



HOW TO GUIDE: Vocational Profiling

Introduction

In order to assist people with disabilities or people from disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment, a person-centered approach is used within Supported Employment to collect relevant information about the individual's aspirations, interests, skills and abilities for work. In the Supported Employment process a Vocational Profile is used to gather this information.

The vocational profiling process occurs at the second stage of the 5-stage process. The preceding stage is the client engagement stage. This stage should clarify if the client wants to work and wishes to go further in the future stages of the Supported Employment process. The Supported Employment process is illustrated in the following flow-chart.



Why do we need a vocational profile?

Supported Employment was developed in the 1970/80's to assist people with disabilities to make their own choices about work and to define what they need in order to be able to access employment. Vocational profiling was therefore established as a person-centred tool to assist job seekers make informed choices about job preferences and establish the necessary training and support strategies for on or off the job support (place - train - maintain). This differed from the traditional assessment process within rehabilitation programmes where individuals were tested in sheltered environments and were presented with different support alternatives by rehabilitation specialists (train - place)¹.

What are the objectives of the vocational process?

The main objective is to gather and assess information about the job seeker that is relevant to a future job and career aspirations of the individual. The aim is to identify the job seeker's motivation, interests, work attitudes, resources and support needs, and to establish realistic aims for career development.

The information collected should be future orientated. This means that the Employment Support Worker together with the job seeker strive to think ahead rather than look back when it comes to identifying resources, experiences and employment goals for the job seeker. Collecting information about previous work experience/employment, rehabilitation programmes and education is a necessary part of the profiling process. However, to focus only on this kind of information, is not sufficient for gaining knowledge about the job seeker's employment and career possibilities. The employment and career aspirations of the job seeker offer valuable information which makes the vocational profiling process more personal, innovative and opens up a variety of options and opportunities for the future.

The process should be person-centered, this means:

- The job seeker's wishes and needs direct the process. The Employment Support Worker's role is to support and guide the job seeker through vocational profiling.
- The job seeker and the Employment Support Worker cooperate in terms of deciding what kind of information is relevant.
- The job seeker plays an active part in deciding who is going to provide information. For example, this may include family, friends, professionals of different fields, previous employers etc. It is important to include only people that can give relevant information. This means information that is constructive and job related.
- Lastly, the final decision about what kind of information to disclose is decided by the job seeker.

Note that personal information about health, housing, income matters and personal circumstances may already have been collected at the client engagement stage (stage 1).

¹ Corden, A./Thornton, P. (2002): Employment Programmes for Disabled People - Lessons from research evaluations. Department for Work and Pensions In-house Report, Social Research Branch, Department for Work and Pensions, London.

