

Supporting the voluntary community and social enterprise paid workforce: an action research study

Submission date 17/03/2025	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 26/03/2025	Overall study status Ongoing	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 25/03/2025	Condition category Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data <input type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise organisations (VCSEs), including charities and community groups, deliver health and wellbeing services. Three percent of the UK workforce (950,000 people) are VCSE employees. Some are health and wellbeing staff (we call these VCSE staff) who deliver support to service users. Examples include Link Workers, Peer Support Recovery Workers, Welfare Advice Officers and Community Befrienders. VCSE staff report feeling unsupported and consequently leave their jobs. A fifth of VCSEs face worsening staff retention, and 43% report recruitment challenges. This is detrimental for service users who face disruptions to their care. Professional Support, e.g., supervision and mentoring, has improved retention amongst NHS staff. However, there is a lack of research on implementing Professional Support for VCSE staff that considers the unique VCSE context. This study addresses this. Given this, the aim of the study is to explore which Professional Support interventions can be implemented to enable VCSE staff to feel sufficiently supported to stay in their role delivering health and wellbeing services.

Who can participate?

Staff working in Voluntary Sector organisations in South and West Yorkshire, UK

What does the study involve?

The researchers will use a multi-case action research design to implement Professional Support with six VCSE organisations based in two Integrated Care Board areas. They will:

1. Explore VCSEs' experiences of implementing Professional Support by conducting a staff questionnaire and stakeholder interviews.
2. Calculate the costs of delivering different types of Professional Support, e.g., staff time to develop, deliver and attend support.
3. Support stakeholders to co-design the implementation of locally appropriate Professional Support strategies e.g., creating a supervision programme.
4. Evaluate the impact of Professional Support through follow-up questionnaires and interviews.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Benefits include having the opportunity to engage in Professional Support. Risks include the time commitment to participate.

Where is the study run from?
University of Sheffield (UK)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
November 2024 to April 2027

Who is funding the study?
National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health Services and Delivery Research (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Alexis Foster, alexis.foster@sheffield.ac.uk

Contact information

Type(s)
Public, Scientific, Principal investigator

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Additional identifiers

National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
159286

Study information

Scientific Title
Implementing professional support for the voluntary sector paid workforce: a multi-case action research study

Study objectives
Implementing additional Professional Support improves retention rates for Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise organisations (VCSE) staff.

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

submitted 14/03/2025, University of Sheffield Ethics Committee (Division of Medicine and Population Health, Sheffield, S10 2RX, United Kingdom; -; medschoolethics@sheffield.ac.uk), ref: 066247

Study design

Multi-case action research study

Primary study design

Observational

Study type(s)

Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Professional support for the voluntary sector paid workforce

Interventions

The interventions will be co-designed with stakeholders but examples include a new supervision programme or a peer support group

A multi-case action research with four elements over 30 months:

WP1: engage Experts by Experience including VCSE staff, managers and service users throughout the study to provide input.

WP2: conduct a mapping review to identify Professional Support that has been implemented in similar health and care workforce roles e.g., counsellors to inform learning for the VCSE workforce.

WP3: use a multi-case action research design to implement Professional Support with six VCSE organisations based in two Integrated Care Board areas:

1. Explore VCSEs' experiences of implementing Professional Support by conducting a staff questionnaire and stakeholder interviews.

2. Calculate the costs of delivering different types of Professional Support e.g., staff time to develop, deliver and attend support.

3. Support stakeholders to co-design the implementation of locally appropriate Professional Support strategies e.g., creating a supervision programme.

4. Evaluate the impact of Professional Support through follow-up questionnaires and interviews.

WP4: involve Experts by Experience in designing outputs including a Professional Support toolkit and training resource.

Intervention Type

Not Specified

Primary outcome(s)

How supported staff feel at work, measured by questionnaire at baseline and 15 months later

Key secondary outcome(s)

Intention to leave role within next 12 months, measured using a questionnaire at baseline and 15 months later

Completion date

30/04/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Working for a VCSE organisation delivering health and wellbeing related activities in West or South Yorkshire, UK

Participant type(s)

Employee

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Lower age limit

18 years

Upper age limit

100 years

Sex

All

Key exclusion criteria

1. People not working for VCSEs in South and West Yorkshire
2. Aged under 18 years
3. People without the capacity to consent

Date of first enrolment

14/04/2025

Date of final enrolment

01/09/2025

Locations

Countries of recruitment

United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
NHS West Yorkshire Icb - 02t
2nd Floor
Westgate House
Westgate
Halifax
United Kingdom
HX1 1PW

Study participating centre
NHS South Yorkshire Icb - 03l
Oak House
Moorhead Way
Bramley
Rotherham
United Kingdom
S66 1YY

Sponsor information

Organisation

University of Sheffield

ROR

<https://ror.org/05krs5044>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Government

Funder Name

National Institute for Health and Care Research

Alternative Name(s)

National Institute for Health Research, NIHR Research, NIHRresearch, NIHR - National Institute for Health Research, NIHR (The National Institute for Health and Care Research), NIHR

Funding Body Type

Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype

National government

Location

United Kingdom

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during the study are not expected to be made available due to concerns about participant anonymity

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Protocol file	version 1.0	23/03/2025	25/03/2025	No	No