

Identity fraud

The term 'identity fraud' is commonly used to describe the impersonation of another person for financial gain. Fraudsters steal your personal identity and/or financial information and use it to purchase goods and services or access facilities in your name.

What is identity fraud?

Identity fraud is the use of a false identity or another person's identity to obtain goods, money or services by deception. This often involves the use of stolen, counterfeit or forged documents such as passports, driving licences and credit cards.

According to CIFAS – the UK's Fraud Prevention Service identity fraud is one of the most prevalent types of fraud in the UK.

Common types of identity fraud

Application fraud/account takeover:

A fraudster applies for financial services (eg a new credit card or bank account) in your name or changes your postal address.

Impersonation of the deceased:

A fraudster uses the identity of a deceased person to obtain goods and/or services.

Phishing: A fraudster sends you an email claiming to be from your bank or other legitimate online business (eg a shop or auction website) asking you to update or confirm your personal or financial information such as password and account details. This information is then used to impersonate you and gain access to your accounts.

Present (current) address fraud:

A fraudster living at your address (eg a family member) or nearby (eg a person living in the same block of flats) uses your name to purchase goods and/or services and intercepts the mail when it arrives.

How does the fraud work?

A fraudster acquires or steals information about you. This may include:

- your name
- your current (or previous) address
- your date of birth

- your bank account or credit/debit card details, or
- any other personal or financial information about you.

This information is then used to:

- acquire new debit, credit or store cards
- open bank or mobile phone accounts
- forge or obtain new passports or driving licences
- apply for benefits
- take out loans

all in your name.

You may not realise that you have been a victim of identity fraud for some time. This is because the fraudster may intercept deliveries or redirect your mail without your knowledge or consent.

What happens if you become a victim?

Unless you have been negligent, you will not generally be liable for all of the debt

incurred by the fraudster in your name. However, you will need to rectify the damage caused by the fraudster (particularly to your credit rating) and this can take time.

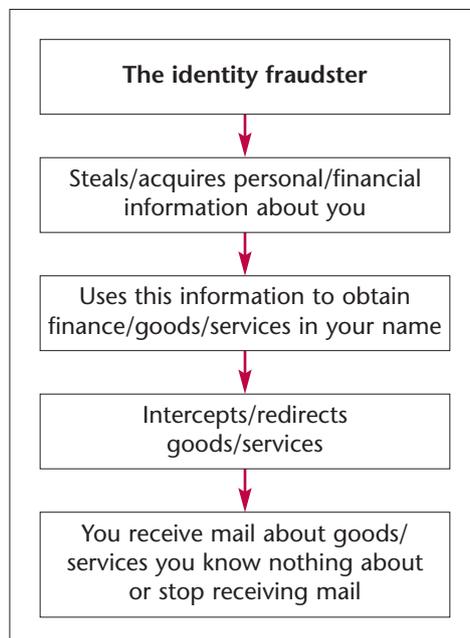
Five steps that you should take:

1. Immediately report the matter to the relevant organisation(s). Follow their advice.
2. Obtain a copy of your credit report (available from credit reference agencies) and check for discrepancies. Go back to step 1 if necessary.
3. Keep a record of all correspondence you send or receive in respect of the identity fraud.
4. Consider 'protective registration' through CIFAS – the UK's Fraud Prevention Service (www.cifas.org.uk/pr). A small annual fee is charged for this service.
5. Reassess your personal security strategies in respect of your personal and financial information. Ask yourself 'How well do I protect it and can I do anything differently?' Change relevant passwords and PINs.

In most cases it will be at the discretion of the organisation that supplied the goods and services to the fraudster to decide whether or not to prosecute. This is because the organisation supplying the goods or services is considered the victim in law – not you.

Where to report identity fraud

If you think you may have become the victim of identity fraud and suffer financial loss as a result, report it to Action Fraud by calling 0300 123 2040 or visiting the website www.actionfraud.org.uk.



Credit or debit card, cheque and online banking fraud: Contact your financial institution. You do not need to make a separate report to the police unless instructed to do so (England, Wales and Northern Ireland only).

Goods and services purchased in your name: Contact the relevant organisation. You may be asked to make a separate report to the police.

Loss or theft of passport: Contact the Identity and Passport Service.

Loss or theft of driving licences: Contact the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA).

Loss or theft of mail: Contact Royal Mail.

Further information

See our separate fraud factsheet on *Online shopping scams* for more information about protecting yourself online.

Action Fraud

www.actionfraud.org.uk

CIFAS – the UK’s Fraud Prevention Service

www.cifas.org.uk

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority

www.dft.gov.uk/dvla

Fraud Advisory Panel

www.fraudadvisorypanel.org

GetSafeOnline

www.getsafeonline.org

Identity and Passport Service

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/passports-and-immigration

Identitytheft.org.uk

www.identitytheft.org.uk

Royal Mail

www.royalmail.com

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How to protect yourself

Be aware of the risk from identity fraud and safeguard your personal and financial information.

DO:

- ✓ Shred documents containing personal and financial information. Wipe the memory on computers and mobile devices before disposal.
- ✓ Monitor your bank accounts regularly for any unusual transactions. Close banks accounts you no longer need.
- ✓ Review your credit report on a regular basis.
- ✓ Report lost or stolen personal documents and/or credit/debit cards.
- ✓ Limit the number of personal documents you carry to those that you need – leave the rest at home in a secure place.
- ✓ Remove your name from unnecessary or unwanted mailing lists.
- ✓ Arrange for your mail to be redirected (for at least a year) if you move house and notify relevant organisations of your change of address.
- ✓ If you don’t receive any mail, check with Royal Mail to ensure that a redirection hasn’t been set up in your name without your knowledge.
- ✓ Use secure passwords and PINs. A combination of numbers, letters and characters is best (eg £3c\$4d%5e).
- ✓ Limit the amount of personal information you disclose on social networks. Regularly check your privacy settings.
- ✓ Check that the padlock symbol is displayed in either the bottom right-hand corner of the webpage or in the address bar when you proceed to the checkout on online shopping websites.

- ✓ Shield the display when entering your PIN into a cash machine or mobile terminal.
- ✓ Keep computer security software (such as anti-virus and anti-spyware) and firewalls up to date.

- ✓ Limit the amount of personal information stored on mobile devices such as phones, PDAs and hand-held computers.

DO NOT:

- ✗ Disclose personal information over the telephone (especially a mobile phone), on the internet, by mail or in person to people you don’t know.
- ✗ Respond to unsolicited emails. Delete them.
- ✗ Disclose your passwords and PINs to other people, even to family members.
- ✗ Use obvious passwords or PINs or the same password for different accounts.
- ✗ Let your debit or credit card out of your sight in restaurants and shops.
- ✗ Disclose personal and financial information on websites that are not secure.
- ✗ Provide financial information on questionnaires, surveys or competitions no matter how innocent it might appear (eg by answering a question such as ‘Do you own a credit card?’).

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