



Research Institute of Molecular Pathology

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Dr. Bohr-Gasse 7, 1030 Vienna, Austria
Tel: ++43-1-797 30/ext.
Fax: ++43-1-798 71-56
www.imp.univie.ac.at

Barry Dickson: bright ideas for a bright future at the IMP

As of January 2006, Barry Dickson is Managing Director of the Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP) in Vienna. Among his first initiatives are new career models for young scientists and an interdisciplinary research unit.

Barry Dickson is following in the footsteps of Kim Nasmyth, who headed the IMP for the past eight years. After Nasmyth had accepted a call to the University of Oxford, an international search committee identified the Australian neurobiologist Barry Dickson as the ideal candidate to carry on the torch.

Dickson is not an outsider to the IMP. As Group Leader, he had already been part of the faculty for five years and earned wide recognition as an expert in *Drosophila* developmental biology. In 2003, he was appointed Senior Investigator at IMBA, the newly founded Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Around this time, the research focus of Barry Dickson shifted to a new and challenging topic: the genetic basis of complex innate behavior. In a groundbreaking paper in June 2005, he was able to describe a master gene for sexual behavior in fruit flies.

Wittgenstein Prize sparks interdisciplinary research unit

Shortly afterwards, Barry Dickson's achievements were honoured by the Wittgenstein Prize - Austria's most prestigious scientific award - worth 1.3 Million Euro. With the money, he decided to set up a new interdisciplinary research unit that combines advanced light microscopy, image analysis, modelling, and bioengineering. 'The goal is to encourage and help other researchers at the IMP to conduct technically challenging experiments involving the acquisition and analysis of complex biological data sets, and building quantitative models from these data', Dickson explains.

IMP fellowships: independent research positions for young scientists

One of the biggest concerns of the IMP's new director is to encourage and support young scientists at an early age: 'Today, few scientists obtain an independent position before their mid-30s. Increasingly, the postdoc is becoming a period of scientific employment, not of creative and independent research. At the IMP, we are concerned by this trend, and strongly believe that talented young scientists should be encouraged to follow their own scientific ideas as early as possible in their careers.'

In order to counteract this trend, Barry Dickson has launched the "IMP fellowship" program. 'This program is a real novelty, at least in continental Europe', he explains his vision. 'It will give ambitious young scientists with little or no previous post-doctoral experience the opportunity to conduct innovative and original research in a world-class scientific environment. Mentoring by more experienced faculty members provides IMP Fellows with guidance, yet they are expected and encouraged to conduct and publish their research independently.' The first fellows are expected to join the IMP in mid-2006.

Contact:
Dr. Barry Dickson
+43 1 79730-880
dickson@imp.univie.ac.at

Dr. Heidemarie Hurlt (IMP Pressereferat)
+43 1 79730-358
mobil: +43 664 8247910
hurlt@imp.univie.ac.at

Links:
<http://www.imp.univie.ac.at>
<http://www.boehringer-ingenheim.com>



Photo: point of view, © IMP

IMP Press Release

On Barry Dickson

Barry Dickson was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1962. After taking a degree in mathematics, he turned to biology, receiving his doctorate in 1992 under Ernst Hafen at the University of Zurich. He then performed postdoctoral research at the University of California, Berkeley, before establishing his own research group in Zurich. In 1998, Dickson moved to Vienna where he was group leader at the IMP for five years. From there, Josef Penninger recruited him to IMBA, where he held the position of senior scientist since 2003.

On the IMP

The IMP is a basic research institute in Vienna, Austria. Its main sponsor is Boehringer Ingelheim International, headquartered in Germany. With over 200 employees from 31 different nations, the IMP is a Center of Excellence in the life sciences and the core unit of the Campus Vienna Biocenter. Research at the IMP aims at elucidating the molecular basis of normal development and disease.

IMP- IMBA Research Center

The Research Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP), established in 1988 by Boehringer Ingelheim, and the Institute of Molecular Biotechnology of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (IMBA), which went into operation in 2003, have agreed on a close research collaboration. Under the name "IMP-IMBA Research Center", the two institutes share most of the administrative and scientific infrastructure. Together, IMBA and IMP employ over 300 people from more than 30 different nations. Both institutes are members of the Campus Vienna Biocenter.

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