The University of Brighton’s sports and exercise research findings have been adopted by elite athletes across the world and been praised by the International Paralympic Committee.

During the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Dr Nick Webborn, Principal Research Fellow at the School of Sport and Service Management, was Chief Medical Officer for the Paralympics and worked with injured Olympic athletes. He also oversaw the collection of unique data on injury and illness from the 4,000 athletes taking part in the Paralympics. These data are generating a raft of research articles. “We can use this to work on injury prevention strategies,” said Dr Webborn. “We were able to collect 50,000 days of exposure of athletes to sport. It would normally take 25 years to get the same volume of data in a single sport in the UK.”

Dr Webborn, who was involved in London 2012 from the bidding stage through to delivery, has recently been appointed to the International Paralympic Committee’s medical committee and is organizing the research taking place at the Games in Rio. Dr Webborn has also recently been appointed as Chair of the Scientific Commission of the International Federation of Sports Medicine (FIMS). His work at the Olympics has led to a study he conducted on injuries sustained at the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Paralympic Games in the United States. The success of this first survey led the International Paralympic Committee to make the survey standard practice in all Winter and Summer Paralympics. Dr Webborn’s research into injury at the Paralympics has also led to rule changes for ice sledge hockey. The University of Brighton’s links with London 2012 are only one example of its influential work with elite athletes and the wider application of its exercise research can also be seen in the University’s collaboration with the Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport at Loughborough University on toolkits that promote safe physical activity for people with various disabilities.

The recommendations of the toolkits have led to changes in how we deliver and frame our material to ensure that practical resources for people with disabilities to engage in physical activity can be sought.

Professor Vicky Tolfrey, Director of the Peter Harrison Centre for Disability Sport

The University of Brighton researchers have also been involved in ongoing work helping athletes involved in different sports and with different impairments deal with challenging climate situations. This work has influenced the strategy for Great Britain’s athletes from the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games onwards and also forms part of the USA Olympic Committee’s preparation manual.

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Photography: GB Paralympic archers use pre-cooling strategy for competition in thermally challenging environments. © ParalympicsGB