

I did my best work 50 years ago, says Nobel winner Gurdon (Update)

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British scientist John Gurdon, [awarded the Nobel Medicine Prize on Monday](#) with Japan's Shinya Yamanaka for work in cell programming, said he was "immensely grateful and astonished."

British scientist John Gurdon, awarded the Nobel Medicine Prize on Monday, admitted on Monday that he had done the bulk of the cell programming work for which he was honoured half a century ago.

The 79-year-old, with a shock of swept-back greying blond hair, held a hastily-arranged press conference in London, just hours after being telephoned by the Nobel academy with the news of his award.

He told reporters his ground-breaking work "was essentially to show that all the different cells of the body have the same genes.

"The work that I did was to test that proposition. In the 1950s we really didn't know.

"The outcome was that they do. That means that, in principle, you should be able to derive any one kind of cell from another because they've all got the same genes.

"That was the contribution I made at that time. Some people say, 'that was done 50 years ago, have you been sitting round gardening ever since?'"

Gurdon, who shared the Nobel with Japan's Shinya Yamanaka for work in cell programming, said he was "immensely honoured" by the award.

Walking in carrying a black leather briefcase and wearing a blue jumper over a blue-and-white check shirt, Gurdon, who uses hearing aids, had a glint in his eye as he surveyed the bank of microphones before him.

"I am immensely honoured to be awarded this spectacular recognition, and delighted to be due to receive it with Shinya Yamanaka, whose work has brought the whole field within the realistic expectation of therapeutic benefits," he said.

"It is particularly pleasing to see how purely basic research, originally aimed at testing the genetic identity of different cell types in the body, has turned out to have clear human health prospects."

An early riser who still works full time, Gurdon said he was in his lab at 8:30am when "a very nice man from the Swedish academy called up and said 'we've decided to award you this prize'.

"He said enough things to make me believe he was in fact the right person—because you can always have people pulling your leg.

"If you stop the random person in the street, they might just have heard of the Nobel Prize. It has to be ranked as perhaps the most important scientific award."

He said the bulk of the work he has been recognised for was done in 1958 but was not published until 1962.

Gurdon, an emeritus professor of developmental biology at the University of Cambridge, might never have made it had his school tutors and the army had their way.

His schoolmaster said it would be a "total waste of time" for all concerned if he studied science, while his mother and doctor got him out of two years' national service by playing up a cold as a touch of bronchitis.

Gurdon said he would likely put his prize money towards helping doctorate students to stay on for a fourth year.

He said the institute named after him at Cambridge was planning to hold a drinks party for him at 6:00 pm, but he was nonetheless planning to be back in the lab early on Tuesday.

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