



# Vocational Profile

## Introduction

In order to assist people with disabilities or disadvantage 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 and abilities for work.

In the Supported Employment process a vocational profile is used to gather this information.

This paper provides the position of the European Union of Supported Employment on the aspects of vocational profiling within Supported Employment.

## Background

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 support they need in order to be able to work. Vocational profiling was therefore established as a person centred tool to assist job seekers make informed choices about job preferences and to establish the necessary training strategies for on or off the job support. This differed from the traditional assessment process within rehabilitation programmes where individuals were tested in sheltered surroundings and were presented with different support alternatives by rehabilitation specialists.

In the vocational profiling process today, job seekers are supported to make informed and realistic choices about work and future career development.

## The Issues

The vocational profile occurs at the second stage of the 5-stage Supported Employment process<sup>1</sup>. It is a tool that provides a structured and goal orientated approach towards securing and maintaining employment in the open labour market within a person centred approach. The objective is to achieve the best possible match between the job seekers' skills and support needs and the requirements of the job/employer; this is called the job match.

<sup>1</sup> For a description of the 5 stages see also EUSE (2005): European Union for Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards

Vocational profiling in Supported Employment is not about service providers collecting information about the job seeker and then making decisions on their behalf. Vocational profiling is a tool that service providers may use to facilitate the process so that the job seeker is able to make personal and informed choices about jobs and careers.

Vocational profiling aims to develop the persons' own awareness and understanding of opportunities and obstacles in the labour market. There is evidence that vocational profiling is one of the most important success factors for sustainable integration into the labour market<sup>2</sup>.

Work experience placements and job tasters are possible tools to be utilised in the vocational profiling process. The aim of the placements should always be clearly defined as part of the individual planning process and should be strictly time limited. Placements should always be a means to develop skills and opportunities for work and should not be seen as aims in themselves. The process should always lead to a support strategy that is owned and understood by the candidates, regardless of their disability and disadvantage.

There are occasions whereby little effort is made in supporting the job seeker to determine their career choice; instant solutions and instant job hunting are often prescribed as the best tools to find employment and to ensure a job match. However experience has shown that failure to plan and engage with job seekers fully, usually leads to unsuccessful job matching and job outcomes.

## Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

In the person centred approach, the vocational profile is an individual, flexible and live plan with detailed information of the job seekers' abilities, motivation, skills and knowledge. The plan should also clearly define the support and resources that are required to meet the individuals' support needs.

Vocational profiling is a collaborative process between the job seeker and the service provider. It is important that the job seeker maintains ownership of the whole process (empowerment). Vocational profiling must ensure that the job seeker gains an insight and an understanding of their own career opportunities based on their interests and abilities. It is equally important that job seekers are able to identify what their individual support needs are and also to determine which support strategies will be effective and appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> Doose, Stefan (2007): Unterstützte Beschäftigung – Berufliche Integration auf lange Sicht, p. 329-334. Lebenshilfe-Verlag, Marburg.

The Employment Support Worker has the main responsibility for establishing good working relationships with the job seeker in the vocational profiling process while at the same time keeping the necessary professional distance. It is important to define who is responsible for the different tasks in the process and also to identify important stakeholders in the job seekers' professional and private network. The responsibility for the documenting and completion of the vocational profiling process lies with the Employment Support Worker.

The vocational profile should conclude with a working action plan specifying the agreed activities, outcomes, aims and objectives and who is responsible.

## Conclusion

Vocational profiling differs from traditional assessment procedures in that it is a person centred process owned by the candidate and should contribute to their employment choice and choice of support strategies in terms of getting and maintaining jobs in the open labour market. The vocational profile is a crucially important stage in the Supported Employment process.

### Further Reading

- EUSE Position Paper "Values Standards and Principles of Supported Employment"
- EUSE Position Paper "Work Experience Placements"

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