The Process and Methodology

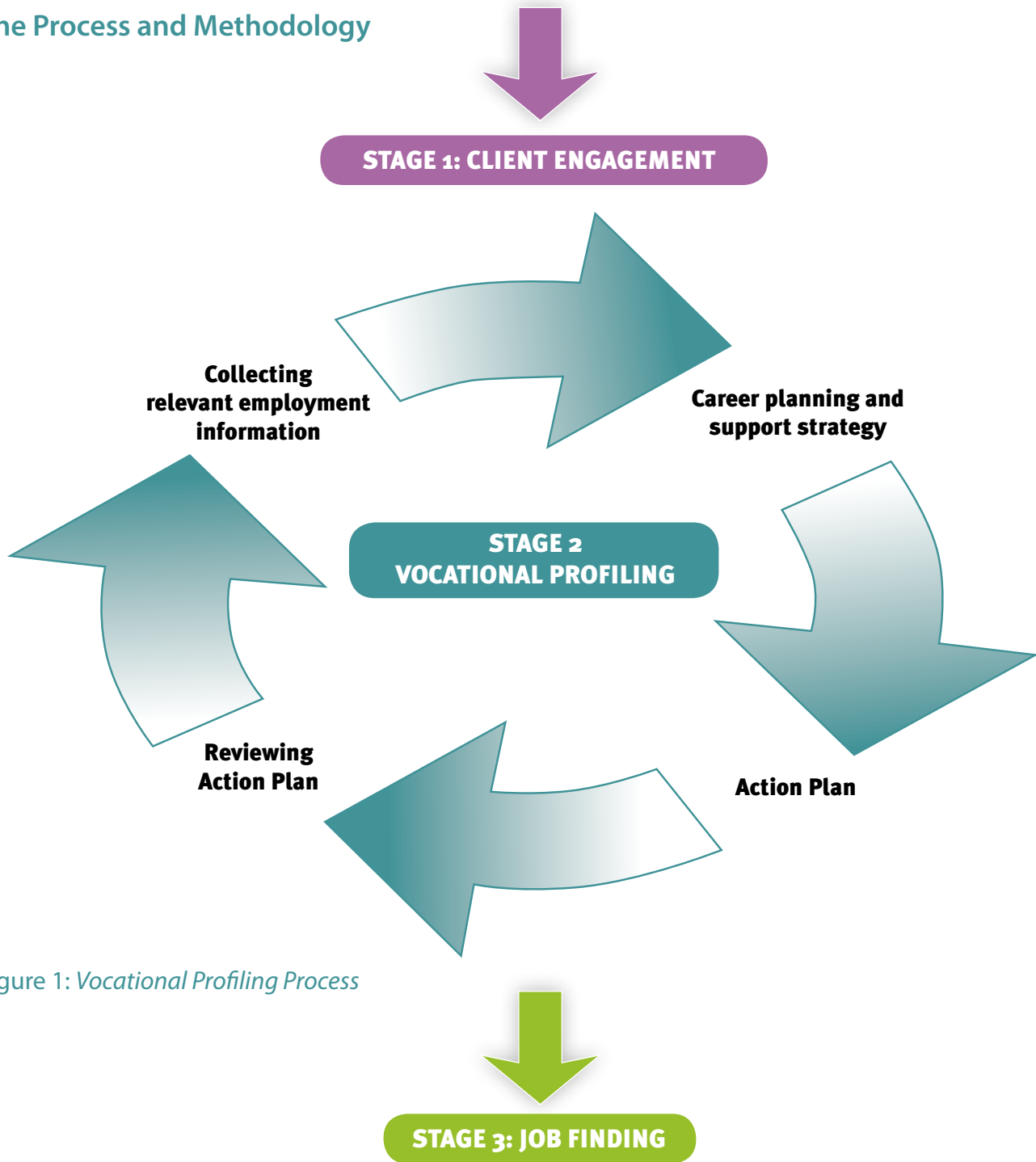


Figure 1: Vocational Profiling Process

Issues to be considered by the Employment Support Worker

The most important role of the Employment Support Worker is to establish a good working relationship and to empower job seekers to take the lead in their own career planning. In the vocational profiling process this means that the Employment Support Worker has to set several aims for the process together with the job seeker. The aims will include:

- To find out what are the job seekers' overall job objectives;
- To find out what kind of work and work environments are desired and realistic;
- The kind of support strategies necessary in order to find, secure and maintain a job

The vocational profile is based on a mutual on-going discussion between the job seeker, the Employment Support Worker and, where relevant other key stakeholders. To assist in this process, a vocational profiling document is used². This document contains all job relevant information regarding the job seeker. The profile is a live, developing, on-going document that needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. Furthermore, the profile is a personal document that belongs to the job seeker. The use of a single document will also ensure that all relevant job information regarding the job seeker is kept safely in one place and easily transferred between Employment Support Workers.

It is vital that a job seeker's vocational profile is updated on a regular basis to ensure that all relevant information is up to date (such as changes in circumstances, i.e. housing, social welfare/income) as this may have an impact on a job seeker's employment.

