

Free rooms for poorest students at university

STUDENTS are being offered free accommodation as universities move to attract more students from deprived areas.

The Aberdeen University offer reportedly applies to students who have a postcode officially deemed as among the most deprived 20 per cent in the country.

Universities are under 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 promises applicants a free year in halls of residence, which usually costs between £3,861 and £5,733.

However, experts raised concerns about the eligibility criteria, based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), as tens of thousands of people in poverty do not live in the most deprived postcode areas while they are often home to better off families.

Lucy Hunter Blackburn, a researcher at the Edinburgh University and former head of higher education at the Scottish Government, said the scheme could disadvantage poorer students from rural areas as they are unlikely to be officially classed as being from a deprived area.

She said: "The idea that you offer targeted, free accommodation to some students is clearly worth looking at; that principle is very easy to defend.

"But SIMD is such a crude measure to use."

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

