

Student Safety

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For advice on staying safe:

www.scotland.police.uk/studentlife



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POLICE SCOTLAND ADVISE STUDENTS TO WATCH OUT FOR RENTAL SCAMS

The vast majority of students moving into higher education and moving away from home to live in student or private rental accommodation will experience no problems with securing somewhere to live.

However Police Scotland is warning students about the potential for fraudsters to target those who are looking for accommodation.

The scams work by offering to let property in prime areas at below market rents and asking for deposits, or in some cases full payment upfront in order to secure the property prior to visiting it, or to prove they have the money in order to rent for the duration.

Prospective tenants are convinced to part with either credit card details, cheques or cash before seeing the property, which then turn out not to exist. Payments are then not returned and the student cannot get in contact with the supposed "landlord".

There have also been occasions whereby fraudsters gain access to properties and take prospective tenants around, portraying the property to be vacant and under their control. In other cases the fraudsters are purporting to rent out property that does not exist, has already been rented out, or has been rented to multiple victims at the same time.

Protect yourself:

- **Do not send money upfront** - Make sure you are certain the person and property exists and that the person has control of the property. Deposits are standard in renting; paying money upfront to secure a room is not.
- **Protect your deposit** – When a deposit is taken other than a “holding deposit”, the money must be paid into a deposit scheme approved by the Department for Communities and Local Government. Further information about the scheme and tenant's rights can be found on the Department for Communities and Local Government website.
- **Use your common sense** – If the property is too cheap and looks fantastic then it’s probably too good to be true.

How to avoid being a victim of student rental fraud:

- **Visit the house you intend to rent** - Make sure you visit the property with the landlord to confirm if the house share is bona fide. Be suspicious of anyone who refuses to let you visit the property.
- **Ask for ID from the Landlord** - Check the landlord’s driving licence and/or passport to establish if they are who they say they are. Prospective tenants should also check that the landlord is a member of the National Landlords Association (NLA) via the NLA’s Landlord accreditation website www.landlords.org.uk
- **Check that the owner is on an approved accommodation list** - Check with your student union or accommodation office as many Universities and Colleges will have an approved housing list. Also look for accreditation membership such as National Approved Letting Scheme (NALS), Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) or Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA).
- **Ask for evidence that the property exists** - Ask for copies of tenancy agreements and any safety certificates such as Gas, Electricity or HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) Licence.
- **Be aware of adverts with no telephone numbers or where the only email address is a free one** (i.e Hotmail, Gmail etc) when you’re not sure who you are dealing with. – Look for telephone numbers that are based in the UK but be wary of phone numbers beginning with 070 (or +4470) which are nongeographic business numbers. Check that the numbers work as they are often fax numbers that fraudsters find on the internet.

- **Check the legitimacy of the advert** – Avoid adverts with no photographs or where multiple adverts have the same photographs.

- **Be cautious on how you send money** - The safest way to make a payment is by a credit card in person at the letting agent's office. A formal contract should also be signed before any money has changed hands.

- **Be sceptical if you are asked to transfer money via money transfer agents such as Western Union or Money Gram.** – Their advice is clear – only use these money transfers to send money to people that you know and trust.. Also do not respond to a “Proof of funds” scam whereby you are asked to send money to a friend and then send the details of the transaction to the “landlord”. The funds can be withdrawn using forged identification and allows scammers to access the funds.