Vocational Profile Process 1 - Collecting relevant information:

This means arranging a number of meetings between the job seeker, the Employment Support Worker and relevant others to gather employment related information³. In order to avoid collecting information for its own sake, the Employment Support Worker continuously needs to reflect on the important questions below:

- Why do I need this particular information?
- What are the consequences of knowing and disclosing the particular information?
- What are the consequences of not knowing about certain aspects of the job seeker's life?
- How relevant to the job is information about symptoms, health conditions and personal life?
- How much information is it necessary to keep in the filing system?
- What kind of information will a future employer need to know and what is the best way to present information at a job interview?

Information Disclosure

On the issue of disclosure of information; the Employment Support Worker should take in to consideration the principle of the job seeker's choice. Although in some countries disclosure is mandatory, only relevant information needs to be disclosed to the employer. The individual must give their consent for information to be disclosed and it is important that disclosure provides only information that is relevant to the job situation. For some job seekers it is important to prepare what kind of information is necessary to disclose before approaching employers. All information should be contextualised and future orientated towards the desired jobs of the individual job seekers.

² See Appendix - Vocational Profile template

³ Leach, S. (2002): A Supported Employment Workbook - Individual Profiling and Job Matching. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, p. 68ff

Relevant information

Relevant information is information that may have a positive or negative effect on the work situation. Relevant information is collected by looking at the job seeker's current situation. There are legal and ethical issues in relation to gathering information which should always be considered. The Employment Support Worker should be guided by a code of ethics that should be well known and serve as a working tool in the Supported Employment organisation. It is crucial to avoid judgmental information about the job seeker and/or the job seeker's family and health conditions. Judgmental information may lead to stereotyping the job seeker, and may also impede the working relationship between the Employment Support Worker and the job seeker. Information should be open, yet at the same time specific and clear and concise – avoid jargon.

List of relevant information, see also example of template⁴ :

- Work history, formal and informal. Work experience may include voluntary work, working in organisations, housework, child/family care, work practice through education etc.
- Education and formal qualifications (education, courses and training) give a picture of what kind of work areas to focus on and is important to include in the profile. However, this kind of information is not always sufficient to give the overall picture. It is therefore important also to look at the following information:
 - Physical skills – are there any physical disabilities that limit the choices?
 - Cognitive skills – learning skills and assessing situations and adapt own behaviour to different situations.
 - Personal skills – including important work related skills like hygiene, dependability, ability to travel independently etc.
 - Social skills – skills and abilities in understanding and interpreting messages given by other people and act to them accordingly.
 - Language and communication skills – including if there are specific facilitating needs in order to overcome communication issues.
- Work preferences
 - Preferred environment/surroundings (i.e. working inside or outside, working in a large company or small company, busy or quiet environment).
 - Location of potential employers.
 - Types of jobs (i.e. administration, retail, catering, manufacturing, construction, information technology, caring; unskilled or skilled jobs; academic/non academic).
 - Working hours (i.e. full time/part time, days, evening or weekends, shift work etc).
- Hobbies and interests

⁴ See Appendix 1 - Vocational Profile template

Vocational Profiling Process 2 - Career planning and support strategies:

Based on the information collected, the job seeker and Employment Support Worker agree on the steps ahead. Together they have to decide what are the realistic jobs and career aspirations for the job seeker. If necessary, a job taster or work experience placement could be used as a tool at this stage in process.

Having decided what kind of work the job seeker would like to achieve, the next step is to determine what kind of support the job seeker and/or the potential employer need at or outside of the workplace. The vocational profiling process should aim to facilitate the transition into a job and to secure a good job match. This means matching the job seeker's skills, abilities and preferences to the work tasks, social skills tasks and the overall culture of the work place. In the vocational profiling process the Employment Support Worker and the job seeker need to decide what support is necessary to take them from their current situation to a job situation. It may be necessary for the Employment Support Worker to consider the support needs in crucial areas, such as:

- Social skills
- Independent travelling
- Work experience placements
- Strengthening qualifications
- Support at home/network

Providing support at this stage should be proactive; this means planning ahead and to have a strategic view on possible challenges in the future work situation; find alternative solutions to problems, build on experiences along in the process; and think about positive ways to provide information to future employers.

