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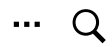
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# Fake university degree websites shut down

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A BBC investigation found fake degrees from UK institutions for sale on a website in China

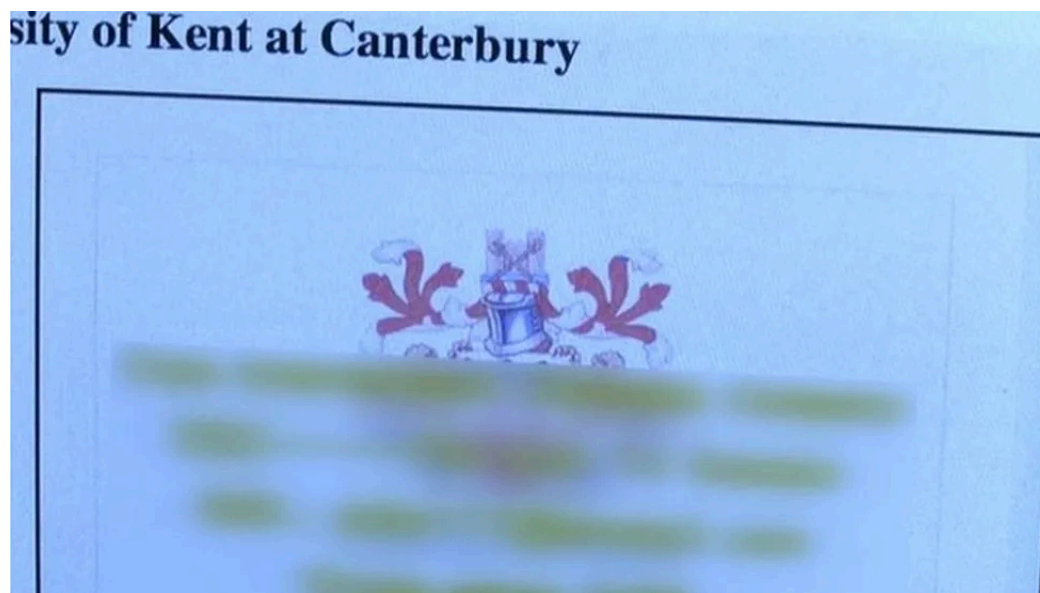
**More than 40 fraudulent websites have been shut down in a major crackdown on the sale of fake degrees.**

The sites closed included those selling authentic-looking certificates using the names of real British universities.

Others were providers offering distance learning courses but were not valid UK degree awarding bodies.

An agency set up to investigate the issue, **Higher Education Degree Datacheck** (Hedd), said it had reports of more than 90 bogus institutions.

It follows a **BBC South East investigation** which found fake University of Kent degree certificates on sale online in China for £500.



The University of Kent certificate was being offered for sale for £500

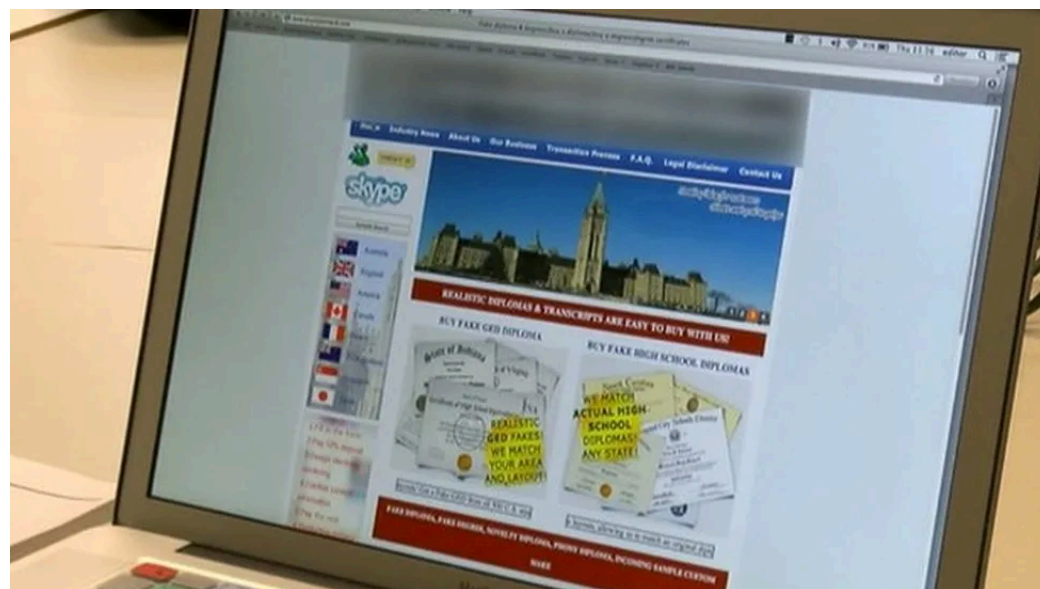
Jayne Rowley, the higher education services director at Prospects which runs Hedd, said last September was its busiest month so far, with the closure of four bogus university sites and three websites selling fake degree certificates from multiple UK universities.

"One of the institutions we shut down in September was Stafford University. Now, of course there is an entirely genuine Staffordshire University, so they are piggy-backing on a name," she said.

"There are some sites where they've actually taken the name of a real university - Surrey for example.

"There was a bogus provider shut down by us a couple of months ago calling itself Surrey University, and we've had 'Wolverhampton university' without the 'p' in the middle."

Other fake certificates have purported to have come from Salford and Anglia Ruskin universities, while degrees from the University of Manchester were sold on the auction website eBay.



A Chinese website offered fake degree certificates for a number of UK universities

The government announced a **crackdown on bogus providers** in June 2015, with the aim of prosecuting and taking down fraudulent websites.

Ms Rowley said Hedd had taken action against offenders both in the UK and overseas.

She said: "Under UK law you are not allowed to call yourself a university unless you are entitled to do so and that requires an order from the Secretary of State.

"If you are using the name of a real university that is breaching trademark laws, you are not allowed to trade on somebody's good name."

Hedd has now asked new graduates not to take photographs with their real degree certificates in case they inadvertently aid fraudsters.

A spokesman for the Department for Education said: "Degree fraud cheats both genuine learners and employers so we've taken decisive action to crack down on those seeking to profit from it."

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