Lifetime Achievement Award
2015

Professor Trevor Robbins

Trevor Robbins is Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience and Experimental Psychology, and Head of the Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge. Internationally recognised for his outstanding research and original thinking in the areas of cognition and behaviour, his work on the neurobehavioural mechanisms of reward and motivation has proven groundbreaking. Similarly, he has made a highly influential contribution to our understanding of the neurobiology of attention and decision-making. From a technological perspective, his co-invention of CANTAB, a computerised neuropsychological battery, currently used in over 700 institutes and clinical centres worldwide has had a major role in, and impact on, clinical neuroscience research.

Trevor completed a Natural Sciences BA in Psychology, First Class Honours (1971) at Jesus College, University of Cambridge. Continuing at Cambridge, he obtained his PhD in 1975. His thesis ‘An analysis of the behavioural effects of d-amphetamine’ led to numerous high quality publications including one in Nature with Sue Iversen. Following his PhD he transferred to the Faculty staff of the Experimental Psychology Department, initially as a Demonstrator, eventually firmly establishing his base in Cambridge, where he has stayed ever since, apart from three highly productive spells as a visiting researcher at Harvard with Peter Dews, the Salk Research Institute with Floyd Bloom and George Koob and lastly the Institute of Neurology with the late David Marsden and Elizabeth Warrington. In 1997 he was appointed Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge and became Head of the Experimental Psychology Department in 2002 upon his election to the Chair in Experimental Psychology (1931). In 2005 he both became a Fellow of the Royal Society and, with Professor Ed Bullmore, established the MRC-Wellcome Trust Behavioural and Clinical Neuroscience Institute. He was made CBE in the New Year's Honour List in 2012 “for services to medical research”.
He has received many academic awards. In 1982 he received the British Psychological Society’s Spearman Medal for outstanding research and in 1996 the D M Marquis Award for the best paper in Behavioural Neuroscience from the American Psychological Association. In 2001 he received the inaugural Distinguished Achievement Award from the European Behavioural Pharmacology Society and in 2005 he shared the IPSEN Fondation ‘Neuronal Plasticity’ Prize. In 2006 he gave the Fred Kavli Distinguished International Lecture for the Society of Neuroscience. More recently in 2011 the American Psychological Society recognised his Distinguished Scientific Contribution (together with Barry Everitt for their work in collaboration). In 2012 he received the Behavioural Brain Research Award by the European Brain and Behaviour Society and in 2014 he shared the prestigious and valuable ‘Brain Prize’ of the Grete Lundbeck European Brain Research Foundation with S Dehaene and G Rizzolatti for “research on human cognitive disorders”.

Trevor’s research has spanned the whole range of cognitive and behavioural neuroscience and he has done high quality work in neuropsychology and psychopharmacology. He has been particularly concerned with the functions of the fronto-striatal-limbic systems in cognitive and executive functions and their modulation by monoaminergic systems. He has conducted his research to test key hypotheses but he has also been interested in how his findings apply to the clinical situation, particularly in relation to addiction and cognitive enhancement. A key theme to all of his work has been the practical and translational application of research findings from rodents to humans and back. This started with the early use of online control of experiments via computing in collaboration with Paul Fray. This, in turn lead to the development of the ‘nine-hole box’ and associated protocols with John Evenden and Mirijana Carli, the primate CANTAB with Angela Roberts and, with Barbara Sahakian and others, human CANTAB, which is now accepted internationally as one of the standard platforms for assessing cognition both in academic and industry settings.

Trevor’s research output has been outstanding, with more than 700 peer reviewed original papers, 70 book chapters or reviews, 70 commentaries and 7 co-edited books. His current H index is an impressive 159 (Web of Science) which puts him in the current top 10 cited neuroscientists worldwide. In addition to his own publications he has guided, as managing editor since 1980, Psychopharmacology, a key journal in the area. A characteristic of his papers is the way they vigorously examine concepts and hypotheses and describe important models to be tested in future research. His more recent papers have similar qualities, but are more translational, involving research on development and in patients with Parkinson’s disease and OCD. Trevor has stimulated and developed major productive collaborations in Cambridge over the years; with Barbara Sahakian (a particularly close collaboration!), Barry Everitt, Angela Roberts, Jeff Dalley and Ed Bullmore, to name but a few.

Trevor has always recognised the importance of developing productive teams of senior and junior researchers and he has been a supervisor and mentor to many successful scientists. He has supervised over 40 successful PhD students of whom about 20 have obtained University
Lectureships or higher posts in Research Institutes and industry. He has also supervised about 40 postdoctoral fellows and 8 successful Master’s students.

Over the years Trevor has been in receipt of spectacular grant income which is a testament to his quality. He has received funding particularly from the Wellcome Trust and Medical Research Council, often as long-term programme grants. And he is still going ... he has recently received a Wellcome Trust Senior Investigator Award to investigate fronto-striatal systems and impulsive-compulsive disorders until 2020!

Trevor has made a major contribution to the development of psychopharmacology as a discipline. He was President of the European Behavioural Pharmacology Society from 1992 to 1994, Council Member of the European Neuroscience Association from 1996 to 1999 and President of the British Neuroscience Association from 2009 to 2011. He has made a major contribution to the development of the BAP and its ethos. He was a BAP Council member from 1985 to 1996 and amongst major achievements he was pivotal in putting the administration of the Association on a professional footing. He was President of the BAP from 1996 to 1998 and continues to be a regular attendee at the Summer Meeting, stimulating discussion both at symposia and at poster sessions. He is much in demand as a speaker and as a member of research grant committees, but has always found time for the BAP.

In summary, Trevor has been one of the leading British psychopharmacologists and behavioural scientists of his generation and he is a wonderful example of a researcher who develops and fosters the field. Although he remains as active as ever, his achievements to date mean he is fully deserving of the 2015 BAP Lifetime Achievement Award.

Trevor received his Award at the 2015 Summer Meeting Conference Dinner at Bristol Grammar School on Tuesday, 28 July.

Nicol Ferrier

Hugh Marston

Brian Leonard