

Seeking Six People to Tackle the Region's Weightiest Issue

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Health experts at the University of Birmingham are launching a pioneering initiative in a bid to combat the burgeoning obesity crisis in the West Midlands.

The Centre for Obesity Research is set to recruit members of the local public to form a group of "Obesity Ambassadors" to help input into and promote key findings from the groundbreaking research undertaken within the university.

"We want to start a conversation," says Dr Eliot Marston, Translational Research Manager for the Centre. "We want to hear from our regional population about their most pressing needs in terms of weight management and related health issues. What questions do they have? How can we work together to stop this alarming upward trend?"

"Equally we want to share the results of the Centre's cutting edge research into the prevention and treatment of obesity with the people to whom it is most useful, so we can make a real impact on people's health and wellbeing."

Obesity is known to significantly increase risk of heart disease, diabetes and a range of cancers, and to decrease life expectancy by up to nine years. The West Midlands is at the forefront of this national epidemic, with 28% of men obese and 48% overweight. Worryingly, only 38% of women are classified as normal weight.

More shockingly, the region's children are among the fattest in the UK, with 34% of boys and 31% of girls either overweight or obese.

Dr Marston is looking to recruit six Obesity Ambassadors – both adults and children – as part of an ambitious public engagement project driven by the Centre. Ambassadors will spend time with researchers at the university, go out to visit schools and other groups, as well as getting involved with online activities such as blogging and presenting webcasts.

One important point is that it is not necessary that the ambassadors themselves are obese.

Dr Marston explains: "What we want most is passion. Our ambassadors will be taking exciting research pioneered at the University out into the local community. We need people that care about the health of the region, and the nation, who want to help tackle the health impacts of being overweight.

"We want our research to make a real difference, to impact on people's lives."

Ambassadors must live in the West Midlands, be happy to visit the University every few weeks (travel expenses will be paid) and be great communicators with a real enthusiasm for the subject. Most importantly, they should be keen to help shape research that is of growing importance to everyone in Britain.

The application process is now open, with a deadline of 21st August, and further details can be found [here \(http://www.obesity.bham.ac.uk/news/\)](http://www.obesity.bham.ac.uk/news/).

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Notes to Editors

For the latest news on obesity research at the University of Birmingham, visit: www.obesity.bham.ac.uk

Further Media Information

Dr Eliot Marston is available for interview. Please contact Anna Mitchell on 0121 414 6029 /07920 593946.

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