

Born Smart?

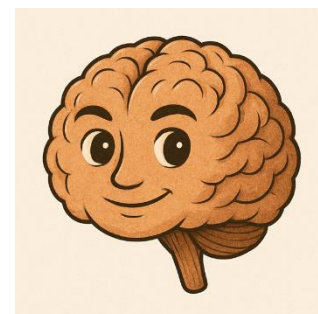
Overview

Are some people born smarter? Research suggests yes, with important caveats. Intelligence is heavily influenced by genetics, but also shaped by evolutionary history, culture, and environment. Understanding these roots can help individuals build on their strengths to create more resilient, fulfilling lives.

Key Findings & Insights

Genetic Foundations

Intelligence is highly polygenic: individual genes have tiny effects, but together now explain ~10% of variation in European-ancestry populations (Reis & Spinath, 2025). Heritability increases with age, from ~40% in childhood to ~70% in adulthood (Segal, 2025). Ancient DNA studies suggest positive selection for cognitive traits over the past 10,000 years, especially in West Eurasian and East Asian populations (Akbari et al., 2024; Piffer, 2025; Olalde et al., 2018; Lamnidis et al., 2018).

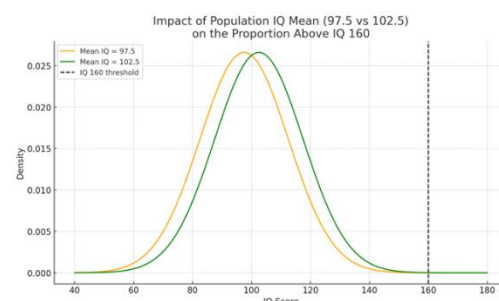


Evolutionary and Cultural Context

Cognitive-related genetic variants emerged 400,000–600,000 years ago, with notable shifts ~4,000 years ago (Libedinsky et al., 2024, Kaczanowska et al., 2022).

Traits linked to intelligence were favoured in societies developing agriculture, hierarchies, and dense cities (Piffer, 2025; Olalde et al., 2018).

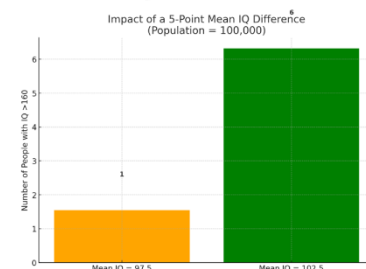
Cultural values matter: discipline, rationality, and achievement predict student success and economic growth across 86 countries (Becker et al., 2024). Small population IQ gains have overlapping distributions but also greatly boost the number of exceptionally high performers, fuelling innovation and progress.



The Genetics of Opportunity

Socio-economic status may also now have heritable components; traits supporting success partly pass genetically across generations (Abdel Abdellaoui et al., 2025).

Genes interact with environment: supportive settings amplify genetic potential; harsh environments diminish it (Reis & Spinath, 2025).



Conclusion

Genetics do influence intelligence, but outcomes depend on culture, education, and environment. Some individuals are 'born with more smarts', but life experience shapes how those talents unfold. Recognising your strengths, and nurturing them, maybe this will lead to a more satisfying, resilient, and meaningful life.

In short: Genes lay the groundwork. You build the house.

Note: Some findings (Libedinsky et al., 2024; Akbari et al., 2024) are preprints and await peer review.

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Libedinsky, et al. (2024). Mapping the genetic evolutionary timeline of human neural and cognitive traits. *bioRxiv*.

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Piffer. (2025). Directional Selection and Evolution of Polygenic Traits in Eastern Eurasia: Insights from Ancient DNA. *Twin Research and Human Genetics*.

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Lamnidis, T. C., Majander, K., Jeong, C., Salmela, E., Wessman, A., Moiseyev, V., ... & Schiffels, S. (2018). Ancient Fennoscandian genomes reveal origin and spread of Siberian ancestry in Europe. *Nature communications*, 9(1), 5018.

Kaczanowska, J., Ganglberger, F., Chernomor, O., Kargl, D., Galik, B., Hess, A., ... & Haubensak, W. (2022). Molecular archaeology of human cognitive traits. *Cell Reports*, 40(9).