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To: ecu@bbc.co.uk
Date: Thu 24/04/2014 1:01
Subject: BBC Complaints - Case number CAS-2661021-0QVP81

Dear Sirs

I have previously corresponded with Paul Moseley, Senior Complaints Adviser, with regards to my concerns about an interview with Alistair Moffat that was broadcast on BBC Local Radio on the Mark Forrest Show on 6th March 2014. The final e-mail I received from Mr Moseley was dated 18th April 2014. Although Mr Moseley has addressed some of my points there are still unanswered questions which I would now like the Editorial Complaints Unit to investigate. In particular, I would like to revisit the question of how the editorial decision was reached to invite Mr Moffat on the programme, and the requirement stated by Mr Moseley that the BBC should show impartiality over time. I appreciate that the editorial team were not aware that the ECU had previously upheld a complaint about a previous inaccurate and misleading interview from Mr Moffat, as that complaint had not at that time been published on the BBC website.

I have been advised that Mr Moffat was invited on the Mark Forrest Show because “A member of the team heard an interview with him on BBC Radio York last year. They felt that he was an engaging speaker on the subject of DNA and noted that he might be an interesting guest for the programme.” While I appreciate the need for an engaging speaker on the radio, the BBC quite rightly strives for “truth and accuracy” in its output, and to this end it seems imperative that interviewees are selected not just for their speaking ability but also for their expertise on the subject. Genetics is a specialised scientific discipline. Mr Moffat is a journalist not a scientist. He has not published any scientific papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals. His only connection with the subject is as the Managing Director and major shareholder of a commercial genetic ancestry testing company, and he therefore has a vested interest in marketing and selling DNA kits.

In my original complaint I asked why Mr Moffat was the only person considered as an interviewee on the subject of Viking DNA, and why a qualified expert had not been considered instead. This question has not been answered. No attempt seems to have been made to research the subject and to find out the names of the experts in this field. There is, for example, a Viking DNA Project being carried out by academics at the University of Leicester which is very easy to find because it's the first result to appear when searching for “Viking DNA”:

<http://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/impact-of-diasporas/diasporas-projects/surnames-and-the-y-chromosome/the-viking-dna-project>

Professor Mark Jobling and Dr Turi King are both well respected researchers and public speakers. Why were they not invited on to the programme in preference to Mr Moffat? If the BBC researchers did not have time to do the research themselves to locate an appropriate expert why did they not seek advice from the BBC's Science Editor or contact an independent organisation such as the Science Media Centre (<http://www.sciencemediacentre.org>)?

I have not heard the interview given by Mr Moffat on BBC Radio York and would appreciate it if you could send me the details of the name, date and time of the programme. I would also like to know how Mr Moffat was selected to appear on this programme.

As a result of the BBC's decision to interview a non-qualified expert, listeners were subjected to a highly misleading and inaccurate interview on the Mark Forrest Show. Mr Moffat was allowed to discuss his Viking DNA "research", yet this "research" has not been subjected to the usual scientific scrutiny and has not been published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. The only place where Mr Moffat's Viking DNA "research" has been published seems to have been in the *Daily Mail*:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2577003/A-million-Vikings-live-One-33-men-claim-direct-descendants-Norse-warriors.html>

The Mail story was presumably based on a press release provided by BritainsDNA, and it is therefore a PR exercise for the company.

None of the other outlandish claims Mr Moffat made in his interview are backed up by peer-reviewed scientific research. Indeed, there is a considerable body of evidence which shows that all such claims are completely unjustified. My colleagues at University College London have been so concerned about Mr Moffat's well publicised and unsupported claims that they have set up a website to counter the claims:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mace-lab/genetic-ancestry>

You will find a list here of all the scientific papers which explain why the inferences Mr Moffat makes are wrong:

https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mace-lab/genetic-ancestry/guff_pages/wrong

I agree with Mr Moseley that "the BBC should show due impartiality over time". I would, therefore, like to know why the BBC has given Mr Moffat and his company unprecedented publicity in the last couple of years and has never given any qualified experts the opportunity to respond to his unscientific claims. In every case the commercial nature of Mr Moffat's company has been disguised by referring to it as a "project" which is conducting "research". The editorial team on the Mark Forrest Show have conceded that more could have been done to make the public aware of Mr Moffat's commercial interests, but I am astonished that the BBC has allowed a commercial enterprise to be promoted to such an extent in the first place, and has given someone with no expertise or qualifications in genetics so much airtime. Mr Moffat's company is one of many selling such tests but I am not aware of representatives from any other company being given a similar opportunity to advertise their products on the BBC for the sake of balance. You will find a list of all the occasions we know of on which the BBC has promoted Mr Moffat's company here:

https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mace-lab/genetic-ancestry/guff_pages/attack

Furthermore, it would appear that on a number of occasions BBC presenters were provided with free DNA tests from Mr Moffat's company and subsequently discussed their results on air. This would appear to be in breach of clause 14.4.9 of the BBC's guidelines on Product Prominence.

According to the BBC guidelines you quite rightly have a duty to maintain editorial integrity and independence. When covering the subject of genetics in the future I hope that the BBC will consult with qualified experts, and select people for interview who are appropriately qualified and without any commercial interests to promote.

Kind regards

Debbie Kennett

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and *The Surnames Handbook* (The History Press, 2012)

<http://cruwys.blogspot.co.uk>