

## Spotting the signs of false investment scams on social media

PCC Mark Shelford is encouraging social media users to spot the signs of false investment scams/frauds to stop more people becoming victims of fraud.

False investment scams/fraud are when scammers/ fraudsters promise unrealistic monetary benefits and returns. Fraudsters will use tactics like offering to convert a small amount of money that victims have to pay to them up front into a larger sum and solicit money from them. This false promise of return on the victim's investment results in the scammer/ fraudster disappearing with their money leaving them at a loss.

Money-flipping is a type of investment fraud, which is heavily reliant on social media. After transferring funds, the fraudster tells the victim they have made a substantial return on the initial investment, which is when they ask for more funds to be invested so that further 'profits' can be made.

Between April 2020 – December 2020, over 12,000 reports of money-flipping were made nationally and total losses reported to be over £2.2million.

PCC Mark Shelford, the national PCC lead for Economic and Cyber Crime, has become aware of a particular money-flipping scam happening on Instagram where, in addition to soliciting money from victims and before the victim realises they have been scammed, fraudsters ask victims for a video endorsing the 'scheme' and asks for their Apple ID password.

As a result, the fraudsters log into the victim's Instagram and post the endorsement video to target the victim's friends and family. Fraudsters continue to pose as the victim, responding to messages from friends and family to encourage them to take part in the money-flipping 'scheme.'

PCC Mark Shelford spoke about this scam and the responsibility of social media organisations on BBC Radio 4's 'You and Yours' programme (<https://t.co/7zUb0mfpPE>) and BBC Radio Bristol Breakfast (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0bfq5nl>).

Remember:

- If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is
- The 'get rich quick' scams are often indicative of investment fraud
- Be mindful of unsolicited investment offers
- Check the FCA register to make sure you're dealing with a legitimate company
- Seek impartial advice before investing

PCC Mark Shelford said: "Any type of fraud often leaves victims feeling humiliated and violated but I know this particular scam is leaving victims with a sense of guilt that their Instagram accounts are being used to target more victims from their own social circles. The only people in the wrong here are the fraudsters.

"We need to ensure that social media companies are being held accountable and are protecting their users. The Online Safety Bill, which is due to be put to Parliament this year, will make providers more responsible for what's happening on their platforms including fraud.

“The Bill is a huge step forward in keeping people safe and aims to give Ofcom more powers to investigate, audit and fine big tech companies if they do not prioritise user’s safety.

“We need to make the UK the least attractive place for fraudsters and disrupt online criminal activity at every opportunity to reduce victimisation.

“As the national PCC lead for Economic and Cyber Crime, I will continue to raise awareness of how to prevent yourself becoming a victim of fraud. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is and do not share any of your passwords with anyone.”

Take Five – To Stop Fraud Advice:

- Stop: Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe
- Challenge: Could it be fake? It’s okay to reject, refuse or ignore requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.
- Protect: If you think you’ve been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud online at [actionfraud.police.uk](https://actionfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040.