Health information management education in Australia has undergone significant change during the last decade. Curtin University, Western Australia (WA) and La Trobe University Victoria (VIC) have continued to provide Health Information Management programs; however, the demise of long-term health information management programs at the University of Sydney (USyd), New South Wales (NSW) and at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Queensland (QLD) has caused considerable concern for the profession and for the Health Information Management Association of Australia (HIMAA). Paradoxically, this reduction in programs came at a time when demand for Health Information Management graduates was at an all-time high, with most states reporting a shortage of qualified health information management graduates to fill positions in the health sector. The graduate output from Curtin and La Trobe Universities cannot meet the national demand for Health Information Managers (HIMs), which has been clearly articulated in several workforce documents, both at a national and state level. There have been a number of responses to this dilemma, from both the profession and from employers. The profession has actively lobbied, especially in NSW, for a health information management program to be established within the State. In QLD, news that QUT was considering establishing a new undergraduate health information management program garnered a strong response from the profession, with widespread support for such a course. This ground level support is critical in order for universities to consider new programs.

From an employer perspective, the shortage of health information management graduates has often meant that positions previously requiring a health information management qualification no longer have this requirement. In my own workplace, we have had this challenge. HIMs are very ‘employable’ and the knowledge and skills they bring has meant that they are ‘in demand’, especially for project work; however, this creates temporary ‘vacancies’ that we have been unable to fill with a qualified HIM. In response to this shortage, we have had to consider each position and determine which functions and tasks need to be performed by a HIM-qualified person versus those that do not. This has created new non-HIM roles, which have not always met requirements and my strong preference would be to continue to employ quality health information management graduates.

The university sector has also recognised the current need for health information management graduates. QUT will offer a Bachelor of Health Information Management course in 2013, and the University of Western Sydney (UWS) is also developing a health information management major within their Bachelor of Information Communication Technology (ICT) course, for which they are seeking approval to commence in 2014. This is very good news. However, to ensure that these health information management programs have a long-term future, there needs to be sufficient student demand. The increasingly constrained fiscal environment means universities are unable to offer courses with low student numbers. Student demand for health information management programs is not strong, especially among ‘school leavers’. This is a critical issue, which needs a focused response. Health information management is not always considered a ‘sexy’ profession; nor is it a profession that the general public identifies with in the way they identify with nursing or physiotherapy, for example. We need to consider how we can market the health information management profession to ensure an ongoing supply of students, and hence graduates, to meet our workforce needs.

In considering health information management education in Australia, I posed a number of questions to course coordinators at each of the universities, such as: What courses do you offer; what are the key foci of these courses; what are the major challenges faced by new health information management graduates and health information management education generally; and what can the profession to do to assist universities. Their responses are below (in alphabetical order).

**Curtin University**

*(Kerryn Butler-Henderson)*

Curtin University offers: a Bachelor of Science (Health Information Management); Graduate Certificate of Clinical Classification; Graduate Certificate of Health Informatics; and Master of Health Information Management. The focus is on applied skills to create work-ready graduates and ensuring each student has an excellent learning experience. A restructure of our undergraduate degree allowed us to increase curricula around health informatics and clinical research, while maintaining our strong focus on management, clinical classification and casemix. Health informatics is probably

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1 For further details, see ‘A HIM major within an IT degree’ by Dr Joanne Curry and Vera Dimitropoulos in this issue of HIM-Interchange.
the strongest area of this Degree, which is also reflected in our Master's degree. In keeping with these aims, practical experience is another area of strength, with onsite fieldtrips and placements across a number of units of study, using real-life examples for assessments where fieldtrips are not possible and industry experts to teach and engage with students to ensure that our teaching is realistic and relevant.

The biggest challenge stems from young graduates, with little experience, who gain employment in positions they may not be ready to fill. Many find themselves in positions of responsibility with little or no mentorship. Curtin has increased the level of practical experience in our courses and we encourage students to work part-time while studying to consolidate their learning and be better prepared when they graduate. Graduates are also encouraged to use Curtin and the WA HIMAA Executive team for support and mentoring. The biggest challenge for the Health Information Management program at Curtin is attracting and retaining school leavers. Curtin commenced a campaign in 2012-13 to raise awareness about the profession and courses among high school students in WA and has been fortunate to receive support, including financial, from WA HIMAA. Tapping into the school-leaver market is essential in building a younger health information management workforce. Another challenge is employing academic staff with appropriate qualifications. With most universities moving to a research model, typically we cannot employ anyone without a PhD, or at least progression towards a doctoral degree. Academic working conditions are not appealing to many health information management graduates with a Master's degree. HIMs with a PhD are rare and may not want to move to WA, while those who have expressed an interest in moving into academia do not possess a Master's degree. Despite these challenges, we see exciting possibilities ahead. We envision change not possessing a Master's degree. HIMs with a PhD are not appealing to many health information management graduates and values and promotes all Health Information Managers and their unique skill-set. Looking ahead, the main challenges for health information management education include: attracting potential students to the courses; ensuring there is clear differentiation between the qualified Bachelor and Master graduates

health and safety across a number of universities when this became a key issue in the media. With e-health and activity-based funding (ABF) currently in focus in the media, HIMAA should directly engage to promote the profession. I would like to see a part-time media or public relations person employed to develop ongoing relationships with the media, and advise/devise strategies on how the profession can be better promoted. This would need a long-term strategy with a permanent employee to ensure continuity.

