



University of East Anglia
Professor Edward Acton BA PhD
Vice-Chancellor
The Vice-Chancellor's Office

University of East Anglia
Norwich
NR4 7TJ
England

Email: e.acton@uea.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0) 1603 592206
Fax: +44 (0) 1603 507753
www.uea.ac.uk

Mr Phil Willis MP
Chairman
Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1P 3JA

10 December 2009

Dear Mr Willis

The work of the Climatic Research Unit

Thank you for your letter of 1 December 2009.

As you point out there has been considerable press coverage concerning an amount of data, emails and documents relating to the work of the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) which have been published on various websites. You ask a number of questions, which I will seek to address:

a) your account of what has taken place

A significant amount of material including emails and documents appears to have been accessed illegally from a back-up server in CRU and downloaded in whole, or possibly in part, on to the Real Climate website. Whilst it was removed promptly from that website, it was not before it had been widely accessed and distributed across a number of other websites. The method by which the material was obtained from CRU is the subject of a police enquiry. Substantial resources from the Norfolk Constabulary are being brought to bear but clearly this is a complex and technical forensic investigation, and must be expected to take time.

The contents of some of the emails, all of which were thought to be private exchanges between close collaborators, and phrased accordingly, have been publicised as calling into question the robustness of the scientific outputs of CRU i.e. the now commonly accepted view that the past fifty years have shown significant increases in global temperature, which can only be explained by human activity. This has largely been evidenced by a data-set (HadCRUT) of meteorological observations from around 5000 stations world-wide, compiled and analysed by CRU.

b) the steps that have been taken to investigate the allegations and to test the integrity of the data held and used by the CRU

The University has commissioned Sir Muir Russell, previous Vice-Chancellor of Glasgow University and prior to that the first permanent secretary to the Scottish Executive, to undertake an independent review. Sir Muir is extremely experienced in public life, has an understanding of the conduct of universities and research, and is entirely independent of any association with this University and with the climate change debate. The terms of reference for the Review are:

“The Independent Review will investigate the key allegations that arose from a series of hacked e-mails from CRU. The Review will:

1. Examine the hacked e-mail exchanges, other relevant e-mail exchanges and any other information held at CRU to determine whether there is any evidence of the manipulation or suppression of data which is at odds with acceptable scientific practice and may therefore call into question any of the research outcomes.

2. Review CRU’s policies and practices for acquiring, assembling, subjecting to peer review and disseminating data and research findings, and their compliance or otherwise with best scientific practice.

3. Review CRU’s compliance or otherwise with the University’s policies and practices regarding requests under the Freedom of Information Act (‘the FOIA’) and the Environmental Information Regulations (‘the EIR’) for the release of data.

4. Review and make recommendations as to the appropriate management, governance and security structures for CRU and the security, integrity and release of the data it holds.

Sir Muir will have the discretion to amend or add to the terms of reference if he feels necessary, devise his own methods of working, and call on appropriate expertise in order to investigate the allegations fully.

The University has asked for the Review to be completed by Spring 2010 and this will be made public along with UEA’s response.”

c) how the CRU can justify its commitment to academic transparency

CRU's research outcomes have been published in peer-reviewed journals of the highest standing. All adjustments to data where this has been necessary (for example to account for the move of a meteorological station), have been explained. CRU has undertaken, with the good offices of the Met Office, to seek permission from the various national meteorological services which have provided the original station data to publish it. This is not a simple undertaking as some 150 meteorological services were involved in the collection of the original data, and some see the data as having economic value or are otherwise sensitive to its release. It should be noted that over 95% of the data has for some years been in the public domain, such as on the NOAA site.

d) how you propose to restore confidence in the CRU and its handling of data

None of the adjusted station data referred to in the emails that have been published has been destroyed.

When we receive Sir Muir's findings we will understand which if any of the allegations stand and which fall and we will act accordingly. We will publish the findings and the University's response.

To provide you with some further detail, I enclose a Briefing Paper and the Press Statement announcing the Independent Review.

I hope that this response is helpful to you and will give the Committee full confidence that this episode is being treated very seriously by the University, and that our response is both considered and appropriate. I would welcome the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee in due course.

Yours sincerely



Edward Acton

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Independent Review into the allegations against the Climatic Research Unit (CRU)

Background

On Tuesday 17 November 2009, a substantial file, including over 1000 emails either sent from or sent to members of the Climatic Research Unit ("CRU") at the University of East Anglia, was downloaded on the RealClimate website, together with meteorological station data used for research by CRU into the rate of the Earth's warming.

The information subsequently appeared on a significant number of other sites. The material concerned is thought to have been accessed illegally from a back-up server in CRU and the police are investigating the matter.

The Allegations

The CRU emails have been the subject of considerable comment both in the mainstream press, and on the internet. The contents of a small sub-set of the emails have been alleged to evidence a series of inappropriate actions attributable to Professor Phil Jones, the Director of CRU.

The main allegations are as follows:

1. the manipulation of climate data (potentially to overstate increases in global temperatures);
2. an intention (or attempt) to manipulate the peer review system to prevent the publication of research;
3. withholding or attempting to withhold information in breach of the Freedom of Information Act ("the FOIA") or the Environmental Information Regulations ("the EIR"); including the deletion of emails between scientists contributing to the International Panel on Climate Change;
4. the lack of availability and transparency of data held by the CRU.
5. an unreasonable or unusual reluctance to have the research questioned or tested by others, who may have a different view, albeit always subjected to peer review.

