

Resource Review

Profile.ac.uk – A Program for Administering Placement Students and Much More

by Stephen Gomez *et al.*

www.profile.ac.uk Version 1.0 of the software is free.

The program *Profile* was first developed to aid work placement students and to create three-way communication between the student, university and employer.¹ There are three levels of access to *Profile* – student (basic), academic and supervisor (intermediate), or administrator (advanced). Placement students are allocated a ‘realm’ within *Profile* – a password-protected area where the relevant forms are uploaded. An example might be a form sent by a university department to an industrial supervisor asking about the progress of a placement student. Another example might be a form sent to a placement student asking for an indication of progress and self-reflection on skills etc. being learned – but there are many more possibilities. But basically this web-based system can be used to mount and display forms of any type.

The forms (questionnaires) can be tailored to individual needs and can be used to collect and collate information remotely. The student then invites their academic and placement supervisors into their realm which enables all three users to view the forms. The three-tier system allows certain questions within the forms to be answered only by either the student, academic or supervisor. For example, an employer must complete a Health and Safety form before the student starts the placement, and only they are allowed to do so. The software allows the other users to view but not input information into the relevant tick or drop-down boxes, in this case related to health and safety.

One of the main advantages of *Profile* is its versatility and the ability for it to be customised for different needs. On this basis the University of Reading’s Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills (CETL-AURS) has used *Profile* in two very different projects. First we have adapted UWE’s use of *Profile* for our own new Industrial Training scheme, enabling placement students to update us on their progress, and encouraging them to regularly reflect on the skills they’ve used and developed.

The *Profile* software also proved a useful tool for staff when auditing skills provision across degree programmes, facilitating communication between programme directors and module convenors. *Profile* provided solutions to problems encountered with an earlier paper-based version, namely: an overly long questionnaire; issues of confidentiality; and issues of how data could be collated and analysed. The software’s drop-down and tick-box format reduced the overall length of our forms without compromising the number of questions. These also minimised the input required by module convenors and reduced the time taken for completion. Using the three-tiered structure of *Profile*, different users (in this case programme directors and module convenors) can be allocated different access rights, which can ensure confidentiality of data.

In our experience the most useful aspect of *Profile* was its ability to collate the data quickly and easily. Once the relevant modules for a degree programme had been audited, the programme director had the option to “create a report” which was cut and pasted into an Excel file. This allowed the required data to be highlighted (e.g. the different methods used to assess written communication) and displayed in table or graph format. Only the standard ‘cut’ and ‘paste’ functions of Excel were required for this stage, thereby ensuring the task could be easily completed by any member of staff.

Profile uses web-based forms and if you are not confident in your IT ability, the *Profile* team at UWE can take your questions (for example in Word format) and create the appropriate forms (there is a small cost associated with this). Our experience suggests this is the easiest option and the *Profile* team members are extremely helpful and easy to work with.

The user-friendliness of *Profile* and the ability to tailor the forms to your requirements means it can be used for a wide-range of applications. The University of the West of England uses *Profile* for PDP where students are encouraged to build e-portfolios in relation to their potential careers. Academics and/or employers can then be invited in to view the student's CV, covering letter and skills profile. The flexibility of use of the software, combined with good user support suggests there are a range of applications across the HE sector for which *Profile* can readily be used. *Profile* software was developed by the University of the West of England (UWE), as part of an FDTL Phase 4 HEFCE-funded project.

Reviewed by Gillian Fraser

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills
(CETL-AURS) and School of Agriculture, Policy & Development
University of Reading
Reading RG6 6AR

References

1. Gomez, S. (2005) Presentation on 'Assessment of Work-Based Learning' given at a Centre for Bioscience event on 'Assessment for Learning' at University of Reading on 13 April 2005, available at www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/events/read05/gomez.pdf