



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

news letter

School of Psychology

May 2026

Professor Sven Vanneste, Head of School, School of Psychology

Dear friends,

Over the past ten years, our School has grown in ways that are visible across our teaching, our research, and our public contribution. We have expanded the breadth of our scientific work, strengthened the quality and ambition of our training, and deepened the culture of collegiality and inclusion that underpins everything we do. Above all, we've strengthened our connections across disciplines, across sectors, and with the communities our work is meant to serve.

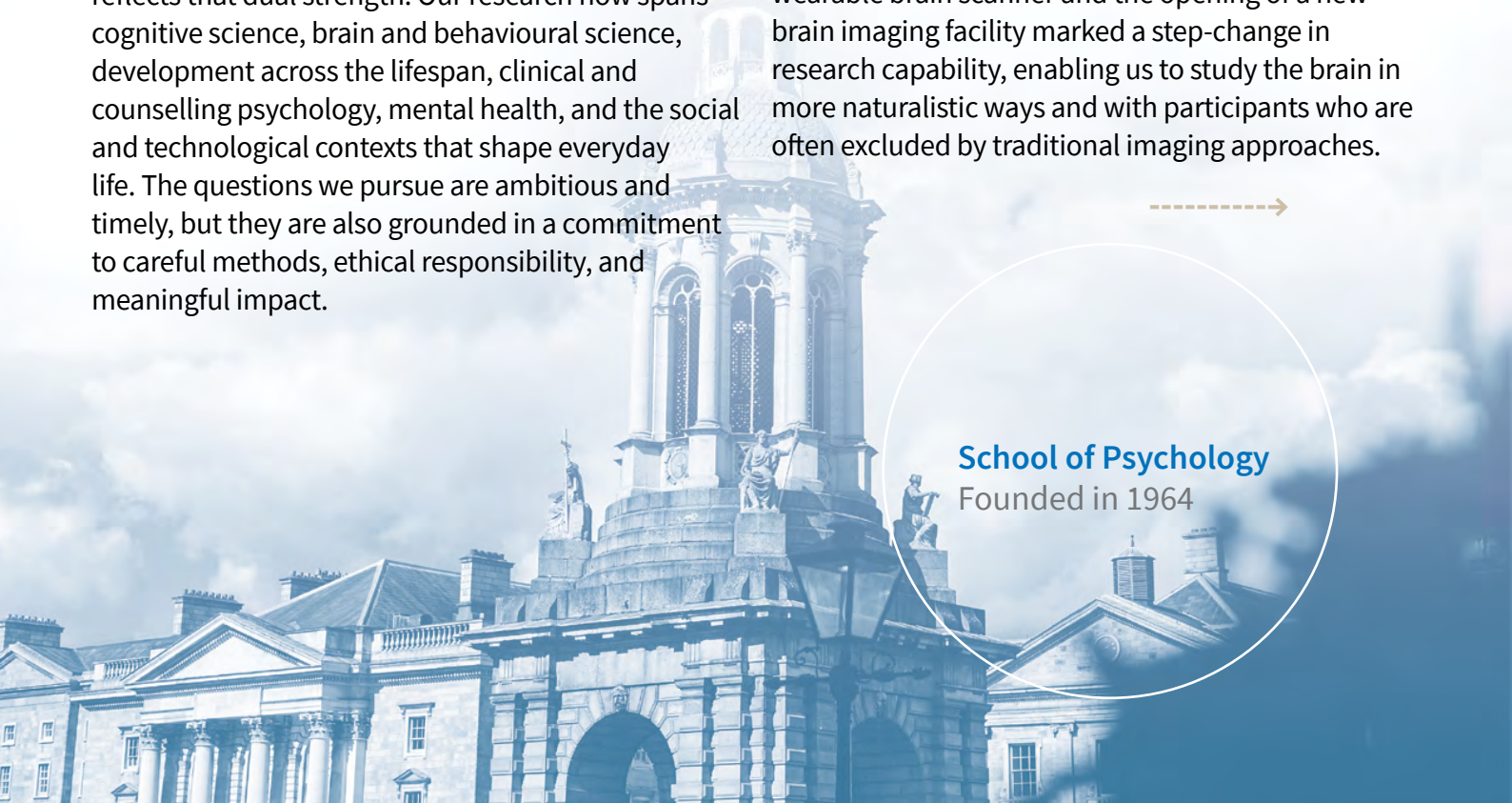
Psychology is both a rigorous science and a profoundly human one, and our School increasingly reflects that dual strength. Our research now spans cognitive science, brain and behavioural science, development across the lifespan, clinical and counselling psychology, mental health, and the social and technological contexts that shape everyday life. The questions we pursue are ambitious and timely, but they are also grounded in a commitment to careful methods, ethical responsibility, and meaningful impact.

