

DAVID BALDING

PROFESSOR OF STATISTICAL GENETICS

UCL GENETICS INSTITUTE (UGI)



Professor Louise Richardson,
Principal and Vice-chancellor of St Andrews University,
principal@st-andrews.ac.uk

12 December 2012

Dear Professor Richardson,

**Complaint against Mr Alistair Moffat
Rector of St Andrews University**

We write to you concerning a serious matter of professional conduct by Mr Moffat.

Mr Moffat, runs a business "Britain's DNA" which for a fee provides a service of typing genetic markers from a saliva sample provided by a customer, and drawing inferences about the customer's ancestry.

On July 9 Mr Moffat gave an interview on the BBC radio 4 Today programme, which was replete with untruths and misleading statements. It continues to be available at:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9736000/9736128.stm

Please listen to it. We, among others, heard it and were shocked at its many inaccuracies. The interview appeared to us to promote a commercial enterprise under the guise of a science item of public interest. In particular, Mr Moffat claimed that the DNA tests offered by Britain's DNA were "subsidised massively", a claim that we felt to be implausible given that they charge £170 for mtDNA or Y chromosome testing, which should be adequate to cover costs; there are, for example, other companies that charge less for similar tests.

Concerned, we looked up the Britain's DNA website that was promoted during the interview and found that, in addition to Mr Moffat, two academics with whom we were professionally acquainted were listed among the four personnel of Britain's DNA: Dr Jim Wilson of Edinburgh University and Dr Gianpiero Cavalleri of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. We each sent e-mails to these colleagues expressing our shock and dismay at what we'd heard, and asked them to put pressure on Mr Moffat to retract his erroneous statements. We also questioned his claim that the DNA tests offered by Britain's DNA were "subsidised massively". We later sent a letter to Mr Moffat explaining many details of why almost all his claims made on the Today programme are untrue or misleading. Those e-mails led to a solicitor's letter on behalf of Mr Moffat, threatening legal proceedings for defamation.

We have made frequent requests to Mr Moffat and his colleagues to explain the "subsidised massively" claim, but with no success. We believe that it is unacceptable for somebody in public life, such as the Rector of St Andrews, to refuse to withdraw or to clarify an important claim made in a public forum that appears to be both untrue and aimed to benefit his commercial interests.

It is also unacceptable for a holder of a high academic office, when challenged on the veracity of his claims by academic colleagues, to respond with legal threats rather than an attempt to address their concerns. Whatever the superficial basis of the legal threat, we believe it is motivated by a desire to draw attention away from the many untruths told by Mr Moffat during his radio interview.

We ask you to investigate whether this behaviour is consistent with the standards of conduct expected of office holders at St Andrews University. Many of the wrong and misleading

UCL Genetics Institute (UGI)
Darwin Building, Gower Street,
London WC1E 6BT
Direct phone +44 (0)20 3108 4005 internal 54005
Mobile: +44 (0)75 9025 0432
Email: d.balding@ucl.ac.uk
Website: www.ucl.ac.uk/ugl

comments in Mr Moffat's interview will be clear to any educated listener, but some are more complex and we will be happy to send you a copy of our letter to Mr Moffat detailing many of his errors, if that would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



David Balding, Ph.D.
Professor of Statistics Genetics,
Genetics Institute, University College London,
Darwin Building, Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)20 3108 4005
Email: d.balding@ucl.ac.uk
<https://sites.google.com/site/baldingstatisticalgenetics/home>



Mark G. Thomas, Ph.D
Professor of Evolutionary Genetics
Research Department of Genetics, Evolution and Environment
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT
Tel: +44 (0) 207 679 2286
Email: m.thomas@ucl.ac.uk
Web: www.ucl.ac.uk/mace-lab/