

Bromley

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## CHEATING WAS HER 'BUSINESS'

### Asylum seeker cheats her way to £1m payout but only has to repay less than £200,000

AN IRAQI asylum seeker who illegally claimed more than £1m in benefits, mortgages and loans has been ordered to pay back less than £200,000.

Mahira Rustam Al-Azawi falsely claimed income support and housing and council tax benefits using her own and a fake identity over a 10-year period, despite owning two properties.

The 50-year-old, of Manor Way, Petts Wood, also falsely obtained a student loan and grant via Bromley Council to fund a course at Greenwich University.

Under the false name of Sara Sami, Al-Azawi also got two mortgages from HBOS and, using her true identity, an unsecured loan from Abbey PLC by claiming she was a self-employed businesswoman.

She was jailed for three years at Croydon Crown Court in June

by MICHAEL PURTON

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last year after admitting five fraud charges and being found guilty of a further eight fraud offences.

Al-Azawi appeared at the court on Friday for a confiscation hearing in which Judge Stephen Waller heard she had illegally obtained a total of £1,029,534 through her various fraudulent activities.

However, the judge heard Al-Azawi now has only £190,711 in assets and made an order to confiscate the amount.

He said: "I give her six months to pay that amount in full."

Judge Waller also ordered Al-Azawi will be jailed for a further 30 months, to run concurrent with her current sentence, if she fails to pay back the money.

Gillian Frost, representing



**Mahira Rustam Al-Azawi was jailed last year for 13 fraud offences**

Al-Azawi, told the court she is expected to be released from her three-year sentence in December this year.

Of the £190,711, Bromley Council will receive £85,388 in compensation, Lambeth Council will get £45,764, and the Department of Work and Pensions will get £42,958.

During the trial last year, the jury heard Al-Azawi had been a student in the UK and had returned to Iraq when she graduated.

She later returned and claimed asylum in the early 1990s before travelling to the Republic of Ireland and claiming asylum in a different name, for which she was given Irish nationality for herself and her son.

The jury also heard her son, now aged 19, was educated at a private school.

Following Al-Azawi's sentencing last year, Bromley police's financial investigator, Ian Smith, called her "the most greedy and organised fraudster I have ever dealt with".

He added: "Mahira Rustam, or Sara Sami as she chose to call herself during her fraudulent activities, has abused the benefit system to the detriment of other people.

"This was more than the work of just a simple benefit cheat and mortgage fraudster, this was a business for her."