



August 2026

That’s a wrap on Follow-up 2!

Welcome to the latest edition of the ADVANCE newsletter. We have now completed the latest round of visits, and we want to give a huge thank you to everyone who came in for their appointment with us. Over the last 3 years, we have seen 1030 participants- that’s a retention rate of 90% from baseline!

As you know, now that we have finished with Follow up 2, there is a small pause before your next in person appointment with us. We will be starting Follow up 3 in 2028. That doesn’t mean we’ll disappear on you though, keep an eye out as we’ll be in touch with newsletters, news of publications and a few remote questionnaires as well. It won’t be long until we’re contacting you again to book you in for Follow up 3.

In this newsletter, we’ll look back at the achievements of this follow up and look forward to what ADVANCE has in store over the next few years. But most importantly we’ll say a huge thank you to those who helped make Follow up 2 happen.

Best wishes,
The ADVANCE Team

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1000TH PARTICIPANT

Impressive timing



On the 8th May, we saw our 1000th and 1001st participants for follow up 2. Somehow, Ryan managed to time his visit spot on to be our 1000th participant at both Follow up 1 and Follow up 2. That might not sound impressive, but when you consider that participants never come for their visits in the same order and there are often cancellations or delays, Ryan being number 1000 twice in a row has us wondering what powers he possesses! In fact, we had a cancellation the day before his visit that would have been enough to bump him to 1001.

Not ones to miss an opportunity to celebrate with a sweet treat, we of course had cake to ring in 1000. Ryan happily shared with fellow participant, Mike- number 1001, and the clinical team too. Big thank you to both of you for coming in for your visit, we had a great time and you both thrived in your photoshoot!

Number of
Participants seen at
Follow-up 2

1030

Approximate data points collected at Follow-up 2:

12,000
per person

Approximate total data points collected across all
time points :

40,000,000

Retention rate since baseline:

90%

ADVANCE UPDATES



Alex Bennett- OBE

June 2026

Our Principal Investigator, Group Captain Alex Bennett received an OBE! *"I was delighted. There is no doubt that the success of the ADVANCE Study has played a significant role in this award. I would very much like to thank all my colleagues, collaborators, researchers, team members and most of all the participants for taking part in the study and taking ADVANCE where it is today"*

- Alex Bennett



Prize Draw! Your chance to win

July 2026

The end of this follow up brings with it another prize draw. If you opted into the draw at your visit, you were in with a chance of winning £100, £250, £500 or our top prize of £1000! Check out more on page 12



A trip to Poland

March 2026

In March 2026, Dr Rabeea Maqsood took a trip to Poland to present her work on the assessment of heart rate variability as a marker of cardiovascular risk in the ADVANCE Cohort. She gave a great presentation at the Biofeedback Federation of Europe.

THANK YOU!

To the team that helped make FU2 happen

We are incredibly proud of the success of Follow-Up 2 and of all the staff who helped make it possible. Many wonderful people have contributed to this follow-up — some familiar faces you may have met during your visits, and others you won't have seen at all.

As the study now pauses in-person visits for a couple of years, we are sadly saying goodbye to several members of our team. We would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to them all for their hard work, dedication, and support throughout the study.

Clinical Team

Our clinical team are the people many of you will have met during your appointments. Their expertise across all assessments, alongside their ability to guide participants through each step of the visit, has been invaluable. Together, they have seen all 1,030 participants during this follow-up and recorded countless data points. Without their hard work, our researchers simply would not have the data needed to continue this work. Most importantly, they have carried out every visit with kindness, professionalism, and care — helping to make participants feel welcome and supported throughout.



Radiology Team

ADVANCE has been fortunate to have its own dedicated radiology team. These ladies have been exceptional, not only in performing X-rays, DEXA scans, and MRI scans to the highest standards, but also in managing the extensive data that accompanies each scan. From ensuring that every participant can safely undergo imaging, to explaining procedures clearly and putting participants at ease, their professionalism and care have made a real difference. They even do their best to keep spirits up by playing your favourite music during MRI scans—although they haven't quite mastered making the scanner feel less Arctic!

Once the images have been collected, the team's work is far from over. They meticulously process, pseudonymise, and prepare the imaging data for both clinical and research analysis. Their dedication, expertise, and attention to detail have been vital to the success of ADVANCE, and we are incredibly grateful for everything they do.



Traumatic Brain Injury Team

Max and Sandra joined ADVANCE to support the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) aspect of the study and quickly became invaluable members of the team.

Many of you will recognise Max and Sandra as the team members who carried out your neuropsychological assessments – the ones that test cognitive function and memory. They have not only conducted these assessments with care and expertise, but have also meticulously scored each one and ensured that MRI result letters were sent out promptly.

