

Vocational Profiling Aide Memoir



Introduction

This guide has been created to assist advisers and staff in the practice of Vocational Profiling pupils with additional needs. It is intended as an aide memoir for those who attended the training sessions and is not intended to be used as a standalone toolkit.

Vocational Profiling is a professional method of assessment deeply rooted in values and ethos that underpin the methodology. It is highly recommended that advisers undertake the training course so they can fully understand how to successfully implement this method of assessment.

A Brief History

A Vocational Profile is not merely a form but a holistic method of assessing people with additional needs. The practice of Vocational Profiling is one of the five key stages in Supported Employment and was developed in the 1970s.

Dr Marc Gold had developed a method for training people with severe intellectual disabilities to learn practical tasks, it was known as the 'Try Another Way' method, which is now more commonly known as TSI (Training in Systematic Instruction). He believed people with learning disabilities had the capability to learn, if given support conducive to their needs, and that failing to learn is due to ineffective teaching strategies.

When initially applied to the workplace it failed. Although learners were competent at completing the tasks associated with the role, Marc Gold hadn't considered the other elements involved with being in the workplace. Being successful at work involves a lot more than just carrying out the tasks given to you by your manager. There are often expectations on our wider behaviours, certain unwritten rules we are expected to know, such as how to interact with colleagues, our ability to travel, and judgement of social situations to name a few.

Why it failed can be attributed to several things, but primarily.

- They didn't know enough about the individuals they were placing.
- They weren't aware of their needs and support requirements with regards to the environment.
- Poor job matching.
- They didn't consider the softer skills needed to be successful at work and the assumed knowledge most of us take for granted.

As a result of this, the Vocational Profile was developed as a holistic method for assessing skills, experiences, aspirations and dreams. Traditional methods of assessment tended to excluded people with disabilities because those methods work on assumed knowledge.

We all know how to behave around colleagues, how to interact with others, and understand what is acceptable in the workplace. This knowledge we learn from our peers, family member's and our own experiences, to such an extent that it becomes assumed knowledge. Those with cognitive impairments may be unable to process some of the things we take for granted either due to their condition, lack of experience, or not being able to understand abstract concepts.

It was first used by The United Cerebral Palsy Association from 1987 – 1990 for people with severe physical disabilities. It failed because the advisers were viewing it as a form. In several instances the document was completed and sent back within a few hours. Advisers were completely missing the point, it is not merely a form, it is a process.

Traditional methods of assessment are usually conducted out of context. Supported employment recognises that people with additional needs require a different method of assessment for them to have the best chance to move into work. Supported Employment uses 'The Place then Train' method, the Vocational Profile is pivotal in ensuring people with additional needs are given the opportunity to be successful.

What is a Vocational Profile?

It is a getting to know you process, designed to empower the individual and those in their circles of support in a person-centred way. The individual should drive the process and their wishes and needs should be the most important considerations and factors.

Here are some of the most important things you need to know.

- It is a living document, designed to be updated and amended over time as more information is gathered.
- It is an essential part of the Supported Employment process.
- It is a holistic method of assessment.
- Is the ultimate tool for Job Matching.
- Is never complete or done.
- It is not just a form; it is a process.

It does not:

- Grade people
- does not make assumptions on what someone can or cannot do
- judge people on the abilities of others.

The Purpose of Profiling

Vocational Profiling is used to help with the transition from education to employment, it should paint an accurate picture of someone's life and empower those closest to that person. It should be used to link the individual to job developments, be those paid

employment, time limited work experience or supported internships. It is also used to identify what support the person will need when moving into work at every stage of the process. Will they need support at interview? Or travelling to work? How much assistance will they need in the workplace? All this information can be gathered as part of the profiling process.

For people with additional needs moving into work can be a daunting prospect. Current recruitment and selection processes often leave people with additional needs at a disadvantage. For those with cognitive impairments who have difficulty with literacy, facing online application forms means there can be significant disadvantage. The same for interviews, people on the autistic spectrum may have difficulty answering questions because it requires them to process information about abstract concepts, for example, where do you see yourself in five years' time?

The Vocational Profile will inform you when the individual will need support, how they would like to be supported and who they would like to provide it.

The Purpose of profiling:

- To link the individual to subsequent job developments
- to paint an accurate picture of the person's life
- to stand against negative evaluations
- to empower others, especially those closest to the individual
- to assist with transition into employment
- to be updated every time significant information is gathered
- to demonstrate professionalism
- to assist the individual to make informed choices about -
 - job preferences
 - necessary training
 - support needed.

