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Evaluating the Cephalonia method of library induction

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Having read the article *SCONUL Focus 32* on the Cephalonia method,(1) Learning Resources at the University of Chester decided to implement it for library induction in 2005. The Cephalonia method promotes an interactive and humorous approach to library induction. Students are given questions to ask about different library services in pieces of card that are colour-coded (for different categories of questions); the questionnaire then in turn answered by library staff.

A year later, the Cephalonia method was used again but this time with one extra element. Deputy Director Angela Walsh suggested carrying out an evaluation and her suggestion was taken by the subjects teams for education, business and management, and law. Nearly 500 students completed the questionnaire. They were asked 5 questions:

1. Did you find the session useful?
2. Did you like the interactive nature of the questions?
3. Was there too much information?
4. Would you like the opportunity of further help with resources? (not used for law students)
5. Any other comments?

The questionnaire was deliberately designed to be short as we didn't want to overwhelm the students by getting them to complete a long questionnaire, especially as they already had to complete a questionnaire about induction week. Question 4 was excluded for law students because unlike education, and business & management students, all law students have a number of sessions in the first year introducing them to legal resources.

The overall response was very positive. Over 99% found the session useful and 94% liked the interactive nature of the questions although 9% thought there was too much information. It was perhaps a little disappointing to learn that the session had failed to convince students of the importance of developing information literacy skills: nearly two-thirds of those questioned did not want further help with library resources. Whether this was because they were not sufficiently aware of the range of print and electronic resources that the library possesses or because they believed that they already had the requisite skills is unclear. We need to make further efforts to persuade students of the need to develop and improve their information skills.

Many students wrote additional comments, both positive and negative. A number commented very positively on the interactive nature of the session – ‘more interesting than just a talk’, ‘a genius way of involving us’, ‘a fantastic way to learn and have fun’, and ‘more exciting and easier to remember compared to just handing out sheets with information on.’ A small number said that they would have preferred a tour whilst others said that they preferred the Cephalonia session to a tour. Some students complained that the session took too long and repeated information that they already knew. This complaint may have been due to the nature of the induction programme as combined students are obliged to attend all session timetables for both their subjects, for example and Business & Law students would have to attend the library induction session for business and a library induction for Law. This is clearly not beneficial for either the student or the library and needs to be addressed. A number of students complained about having to play for printing – a decision beyond Learning Resources’ control.

A justifiable complaint from some students was the lack of a handout or similar to remind them of the questions and answers of the session. Usually, the library survival guide (which contained all the information covered) would have been given to students at the end of the session. Last year, unfortunately, the printing of the guide was delayed and so it did not appear until the end of induction week, by which time most of the library induction sessions had taken place. When it became clear that the library survival guide was not going to appear in time, some staff printed the slides as a handout for students.

Library staff generally enjoyed using the Cephalonia method, preferring it to herding groups of students through the library. As the questions were designed to be comical, staff were able to inject some humour, which was appreciated. Staff ran their session slightly differently, for example, the law librarian asked students to give their name and where they came from before they read their question as a mini ice-breaker and the Business & Management team chose to demonstrate some of the business databases. The teams agreed that Cephalonia worked well with different sized groups, the exception being very small groups as the same individuals asked all the questions.

The one aspect of the Cephalonia method that troubled staff was how to get students to read out the prepared questions, bearing in mind that some students could be shy and unwilling to speak out (we did have some students commenting on the questionnaire that they would not have liked to read a question out). Again, the staff took different approaches to distributing the questions. The Education team asked students as they entered if they would be willing to read a question, the Business & Management team also asked students as they entered if they would be willing to read a question and then asked for volunteers once the students were seated, offering chocolate as a reward, whilst the law librarian (working on the principle that lawyers aren’t shy) left the questions on seats and told students that they could pass their questions onto a neighbour if they didn’t want to read it out. All of these

different approaches worked, as enough students were brave enough to ask the questions.

We have enjoyed using the Cephalonia method in our library induction and are pleased that our questionnaire showed that our students liked this approach. The questionnaire replies did point out some areas that we need to improve, most notably giving students something to take away that summarises the session. We clearly have a problem with combined students that we need to work with the induction planning team to solve. Finally, it is interesting to note that some students still want and expect a library tour!

Reference

1. N. Morgan and L. Davies, 'Innovative library induction – introducing the 'Cephalonia method', *SCONUL Focus*, 32, 2004, pp 4-8.