

Date: 28/8/12

To: Jim Wilson and Gianpiero Cavalleri:

cc: Alistair Moffat

From: Mark Thomas and David Balding

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Dear Jim and Gianpiero,

We haven't had any response to our e-mails of July 9 and August 7. Given the seriousness of our concerns, non-response is not going to make the problem go away.

We understand that you did not make these misleading comments personally, but it appears that you stand to benefit from them.

The most serious concern is the claim that the genetic testing done by Britain's DNA is "massively subsidised".

Since the fee is £170 for typing mtDNA or Y SNPs, this claim does not sound plausible. If we are right in our suspicions then the Today programme audience have been seriously misled, from which you will gain. Moreover it appears that a commercial enterprise has been promoted on the BBC under the guise of a scientific research project. We hope and can easily believe that there are research spin-offs from your commercial enterprise, which is great, but the true nature of the enterprise needs to be made clear. Nothing in the various broadcasts and newspaper reports related to Britain's DNA that we have heard/read appears to reflect any substantial research outcome, despite the exaggerated claims.

Although we see the "massively subsidised" claim as the most important issue, our other concerns are also important: the many factual errors that we have detailed, that Today listeners have been misled about the nature of what can be inferred from current genetic ancestry testing, and that wrong and outdated notions of ethnicity, human ancestry and human history have been promoted. We hope you agree that to the public and media alike, making exaggerated claims (such as those made by Alistair Moffat on Today, or made on <http://www.britainsdna.com/demo.html>) diminishes the value and interest of more circumspect and credible comments made by serious scientists.

We propose to circulate widely amongst our academic colleagues what was stated by Mr Moffat in the Today interview, together with our explanation of why it is wrong. If anything we have said in our correspondence is wrong we will be happy to hear from you and discuss. However if you do not intend to address our concerns then you will inevitably be associated with his comments and be seen as benefiting from them, which we think will damage your reputations more than any benefit you derive from Britain's DNA and similar enterprises.

We know that Britain's DNA is not the worst offender in the genetic ancestry industry, although the Today interview does seem unparalleled. We also plan to encourage our colleagues to make available to the public more information about the misleading nature of many claims made by the industry, and to clarify what can be fairly concluded about an individual's history from mtDNA or Y data. This won't name individuals or companies, and we hope you will co-operate in this effort to try to raise standards in the industry, make sure that the public is better informed, and reduce the number of dissatisfied customers.

yours sincerely

David & Mark