



2016 NEW ZEALAND FELLOW FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE

EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY 25TH OCTOBER, 2.00PM

THE WORLD NEEDS SCIENCE
AND SCIENCE NEEDS WOMEN

DR ERIN LEITAO

University of Auckland

Dr Erin Leitao has always been fascinated by chemistry and how the world works. Previously working at the University of Bristol, Erin has recently moved to New Zealand to continue her research career in synthetic chemistry at the University of Auckland.

The vast majority of synthetic chemistry is targeted at making molecules and materials containing predominantly carbon atoms. Erin wants to create new polymers by making use of other main-group (inorganic) elements such as silicon, phosphorus, nitrogen, and oxygen. These alternatives to carbon are not only in high abundance, they give the potential to produce materials with unexplored properties and reactivity.

Linking atoms together to form polymers is possible by the use of a catalyst, a substance that speeds up a reaction. Currently the chemistry of linking main-group atoms together is not well-developed. Erin plans on developing new, efficient synthetic routes, by focusing on promising catalytic reactions that will open doors to another generation of functional polymers and materials. "By replacing the carbon atoms in the polymer chain with other atoms, such as silicon, phosphorus or nitrogen we can develop polymers with new properties which will give rise to really interesting new materials." >





The L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Fellowship will assist Erin in starting up her own independent research laboratory at the University of Auckland. Her research will be critical to the internationally competitive field of main-group chemistry and will inspire further development of inorganic polymers, a currently under-explored topic.

As a scientist and a mother of two young children, Erin hopes to inspire other women, including her own daughter, to raise a family while pursuing their career so that one day we can live in a world where motherhood and academia are symbiotic.

"I feel very fortunate to be starting my independent academic career with a family by my side. I have had some amazing support to get me here, including some fantastic male mentors who recognize that the female deficit in academia is a challenge that requires support from many sources. Their encouragement has enabled me to fulfil my aspirations in my career and as a mother."

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"My hopes for the future are that at every stage in academia there are excellent support systems, government/university policies and mentorship in particular, *everywhere in the world*, which are available to women and remove the unnecessary pressure around the addition of motherhood." ■



FOR FURTHER MEDIA INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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