As head of research and development for one of the biggest brands in sport, Tom Waller will influence everything from Olympic finals to family beach holidays.

The former EPSRC-supported student and researcher is now head of Aqualab, Speedo’s global research and development facility based in Nottingham.

Swimming is a multi-billion pound industry, ranging from elite performance products to a lifestyle market that includes “anything you would wear in or around water”.

“Technology is at the heart of our brand,” says Waller. “Everything we do is about differentiating ourselves from the competition and we believe the future lies in research and development.”

He moved to Aqualab from the world-leading Sports Technology Institute at Loughborough University, funded by EPSRC.

“I always wanted to work in the commercial sector but could see that gaining in-depth academic knowledge would make me very useful in industry,” he says. “I don’t hide the fact that I owe everything to Loughborough, I also studied for my PhD there and that was EPSRC-funded.”

“But now on the other side, I can still see that EPSRC-funded research is critical. It is sometimes difficult for companies to invest in fundamental research. It is vital we get that support from EPSRC to create the knowledge that can be taken up by brands like Speedo.”

So with that in mind, what will be swimming’s next big thing? “Everything is under wraps,” laughs Waller, “but clearly the Olympics remain one of the key areas for how the Aqualab research is applied.”

So watch this space come London 2012.

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