In the past decade we have also strengthened the research ecosystem that makes this work possible, with active links to centres and institutes across the University that support interdisciplinary collaboration, doctoral training, and engagement beyond academia. Milestones such as the establishment of the Global Brain Health Institute and the continued growth of our research reflect our determination to tackle complex challenges through partnership, imagination, and global perspective.

Recent achievements illustrate the momentum of this decade. Trinity's acquisition of an OPM-MEG wearable brain scanner and the opening of a new brain imaging facility marked a step-change in research capability, enabling us to study the brain in more naturalistic ways and with participants who are often excluded by traditional imaging approaches.



School of Psychology
Founded in 1964





Our interdisciplinary reach has also been recognised through major European funding, including an ERC Synergy award for the JUSTICE project, which brings together law, psychology, neuroscience and data science to understand coercive interrogation practices and develop more humane and effective alternatives. Closer to home, our work continues to influence national priorities in mental health, with recent Health Research Board investment supporting projects focused on underserved groups and improved outcomes for children in care, delivered in partnership with key agencies.

This growth has been matched by sustained excellence in scholarship and recognition for our staff, alongside a continued commitment to research-led education and high-quality professional training. Just as importantly, we have worked to ensure that progress is reflected in our culture. The School's advancement to a Silver Athena Swan award is one indicator of ongoing work to build an equitable, supportive environment where people can thrive. As Head of School, I am proud of what we have achieved together and excited about what comes next. The next decade will demand creativity, courage, and care—and I am confident that our community is ready.

Warm regards,
Professor Sven Vanneste

Head of School,
School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin



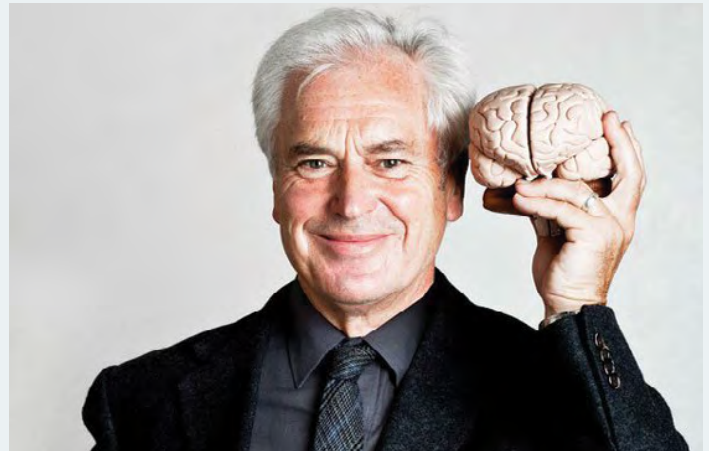


Staff News

Professor Ian Robertson retires and receives Trinity honorary degree

World-leading neuroscientist and psychologist, Professor Ian H. Robertson, whose work has had extraordinary social impact and whose pre-eminence in the field of neuroscience is a testament to his relentless pursuit of knowledge and innovation, has retired and received an honorary degree. The stellar nature of his academic career is evidenced by the fact that he was the first psychologist in Ireland to be elected as a member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Professor Robertson was formerly Professor of Psychology in Trinity College Dublin and a Visiting Professor at University College London, Bangor University, University of Wales and Visiting Scientist at the Rotman Research Institute, University of Toronto. Previously, he was a senior scientist at the MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit at the University of Cambridge, where he was also a fellow at Hughes Hall College. His publication of over 600 books and articles in esteemed scientific journals such as *Nature*, *Brain*, *Journal of Neuroscience*, and *Psychological Bulletin* underscores the profound impact of his contributions to neuroscience and psychology.



Professor Robertson's pioneering research and development of innovative rehabilitation strategies, including limb activation training, sustained attention training, and self-alert training, have revolutionised cognitive rehabilitation. His ground-breaking work in Goal Management Training has played a pivotal role in managing frontal lobe impairment. His theoretical approach to cognitive rehabilitation and widely used tests of attention are cornerstones of the field. His research offers invaluable insights into enhancing cognitive function, improving quality of life, and granting autonomy to individuals grappling with neurological and cognitive impairments.

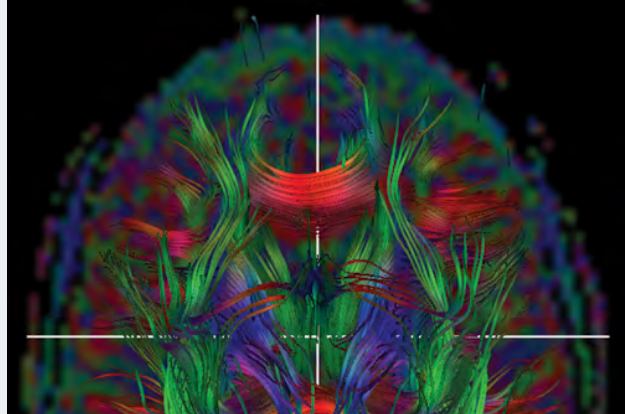
He has written notable books which are scientifically rigorous and accessible to non-scientists, including *The Winner Effect* (2012), *The Stress Test* (2016) and *How Confidence Works* (2021).



