

MAYOR OF LONDON

Professor Sir Richard Trainer KBE
Principal and President
Kings College London
James Clark Maxwell Building
57 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8WA

Date: 14 July 2014

Dear Sir Richard

Comments about Air Quality in London

I am writing on behalf of the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, following some recent media coverage about London's air quality.

Since the 1990s King's College Environmental Research Group (ERG) has been a leader in the field of air quality research. Working with the Mayor's Office at the Greater London Authority, Transport for London and the London boroughs, your researchers have helped create one of the world's most comprehensive air quality monitoring networks, build the London Atmospheric Emissions Inventory and provide invaluable information on air quality to Londoners.

We are proud to be working with King's College ERG to ensure we have the most complete analysis possible in order to deliver evidence based policies to drive improvements in London's air quality.

I was, however, surprised and disappointed when I read in the Sunday Times of 6 July a misleading quote from a researcher at ERG, which stated that: "[Oxford Street has the] highest [levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂)] in the world in terms of both hourly and annual mean. NO₂ concentrations [in Oxford Street] are as high as they have ever been in the long history of air pollution." This story has since been picked up in wide-ranging media and has been the basis for extensive commentary and public concern.

I believe the statement to be misleading for three reasons: pollution levels in London are lower than for many other world cities, other monitoring sites are currently recording higher concentrations of NO₂ than at Oxford Street and various monitoring sites have reported much higher concentrations of NO₂ in the past. Generally speaking the GLA does not rank locations precisely because of the variability between sites and instead we refer to our 187 air quality focus locations, all of which require action to deliver further improvements to air quality. Recent conversations with the ERG, where it is recognised that there is no single "worse location" due to variability between sites, would validate this approach.

Average levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) across monitoring sites near busy roads in Stuttgart, Paris, Munich, Rome and Milan are all higher than those recorded for London. Mexico City's levels are nearly double those of London, and Hong Kong, Istanbul, Beijing and Shanghai all have higher average readings as well.

The phrase "as high as they have ever been in the long history of air pollution" is also misleading. In 2012 Putney High Street recorded concentrations of 155 ug/m³, 20 ug/m³ higher than that currently being recorded at Oxford Street. In 2000 sites in Lagos recorded an equivalent annual average concentrations of 2885 ug/m³. In fact, there is emerging evidence of decreases in NO₂ at certain London monitoring sites (Marylebone Road for instance) that was not reflected in the statements made to the reporter.

Finally, the claims about Oxford Street fail to explain our comprehensive approach to monitoring developed in partnership with King's. Whereas many cities do not monitor at kerbside and often choose sheltered locations, in London we have often deliberately sited monitoring equipment at the most polluted locations to enable us to shape policy interventions to tackle local sources. The ERG team are well aware of this and it provides important context which is needed for a fair comparison of monitoring data to take place.

We are all trying to improve air quality in London and we rely on King's expertise to help us monitor pollution and tackle this issue. I fully understand that academics need to make their research understandable to the wider public and therefore media friendly. However, it is important that public statements are supported by evidence and set in the proper context.

I look forward to continuing to work with King's ERG and trust that in the future more rigour will be applied to public statements made by members of the Group's staff. I would, of course, be very happy to have a meeting to discuss this further.



Matthew Pencharz
Senior Advisor – Environment and Energy

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25 July 2014

Mr Matthew Pencharz
Senior Adviser – Environment and Energy
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By email and post

Dear Mr Pencharz,

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Mayor of London, dated 14th July, with respect to recent media coverage of academic commentary about air quality in London.

At the outset, I would like to make clear that we greatly value the relationship we have built up over the years with the Mayor of London and the GLA.

I was pleased to read that you and the Mayor recognise the long-term contribution the Environmental Research Group has made working in partnership with the GLA and other strategic partners across London.

I have conveyed your concerns to the Director of the Environmental Research Group, Professor Frank Kelly.

He is better placed than I to discuss the issues you raise, and he would like to meet with you in the near future to do this, as well as explore how the ERG can enhance the support it provides to the GLA and other strategic partners over time.

The College's Public Affairs Manager, Daniel Cremin, would be happy to facilitate a meeting between you and Professor Kelly in the near term future. He can be contacted on 020 7848 4071 or via Daniel.cremin@kcl.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Trainor', written over a horizontal line.

PP

Professor Sir Richard Trainor KBE
Principal, King's College London