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Cyber scams targeting new students

Last year HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) asked for your help in warning your students to be vigilant about tax scams, which often target them at their personal university email addresses.

While it was great to see a number of universities and student unions share our phishing advice, we are concerned that the new academic year and remote working in academia will see another wave of email and text tax scams, targeting a new and potentially vulnerable university intake. These scams often offer fake tax refunds or help with claiming Covid-related financial help. We also see frauds offering spurious support with reclaiming council tax, purporting to be from TV Licensing, the DVLA or 'GovUK'.

We also know students can be approached to act as 'money mules', with offers of reward to transfer funds through their own, genuine financial accounts, inadvertently laundering criminal funds.

New university students who might have had little or no interaction with the tax system might be tricked into clicking on links in such emails or texts. We are therefore asking each university to join us again in raising awareness of HMRC scams as early as possible in the academic year and in encouraging university leaders to ensure fraud prevention and cyber advice is integrated into your guidance for new students, to help prevent financial loss.

I am attaching our advice on how to avoid tax scams and including a link to examples of current frauds, and would be grateful if you'd share this with your student body.

With grateful thanks for your help.

Mike Fell

Head of Cyber Operations