As well as serving as Dean of Research, Professor Robertson was the founding director of Trinity's Institute of Neuroscience, and the founding director of the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI).

GBHI represents the largest philanthropic donation ever received by Trinity. This accomplishment alone underscores Professor Robertson's extraordinary ability to leverage his expertise and vision to establish institutions that significantly impact society, culture, and civil society. Since 2016, Professor Robertson has been the T Boone Pickens Distinguished Scientist at the Centre for Brain health at University of Texas, Dallas. His dedication to advancing knowledge and improving the lives of individuals facing cognitive challenges perfectly aligns with Trinity's mission and values.

Professor Robertson has been simultaneously awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Science – to mark the scale of his achievements – and an Honorary M.D. The latter degree, while not as eminent as a Higher Doctorate, is one of Trinity's oldest degrees, being first mentioned in the Statutes in 1614, thus there is symbolic significance in connecting Professor Robertson to this degree.



Research Focus

**“I SEE A
RUBBER
DUCK”**



Neuroscience Updates

Babies as young as two months old can categorise distinct objects in their brains, much earlier than previously thought, according to new research. “It highlights the potential for neuroimaging and computational models to be used as a

Psychology Updates

New research from Professor Kristin Hadfield and colleagues from the UK have shown that people with highly sensitive personalities are more likely to experience mental health problems. Sensitivity was defined as a personality trait that reflects people’s capacity to perceive and process environmental stimuli such as bright lights, subtle changes in the environment and other people’s moods. Around one-third of the population are considered highly sensitive.

In their meta-analysis of 33 studies, the authors found that sensitive people are more affected by both negative and positive experiences

diagnostic tool in very young infants”, explains team lead Rhodri Cusack, the Thomas Mitchell Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the School of Psychology and Director of the Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN).

Further advancements in the field of neuroimaging are happening as Ireland’s first OPM-MEG system, a revolutionary new wearable brain scanner has just arrived in Trinity College Dublin. It is a gamechanger for researchers in Ireland studying the brain and seeking to identify the earliest signs of life-changing conditions such as epilepsy, dementia and Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The new scanner is hailed as “the most important breakthrough in human brain imaging in the last two decades” says Professor Redmond O’Connell, director of the new MEG facility.

and that the quality of their environment is particularly important for their well-being. This also means that highly sensitive people are also more responsive to positive experiences, such as psychological treatment, and the findings show that highly sensitive people are likely to respond better to some psychological interventions than less sensitive individuals. The authors conclude that sensitivity should be considered more in clinical practice with a view to improving diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions.

Highlights

Faculty Spotlight: Psychology



Professor Olive Healy with colleagues from Trinity’s ADAPT centre and Inclusion Ireland have been commissioned by Meath and Fingal County Councils to lead an innovative community outreach initiative to produce bespoke Communication Boards for playgrounds. These boards which include picture representations of day-to-day words relevant to the setting, are of particular benefit to children and adults who are either pre-verbal or non-verbal and/or have communication difficulties. They also act as a symbol of inclusion for children and their families and benefit everyone involved in the communication transaction. Over 20 playgrounds have had these boards installed and an evaluation of their effectiveness is ongoing.

Faculty Spotlight: Neuroscience



A €10 million ERC grant to investigate coercive interrogation practices has been awarded to Professor Shane O’Mara and colleagues. Watch the interview [here](#).

Highlight on our Students

A group of third year undergraduate students, David Curran, Katherine Farrington, Michael Fanning, Aaron Murphy, Leo Schwartz and Irewonuola Sanyaolu, have explored how emergency service workers in Ireland use leisure and recreational activities to protect against poor mental health and PTSD following distressing work experiences.