La Trobe University
(Kerin Robinson)
La Trobe University offers profession-entry level health information management education: Bachelor of Health Sciences and Master of Health Information Management (combined degree program); Bachelor of Health Information Management (International) (only for International students); and Master of Health Information Management. The Master of Health Sciences (Health Information Management) is for qualified HIMs only. The key focus in our profession-entry courses is on producing work-ready graduates with the competence and confidence to operate in a complex and changing healthcare system and funding environment. Our curricula focus on all key domains of health information management work, including: health classification and ABF/casemix analysis; health information management and professional practice; health informatics and information technology (IT); and epidemiology, research and health data analysis.

A major strength of our courses is the extensive, integrated and supervised Professional Practice placements. A further strength is the rigorous academic program which is designed to ensure that students achieve levels of competency well beyond the minimum required by the HIMAA Profession-entry Competency Standards. In fact, La Trobe now has a final ‘Qualifying Examination’ (separate from all other scheduled examinations and assessments) which tests students’ knowledge of the competencies (and, indeed, higher levels of HIM knowledge and skills) at the end of their final semester. This innovative approach means that not only is the curriculum designed to meet and exceed the HIMAA Competencies, and accredited as thus by HIMAA, but each student must also demonstrate consolidation of his/her individual professional knowledge, and preparedness for the workplace.

Challenges that new graduates face include: Determining their preferred area or domain of health information management work - because the choice is so extensive; and choosing a work environment with a culture that both supports and encourages entry-level graduates, and values and promotes all Health Information Managers and their unique skill-set. Looking ahead, the main challenges for health information management education include: attracting potential students to the courses; ensuring there is clear differentiation between the qualified Bachelor and Master graduates

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(i.e. professional HIMs) and other categories of the health information workforce; increasing the knowledgebase that underpins the profession of health information management so that it continuously informs health information management professional education.

There are a number of ways that the profession can support universities to deliver health information management courses. The professional Association could ensure a higher profile in the national health and political arenas to showcase and promote the health information management profession; and the marketing of the profession itself. The state Branch(es) could continue the long-term, superb support they have given to our courses and students; and continue their excellent communications with the University. Individual members of the profession could support and engage with the University and our courses (e.g. via placement supervision); contribute to Course Advisory Committee and Expert Reference Panels; and engage with academic staff and students in research projects. We acknowledge and value the fantastic support provided by our professional colleagues throughout Victoria and elsewhere.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
(Sue Walker & Maryann Wood)

In 2013, QUT will offer a Bachelor of Health Information Management in full-time and part-time mode, internally only initially. The course aims to produce work-ready graduates who are skilled in communication, management (including human resource management), record services planning, IT assessment, data management and analysis, clinical coding, health information systems, medical terminology and medical science, medico-legal aspects relating to health information and casemix and ABF. The course has 288 credit points with 22 core units (276 credit points) and one elective (12 credit points). Year 1 is a foundation year, an introduction to health information concepts and contemporary health services and public health issues. Year 2 will focus on specialised health information management units. Year 3 includes more advanced units, which will provide students with the opportunity to deepen their knowledge. The course will be underpinned by workplace-aligned activities and assessment, with work integrated learning in the final semester of Year 3. Students will also be required to participate in a virtual environment for tutorials, group activities and student presentations. In addition to these online activities, students will complete self-directed study, with both of these activities being equivalent to one academic day per week. In the final semester, students will also spend four days each week in a hospital or other healthcare setting; and be required to complete formal assignments, including project work, a reflective practice essay and demonstrate competency in the application of their information management skills.

Major challenges faced by new graduates include: work environments that acknowledge the student has entry-level qualifications, but do not sufficiently acknowledge that while their placements have exposed them to the ‘real world’, they still have to consolidate their learnings; and identification of mentors within the workplace who can assist with the transition from university to the ‘real world’. HIMs need to build professional networks that go beyond those of the university environment and the mentors within their own workplace, and acknowledge the need for lifelong learning – completing the degree does not mean that graduates have finished learning. They should also seek opportunities to keep up to date with developments in the profession and in health generally; and have confidence to seek opportunities outside of their ‘job description’. Major challenges impacting on health information management education include: ensuring the right messages are provided to potential students (and school leavers, in particular) that health information management is a wonderful career with diverse opportunities; providing a course that can be offered as flexibly as possible (i.e. offered in external mode), while still being pedagogically sound; providing a course that meets industry needs now and into the future, in spite of the rapid changes in the health information environment and the diverse nature of the profession; getting the balance right between industry needs and university requirements; finding industry representatives willing to commit to taking students for placements who are also skilled supervisors; and identifying appropriately qualified industry experts to undertake sessional lecturing or develop teaching materials.

The HIM profession can support universities to deliver HIM courses by: identifying suitable projects that provide students with the opportunity to consolidate their skills and knowledge during professional placements; commitment to providing at least one placement opportunity annually within their facility; active involvement in a Course Advisory Committee; promotion of the profession and marketing of the course to school leavers and other potential students within their region; advocating for the importance of undertaking postgraduate studies in areas relevant to the profession; collaboration on the writing of peer reviewed journal papers and submission of articles for professional journals to ensure there is a research and evidence base on which students can draw; and identification of potential research projects to be undertaken by honours, masters and PhD students.

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