Vocational Profiling Process 3 - Action Plan:

On completion of the initial Vocational Profile* document a meeting is held to discuss and agree an Action Plan. A Vocational Profile Action Plan is a tool used in the vocational profiling process to record the different steps that are necessary to reach the objectives (i.e. to find paid employment) and move on to the next stage of the Supported Employment Process (Stage 3 – Job Finding).

In conjunction with the job seeker, the Employment Support Worker should arrange the meeting. The job seeker will decide who should also be invited to the meeting to assist them in their Action Plan such as a family member, other professionals, friends etc.

** NB: Vocational Profiling is an on-going process and must be continually up-date*

The Action Plan needs to clearly state the long term objectives (i.e. find employment) and the immediate objectives to achieve this. For each objective, decisions need to be made on:-

What –

What does the job seeker want to achieve? i.e. experience different types of employment (job taster), complete a qualification. This will be based on the findings in the Vocational Profile

How –

How is the job seeker going to achieve this? What actions/activities will the job seeker need to undertake? For example, identify different types of employment they would like to try

Who –

Who is responsible for carrying out the action? i.e. job seeker, Employment Support Worker, family member, other professional etc

When –

Set realistic time frames to complete action/activity. In addition to setting a time frame for each action, a review date should also be agreed between the job seeker and the Employment Support Worker

Achievements –

Record actions/activities when completed. This should be discussed at the review stage

As throughout the vocational profiling process, the job seeker will be central to developing the Action Plan in conjunction with the Employment Support Worker. The Action Plan must be agreed by the job seeker.

When preparing the Action Plan, it is important to remember:-

- Everyone involved should understand exactly what is going to happen
- All involved should be clear about their specific responsibilities
- The plan should be realistic in terms of timescales
- The plan should be reviewed regularly

Vocational Profiling Process 4 – Reviewing Action Plan⁵:

Finally, the Action Plan is crucial for monitoring purposes. Monitoring will make sure that we are heading in the right direction and also helps to choose alternative strategies if necessary. An Action Plan should include main objectives/what you want to achieve, strategies/how you are going to achieve, who is responsible for elements in the process, timescales/when and achievements/comments.

The job seeker in conjunction with the Employment Support Worker will agree a date to review the Action Plan. It will be the responsibility of the Employment Support Worker to arrange the review meetings and ensure that the job seeker and other relevant stakeholders are invited. At the review meeting the progress of the actions will be monitored, recorded and alternative strategies recommended if necessary.

Compiling a Vocational Profile

In many traditional services for people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged groups, meetings are held in an office base that are not always user friendly and can be intimidating to the job seeker. In Supported Employment there is a different approach. Reasons for this is the assumption that traditional meetings do not facilitate user involvement and that you do not get the relevant information solely by talking at meetings – the vocational profiling process is a much more live, dynamic and creative process which includes several tools. While clarifying the needs of the job seeker, the Employment Support Worker supports the job seeker to participate in various relevant activities. Activities are used as a tool in the vocational profiling process to make it easier for job seekers to make decisions about future jobs and careers. Activities should be job specific and may include visiting work places, talking to employers, going to the Job Centre, job sampling, reading newspapers, finding jobs on the Internet, interview training etc. It may also include working side by side in job tasters and work experience placements. Job related activities are also an efficient tool in the job finding process.

Involvement in different activities in the vocational profiling process facilitates a reflecting, interpreting and feedback process between the Employment Support worker and the job seeker. The processes can be one to one or group exercises or a combination of these including sharing experiences with peers. Feedback from peers on role plays may give valuable information to job seekers that are relevant to a future job. The process should be appropriate to the individuals', aspirations, needs, experiences and capabilities.

