

Nutritional guidelines and standards: past and present perspectives
3 July 2013, University of York

According to the WHO, 925 million people in the world are undernourished and 1.5 billion adults over 20 are overweight. From the 19th century onwards, nutritional guidelines and standards have been devised to both counteract and measure these dual problems. In 1894 W. O. Atwater of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), for instance, drew up the first dietary standards for protein, total calories, fat and carbohydrates for the American population. Seebohm Rowntree used Atwater's and the work of other early nutritional scientists in his famous study of poverty in York in 1901 to discover the minimum calories and nutritional balance needed before people got ill or lost weight,

Yet nutritional guidelines and standards have not only a long but also an evolving history. The USDA, for example, issued a food wheel in the 1940s that was gradually replaced by a food pyramid and more recently by a food plate, while major supermarkets in the UK have recently replaced the Guidelines Daily Amount (GDA) with traffic-light labels on their food products. And the history of nutritional guidelines and standards is contested, especially when norms created for particular populations are imposed upon others. The tendency for proxies for good and poor nutrition to universalise the human condition has, however, been challenged. For example, with the rise in obesity levels, the Body Mass Index (BMI), which was first devised in the early 19th century, has increasingly come under attack as a useful means to measure obesity. And many scholars fiercely criticised Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's use Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR) and other nutritional standards to assess the health of the American slave population and make inferences about the profitability of American slavery.

By bringing together scholars from various fields, this one-day conference will explore the politics behind and the usefulness of past and present nutritional guidelines and standards.

We welcome proposals for 20-minute papers from any discipline and on any geographical setting that engage with one or more of the following questions:

- What role does nutritional science play in dietary guidance?
- How useful are nutrition surveys in the construction of nutritional guidelines?
- What factors other than developments in nutritional science give rise to and lead to changes in nutritional guidelines and standards issued by national governments, supranational bodies such as the WHO, and national and international NGOs?
- How do producers and distributors of food affect nutritional norms?
- What effects do nutritional guidelines, including food labelling, have on population behaviour?
- How useful are BMR, BMI and other nutritional diagnostic tools to assess the health and wealth of past and present societies?

We may offer a limited number of Postgraduate Bursaries to assist postgraduate presenters with registration and travel costs. Those seeking a bursary should state so on their submission.

Proposals for papers must include the following:

- Title
- Summary of proposal of maximum 250 words
- 1 page c.v. including author's name, address, email , institutional affiliation

All proposals must be sent to Dr. Henrice Altink (henrice.altink@york.ac.uk) or Dr. David Clayton (david.clayton@york.ac.uk) no later than Friday 15 March 2013. Notifications will be sent by 15 April 2013.