



NEWS RELEASE

09:00 21/09/09 (GMT)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Experts warn of gaps in student security

Copied keys and substandard locks could be putting over 400,000 British students at risk of burglary, assault, fraud and worse still, experts warn this Freshers week.

The Master Locksmiths Association (MLA) is calling on universities and landlords to consider if the type of locks fitted in student halls of residents and flats meet industry standards and if spare keys left in the hand of previous occupants are putting students at risk.

Figures from the Home Office reveal that students are one of the highest at-risk groups of crime with one in three students becoming a victim of criminal activity each year. Furthermore, statistics also report that over a third (36 per cent) of students live in fear of crime.

Dr Steffan George, business development director from the MLA warns: "While universities and police forces work hard to raise awareness of personal security among students we are concerned that locks to rooms and flats are often not even considered.

"Presumption is that once someone has returned a key it is the only copy, however this is sadly not always the case and high student turnover could mean excess copies have been made and used by former residents, employees, contractors and even rogue locksmiths to the detriment of new residents.

For further information please contact:

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“We would encourage private landlords and universities to review the security of their accommodation and call on students and parents to ask questions about standards of locks, when they were last replaced and how the copying of keys is controlled.

“By installing quality locks with patented keys which can’t easily be copied and by carrying out regular key checks at the end of each academic year, landlords would be acting in a responsible manner and rightfully positioning the safety of tenants at the top of their agenda.”

Backing the MLA campaign National Union of Students (NUS) vice president for welfare, Ben Whittaker, said: "Students are the most likely victims of burglary in the UK, which is why we are pleased to support the MLA campaign. Students should look at their accommodation and ensure that it is safe, with adequate locks on doors and windows. As the main cause of burglary against students is walk-in theft, we would advise students to be particularly vigilant in locking up their flats and houses securely."

Endsleigh has been the UK's leading student insurance provider for over 40 years and is the only insurance provider approved by the NUS.

Rhiannon Harris, Endsleigh spokesperson, said: “Although Endsleigh’s student contents policies offer cover for walk-in theft many other insurance providers do not offer such reassurance. Students should make sure that the insurance they choose is specifically tailored to their lifestyle so that they do not find themselves caught short by theft.

“In addition, second and third year students living in shared accommodation should carefully select their insurance as their accommodation is often perceived to be less secure by thieves and therefore is at greater risk.”

The MLA was established over 50 years ago to set and promote standards of conduct, practice and materials within locksmithing. The organisations’ student campaign is aimed at increasing awareness of lock and key safety and encouraging landlords and universities to use reputable locksmiths to upgrade systems where necessary.

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The MLA has recently been granted the right to carry out standard Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks into the backgrounds of its members and would be locksmiths applying for MLA training or licences.

Dr George added: “We estimate that approximately 60 per cent of people currently working as locksmiths in the UK are unlicensed – that’s over 6,500 unregulated individuals with access to people’s homes, businesses, hospitals and schools.

“While we do not think CRB checks should be the norm, for all specialist trades people, we do believe that where people have unique skills and in effect, unlimited access, as in the case of locksmiths, then background checks are essential.

“The MLA is aware of at least one case where a convicted murderer approached us to become a licensed locksmith, which is obviously a worrying thought and raises questions as to how many others with potentially threatening backgrounds could be working in the field.

“By being able to carry out CRB checks we are able to make sure our members have suitable backgrounds to take on this position of trust. Customers also have increased confidence that by selecting an MLA licensed locksmith they are using a regulated service provider.”

Ends

Notes to Editor

Issued on behalf of the Master Locksmiths Association by Karol Marketing Group. For further information, pictures or to set up interviews please contact Steffan George on 01327 262255 or steffan.george@locksmiths.co.uk

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Interviews available

Dr Steffan George, business development director, Master Locksmiths Association – available to comment on press release, history of the Master Locksmiths Association, recent CRB ruling, membership and code of conduct.

Justin Freeman, technical manager, Master Locksmiths Association – expert on key security, locks, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) lock and door requirements and technical aspects of locksmithing industry .

About the MLA

The Master Locksmiths Association (MLA) was established over 50 years ago to set and promote standards of conduct, practice and materials within locksmithing. With circa 1400 members in the UK and some in the rest of the world, the MLA is recognised as the authoritative body for locksmithing by the police, home office and other leading organisations such as the British Standards Institute.

As a not for profit association, the MLA ensure its member companies undergo strict vetting procedures so the public, government and industry receive the appropriate service and advice. MLA members share the ethos that 'skill and integrity' remain paramount in locksmithing and are able to provide sound advice based on knowledge and experience.

A list of approved MLA companies are listed on the MLA website, for further information please visit: www.locksmiths.co.uk

CRB checks

1. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 introduced limitations on the requirement by members of the public to disclose previous convictions when applying for positions of employment. The thought behind this was to enable ex-offenders to find work without their previous criminal history prejudicing their chances of employment.
2. Although generally it is desirable to encourage employment of ex-offenders by allowing their convictions to become 'spent', there are certain positions of such sensitivity that disclosure of all convictions should be made available when requested.

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3. Where members of society are at risk or vulnerable, such as might be the case with children and the elderly, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 has a number of exceptions to the order which removes the right of ex-offenders to 'not disclose' details of past convictions. The Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) is the organisation that manages the records associated with ex-offenders.
4. Prior to the ruling made on the 6 July 2009 and signed on the 10 July 2009 the Master Locksmiths Association was not legally able to carry out CRB checks. This meant that the Association had no way of vetting its membership or those who wished to make use of its training.
5. Since locksmiths have access to all sorts of establishments, from schools to airports, the MLA has rightly been concerned at the lack of control and security within the industry. The MLA sees the Government's decision to allow them to carry out CRB checks as recognition of the problem and a valuable first step in tightening up procedures within a largely unregulated industry.

About Endsleigh

Endsleigh is the trusted brand for student insurance, and the only insurance provider recommended by NUS

Endsleigh is an independent intermediary specialising in the provision of insurance and financial products for career people.

Originally founded in 1965 to serve the student market, Endsleigh has since broadened its products and services for graduates and professionals, as well as being the preferred insurance supplier for a variety of trade unions and professional organisations. The company offers a wide range of services including motor, home and travel insurance.

Endsleigh also offers business insurance through Endsleigh Business Insurance Services and financial advice through Endsleigh Financial Independent Tailoring.

For further information, please contact: Jamie Kilduff, Bethany Wheatley, Natalie Bateman or Esme Knight at Luther Pendragon on 020 7618 9103 or at endsleigh@luther.co.uk

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