

Independent Climate Change E-mails Review

Notes of Interview with Professor Trevor Davies, PVC Research, Enterprise and Engagement and Professor David Russell, Associate Dean for Research, Faculty of Science

Interviewers: Sir Muir Russell & David Eyton

Interview carried out at UEA on 26 March 2010.

Background

1. Sir Muir Russell and David Eyton briefly summarized the purpose of the Review. The terms of reference required the Review to consider among other things management and governance structures. This sequence of interviews was aimed at exploring the framework for the management of research within the University: what staff take on; what the university expects them to deliver, subject to what requirements on quality, standards, processes and procedures; what are the associated financial disciplines; and how all this is communicated to staff. A particular aim of this session was to review the University's procedures for ensuring good research practice and managing the performance of academics.

Overview of the process

2. Professor David Russell tabled a set of documents: guidelines on good practice in research [Supporting Doc 5]; a University Code for research staff [Supporting Doc 17]; and procedures for dealing with allegations of misconduct in research [Supporting Doc 6]. They contained appropriate cross references to University policy documents, regulations etc; to external sources of information; and to codes of practice in other universities and organizations which had informed the preparation of the guidelines.
3. The process applied to all those working in research. They were sent weblinks before arrival and there was training for undergraduates carrying out research as part of their coursework, and for postgraduate students. It was the responsibility of Principal Investigators to ensure that their people were fully trained, and for new members of staff there was a defined probationary training period for this purpose. The system was continuously developing: the good practice guidelines had first been introduced in 2003 (we had the 2009 version) and the university was confident that all young and recently recruited staff would have been through the process.

Monitoring performance

4. We asked how we could be sure that all this was being followed through. Outputs such as publication and citations were monitored on a yearly basis. Research plans were prepared at institutional level and had to be signed off each year, and individuals received appraisal with feedback every 2 years.
5. Prof Russell referred to the importance of peer review as a check on people's work and outputs. There was positive encouragement to academics to seek outside involvement: it was recognized that for something like the IPCC this could absorb significant resources, but it was seen to be good for the University; and in

some senses could be regarded as an extension of peer review. The blog debate associated with climate change had initially been seen as part of the academic science debate, but less so now because there is no quality control. Professor Davies acknowledged that extreme polarization of views could risk the breakdown of the peer review system, in the sense of people simply not accepting the judgement made. He made the point, however, that the citation rate of the work being challenged remained very high despite criticisms of it.

6. Prof Davies had occasional chats with Prof Jones about the IPCC, regular discussions about his research when he (Prof Davies) was Director of CRU 1993-98, and less regular discussions since. Prof Jones' formal appraisals were undertaken every 2-3 years by Prof Chris Vincent, and then Prof Peter Liss (both of the School of Environmental Sciences). Discussions about the IPCC did not address potential conflicts of interest, but these were enshrined in the Nolan principles, also required by the EPSRC.

Misconduct

7. We received confirmation that the various procedures covered allegations of misconduct [Supporting Docs 6 & 7]. There had been very few instances, and in practice these related to student plagiarism, not to the conduct of members of staff.

Muir Russell

27 April 2010