INSTITUTE for Molecular Bioscience group leader Rob Capon knows well the importance of archives, particularly when dealing with extracts and microbial isolates kept in -80°C freezers.

"You need to know what is in what place, in what box, because you don't want to open a -80°C freezer and sit there for half an hour," says Professor Capon, who is a professorial research fellow.

"You have got 30 seconds to find what you want and then you shut the door, and the only way you can do that is if you have got a very comprehensive archiving system that tells you what everything is and where it is."

Professor Capon, who is with the chemistry and structural biology division of IMB at the University of Queensland, is also responsible for IMB's postgraduate program. After using FileMaker earlier in his career at the University of Melbourne, Professor Capon knew it would work at IMB too.

The institute has about 500 people and raises $50 million to $60m a year.

Professor Capon manages a team of 15 to 20 researchers (staff and students) with interests across multiple areas, including the discovery and development of new pharmaceuticals and agrochemicals. In the course of running the group, Professor Capon has established and maintained an extensive national and international network of collaborators spanning dozens of laboratories, across academia, industry and government.

FileMaker is used as the core system to manage everything from staffing to research data to grant funding and more. The group uses a secure login to interact with the data.

"For example, molecules that would treat chronic inflammatory pain is one of our big leads at the moment," Professor Capon says. "Other examples are treating pancreatic cancer. We are working
closely with other groups around the world to figure ways to get on top of that problem."

Professor Capon oversees about 145 PhD students, with 75 per cent of IMB's intake being
international students. The institute also uses a FileMaker database system, codenamed Peebles,
to run the postgraduate program.

"In the early days, the idea of a database of your postgraduate students was their phone number,
address and name, which is very 1980s," Professor Capon says. "The database keeps track of not
only their scholarships but also the milestones every year."

Peebles Server is the core database used by the postgraduate office staff to enter data and extract
reports. Peebles Online is the secure web interface developed to support academic advisers who
have responsibilities for multiple PhD students.

Academics can quickly print a snapshot of their advisory load, see how many students there are
and at what stage they are at in their candidature.

This is used in annual appraisals, as well as reappointment and promotion interviews.

Peebles was so successful at IMB that it was subsequently rolled out into all bioscience institutes
at UQ and several of the other schools.

"So wherever they (academic staff) are in the world they can log in and complete their tasks in
terms of keeping track of their students," Professor Capon says.

The database sends automatic emails and PDF prints of documents. IMB has recently loaded on
to its server a new version for students, called Peebles Jr.

When a student opens their card they can look across 10 "traffic light alerts" at the top of the
screen to keep tabs on a range of requirements such as their scholarships, visas or health
insurance.

"The missing link in that whole process was engaging the students because increasingly we want
the students to take more responsibility for their own future and their own career, which means
taking more responsibility for their PhD program," Professor Capon says.

Peebles Jr is due to be rolled out in the middle of this year.

Professor Capon hopes to introduce a greater degree of sophistication into the program. "I'd like
to do more automated trend monitoring and more automated alerts," he says.

CASE STUDY: IMB

PROBLEM: Research needed to be archived and auditable; 145 PhD students had to be managed.

PROCESS: FileMaker is used as a core system. The database is used to manage postgraduate
students.

RESULT: Institution can manage a network of collaborators which spans dozens of laboratories
across academia, industry and government and which supports academic advisers managing PhD
students.

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