Knowledgeable, approachable, and always bringing a sense of humour to the clinic, Max and Sandra have made a lasting impression on both participants and colleagues alike.



Administration / Recruitment Team

Our administration and recruitment teams worked tirelessly behind the scenes to coordinate your study visits and ensure that everything ran smoothly. Their dedication, flexibility, and problem-solving skills have enabled us to successfully schedule appointments for all 1,030 participants in this follow up.

With participants travelling from far and wide – often with varying availability and individual requirements – the team consistently went above and beyond to accommodate everyone wherever possible. As the first point of contact for many participants, their kindness, professionalism, and approachable manner helped create a welcoming and positive experience from the outset. They are the force behind getting each of you participants through the doors for your visits, and are vital to the success of ADVANCE. We really appreciate everything they have done.



Communications Team

Our comms team vastly improved our communications this year. They have significantly enhanced our newsletters and participant mailouts, helping to ensure that our updates are clear, engaging, and accessible. They have gathered interesting stories by interviewing participants, always taking the time to get to know them and thoughtfully share their experiences with the wider ADVANCE community.

We continue to benefit from the systems and processes they have put in place, and their contributions have had a lasting impact on our work.



Andy Geelan

On a scorching midday during Operation Herrick 16, Vehicle Commander Andy Geelan led a routine show-of-force patrol with three men under his command. The team were reluctant to head out, instinct and experience telling them that something felt “off” but they trusted in Andy, trusted in their training, and rolled out following his SOPs to the letter.

Moments later, everything changed.

Their vehicle was rolled over a cracked IED, leaving Andy with a category A cervical spine injury and a traumatic brain injury (TBI). In an instant, the mission became a fight for survival, and the long road ahead would demand far more from Andy than any deployment ever had.

A long recovery, a lifelong battle

From 2012 through today, Andy has been navigating the invisible and exhausting aftermath of catastrophic injury. The physical damage demanded years of rehabilitation, but it is the mental exhaustion the relentless cognitive fatigue common after TBI that remains one of his greatest daily challenges. Yet, true to form, Andy refused to let injury define him.

He found grounding in mindfulness, using it to quiet the overload when the world becomes too loud. He found purpose in running, training for marathons and raising money for charity. And he found strength in community, in service, and in continuing to push his limits even when his body and mind are heavy.

“I’m still recovering, but every mile, every breath, every moment is progress.”

The turning point, he shares, was recognising the importance of taking care of himself while staying mindful of his family and their well-being. “I made a conscious effort not to bring them into a dark place. That’s when I tried looking at life differently - focusing on myself and spending time talking to professionals (if I felt like it)', he laughs 'If I didn’t, they understood.”

The Role of ADVANCE- a lifeline for those who served

For Andy, taking part in the ADVANCE Study has been more than a medical assessment; it has been a lifeline. “The ADVANCE study is amazing,” Andy reflects. “You’re taking care of injured personnel as they move through some of the hardest times of their lives. What you’re doing is incredibly important not just for us now, but for those who will follow in our footsteps.”

Across years of data collection, benchmarking, imaging, and long-term follow-up, the study has offered Andy something rare: a clear view of his health trajectory, ongoing monitoring from experts who genuinely understand military trauma, and the reassurance that his injuries and his recovery matter.



A Legacy of Strength for the Next Generation

Andy’s story is one of quiet resilience. There is no dramatic spotlight, no headline-grabbing moment of triumph. Instead, there is daily discipline. There is struggle and acceptance. There is the decision every single day to keep going.

And through his participation in ADVANCE, his experience will inform the care, rehabilitation, and protection of generations of service personnel to come.

His journey began in the dust of Afghanistan, but today it stretches across running tracks, research labs, and the hearts of those he inspires.

Andy Geelan is still recovering.
He is still running.
And he is still leading the way.



The Brain Injury Group provide specialist support to those who have suffered a brain injury in UK military service. They work closely with the Veterans Welfare Group to ensure the support and treatment they provide is tailored to best support veterans in need.

They recognise that TBIs can lead to a wide range of challenges. Those in the Armed Forces who experience these injuries often face not only physical difficulties, but also emotional and cognitive struggles that can persist long after their service ends.

They offer a range of treatments including Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech and Language Therapy as well as Mental Health Support.

If you think you or a member of your family would benefit from this support you can submit an enquiry to speak to one of their trained advisors [here](#).

Research

HIGHLIGHTS

Remote Questionnaires

Last year, we sent out our first ever remote questionnaire. 80% of participants completed it and we really appreciate you taking the time to answer these questions, as this data has been used to support many of our research questions.

