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News Release

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Secrets of successful ageing shared in anniversary reunion

A remarkable group of people who have contributed to years of research to uncover the keys to healthy ageing will be re-united in Edinburgh this weekend (Sunday, 4 June).

More than 400 people in their 80s and 90s who have been working with researchers to chart how a person's thinking power changes over their lifetime, will join in the event.

The reunion takes place 70 years to the day since many of the participants sat an intelligence test in the Scottish Mental Survey 1947, when they were 11 years old.

Researchers have been using results from school mental tests taken by participants, combined with studies of individual's thinking skills and health over the past decade for a major study into why some people's thinking skills, brains and bodies age better than others.

The study has involved two groups of people – the Lothian Birth Cohort 1936, now aged 81 and the Lothian Birth Cohort 1921, now aged 96. Some of the 1921 group will attend the reunion.

The group will meet University of Edinburgh researchers behind the project at the General Assembly Hall to mark their achievements on the understanding of the ageing brain.

As well as regularly resitting the school mental test both groups have taken medical three-yearly examinations, including blood and ultrasound tests, brain scans and retina examinations in older age.

They have also reported on their diet, social background, activity and feelings of wellbeing.

Researchers have looked at a number of mental and physical functions of the group as they grow older including memory, speed of thinking, and many aspects of fitness and health.

During the reunion of the Lothian Birth Cohort, scholars will review some key findings.

The event coincides with a review of the research published in the journal *Psychological Medicine*.

The review shows the research has identified key contributors to brain and cognitive health in older age.

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These include having particular genetic characteristics, being in good physical condition, being active, being more intelligent in childhood, speaking more than one language, not smoking, and having more education.

Researchers found the drivers of cognitive and brain health are many and their individual influences are small.

They say the key to successfully tackling cognitive ageing is not by addressing any one of these influences in isolation, but by an inclusive approach which includes many positive factors, all of which have small influences.

Researchers say the contribution of the group is invaluable in advancing their understanding of the ageing brain.

Professor Ian Deary, of the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Cognitive Ageing and Cognitive Epidemiology, who originated and leads the study said: "These anniversaries of Scotland's national intelligence testing in June 1932 and 1947 are a lovely way to bring these special individuals together to celebrate what they have contributed to ageing science. From the start of the Lothian studies, almost 20 years ago, I've made sure that the participants see their basic results before we report them. Of course, it's also a happy occasion in which to have a good blether and to swap the pleasures and pains of growing older."

Tom Wright, Group Chief Executive of Age UK, said: "We are very proud to be funding this unique project which is proving to be an invaluable source of information to help us understand how and why our thinking skills change with age."

"As we live for longer, we all want to age as well as we can and keep our mental sharpness for as long as possible."

"The findings from the hundreds of older people involved in these ground-breaking studies will not only help us learn what we can do ourselves to protect our thinking skills as we age, but also what education and health care professionals need to do to provide the best support for healthy cognitive ageing."

The charity Age UK has funded the Lothian Birth Cohort 1936 study.

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