



University
of Glasgow

By e-mail

16th July 2014

Dear Professor Smythe,

It has come to the attention of the University that you have, on at least one recent occasion in the broadcast media, expressed views and/or made representations in your capacity as an Emeritus Professor of the University. **A number of my academic colleagues are concerned that the views which you have expressed, particularly on the subject of shale gas, are not consistent with work which is currently being undertaken at the University.**

Although it is the University's policy to adopt a neutral stance on political issues and matters of public debate, we remain supportive of all staff, current and former, as they pursue excellent research in their chosen fields. We also acknowledge that free expression is a cornerstone of healthy academic debate.

Notwithstanding our support for freedom of expression, we respectfully request that you make it clear, in all of your future publications and broadcast media appearances, that the views which you hold and express are your own and are not necessarily representative of the views held by the University's current researchers. In doing so, we hope that healthy debate will continue to flourish without compromising the University's neutrality or inadvertently misrepresenting research being undertaken by its current researchers.

I should be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this letter and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation with this matter and best wishes for your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

David Newall

Secretary of Court

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29 July 2014

David Newall
Secretary of Court 
University of Glasgow

By email only

Dear Mr Newall,

Thank you for your letter of the 16th July 2014. I wish to respond, firstly, by clarifying for the record the presumed source of your attentions. I had been asked as an expert in the field to comment on 'fracking' on *BBC Morning Call Scotland* on 1 July 2014. During the one-hour programme I spoke for perhaps three minutes in total. There was also an industry representative, who spoke for a similar length of time. About two hours later I received an email entitled 'Misrepresenting the University of Glasgow' from Professor Paul Younger. It was copied to Professor John Chapman and also to the BBC. It was abusive, baseless, and since it was sent outside the confines of the university, potentially libellous. I declined to respond directly, but sent a short email response to Prof. Chapman, after having circulated it for comment among a close group of friends. The email from Prof. Younger and my response to Prof. Chapman are appended herein. I had hoped that a stiff reprimand to Prof. Younger would have been in order, and that would have been the end of the matter, but it would appear not to be.

Secondly, I am delighted that you support all staff, current and former, as they pursue excellent research in their chosen fields. I am also delighted that you believe free expression to be a cornerstone of healthy academic debate. Encouraged by these statements, I shall continue to pursue my research and express my views.

Thirdly, regarding your request, of course I can and do only represent my own views, based on my own research, and would not be able to represent the views of others in the diverse University research community even if I wished to. I believe that it is a correct assumption by the media that whenever an academic is speaking or writing, then he or she is doing so in a personal capacity. This is a core value of academic freedom in practice; it is different from, say, a company CEO or a government minister, where the assumption is that they are representing a group or corporate interest. Furthermore, the use of academic titles such as Doctor or Professor rightly endows the holder with some authority (in the appropriate field), and this fact is also correctly perceived by the media. The fine distinction between Emeritus Professor and (active) Professor is frequently lost on the media, and in any case, during a typical one- or two-minute interview there is neither the time nor the opportunity for me to state precisely my current status, even if I wished to do so. But, to paraphrase Prof. Younger's email subject header, I have never sought to, nor will I ever 'misrepresent the

University'. In academic publications since my early retirement in 1998 I have used one or both of the phrases 'Emeritus Professor' and/or 'University of Glasgow', but always in conjunction with my private address. Therefore there has never been any implied link to a University School or Department. My severance agreement also entitles me to use 'Faculty of Physical Science' or some-such (now-defunct) address, but I have never done so.

If my academic colleagues, when making public statements or publishing their papers always make it clear that their views are their own, and are not necessarily the views of other colleagues, current and former, then I am happy to follow suit. But I was unaware that this was standard academic procedure. Since receiving your letter I tried to find some University staff guidance on how to address the media. The nearest I could find was: <http://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/knowledgeexchange/toolkitsguidesandadvise/>, but these pages did not seem relevant. Perhaps you could point me to the correct link.

It may also prove useful in the pursuit of a healthy and open debate, if colleagues such as Professor Younger would preface their public statements and their published papers with details of their links, if any, to companies and other commercial interests. Prof. Younger is on the board of two private companies with stakeholder interests in coal gasification and geothermal energy. Neither of these companies has any link either to Glasgow University nor his former employer Newcastle University, but such links may sometimes be considered as a material factor in his research utterances.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D.K. Smythe'.

David SMYTHE
[Emeritus Professor of Geophysics, University of Glasgow]

Attached:

Email from Prof. Younger, 1 July 2014, rec. 12:16 (Paris time)

Misrepresenting the University of Glasgow

Dear Professor Smythe

Working on a paper in my study this morning, I was alerted by my wife to today's Morning Call programme on shale gas on BBC Radio Scotland. I was saddened to hear you on that programme once more shamelessly using your emeritus professor status to tacitly imply that you have some meaningful connection to the present-day research base here at the University of Glasgow, and then proceeding to misrepresent not only geosciences generally, and hydrogeology in particular (of which you are clearly deeply ignorant), but also the work of the joint Royal Academies' Panel on shale gas, on which I served. If you had read the report of that panel properly, as you purported on air to have done, then you would know fine that it DID NOT restrict itself to induced seismicity, as you so wrongly claimed. It dealt at length with the issues of groundwater pollution, which you pretend to know about, despite your utter lack of hydrogeological background. I of course phoned-in offering to put the record straight, but was not given the opportunity to do so. Hence this email.

