be taken into consideration in order to make significant improvements to the academic internships undertaken as a part of the current degree course in Information and Documentation. Analysis of the data collected from this evaluation experiment allows us to reach the following conclusions and make these recommendations for the centers accepting students:

- The combination of different assessment systems is key to ensuring quality in the academic internship learning process. The questionnaires and reports drawn up for this purpose must include the induction process. This is a phase which, as this study shows, the students themselves consider vital for their integration into the information center where they will be playing an active role for some time.

- Not all the students had an induction period, although most confirm that they did. Despite this, few students think it was adequate, and there are many aspects which should be improved if they are to get the most out of their placement.

- The first improvement which needs to be made – logically - is that the managers of the centers accepting interns must plan this period properly. This involves designing posts which cover a varied range of tasks in keeping with the

professional level the students' future qualification will allow them to reach - never lower.

- It is very important to take into account how much time and attention each intern will require, and depending on this and on the members of staff acting as supervisors, to determine the ideal number of students a center can receive, so as to make sure that each intern can be attended to adequately.

- The reception, or welcome plan, is one of the aspects which needs improvement, and which students thought very important. The arrival of the interns must be planned for. The person or people responsible, and amongst these one who will act as supervisor, and the time-frame for this activity must be determined beforehand. If this is done well, the students will feel integrated from day one. It should also be borne in mind that the presence of the manager of the information center at the reception is one of the most highly valued aspects.

- As the interns are students still in training, the induction period should continue throughout the entire duration of the placement. Although monitoring of interns' tasks and progress has been carried out, it does not seem to have been done suitably in all the centers. Monitoring of what the interns do and how they do it should be continuous and carried out until the end of the placement. Obviously, supervision can gradually be relaxed, in line with the abilities and skill shown by the intern. This must be compatible with a degree of flexibility in terms of performance of tasks and increases in levels of responsibility as and when interns show they are ready for them. Providing

support for any task-related innovations interns may devise is another aspect which should not be neglected.

While this article was being revised, the author presented the results of the survey to the teachers concerned with a view to taking steps towards improving the reception process within the practicum.

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