

Cambridge may expand to take in poorer students

By Camilla Turner EDUCATION EDITOR

CAMBRIDGE University is considering expanding all its undergraduate colleges to make more places for disadvantaged students, *The Sunday Telegraph* has learnt.

It comes as the university is under pressure to boost the number of students it admits from deprived families.

The vice-chancellor's staff are in "detailed discussions" with 29 colleges about increasing their intake, as it embarks on one of the biggest expansion projects in its 800-year history.

Details will be outlined in the university's 10-year strategic plan, which is due to be published later this year.

Cambridge is also carrying out a review of the criteria that it uses to judge whether or not prospective students are deemed to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It hopes to boost the number of underprivileged students by setting up a "Transitional Year" programme for bright but poor pupils who are offered a place to study at Cambridge but fail to achieve good enough grades in their A levels to meet their offer.

The university aims to have this set up by 2022, but extra places will be required at colleges to accommodate students on the programme.

Cambridge admissions tutors already take into account a student's socio-economic background when making offers. Students are assigned a "contextual flag" based on a number of

factors, including if they come from a low-income household, if they have spent time in care, or if they have attended a low-performing school. This information will also be used as eligibility criteria for the new Transitional Year programme.

So far only one college has confirmed it will expand the number of undergraduate places it can offer.

Lucy Cavendish College, currently a women-only college, will accept men from 2021 and intends to more than double its intake to 130.

The UK's top universities have been told by the higher education watchdog to set radical targets on how they plan to increase their intake of students from underprivileged families.

Oxford has pledged to cut the ratio of students from the wealthiest areas of the country to those from the most deprived from around 15 to one to eight to one in the next five years.

The university says it has no plans to increase the number of undergraduate places it offers.

Meanwhile, Cambridge has committed to cutting the ratio from around 14 to one to around 6.7 to one over the same period.

But private school chiefs have previously warned against "robbing" pupils of places based on social class.

A Cambridge University spokesman said the university is "involved in detailed discussions about the possibility of expanding capacity at the 29 colleges that admit undergraduates".