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# Remarkable year keeps getting better for QBI neuroscientist

Queensland Brain Institute neuroscientist Dr Michael Piper has topped off a remarkable year by receiving a 2010 UQ Foundation Research Excellence Award and \$90,000 of funding for his project.

Dr Piper received his \$90,000 award at a special ceremony at Customs House on Wednesday, September 22, as part of UQ's annual Research Week.

The UQ Foundation Research Excellence Awards have been running for 12 years and recognise outstanding performance and leadership potential in early career researchers. This year's awards total \$910,000.

Dr Piper is currently studying the genes that regulate stem-cell differentiation in the embryonic brain, as this is crucial for development. If the brain fails to form correctly it can lead to a number of different developmental disorders.

The brain is very complex, being made up of over one hundred billion nerve cells, and we don't have a great understanding of how these cells develop during embryogenesis," Dr Piper said.

Basic research is important for understanding how the brain forms correctly. It is really at the beginning of the process, trying to understand at the molecular and genetic level the genes that regulate stem cell differentiation.

Also, we now know that the adult brain contains stem cells, and much research is now focused on harnessing these adult brain stem cells to help combat devastating disorders as such as motor neuron disease, Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease.

Therapeutics based on stem cell replacement for such disorders are a long way from fruition, but basic research directed towards understanding of how stem cell function is controlled is absolutely vital for this to occur."

Dr Piper's research efforts have already been widely acknowledged.

In the past 12 months, he has received the Australian Neuroscience Society's AW Campbell Award for outstanding early to mid-career research, the American Association of Anatomists 2010 CJ Herrick Award for comparative anatomy and was a finalist in the Queensland Government's Tall Poppy Scientist of the Year Awards.

It's very humbling to get awards like these, as they represent acknowledgement from your peers in the scientific community," he said. "I'm also very flattered to receive this award from UQ, as it will give me the opportunity to pursue my research into brain development and function."

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However, the accolades are unlikely to stop for Dr Piper ?he has his sights set on the next challenge.

Establishing an independent laboratory is my next goal, trying to conduct research under my own auspices. For me, the challenge is getting up and running and doing my own research as my own boss,"he said.

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Notes to the editor:

DR MICHAEL PIPER completed his PhD at the Institute for Molecular Biosciences, UQ, before moving to the Department of Anatomy, Cambridge University, to research the visual system. He returned to UQ in 2006 to take up an NHMRC Fellowship at the QBI.

THE QUEENSLAND BRAIN INSTITUTE (QBI) was established as a research institute of The University of Queensland in 2003. The Institute operates from a new \$63 million state-of-the-art facility and houses 28 Principal Investigators with strong international reputations. QBI is one of the largest neuroscience institutes in the world dedicated to understanding the mechanisms underlying brain function.