



# Learning for Life – where you want it, when you want it

Katherine Taylor, GIS Professional Training Programme Manager, gives an insight into one of the most established GIS Distance Learning Programmes of its kind

The Kingston University Professional GIS Distance Learning Programme has been successfully running for over 10 years. In excess of 800 people have taken a variety of modules during that period whereby students are given the option to enrol on to one, two, three or four modules of the Programme according to their needs. Each module is currently divided into 10 separate Units and there are associated assignments to complete within each Unit. The modules are not currently accredited (i.e. there is no formal qualification), however a certificate of completion is issued to those students who successfully complete each one.

People who have successfully completed the Kingston University Professional GIS Distance Learning Programme are eligible to enrol on to either Kingston University or the UNIGIS Distance Learning Diploma / Masters Programme (subject to academic references). Over the past eighteen months, six students have been accepted on to these postgraduate courses.

## Why Enrol?

There are a variety of reasons why people enrol onto the Kingston University Professional GIS Distance Learning Programme: some have no prior knowledge of GIS, some have worked with a GIS for a short time and would like to establish a firm theoretical foundation upon which to build their GIS experience, whilst others wish to change career paths and the Programme offers them a good opportunity to develop their skill set.

Distance learning students come from either the private or public sector. For example, a number of people come from a Local Authority background and may be responsible for the GIS within a particular department. Some carry out data capture and maintenance and others provide analysis services to the council.

## Dedicated Workshop

In January of this year a number of Distance Learning Programme students attended the Cities Revealed Event held at Madingley Hall in Cambridge. Students participated in a dedicated workshop that focused on how GIS might be used in an

emergency and disaster-planning scenario. Students were asked to discuss, in groups, how they would use GIS to ascertain the impact of the (then) recent tsunami. Each group chose a different region and using the maps as geographical prompts explored diverse uses of GIS: planning relief work, distributing food/clean water, transport networks, communication facilities, and power. Each group nominated a spokesperson and that person reported back to the wider group.

Preparations are already underway for the Distance Learning Programme Workshop at the next Cities Revealed Event, 9-10 February 2006 (see pages 16 & 17 for details). This event provides an ideal opportunity for students to meet each other and their tutor as well as gaining a wealth of knowledge from industry experts in the conference sessions.

## What's New?

During 2005 the Kingston University team has been working hard developing new programmes and support aids to supplement the existing GIS Distance Learning Programme. In May 2005 the first GIS Distance Learning Study Guide was launched that focuses on Historic Aerial Photography. It provides an interactive learning resource that gives a complete guide to the development and applications of historic aerial photography. Further Study Guides and new modules are also planned for the coming year.

Furthermore, GIS Distance Learning students are being introduced to the Kingston University Learning Management System called "Blackboard" that enables students to access materials via the Internet. Blackboard has been used successfully in Kingston University for over four years now and supplements student learning through a variety of extra electronic resources such as discussion boards, virtual classrooms as well as links to the University Library catalogue and relevant GIS web site addresses. This is an exciting development that will offer Distance Learning students an opportunity to interact with each other and their tutor and have a wealth of materials at their fingertips.