Department Updates

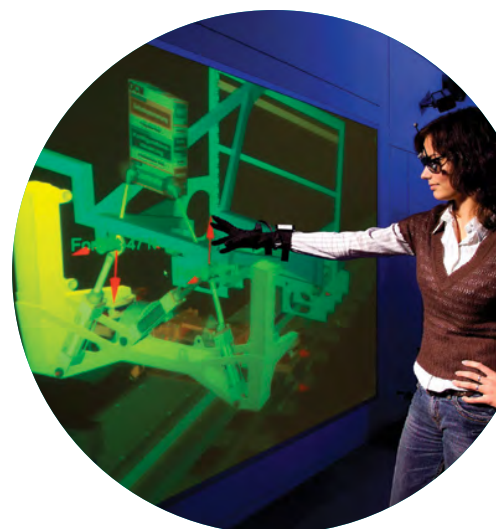
New Centre Launched: The Trinity Centre for the Developing Person

The core mission of this innovative interdisciplinary research centre is to bring together complementary perspectives that help advance understanding of the developing person across their lifespan. We focus on questions and topics that range from early influences on child development, family relationship dynamics, adverse life experiences and health related outcomes, risk and resilience processes across development, enhancing learning

strengths and supporting developmental transitions among individuals and groups with complex needs, promoting effective psychological interventions across the lifespan, engaging new technologies to enhance healthy development, and promoting effective communication of research to enhance policy and practice innovations to support positive health over the course of development.

TCIN celebrates 25th Anniversary

Trinity College Dublin Institute of Neuroscience (TCIN) celebrated their 25th Anniversary with a Symposium and Research Day, hosting a variety of speakers and events. Watch our video of the highlights [here](#).



Trinity-led mental health research project receives HRB investment

The project “Improving Outcomes for Children in Care”, led by Prof. David Hevey and Prof. Ben Butlin (School of Psychology, TCD) and Robert O’Connor (Tusla Child and Family Agency), receives funding as part of 10 projects focused on mental health research.

Professor in Clinical Health Psychology David Hevey said of his project: “Children placed in the care of the state are at

risk of experiencing a range of negative outcomes; key questions for Tusla include what therapeutic help to offer, to whom and when? Unfortunately, the evidence base to inform such decision-making remains unclear. One explanation for this evidence gap is that the screening tools widely used in traditional mental health settings are unable to detect the core difficulties of children in care.”



Professor Ruth Byrne receives 2025 Broadbent Award

Ruth Byrne, professor of cognitive science, has been awarded the 2025 Broadbent prize by the European Society for Cognitive Psychology. The Society's highest honour, it is presented every two years to an outstanding senior scientist in cognitive psychology. She was invited to present the keynote Broadbent lecture at the opening ceremony of the Society's biennial conference, on the topic 'Imaginative Thought'.

Professor Nick Mc Donald awarded the HEP conference

Congratulations to Professor Nick Mc Donald, Fellow Emeritus, TCD & former Director of the Centre for Innovative Human Systems (CIHS), for receiving an Award for his 'Outstanding contribution to Human Factors Research & Education' at the Healthcare Systems Ergonomics and Patient Safety 2025 Conference. Watch our interview with Professor Mc Donald [here](#).



The school launches a Podcast!

Dr Clare Kelly receives the Inspiring Educator Award

Congratulations to Dr Clare Kelly on receiving the Inspiring Educator Award. This honours those who have made a significant contribution to teaching excellence. It celebrates those who inspire, motivate, encourage and support their students and colleagues while enhancing their own teaching practice.

These prestigious awards recognise those who have made an exceptional contribution to teaching and learning at Trinity, often with a lasting impact on students, colleagues, and the institution.

Psychology in Film Podcast

This September the School of Psychology will launch the "Psychology in Film Podcast: a study of behaviour & mind", where psychologists and neuroscientists explore their research through the lens of popular cinema. Each episode features a different academic discussing a film connected to their area of expertise. The aim is to make cutting-edge psychological research accessible, engaging, and enjoyable for a broad public audience – through the familiar and entertaining medium of film.

Events



OPM-MEG System in action with Ciaran Conneely, Operations Manager TCIN; Daria Monakhovych, PhD candidate School of Psychology and TCIN and Professor Redmond O'Connell, School of Psychology and TCIN.

Psychology Evening Course (The Science of Behaviour and Mind) doubled attendance this year. Places for the next course open in September.





Prof Ruth Byrne, Prof Sven Vanneste (Head of School) & Prof Redmond O'Donnell accepting the prestigious Athena Swan Silver Award for equality, diversity & inclusion.



Academic and Professional staff and students at our away day this year.



Belgian Ambassador Karen Van Vlierberge, Provost Linda Doyle, Prof Sven Vanneste & the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Prof Carmel O'Sullivan.



Students Martha Cox and Colin Harper achieved scholarships & Professor Frédérique Vallieres was awarded Fellowship.

Stay Connected with Trinity Alumni

Meet fellow graduates, grow personally or professionally, and tap into exclusive alumni resources through Trinity Development & Alumni. Follow us on social media [@TCDAlumni](#) and [please make sure your details are up to date](#) so you never miss out on upcoming events, learning opportunities, campus updates and more. Your Trinity journey didn't end at graduation — it just entered a new chapter!



Student Lily O'Connell Byrne achieved scholarship; Professor Olive Healy & Professor Ladislav Timulak were awarded Fellowships.



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