⁵ See Appendix 2: Action Plan template

Useful Tips for Vocational Profiling:

This How to Guide was developed by practitioners for practitioners. Therefore the listed “Useful Tips” and “Things to Avoid” should help readers to benefit from the authors’ experience and knowledge:

Useful Tips:

- A person-centred approach should be used to collect relevant job related information
- Empower the job seeker to take part actively in the entire process
- Allow the job seeker to decide
- Review the Vocational Profile frequently
- The Employment Support Worker must be guided by a code of ethics
- Summarise and agree on what has been decided
- Confidentiality is required
- Make an Action Plan and review this frequently

Things to Avoid:

- Do not disclose information that the job seeker has not agreed with
- The Vocational Profile should not be an assessment
- Avoid communication that is not suitable for the job seeker
- Avoid an office based process of vocational profiling. It should take place in the environment where the job seeker lives and interacts with other people
- Avoid collecting irrelevant information during the process

Reflective Questions

The following questions are intended to initiate further discussions and should help practitioners and Employment Support Workers to reflect their methods and approaches:

- In what circumstance may medical history be relevant to a job opportunity? In what situation may medical history not be appropriate?
- Who decides what information is relevant in what circumstances?
- What kind of information can you gather from a job taster/work experience placement?
- If you were applying for a job, what kind of information about yourself would you provide at a job interview?
- What can be the consequences of omitting information to an employer?

Relevant EUSE Position Papers:

- Client Engagement
- Vocational Profile
- Job Finding
- On and Off the Job Support
- Work Experience Placements

Relevant EUSE How to Guides:

- Client Engagement
- Job Finding
- On and Off the Job Support

- Appendix 1: Vocational Profile template
- Appendix 2: Action Plan template

This document is available in alternative formats such as Braille, Audiotape or Electronically on request.

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Produced by the European Union of Support Employment/Leonardo Partnership
as part of the European Supported Employment Toolkit.

Vocational Profile Template

PERSONAL DETAILS

Title: Mr Mrs Miss Ms

First Name: _____

Family Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Social Welfare No: _____

Home Tel No: _____ Mobile No: _____

Email: _____

Next of Kin: _____

Relationship: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Emergency Contact No: _____

Social/Key Worker (if applicable): _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

Religion/Culture: *(considerations you may wish to be taken into account, eg Muslim, etc)*

EDUCATION HISTORY (secondary education)

Dates	School/College/University	Qualifications/ Certificates	Grades

TRAINING

Dates	Training Provider	Training Course	Qualifications/Certificates & Grades

Other relevant qualifications and training (*driving licence, forklift truck licence etc*)

WORK HISTORY (including work experience)

Dates To/From	Employers name and contact details	Job Title	Main Duties	Reason for leaving

SOCIAL INTERESTS & HOBBIES

Please list any hobbies or interests

EMPLOYMENT PREFERENCES

Expectations about working

Preferred Career *(ideal career)*

Preferred work tasks *(clerical, retail, catering, computing, finance, warehouse, hospitality etc)*

Preferred working conditions *(full/time part-time, days or evenings, weekday or weekends, shifts etc)*

Preferred working environments *(working inside/outside, working in a quiet/busy workplace, working in small/large workplace, working in a quiet/noisy workplace etc)*

Other *(eg distance from home, preferred transport to work etc)*

PERSONAL SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Daily Living Skills (*budgeting, time management, domestic, use public transport etc*)

Communication Skills (*spoken, listening, written, following instructions etc*)

Social Skills (*social interaction, conversation skills, ability to cope with social situations*)

Weekly routines (*attending college, other activities etc*)

Other (*eg distance from home, preferred transport to work etc*)

Additional information

EUSE Template: ACTION PLAN

Job Seeker _____ Employment Support Worker _____

Date _____ Review date _____

What	How	Who (responsible)	When	Achievements with comments

I have taken part and agree with this plan.

Jobseeker signature _____ Employment Support Worker Signature _____