

## Program gives scientists an insight into politics

### - Kim Carr and other politicians to host research scientists

By JOHN ROSS

An internship scheme pioneered in Victoria is giving scientists an insider's view of politics – and vice versa.

The Researcher in Residence program, the creation of peak group Biomedical Research Victoria, takes a broad view of industry engagement by planting established researchers in MPs' offices. After a stuttering start three years ago, the scheme has now succeeded in placing three early-career **researchers** with state and federal politicians.



Opposition higher education spokesman Kim Carr with CSIRO biomedical researcher Katherine Locock in his electoral office in Melbourne. Picture: Stuart McEvoy.

Opposition higher education spokesman Kim Carr, whose office will host CSIRO chemist Katherine Locock, said both sides would come out ahead.

“Scientists often develop an understanding of the world in a very structured manner,” Senator Carr said.

“The political system is not quite so formulaic. In the science world you can argue the case through the lenses of a microscope. The political world doesn't have that luxury — there are so many other factors that public policy has to take into account.”

BioMedVic chief executive Jan Tennent said the scheme had been piloted in 2013 with a placement in the office of Greens MP Adam Bandt. She said that while there was no shortage of willing researchers, federal and state elections since then had deterred MPs from putting up their hands.

That has now changed, with two state politicians joining Senator Carr in hosting early career researchers. Jessica Holien, a cancer researcher with St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research, joins the office of Frank McGuire, Victoria's parliamentary secretary for medical research. Monash human movement scientist Kelly-Ann Bowles has been placed with opposition health spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge.

The researchers, who are chosen through a competitive process, have PhDs and at least two years' postdoctoral experience. They spend at least two days a week in the MPs' offices for up to three months, with BioMedVic covering half of the pro rata salary costs plus — for those placed with federal MPs — travel costs to Canberra.

Dr Locock, a former pharmacology academic at the University of Sydney, has been a research scientist with CSIRO's manufacturing arm since 2012. Her key role during the placement will be to organise a roundtable on research and innovation policies.

“I saw this as an opportunity to see what policy process is actually like,” she said.

Dr Tennent said the program gave researchers an understanding of “how priorities within the parliamentary process ecosystem are placed, and how they're jockeyed around”.

“It's about both sides of the conversation being better informed and starting to speak the same language,” she said.

“That's only going to be possible if we educate more researchers to understand the political process and more parliamentarians become aware of the issues.”

Senator Carr said industry experience should be integrated into all education levels, from undergraduate to postdoctoral, with organisers applying a very broad definition.