Over the next couple of years, we plan to send out a couple more remote questionnaires to keep up to date with vital information to support our research. Don’t panic, we won’t be sending you lengthy surveys to complete each month, we will be sending a short one out later this year, with a slightly longer one coming your way in 2027.

We will contact you via text, email and post- if you have a preference of how you would like to receive your questionnaire, or if you need to update your contact details, please let us know via email here: dmrc-advancestudyteam@mod.gov.uk.



Tass White

Clinical Operations Manager

ADVANCE

Green Light for ADVANCE- RELOAD

Lower limb loss can have long-term effects that go beyond mobility, including reduced hip bone strength and a higher risk of fractures from falls. In our previous newsletter, we highlighted that research has not yet tested whether resistance and high-impact exercises can prevent or reverse bone weakening in people with lower limb loss. We also described how we developed expert-informed exercise guidelines aimed at helping to strengthen bone in this group.

In the next phase of this work, we will run a study called ADVANCE - RELOAD (REsistance and LOADing exercise for bone health) to explore whether a simple, home-based exercise programme—based on these guidelines and featuring movements such as squats, deadlifts and small jumps—can be safely and practically carried out by people with below-knee limb loss. The programme will run over eight weeks, with ongoing support from our research team.

We’re delighted to share that this study has now received full ethical approval and is ready to get underway.

We will be recruiting 10 male prosthesis users to take part. Over the coming weeks, some of you may be contacted directly with more information about the study and what participation will involve. If you are invited, we hope you will take a moment to consider getting involved.

This is an exciting first step towards improving long-term bone health after limb loss, and participation could help shape future rehabilitation approaches for others in the Armed Forces community.



Dr Marina De Vechis

Higher Scientific Officer

Academic Department of

Military Rehabilitation

Early Career Research Prize

Back in May 2026, Major Oliver O’Sullivan, involved in the musculoskeletal (muscles & bones) parts of ADVANCE, was awarded the Early Career Researcher award by the Centre for Evidence for the Armed Forces for his work studying post-traumatic osteoarthritis in the military community. The award was renamed this year to the Inaugural Professor Nicola T Fear Award, in honour of her dedication to supporting early-career researchers, and Oliver became the first recipient of it.

He received the award at the annual conference, and was able to present work from ADVANCE, outlining the findings from the first and second study visits for your knee x-rays and pain questionnaires. Importantly, he was also able to highlight how ADVANCE findings are providing the evidence required to develop new care guidelines for serving personnel, challenge the previous age-restrictions around osteoarthritis and push for greater preventative strategies in practice and policy. Many of the people in the audience support the veteran community, and there were many fruitful conversations about how to better link the in Service care to post Service care and provide meaningful differences in the lived experience of those who serve or have served.

Without your x-rays and questionnaires, he would not have been able to build such a strong case for this to happen. Whilst Oliver is the first to state that he wouldn’t have been able to do this without the hard work of all of all of the teams; the research team, data wizards, admin and other musculoskeletal researchers, especially in Imperial, we are all incredibly impressed and proud of his achievement and know it is very well deserved.



Hello Baby!

In June, our data manager Eleanor, welcomed her first baby into the world. After a very long labour he made his debut on her birthday!

Both Eleanor and William are doing well and are settling in at home. We're so excited for their family and cannot wait to meet him.

Congratulations to Eleanor, Sam and little William



Our Biggest Prize Draw Yet!

One of the best parts of completing your follow-up is being entered into our Prize Draw—and this time it was our biggest one yet, with an amazing £4,000 in prizes to be won!

Our Principal Investigator, Alex Bennett, recently carried out the draw, and we're thrilled to celebrate all of our lucky winners.

Here's how the prizes were shared:

💷 20 winners each received £100

💷 2 winners each received £250

💷 1 winner received £500

🌟 And the grand prize of £1,000 went to one very lucky participant - Roger Smith!

Roger, who admits to never having won a prize in his 31 years of military service, had this to say:

“Thank you for giving me the chance to participate in the study, it is something I am very proud of and I always look forward to my visits. It is very rare that anything good comes from wartime injuries like IED blasts, but if there is, it comes in the form of information gathering and data collection by the ADVANCE Study team. It’s great to be involved and to be able to give something back”

Congratulations to all of our winners! Thank you to everyone who completed their follow-up and took part. Every completed follow-up helps move our research forward, and we're so grateful for your continued support. Who knows—you could be one of our next Prize Draw winners!

Follow up 3

The next in person follow up will begin in 2028. We'll be in touch a few weeks before you are due to book you in for your appointment. Please keep us up to date with any changes in your contact information. You can let us know your new mobile number, email and home address by following this QR code:

Update your
contact details





summer
time