I find it the height of disingenuous unprofessionalism that you presume to speak wearing the University of Glasgow badge, whilst making no attempt whatsoever to engage with the current generation of researchers here, who are actively engaged in proper, process-based scientific investigation of the topics upon which you presume to opine in public, with your customary hand-waving and ill-informed, crowd-pleasing prejudice. For someone who has spent much of his career developing and protecting freshwater aquifers for purposes of public water supply and ecosystem services (in Scotland and far beyond), I find your attempts to sow doubts in the mind of the general public by making claims that run counter to the basics of groundwater hydraulics and geochemistry utterly appalling. I am anxious that you doing so in the name of the University of Glasgow, but without any interaction with the active researchers here, risks damaging our reputation in the eyes of the scientific community - as well as needlessly scaring our fellows citizens, who have enough genuine things to worry about without your specious claims that the geology of Scotland is somehow so uniquely complex that the general principles of groundwater hydraulics do not apply here. This is stuff and nonsense, as you know, or should know if you properly read any literature on the matter other than your own outpourings.

I notice that you have never exposed yourself to the rigorous professional review process that is the necessary precursor to becoming a Chartered Geologist. It is just as well, I suppose, for were you a C.Geol. you would be in serious breach of our code of conduct, which forbids holding forth on a topic in which you are not properly versed (in your case, environmental hydrogeology).

I beseech you to desist speaking on behalf of the present generation of researchers at the University of Glasgow, whom you neither know personally nor even know, it clearly appears, from their publicly-available publications. I suspect you will not heed this plea. Do not be surprised, then, when you find yourself facing me on a public platform someday, when I shall not hesitate to denounce your charade of pretended knowledge, and expose your much-vaunted links to the University of Glasgow for the cold historical artefact that they are.

Yours faithfully


Paul Younger

Email from Prof. Smythe to Prof. John Chapman, sent 4 July 2014, 00:22 (Paris time)

Re: Misrepresenting the University of Glasgow

Dear John

I am sending this short email to correct factual errors in the abusive email to me dated 1 July 2014 from Prof Paul Younger, and copied to you and the BBC (below). I have declined to reply directly to him.

Firstly, I am indeed an Emeritus  professor of the University, granted in perpetuity since 1998, and I am indeed a Chartered Geologist, with four decades of professional practice and consultancy.

My understanding is that one role of UK universities is to encourage evidence-based debate under principles of academic freedom. That means it is possible, indeed probable, that there may be fundamental disagreement between experts. Within the scientific method such disagreement is argued out on the basis of evidence, not on the basis of asserted superior academic qualifications or of the most recent research results.

I am reporting in the media the results of meticulous personal research, which are relevant to the debate on security of extraction of unconventional hydrocarbons. This is clearly of interest to the public, who have a right under academic freedom to hear different voices coming to different conclusions.

We should be glad that the University is able to participate in that debate.

Yours

David



University
of Glasgow

DN/ALM

14 October 2014


Professor David Smythe
La Fontenille
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FRANCE

Dear Professor Smythe

My apologies that it has taken some time for me to respond to your letter of 13 August.

Your letter raised some serious concerns. You expressed a view that Professor Younger had initiated a campaign to vilify your reputation and you were concerned that the University was taking no steps to curb him. Most seriously, you saw as defamatory Professor Younger's statement: *'He falsely claims to be a Chartered Geologist. That's fraudulent. It's wilful untruth.'* You also suggested that Professor Younger must have been in private contact with Dr David Manning at Newcastle University in order to alert him to what you said was your inadvertent use of Chartered Geologist status, and you saw that as indicative of a campaign of character assassination against you by Professor Younger.

I have discussed these points in detail with Professor Younger. The most serious is his statement that you have falsely claimed to be a Chartered Geologist, which you see as defamatory. However, I have evidence, provided this year by the Geological Society, that you have not held Chartered Geologist status since 4th December 1996. It is in that context that Professor Younger tells me he viewed so seriously your statement, in your email to Professor Chapman of 4th July this year, that you were indeed a Chartered Geologist.


If it is indeed true that you have not been registered as a Chartered Geologist in recent years, then I do not see that Professor Younger's remarks, however robustly expressed, can be regarded as defamatory. But if my information is incorrect, then I should be grateful if you would supply me with evidence of your Chartered Geologist status through recent years. I should say in conclusion that Professor Younger denies, contrary to your suggestion, that he raised this matter with David Manning at Newcastle University. As is incumbent upon a Chartered Geologist discovering a false claim to the title, he reported it to the Chief Executive of the Geological Society, Edmund Nickless, who then raised it with Professor Manning, who is currently President of the Society.

Court Office

David Newall Secretary of Court and Director of Administration

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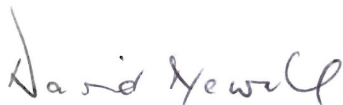
On the wider issue of Professor Younger's harsh word about you in the press, he assures me that he is not engaged in any continuing campaign and has no intention of making similar public comments in future.

Towards the end of your letter of 19 August, you ask me to:

1. *Prevent Professor Younger henceforth from making any comments about me, other than within a strictly scientific debating forum.*
2. *Require him to retract his defamatory comments; and*
3. *Ensure that an appropriate retraction is published prominently in the national press.*

As I do not consider that Professor Younger has made defamatory comments, then I do not intend to take action in respect of points 2 and 3 above. With regard to Point 1, I have asked Professor Younger, and he has agreed, to desist from making any further public comments about you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Newall". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

David Newall
Secretary of Court and Director of Administration