Proposal to close GeoSciences MSc programmes in Remote Sensing

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Affected programmes:
- MSc(T) Remote Sensing and Image Processing (RSIP)
- MSc(R) Quantitative Earth Observation (QEO)
- MSc(T) Geoscience and Remote Sensing (GARS)

Background
The MSc(T) RSIP has been in place for over a decade, and has attracted a maximum number of students of 12, a more typical intake being 7, despite the excellent reputation and prospects of students emerging from the programme. Although it shares options with the Geographical Information Science (GIS) MSc, a review of the relative teaching effort per student across MSc programmes in GeoSciences in 2005 found that RSIP was the most “expensive” MSc within the School, requiring twice the staff input per student of other programmes; this arises because the programme requires a fairly high proportion (50 credits) of specialist core courses not generally taken by students of other programmes, and therefore taught to modest class sizes.

QEO and GARS were introduced in an attempt to improve the overall intake of remote sensing students to address this inefficiency. QEO shares 40 credits of RSIP’s specialist core teaching, but for GARS, these are options and there is more sharing with GIS and other environmental programmes. Unfortunately, take up of these different flavours of provision have not increased the intake, but appear, rather, to have spread the same small cohort of students over three programme titles. Recent intake figures are shown below.

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<th>2004</th>
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<th>2007</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSIP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>QEO</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>GARS</td>
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The School Teaching Organisation therefore decided to propose closure of all three programmes with their core courses from 2009 entry, unless applications suggested a dramatic turn around for 2008 (not the case to date). We will nonetheless retain sufficient course options in remote sensing to meet the needs of GIS and other programmes within the School.

The TO and staff will also undertake detailed analysis of the student demand for remote sensing teaching, to understand why a subject that seems so important in the context of global environmental change has such an apparently weak UK demand, with a view to identifying any strategies that might allow a successful programme to be created in future.

It should be noted that these closures are proposed in a context in which the TO is rebalancing the MSc portfolio, with new programmes opening in 2008 and more planned for 2009.

Need to accelerate closure
At their Board of Studies on 10 March 2008, the School of Physics decided to remove from their portfolio the honours option Digital Image Analysis. The lectures for DIA double as the lecture component of the RSIP & QEO core course, Theory of Image Processing (ToIP). The School of GeoSciences would
therefore need to bring lecturing of ToIP within its own effort. Physics are highly co-operative in terms of offering assistance to do this; notwithstanding, this implies a significant effort to create and run a version of ToIP to be taught by GeoSciences staff for one year only to a projected small cohort of RSIP and QEO students. The TO has therefore decided to seek immediate closure of RSIP and QEO for 2008 entry, while GARS will close as planned for 2009.

**GeoSciences TO proposals**

1. Close RSIP and QEO to 2008 entry. Offer students with offers for these programmes the opportunity to transfer to GARS for 2008 entry (or any other programmes for which they may have offers).
2. Offer to GARS (and GIS etc) students a wide range of remote sensing options (subject to adequate class sizes), but explicitly stating that ToIP is no longer available.
3. Close GARS to 2009 entry.

**Implications for applicants**

The status of applications is:

QEO: no offers

RSIP: 2 UK offers, 4 non-UK offers

GARS: 7 non-UK offers

The “conversion rate” for UK offers is normally good (~80%), and for non-UK offers is normally low (~10% last year).

Students seeking a programme with remote sensing in the title are likely to find GARS an adequate alternative and not detrimental to their career plans. However, a minority of RSIP students (none to two per year) come with a view to pursuing a career more oriented towards image processing, and this minority are less likely to find GARS (with no possibility of taking ToIP) satisfactory in terms of later career options.