The wording of some of the emails were both inappropriate and offensive. Professor Jones accepts full responsibility for this and issued an apology on Tuesday 24 November. On Tuesday 1 December, Professor Jones announced that he will stand aside as Director until the completion of the Independent Review.

The Independent Review

Sir Muir Russell KCB FRSE will head the Independent Review into allegations made against CRU.

The Review will:

1. examine both the leaked e-mail exchanges, other relevant e-mail exchanges and any other information held at CRU to determine whether there is any evidence of the manipulation or suppression of data which is at odds with acceptable scientific practice and may therefore call into question any of the research outcomes;
2. review CRU's policies and practices for acquiring, assembling, subjecting to peer review and disseminating data and research findings and their compliance or otherwise with best scientific practice;
3. review CRU's compliance or otherwise with the University's policies and practices regarding requests under the Freedom of Information Act ("the FOIA") and the Environmental Information Regulations ("the EIR") for the release of data.
4. review and make recommendations as to the appropriate management, governance and security structures for CRU and the security, integrity and release of the data it holds.

Sir Muir will have the discretion to amend or add to the terms of reference if he feels necessary in order to investigate the accusations fully.

Process

Sir Muir will determine his own methods of working and call on appropriate expertise in order to investigate the allegations fully.

Timing

Sir Muir has been asked to complete his work by Spring 2010.

Sir Muir will determine whether an interim report should be published and extend the deadline if he deems absolutely necessary.

Support to the Review

The Review will:

- be provided with appropriate administrative support;
- seek independent expert opinion or advice where necessary;
- have access to, and the full collaboration of, all University staff.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the Review will be made to Professor Edward Acton, Vice-Chancellor who will report, with his response, to the Council of the University.

The final report and the University's response will be made public.

Contact: Simon Dunford t. +44 (0) 1603 592203 f. +44 (0) 1603 259883 e. s.dunford@uea.ac.uk

Communications Office
University of East Anglia
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Web: www.uea.ac.uk/comm

For immediate release

December 3 2009

Sir Muir Russell to head the Independent Review into the allegations against the Climatic Research Unit (CRU)

Today the University of East Anglia (UEA) announced that Sir Muir Russell KCB FRSE will head the Independent Review into allegations made against the Climatic Research Unit (CRU).

The Independent Review will investigate the key allegations that arose from a series of hacked e-mails from CRU. The review will:

1. Examine the hacked e-mail exchanges, other relevant e-mail exchanges and any other information held at CRU to determine whether there is any evidence of the manipulation or suppression of data which is at odds with acceptable scientific practice and may therefore call into question any of the research outcomes.
2. Review CRU's policies and practices for acquiring, assembling, subjecting to peer review and disseminating data and research findings, and their compliance or otherwise with best scientific practice.
3. Review CRU's compliance or otherwise with the University's policies and practices regarding requests under the Freedom of Information Act ('the FOIA') and the Environmental Information Regulations ('the EIR') for the release of data.
4. Review and make recommendations as to the appropriate management, governance and security structures for CRU and the security, integrity and release of the data it holds.

Sir Muir will have the discretion to amend or add to the terms of reference if he feels necessary, devise his own methods of working, and call on appropriate expertise in order to investigate the allegations fully.

The University has asked for the Review to be completed by Spring 2010 and this will be made public along with UEA's response.

Announcing the Independent Review, Professor Edward Acton, Vice-Chancellor said: "The reputation and integrity of UEA is of the utmost importance to us all. We want these allegations about CRU to

be examined fully and independently. That is why I am delighted that Sir Muir has agreed to lead the Independent Review and he will have my and the rest of University's full support."

Sir Muir Russell, Head of the Independent Review, said: "I agreed very willingly to Professor Acton's request to undertake this Independent Review. Given the nature of the allegations it is right that someone who has no links to either the University or the Climate Science community looks at the evidence and makes recommendations based on what they find. My first task is to scope the project, gather the information I need and source the additional expertise that will be required in order to investigate fully the allegations that have been made. Once this has happened I will be in a position to confirm timescales for publishing the review."

Ends

Notes to Editors:

1. On Tuesday November 17, a substantial file including over 1000 emails either sent from or sent to members of the Climatic Research Unit ('CRU') at the University of East Anglia, was downloaded on the RealClimate website, together with meteorological station data used for research by CRU into the rate of the Earth's warming, particularly over the past 150 years, and other material.
2. A police investigation is currently underway into the source of the theft.
3. Professor Jones announced on December 1 that he will stand aside as Director until the completion of the Independent Review to ensure that CRU can continue to operate normally and the Independent Review can conduct its work into the allegations. Professor Peter Liss, CBE, FRS is now the Acting Director.
4. The Review will be provided with appropriate administrative support and have access to, and the full collaboration of, university staff.
5. Sir Muir Russell KCB FRSE was Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Glasgow from 2003 to 2009. During that period he was Convener of Universities Scotland, a member of the Universities UK Main Board, a Trustee of the Universities Superannuation Scheme, and a member of the UCAS Board.

Sir Muir graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1970 with a First in Natural Philosophy (Physics) and took up a career in the civil service, assigned to the Scottish Office. His civil service career included a period in Whitehall as Head of the Home Affairs Secretariat of the Cabinet

Office (1990-92). He was appointed Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Office in 1998, following open competition, and was the first Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Executive following the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

Sir Muir was awarded the KCB in 2001, and became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2000. He has honorary degrees from the Universities of Strathclyde, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Sir Muir currently chairs the Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland. He is also a Trustee of the Glasgow School of Art, a Member of the Board of the Moredun Research Institute, and the Chairman of the Dunedin Concert Trust.