James Macleod has been the Director of the NOC Relations Department and of Olympic Solidarity since 2019. Macleod has been Associate Director for Relations with the Olympic Movement under the supervision of the Deputy Director General since the beginning of 2017. In his earlier Olympic career, Macleod worked for Olympic Solidarity as Head of Athlete Programmes, before joining the London 2012 Organising Committee for the Olympic Games as Head of NOC and NPC Services and then the Baku 2015 European Games Organising Committee as Director of Athlete Services and Operations.

The NOC Competition Uniform Support Programme for the Olympic Games is a collaboration between the WFSGI, and the sport brands that make up its membership, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Together we are committed to making sure no athlete is left behind when it comes to their competition uniform for the Olympic Games. More than 1,000 athletes from 94 NOCs have benefitted from the programme to date – at the Rio 2016, PyeongChang 2018 and Tokyo 2020 Games.

I’ve been privileged – and moved – to see first-hand what being part of the NOC Competition Uniform Support programme means to those who benefit. Athletes come to the Olympic Games along many different paths. Some receive sponsorship and financial support from their national teams; others have a more challenging route. Not every National Olympic Committee (NOC) is able to provide state-of-the-art kit for their competitors.

Thanks to the programme, there’s now a level playing field for every athlete when it comes to their competition clothing. At each Games since Rio 2016, the WFSGI’s sports brand members have provided personalised uniforms designed using the latest technology that comply with the IOC’s guidelines to Olympians whose NOCs do not have the financial means to provide it.

One of my highlights of the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games was meeting Bobsleigh and Skeleton competitors from Nigeria when they were given their uniform. It was a magical moment – they had the biggest smiles on their faces. Coming from a country where there is generally no winter sport, for them having the right uniform and the right sports equipment provided a sense of belonging. I think that, for them, made all the difference.
Why does it matter so much? Firstly, competition clothing has evolved over time. What athletes wear now is part of their performance, with the design, fabric and materials varying between and tailored specifically for each sport. Secondly, the programme goes sport by sport, athlete by athlete and provides them with the most appropriate uniforms and competition wear. It takes away anxieties about what they’ll wear or how they’ll afford it. It enables them to feel comfortable, proud and equal, allowing them to focus on their performance.

Robyn Young, a swimmer from Eswatini, described how she felt collecting her uniform for Tokyo 2020: “I almost cried. I had the newest edition googles, swimsuit, tracksuit. I couldn’t have been happier – it was incredible. It’s a major confidence boost. With this uniform it doesn’t matter where you come from, what your background is: you’re on the same level as everyone else. When you walk out to compete you stand tall. You can concentrate on showing your ability to the world.”

With their NOC name and emblem displayed, the athletes also feel they’re a representation of their NOC at Games time. It gives them pride and the NOC community have been incredibly grateful for the support.

Making it happen
Piloted first at the Rio 2016 Games, the programme arose from an observation that not all NOCs were able to provide their athletes with competition compliant uniforms and here was an opportunity to ensure every single Olympian was supported. The WFSGI and the IOC then worked with the WFSGI sport brand members to bring the initiative to life.

Every effort is made to ensure athletes get the complete kit they need. The programme is logistically complicated but the IOC, WFSGI and its sport brand members all work together to ensure the smoothest process possible for the athletes. We identify the NOCs who need support and then WFSGI works with its members to ensure each athlete is supported by a brand. The brands and the IOC then begin working out exact requirements for each athlete, including individual items and sizing, a process that runs from 12-18 months out from the Games up until only a few weeks before the opening ceremony. If time allows between qualification and the Games, the design will reflect their NOC’s colours.
Then there’s the operational task of getting each uniform from manufacturers around the world to a distribution centre at the Olympic Village in time for the Games. Finally, the athletes arrive and are given their uniform. They meet the brands, try on each item, and have time to train in them. Where possible, alterations are also made as necessary to ensure optimum comfort and fit and that important, final touch, the NOC emblems are applied to their competition uniforms.

**Looking to the future**

We’re delighted to see the programme go from strength to strength. For the upcoming Beijing 2022 Winter Games, around 35 athletes from 14 NOCs will be benefitting. And, as at previous Games, the brands will be bringing specialist uniform tailors to the Olympic Villages to tailor the uniforms to the exact specifications of the athletes.

Looking further forward, the site for the Paris 2024 uniform distribution centre in the Olympic Village has already been identified.

This initiative is an example of true solidarity, enabling every athlete to step out onto the field of play feeling confident and proud. It wouldn’t happen without the sports brands and the WFSGI. A huge thank you on behalf of all the NOCs and athletes involved.

**FACTS AND STATS**

Since its launch, the programme has impacted:

- 1,000+ athletes
- 93 NOCs

The WFSGI brands who have supported this initiative to date are: adidas, arena, ASICS, Descente, Mizuno, New Balance, NIKE Inc., Odlo, Orbea, Pentland (Speedo), PUMA and Under Armour

**WATCH WHAT IT MEANT TO ATHLETES AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES TOKYO 2020**