Vocational Profiling has several principles that should drive the process:

- Respect
- zero rejection – everyone can work
- self-determination
- informed and realistic choice
- empowerment.

It is a person-centred approach to supporting people and with regards to disability services, it was the very first person-centred method. Historically other services often focused on the needs of the service as opposed to the needs of the individual. Supported employment recognises the importance of choice and control for the individual.

Remember, it is their meeting, your role is to facilitate and to assist in capturing the relevant information. You both need to agree with what information is documented, what information is relevant, and if they cannot provide certain information, then they should decide who in their circle of support is able to assist with the process.

Careers, Advice, and Guidance

For those of you that are careers advisers, it will provide you with another method for gathering information, complimenting your professional practice and enhancing your skills.

This method of holistic assessment can be linked to the Gatsby Benchmarks.

1. A Stable Careers Programme: Vocational Profiling can be used as an additional tool, helping your careers offer to be more robust and impartial.
2. Learning from Career and Labour Market Information: By linking the individual's career choices to the current roles available within your local area. Are the career options available to the individual within the local area that reflect the individual's choices?
3. Addressing the needs of each Pupil: As this method of assessment was developed for individuals with additional needs it ensures that no one is excluded. It allows rich data to be captured that focus on the individual's feelings and ambitions, which can help inform decisions and support strategies.
4. Linking Curriculum Learning to Careers: By embedding careers as a lesson into the school curriculum and ensuring that pupils have a relevant understanding of scheme of work currently available. For people with additional needs this could mean discovering what subjects they have an aptitude for, say for Maths for example and then arranging a visit to an accountants in order to demonstrate how this strength is relevant to the workplace.
5. Encounters with Employers and Employees: When compiled correctly the Vocational Profile capture's key data that will help direct careers choices and generate ideas for suitable employment, be that work placements, supported internships or paid employment. It will also help highlight support requirements, such as communication aids, which will enrich the individual's experiences during these encounters and help remove/manage barriers.
6. Experiences of Workplaces: Having a better understanding of the individual will help exposure to different workplaces to be more targeted and with a higher likelihood of them being positive experiences.
7. Encounters with Further and Higher Education: Giving opportunities to students with additional needs to fully comprehend the range of post compulsory school options they can access, ensuring they are able to understand what is available be it apprenticeships or further/higher education. The school should make maximum use of its flexibility to ensure the needs of each individual are fully met.
8. Personal Guidance: Vocational Profiling fully embraces a person-centred individualised approach, to provide a supportive environment and as a tool for

empowerment. The Vocational Profile is used to highlight which areas the individuals may need guidance in, and how to tailor that guidance to their specific needs.

It's important that you as advisers fill the document out and hold responsibility for ensuring that there is only one version of the form, be that in word or interactive PDF. It may be worth considering what happens after you have finished supporting the individual. Often in services, important and valuable information regarding individuals with additional needs can get lost and they may not be able to articulate some of the vitally useful information gathered.

What mechanisms will you put in place to ensure this information isn't lost once your time providing supporting has finished? One way may be to provide the individual with a copy of their profile and explain what needs to happen so the information can be passed on.

The Core Principles of Profiling

Here is a list of the principles that are vital to the profiling process.

- You must see the individual more than once: As advisers we are all aware of how forming a professional relationship with an individual takes time to build a level of trust. If you only have one meeting what information may you have missed?
- You should see them in various settings: As people we all behave differently depending on where we are and who we are with. When profiling ask yourself, does this setting make the individual feel comfortable enough to disclose the information I require? Are the other people at the meeting going to influence the individual's answers?
- It is their meeting; they should invite those they wish to attend: Who else will be able to contribute to the process? Parents, teachers, friends? Also think of how you can reinforce this with the individual, they should be empowered to understand that this is their meeting and not something that is happening or being done to them.
- All meetings should be in a setting where they feel at ease.
- Don't just ask the questions on the form: Sometimes, much like if you are interviewing someone, you will need to ask additional questions in order to gain a better quality of information. If an individual is answering with one-word answers, you may need to ask more questions in order to gain better quality of information.
- Use positive language that avoids stereotyping of people: Often in services individuals can be labelled and therefore judged by others, what is challenging behaviour? What impact will that label have on an individual?
- The focus should be on the future: The information you collect should paint a clear picture of what the individual has done in the past, but the focus should be firmly in the future around what you will be doing with the individual and how you will be supporting them. You may need to check they are fully able to understand the concept of time and that they are fully able comprehend when this will happen.



