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Fertility firm appeals to Cambridge University girls for egg donations

By [Neil Sears](#) and [Jenny Hope](#)

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Would you help us start our family?

We long to be parents, but a rare genetic disorder that causes repeated miscarriages has prevented us. We are now looking for a real-life angel to be our egg donor.

If you are compassionate, kind, healthy and between 18 and 35 years old, could you help us?

We can imagine no greater gift than the chance to love a child.

Please contact:
alison@altrui.co.uk
or call 0844 745 3033 / 01969 667875
www.altrui.co.uk/donors



Read all about it: The leaflet from Altrui that was distributed to Cambridge University students

Thousands of Cambridge students have been targeted by a firm offering up to £750 to egg donors.

Leaflets were stuck in their university pigeonholes, making an emotional plea to help a couple unable to have children.

It said: 'We are looking for a real-life angel to be our egg donor.'

The development appears to be a result of an increase in the amount of 'compensation' that can be given to donors, and may confirm fears of a rise in 'egg brokers' profiting from dealing in human lives.

The targeting of elite students also raises concerns about attempts to create 'superbabies'.

Last night critics warned that young women are often unaware of the risks of egg donation, and a fertility expert said the firm's tactics were 'unacceptable'. Donors have to take drugs to stimulate egg production, and complications may cause death in rare cases.

At the beginning of the summer term two weeks ago, Cambridge students found the company's leaflets stuffed in their pigeonholes, asking: 'If you are compassionate, kind, healthy and between 18 and 35 years old, could you help us? We can imagine no greater gift than the chance to love a child.'

The flyers said the couple, themselves Cambridge graduates, were unable to have children because of 'a rare genetic disorder that causes repeated miscarriages'.

The leaflets were produced by Altrui, an egg broking company based in Hawes, North Yorkshire. It was established two years ago by Alison Bagshawe, 56, a former NHS fertility counsellor, and her businessman husband, also 56.

They do not make clear Altrui is a profit-making company that charges desperate couples £1,300 to try to find them a donor.

Infertile couples also have to pay a donor's 'compensation' of up to £750, giving them a total bill of more than £2,000 even before they are put in touch with a clinic that extracts the donated eggs for use in the would-be mother.

On the firm's website, potential donors are told: 'It is illegal to accept any payment for your egg donation in the UK.

'Having said that, in order that you should not be out of pocket, compensation is permitted.

'The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority recently reviewed the situation. In recognition of the inconvenience, commitment and time given by an egg donor in going through the donation process, they raised the maximum compensation to £750. This came into effect on April 1, 2012.'



Tempted? Critics have blasted egg-broking company Altrui after they targetted Cambridge University pupils

Egg donation has tripled in a decade in America, where donors can get £6,000 or more.

A US survey found donors are typically aged about 24, and one in three donate up to four times. Many pay off credit card bills and other loans with the money.

Last night the medical director of Create fertility clinic in London, Geeta Nargund, said: 'Young women students who are financially vulnerable are being targeted to have unnecessary medical procedures that carry health risks. It's completely unacceptable.

'I hoped this would never happen in this country, but we have imported this tactic from the US.'

Josephine Quintavalle of the campaign group Comment on Reproductive Ethics said: 'This is not donation, this is the buying and selling of human eggs.

'It raises the issue of eugenics because, just like in the States, students are being targeted because they have higher IQs. More brains equals better value.'



Designer babies: The appeal to university pupils has only heightened the belief that parents want 'superbabies'

'There is not enough discussion about the risks to healthy women who have to take serious drugs they don't need, which have risks to them and possibly any children born as a result.'

Professor Adam Balen, of the British Fertility Society, said egg donation must remain an altruistic activity.

He said: 'It is not appropriate to target women in this way. Egg donation should only be offered by appropriately recognised clinics with full counselling.'

'Women should come forward voluntarily.'

Last night the founder of Altrui, Alison Bagshawe, said the couple had asked if they could distribute the firm's leaflets themselves.

She said they had obtained permission from the students' union and all Cambridge colleges except one, where the dean said he feared the leaflets could upset any student who had suffered a miscarriage or had an abortion.

Two women had so far responded, she said, and if one agreed to donate to the couple, the other donor would be asked if she wished to donate to someone else.

Mrs Bagshawe, whose only child, William, died of cancer at eight months, while at the same time cancer also left her husband infertile, said: 'There are couples who are desperate to have someone find them a donor and I can't afford to do it for nothing. I have to pay a mortgage and eat.'

'I find the donors and support them going through treatment, then send them to licensed centres who take over at that point.'

'It really isn't about money – £750 for what these donors have to go through doesn't begin to do it.'

'This particular flyer was put out by a couple who have been through Cambridge and wanted a donor they felt some connection with. It was all above board.

'There was nothing on the leaflet whatsoever about financial incentives.'

**Since publication, we have been asked by Altrui to make clear that they do not entice or induce donors. They do inform donors of their rights under the law to compensation, but again stress this is not a payment. Altrui see their role as offering the opportunity for egg donation in this country under full protection and regulation.*

Yes, we were tempted, say girl targets of fertility touts

By Jenny Hope



Doubts: Cambridge University Students Jo Hall, 21, and Phoebe Pluckrose-Oliver, 22, were given leaflets by Altrui, a company looking for egg donors - and had serious doubts about the scheme

Cambridge students expressed their doubts about the scheme last night.

Phoebe Pluckrose-Oliver, a 22-year-old studying education and drama, said: 'After getting the flyer I genuinely considered donating eggs for a bit and went on to their website to have a look.'

'The monetary incentive wasn't a major player in the thought process, but I can see how it might look attractive to a struggling student.'

'For about a day I decided I wanted to do it, and then woke up the next morning in sudden realisation that it was a pretty terrifying thing to do.'

Josephine Hall, who is on the same course, said: 'The fact we are all Cambridge students hopefully means the targeted girls are intelligent enough to research the company and make an informed decision – although I'm sure £750 is attractive to lots of people. It certainly initially was for me.'

'Targeting women who are financially vulnerable and don't have the resources or intelligence to research and really think about it would be much worse.'

Taking part brings a number of risks. To produce extra eggs, donors have to take drugs, which can lead to ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome.

The condition is usually mild and easily monitored, but can be fatal in severe, if rare, cases. Just as important are the emotional strings attached to the donation, which may not be fully appreciated by childless women.

Anonymous sperm and egg donation was banned in the UK in 2005, which means that donor-conceived children can now trace their biological parents when they turn 18.

Counselling is obligatory for women willing to be donors where these kind of issues should be explored.

But even some fertility specialists question whether would-be donors who have not yet started their own families can be truly informed about the emotional risks, including the possibility that they may help another woman conceive – but fail when they try.

A woman who has the medical procedures necessary for donation will receive treatment at a clinic registered by the UK watchdog, the Human Embryology and Fertilisation Authority.

She will be given medication to turn off her normal menstrual cycle and prevent premature ovulation, where eggs are released by the ovary ready for fertilisation.

She is then given daily or twice daily injections of human gonadotropins, drugs that are concentrated forms of natural hormones which stimulate ovulation in a normal menstrual cycle.

The main health risk at this stage is that too many follicles develop, resulting in nausea, bloating and dehydration.

In severe cases the fluid may collect around organs such as the lungs or heart causing blood clots and strokes, or the ovary may rupture.

In rare cases hospitalisation is necessary, while still rarer cases may lead to fatalities.

There is a small chance of complications at the stage when the eggs are retrieved using a fine needle.

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