

First year free in university halls for deprived students

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who have low incomes do not live in deprived areas and that rural areas are less likely to be classed as officially poor.

Universities are under intense pressure to meet targets based on the criteria and have been threatened with fines, expected to be in the form of funding penalties, if they do not succeed. Aberdeen has struggled to attract high numbers of students from deprived backgrounds, as have Edinburgh and St Andrews.

Edinburgh University has introduced a £3,000 bursary for those from the poorest postcode areas, although unlike Aberdeen, it also takes into account family income levels. Aberdeen quietly introduced the free accommodation scheme, available for all self-ca-

tered halls, last year. In the current year, 33 students took up the offer, at a cost to the university of about £200,000. Of applicants for the next academic year, 191 have so far been offered free rooms.

A spokesman for the university said the scheme would encourage those who might otherwise struggle to afford to move away from home to enjoy "a fuller university experience" and save up for later years of study. However, he admitted the government targets were also a factor. "It is only based on their SIMD status — nothing else is taken into account for this incentive," he said.

A spokesman for the Scottish government said: "We welcome innovative ideas and we are interested to see if they translate into positive results."

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