Asking Questions

Obviously when it comes to profiling the most important element is the conversations you have. For people with additional needs there may be other factors you need to consider when profiling.

Consider when you ask the questions: Is it during the first meeting before you had built up a level of trust? What had they been doing before the meeting? Think about what their experience might have been of other services trying to assist them?

Think about where you asked the questions: Does the place you are profiling bring out the best in the individual? Is it a setting that they feel comfortable in? Is the setting private?

Who else is present at the meeting? Will this influence the individual's answer? Will you need to revisit their answer at any point?

Will they tell you what they think you want to hear? Often people with additional needs will have several other professionals working with them and supporting them, sometimes individuals will tell you what they *think* you want to hear. Think about how you will check to ensure their wishes are being captured.

Are they able to understand you and how will you check this? With the individual's consent, is it worth contacting people within their circles of support to ensure they have understood what you have asked them, or revisit information in subsequent meetings to confirm information has been understood and retained. It is also worth checking you have understood them.

And lastly, think how you would feel if you were in their shoes: Often due to additional needs, individuals have various professionals supporting them, how would you feel if you needed support and if you were being asked the same questions?

Developing the Profile

In order to get the best out of people you will need to tailor your approach depending on the individual you are supporting. Here is a list of considerations for you in order to develop your profiling skills.

- Think about how you can make the individual feel more at ease, so you are able to get the best out of them for the meeting.
- Is the desk a barrier to the meeting?
- Use quote's where you can, this helps the document to be truly reflective of the individual. The way they have described something helps us understand how they feel about it.

- You can use different coloured pens or font for each of the meetings, so you and the individual can reflect later at what was said at different stages during their journey. Later, this will allow you to demonstrate how far they have progressed.
- Ensure you update the profile when valuable information is gained, for example, if the individual has undertaken work experience or gained a qualification. You can ask them what they enjoyed about their experience and how they found the people they worked with.
- Think outside the box and write outside the boxes: The Vocational Profile should be as flexible as you want it to be.
- And lastly, think about the information you may have about the individual stored in your head. As advisers we learn so much about the individuals we support, but what don't we record? Ensure you document as much as you can.

Circles of Support

When profiling it is essential that you gain additional information from the individual's circle of support, with their consent. The individual should be afforded the option of who they would like to attend, be it parents, carers, school staff or anyone else they feel is able to contribute to the process.

It is important to have an awareness on how other people can potentially influence the individual in the meeting, for example the way someone may behave if their parents are present.

You may need to assist the individual with inviting members of their support circle to the meeting, remember your role is to facilitate.

People with additional needs may not have the cognitive ability to give the level of information you require when profiling them, particularly if it's the initial meeting and you haven't yet gained a level of trust. Again, you may need to contact people in the individual's circles of support to gain further insight or clarify details.

Updating the Profile

The profile should be updated every time the individual has a significant experience of work. Documenting how they found it, what did they enjoy about it? Does it help them in identifying their chosen career? How did they get on with other members of staff? Were there any perceived difficulties? It is hugely important that the Vocational Profile is updated, consider how much a student may change over the course of secondary school.

Consider who else can give information regarding their experiences? Colleagues, supervisors, Job Coaches who supported the individual. This is all potentially valuable information that will help in ascertaining their ultimate career goal.

Advice and Strategy's for Documenting Information

Advisers have options around how they wish to fill in the profile, you can be as flexible as you wish when recording information. One option is to go through the document in a systematic way, looking at each of the sections and recording information. The disadvantages of this are the individual may feel that you are more focused on the form than their answers.

As you become more familiar with the process and what things would be normally be captured, you may not actually use the form whilst profiling the individual. This allows the conversation to feel more natural and the focus can remain on the individual. If you are completing the profile this way, it is hugely important to ensure you allow yourself time to type up the conversation notes after the meeting. Ideally, this would happen immediately after the interaction, to keep the risk of forgetting key information to a minimum.

However, you choose to approach profiling, it's important to use a style that is best for you and the techniques you use in your role as an adviser.

The Vocational Profile is a tool to guide conversations, and information can be gathered out of sequence. The focus should be on making the process as natural as possible and putting the individual at ease. This will help in creating an open atmosphere, which will increase the likelihood of gaining honest and rich detail.



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