



## Research Article

# Addition of early vocational advice to usual primary care on sickness absence in employed adults: exploratory findings from the discontinued WAVE Randomised Controlled Trial

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## Plain language summary

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## Plain language summary

The Work And Vocational advice trial aimed to see if adding early vocational advice to usual primary care could help people return to work more quickly if they were on sick leave. The study included adults who had been off work from 2 weeks to 6 months due to health issues and received a 'fit note' from their doctor. Participants were randomly assigned to either usual primary care or usual primary care plus vocational advice, which was delivered by trained Vocational Support Workers by phone and/or videoconferencing.

The trial planned to recruit 720 participants but stopped early due to challenges in recruitment. A total of 130 people took part, with 125 providing outcome data. Results showed that those who received vocational advice plus usual primary care took fewer days off work (average 37.86 days) compared to those who only had usual care (42.66 days). The vocational advice group also had lower productivity losses (£5513.84 vs. £6146.21 in the usual care group), suggesting potential economic benefits.

Although the trial could not confirm the effectiveness of vocational advice, it provided valuable lessons. It highlighted the importance of better collaboration with primary care teams and the need for more flexible ways to recruit participants. This study suggests that early vocational advice could be beneficial, and improving access to such support in primary care could help people return to work sooner, benefiting both individuals and the economy. Future research with a larger sample size is needed to determine if vocational advice can effectively reduce work absence and improve patient outcomes.