

Q&A with Prof Ian Deary



Ian Deary is Professor of Differential Psychology at the University of Edinburgh and Director of The University of Edinburgh Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology. Ian's research interests include the origins of cognitive differences and the effect that ageing and illness can have on mental skills.

How has your research focus changed over the years?

Cognition is at the centre of what I do. I've always been interested in researching why people differ in cognitive function and why they age differently. But I would say the big change in my career came in 1997 when my colleagues and I discovered the Scottish Mental Surveys of 1932 and 1947. We saw that they were a unique way of studying ageing. Two years later we received a BBSRC grant to form the Lothian Birth Cohort of 1921, which is a follow-up study of the Scottish Mental Survey of 1932. This has led to a number of further grants over the last fifteen years to study cognition and ageing.

What influence has cross-Council funding had on your career?

LLHW funding allowed me to establish the University of Edinburgh Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology (CCACE) in 2008. I'm the Director of CCACE, which is a position I had never intended to take on before and which has enabled me to dedicate the majority of my time to my research. Among other projects, I'm now the principal investigator for the 6-Day Sample study. This has followed up a sub-set of the children involved in the Scottish Mental Survey of 1947 to look at the link between cognition and healthy ageing.

Would you say that CCACE has made your work more interdisciplinary?

Definitely – setting up CCACE has drawn together scientists from different disciplines who are all focused on cognitive ageing and cognitive epidemiology. These are scientists who, without the CCACE, might have taken their skills and talent elsewhere. They include epidemiologists, psychologists, neuroscientists, brain imaging specialists and geneticists. The ability to link across these disciplines has really added capacity to the Centre and made a huge difference to our work.

How does CCACE communicate the impact of its research?

We have had a dedicated knowledge exchange programme at CCACE from the very beginning and have worked with professional writers, artists and playwrights to share and communicate our work. The play, *Still Life Dreaming*, which was performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2011, was a re-enactment of our discovery of the Scottish Mental Surveys. We also have a shared impact plan with Age UK, which includes providing accessible information on the brain and ageing in the form of online and print booklets.