

Money mules

Fact sheet

In 2017, more than 8,600 young people in the UK, aged 18-24, were caught using their bank accounts illegally – by acting as ‘money mules’.

Make sure you know how to avoid money mule schemes.

What is a money mule?

A money mule is a person who transfers stolen money on behalf of others, usually through their bank account. Criminals contact people and offer them cash to receive money into their bank account and transfer it to another account. This is a crime known as money laundering. The person is known as a ‘money mule’, transferring money between criminals.

What is the money used for?

The money that money mules transfer is usually illegally obtained. It’s used for lots of different crimes, for example acts of terrorism, human trafficking (forcing people, even children, into slavery), sexual exploitation (forcing people to take part in sexual acts), fraud and scams, or smuggling illegal drugs. It is unlikely that the money mule will know where the money has come from or where it will end up.

Why would someone become a money mule?

Criminals often use job adverts or social media to target vulnerable groups of people who are likely to be in need of money, including young people, university students, migrant workers, or the unemployed.

The money mule is offered an easy way to make some cash and sometimes doesn’t realise they have committed a crime. Some may be suspicious but think they won’t get caught.

How do criminals find money mules to target?

Criminals often make job adverts offering ‘quick cash’ and ‘no experience necessary’ or try to make friends with their target (usually on social media), using their profile to find out about them. The criminal gets in touch and makes it seem as if they have lots in common (e.g. music taste, sports teams, hobbies). After becoming ‘friends’, the person being targeted is more likely to trust the criminal and agree to help out.

The criminal can put pressure on the money mule, offering big money for little effort and saying that the ‘offer’ will disappear shortly. Criminals can often become threatening if the money mule tries to refuse or back out of the agreement.



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How are money mules caught?

Banks have systems in place to detect suspicious money moving between accounts. Once detected, the bank will notify the authorities so that they can take action to catch the money mule and the criminals involved.

What happens when the money mule is caught?

If someone is caught acting as a money mule:

- their bank account will be closed
- they will find it difficult to get loans (including a student loan) or phone contracts
- they could go to prison for up to 14 years

How can I avoid money mule schemes?

- Be wary of people you don't know who contact you on social media
- Don't give your bank account details to anyone unless you know and trust them
- Be wary of offers of easy money. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is
- Be wary of job offers you haven't applied for
- Research any company that makes you a job offer and make sure their contact details are genuine
- Be wary of job offers where all interactions and transactions will be done online
- Be wary of job offers from overseas
- Be wary of job adverts written in poor English with spelling mistakes

For more information about money mule schemes and how to avoid them, visit moneymules.co.uk