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# Accommodation

## Avoiding housing fraud/scams and renting safely

Scams are schemes set up to try and con/cheat you out of money.

Unfortunately, there are lots of housing scams in the UK where people pose as landlords and ask for large sums of money for accommodation that doesn't exist, and hundreds of students are cheated out of thousands of pounds every year. If you lose money in this type of scam it is not always possible to get it back so you should read this factsheet for information on how to avoid getting cheated and what to watch out for.

### Things you should always do

- Try to take someone with you when you go to view a property. If you have to go alone make sure someone knows where you are going, who you are meeting and when you will be back.
- Rent through Bristol SU lettings, [www.bristolsulettings.co.uk](http://www.bristolsulettings.co.uk) or an agency that is a member of a redress scheme and a professional body. You can find details of local agencies on our fact sheet: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/media/docs/letting-agencies.pdf>
- If you are thinking of renting from another agency or through e.g. Gumtree you should monitor your responses very carefully and check with us before parting with any money.
- You can also check property ownership online with the UK Land Registry. See [www.landregistry.gov.uk](http://www.landregistry.gov.uk)
- Ask lots of questions of landlords or agents. You need to check their legitimacy so ask the name and address of the owner of the property. If they avoid answering these questions without good reasons, consider how you feel about their answers. Do you trust them?

- Even if they answer your questions, be cautious and do your own checks.
- Trust your instincts – if it doesn't feel right then don't proceed or contact the Accommodation Office for advice.
- If you think that you are dealing with someone who is trying to cheat you, hang up the phone, do not respond to the email or stop dealing with the person then report the matter (see next page)
- If you feel suspicious you could try Googling the landlords name and/or email address, it could show up as a scam.

### Things you should never do

- Never transfer or pay any money before you have seen the property, or you are certain that the landlord is legitimate. (If you DO go ahead and pay in advance despite this advice – you MUST insist you can only pay by credit card or paypal as you will be more likely to get your money back if you are scammed)
- If you see the words Western Union or Moneygram mentioned in an advert or in any further correspondence, or the landlord talks about 'wiring' money to

them or even to a friend this will certainly be a scam. Don't get involved!

- Never feel pressured to make important decisions quickly - bogus landlords will often claim there are many people interested in the property or that there are fewer houses available than there really are to scare you into signing something and paying a deposit.

#### **You should be suspicious if:**

- The landlord or agent asks for some form of payment before you have seen the property.
- The properties advertised seem very cheap and amazing value for money.
- The landlord or agent requires that you wire money e.g. via Western Union to them, or to a friend of yours or even to yourself.
- The landlord or agent tries to hurry you round the property or puts a lot of pressure on you to pay something immediately.
- The landlord or agent is unable to show you the property or starts making excuses or delaying viewings. Especially if they can only be reached electronically because they say they are away or abroad.
- The contact information is wrong e.g. if there's no telephone number or if the telephone number provided is disconnected, incorrect, or otherwise unusable.
- The advertiser has a free email address (yahoo, gmail, hotmail) or an address that does not designate a Country for example .com rather than .co.uk. A paid corporate URL will be safer to use.

- Their correspondence often contains poor grammar and misspellings.
- The name registered with UK Land Registry does not match the name of the landlord claiming to own the property.

#### **Your money**

You should report the situation to your bank or credit card company as soon as possible, even if the payment was made via a money transfer, to discuss the possibility of getting any money returned.

#### **Reporting fraud**

##### ***Urgent matters***

- a) Where an immediate police response is required – i.e. where the suspect is very near and/or the victim is at immediate risk – dial 999.
- b) Where a police response is required, e.g. for victim care or the suspect can be easily identified and located Dial 101 or go into your local police station.

##### ***Non-urgent matters***

Action Fraud is a national fraud reporting initiative Non-urgent fraud matters where the suspect is not immediately identifiable or where the victim is not at immediate risk should be reported to them. Reports are then sent to the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau for analysis and possible investigation by the police. You can report either online or over the telephone.

Reporting online: [www.actionfraud.police.uk](http://www.actionfraud.police.uk)

Telephone reporting: 0300 1232040

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**The University of Bristol Accommodation Office runs a housing advice service for all staff and students, if you have any problems with your private rented accommodation please contact us.**

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*The contents of this fact sheet are for information only. You should consult the Accommodation Office or an advice centre such as the CAB before taking any action.*