

CASE STUDY

DR ROBERT WALKER

Dr Robert Walker successfully defended his PhD on 19th April 2021. Rob's research was focused on engaging injured military veterans into physical exercise, his PhD was completed in collaboration with Help for Heroes.

BACKGROUND

I left school at the age of 16 and went straight into the military for 8 years. During my career in the army, I was able to complete a BSc in Sport, Coaching and Fitness through the Open University, this sparked a keen interest in research that led me to complete my MSc at the University of Ulster. Due to my newly discovered passion for research, I started to look for a PhD and was instantly drawn to the KESS2-funded project as the focus was on helping retired veterans, something close to my heart. The project was an opportunity for me to give back and work closely with Help for Heroes and the great work they do.

My project focused on engaging injured military veterans into physical exercise, focusing on both the physiological and psychological elements. Having a company partner to collaborate with on the PhD meant that I was able to access an in-built network of veterans to conduct my research. In addition to this, my military background meant I was able to foster a connection with the veterans to engage them in the research as we connected over our shared experience.



IMPACT

As a result of my research, I was able to develop an infographic that summarises the thesis to the general population, helping to engage veterans in the community hubs to take part in physical exercise.

I was concerned that my thesis alone would not communicate the outcome of my research, so I designed the infographic that can be used in community centres and sent out as flyers.

I will be working at Kobe University in Japan on a postdoctoral research fellowship, this will involve me engaging the older generations in physical exercise to improve the health of the population.

My research truly embodies the goals of the [Health and Human Performance Global Academy](#) in taking a holistic approach to human performance. Not only does my research focus on the physiological aspects of engaging injured military veterans into physical exercise; but I also examined the myriad of psychological elements that affect the feelings and behaviours of veterans regarding physical activity and participation in community hubs. My research not only helps the individuals I worked with to stay healthy—but has further implications on a global scale, encouraging the use of holistic and interdisciplinary approaches to physical and mental health. My research addresses the [UN Sustainability Goals](#) related to good health and wellbeing, sustainable cities and communities, and peace, justice, and strong institutions.

"Rob truly embraced the work of Help for Heroes and was keen to develop his understanding of the offer for WIS (wounded, injured or sick) veterans in South Wales from the get go. This desire led to Rob participating in a range of physical activity sessions across the region including weekly exercise classes at the Help for Heroes Bridgend Hub and monthly sport sessions at the Help for Heroes Newport Hub. Rob was quickly able to build the trust of veterans that were being supported and this allowed him to truly investigate their feelings and behaviours regarding physical activity."

"The research produced by Rob has addressed an area that lacked significant investigation and has provided the charity with conclusions and recommendations that we are already looking to implement within future delivery."

Nick Vanderpump | Activity and Wellbeing Regional Lead (Wales & Hereford) | Help for Heroes

“Robert Walker, our KESS2 scholar, is a military veteran himself, so was able to earn the confidence and respect of our Help for Heroes (partner) colleagues and potential participants within the convergence region of Wales.”

“Rob worked tirelessly to engage with local support hubs for military veterans and the approach he employed within his research and many of his findings are novel. His work confirmed the need for a holistic, interdisciplinary approach in this research field and the need for cooperation and collaboration between service providers. We are hopeful that Rob’s findings, conclusions and recommendations will be disseminated widely and implemented by Help for Heroes as well as other military veterans’ organisations.”

Paul M. Smith PhD, FHEA, FBASES | Director of Studies

Working on the KESS 2 Programme

Through the KESS 2 funding I was also able to attend the IAFOR conference in Tokyo, Japan in 2019. While at the conference I was connected with researchers from across the Behavioural Science field and those networks were extremely beneficial as it was through these networks that I decided to apply for my post-doctoral position in Japan.

Advice for New PhD Students!

- “Don’t be scared to get something wrong, I submitted to a journal that was rejected but the feedback I received really helped me during my thesis write-up”
- Everything always takes longer than you expect so don’t be disheartened if this is the case!
- Try not to take too much on, it is great to get involved in marking and teaching but make sure your PhD is the focus of your time
- Build relationships with other students as the PhD journey is like no other, you never know what you may learn from someone in another field of research.
- Find the best way to learn for you, visual etc.
- Set your expectations with your supervisors such as how often you meet etc.

Publications

Walker, R., Smith, P. M., Limbert, C., & Colclough, M. (2020). The Psychosocial Effects of Physical Activity on Military Veterans That Are Wounded, Injured, and/or Sick: A Narrative Synthesis Systematic Review of Quantitative Evidence. *Military Behavioral Health*, 8(3), 292-307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2020.1746445>.

Walker, R., Colclough, M., Limbert, C., & Smith, P. (2020). Perceived Barriers to, and Benefits of Physical Activity Among British Military Veterans that are Wounded, Injured, and/or Sick: A Behaviour Change Wheel Perspective. *Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2020.1781940>.

Walker, R., Limbert, C., Smith, P. M. (2021). Exploring the Perceived Barriers to, and Benefits of Physical Activity Among British Military Veterans that are Physically Wounded, Injured, and/or Sick. *Journal of Social, Behaviour, and Health Sciences*. 15, 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JSBHS.2021.15.1.11>

Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS 2) is a pan-Wales higher-level skills initiative led by Bangor University on behalf of the HE sector in Wales. It is part-funded by the Welsh Government’s European Social Fund (ESF) convergence programme for West Wales and the Valleys. For further information about how your organisation could benefit from participating in KESS 2, please contact the KESS 2 Central team at Bangor at: kess2@bangor.ac.uk



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