

GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT WELCOMED 21 INTERNATIONAL YOUNG RESEARCHERS TO STUDY SATELLITE REMOTE SENSING

International spring school from 23-27 April was a great success

The European Marie Curie Programme aims to enable junior researchers to benefit from the experience of leading researchers.

The University of Leicester opened its doors to 21 outstanding young researchers from all over the world during the METIER Spring School for 5 full days. Most participants were PhD students, with an approximately equal gender balance. The researchers came from Spain, Germany, Italy, UK, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, Poland and Russia. Many have moved to the country where they are doing their research – this is reflected in their nationalities: Italian, Spanish, German, Austrian, Dutch, French, Greek, Pakistan, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Sudanese and British.

Professor Heiko Balzter, a Physical Geographer, was the lead scientist of the Spring School. He said: “We had to have a tough selection process, because we had so much international interest in the course. The European Commission kindly sponsored the travel, accommodation and organisational expenses for the participants with a contribution of 32000 Euro. This money, which we won in an open European competition for Marie Curie funding, has benefited the young researchers by enabling them to attend the training course. We need more qualified researchers who understand how satellites can help quantifying climate change. The course will also provide better employment prospects to these researchers, many of whom currently work on fixed term contracts.

“The UK plays a leading role in understanding climate change. Both the UK and Europe have to train up young scientists to take the research beyond its current limits.



“The satellite images from space show changes in forest fires in Siberia and Africa, land cover change, and changes in vegetation greenness. All these changes are thought to be linked to climate change and human impacts.

“Modern satellites can help us put some numbers on the effects of a changing land surface on the climate system. The young researchers are learning how to interpret these images from space and use them in their research.

“The researchers also learned how to generate 3D images of forests using the latest aircraft sensing technology. This has been used by scientists to map geological earthquake risks under forest, to find hidden archaeological sites overgrown with plants, and to measure how much carbon is stored in a forest.

Satellites are becoming a key tool for observing the effects of climate change on the environment. They are increasingly being used in all environmental disciplines. The data from space do not just produce colourful pictures, but can be turned into numbers used in environmental computer models, which predict future changes.

Lecturers on the course were Prof. Balzter (Univ. of Leicester), Prof. Barnsley (Swansea), Dr. Bartalev (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow) and Dr. Comber (Leicester). It is one in a series of seven training events held across Europe, in the series “METHods of Interdisciplinary Environmental Research” (METIER). Prof. Balzter taught on “Remote sensing of fire” and “3D Vegetation structure”, Dr Bartalev on “Global Land Cover”, Prof. Barnsley on “Estimating biophysical vegetation properties from space” and and Dr Comber on “Land surface processes and land use change”.

After the end of each course, the teaching material will be published on the METIER web page, where it is freely available.

Further details: METIER Graduate Training Course No. 3:
Remote Sensing of the Land Surface
23-27 April 2007, <http://peer-initiative.org/html/obj138.html>

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Statistics of participants:

Country of residence

Germany	4
Ireland	1
Italy	4
Japan	1
Netherlands	1
Poland	1
Russia	1
Spain	5
UK	3

Nationality

Austrian	1
Dutch	1
French	1
German	3
Greek	1
Italian	4
Pakistani	1
Polish	1
Romanian	1
Russian	1
Spanish	4
Sudanese	1
British	1

Gender

F	10
M	11

Status

Early-stage	20
Experienced	1