



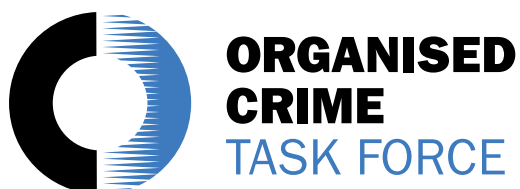
**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

ANNUAL REPORT & THREAT ASSESSMENT 2019/20

**Organised Crime in
Northern Ireland**

www.octf.gov.uk





ANNUAL REPORT & THREAT ASSESSMENT 2019/20

NOVEMBER 2020

FOREWORD BY JUSTICE MINISTER NAOMI LONG MLA

As Justice Minister tackling organised crime is one of my top priorities. My ultimate aim is a safer Northern Ireland with less crime and fewer victims. My Department has been working hard with the range of partners engaged in the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) to make this a reality.

Now in its twentieth year, the OCTF continues to demonstrate that working collaboratively is the best way to deliver results. This report highlights how a strategic and collaborative response to the threat posed by organised crime in Northern Ireland makes a difference to individuals and their families, communities and businesses.

I want to thank and commend all the partners on the Task Force for the excellent work which has been carried out in the last 12 months. Notable achievements include: 250 successful interventions such as searches, arrests and seizures which resulted in organised crime groups being frustrated, disrupted or dismantled; 111 potential victims of modern slavery referred to the support system; 8,177 drug seizures by PSNI; seizures of illicit goods by Border Force including 5.7 million cigarettes, 65,000 litres of alcohol and over 2,000 items of counterfeit goods. The total value of criminal recovery receipts paid under Confiscation Orders during the 2019/20 financial year in Northern Ireland was in excess of £2.2 million.

I also want to acknowledge the additional challenges that arose as a result of Covid-19. Social and travel restrictions have increased cyber and fraud vulnerabilities, with some Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) exploiting the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and others using PPE shipments to conceal illegal drugs.



We need to continue to embed a culture of lawfulness and to challenge any perceived legitimacy around organised crime. Buying counterfeit goods, cigarettes or alcohol, funds criminal gangs who are engaged in exploiting young people in our communities, in drug trafficking, and in the trafficking and exploitation of people. Most organised crime is driven by the reward of money. We all need to work together to ensure it becomes unprofitable, and to bring to justice those who continue to wreak havoc on their own communities.

I want to send a strong message to criminals that the harm they cause to individuals and communities within Northern Ireland will not be tolerated.

As well as recognising the good work of our law enforcement agencies, it is important to remember the part we can all play to remove the scourge of organised criminal activity. For too long criminal gangs have been exploiting the vulnerable in our society, profiteering from communities and contributing nothing but misery and fear. Their lavish lifestyles are often at the expense of the most vulnerable in our society. As Justice Minister, I have asked the Home Secretary to commence the Northern Ireland provisions in the Criminal Finances Act 2017 (CFA 2017) as soon as possible.

The CFA 2017 makes legislative provision to provide law enforcement agencies and partners with new capabilities and powers to recover the proceeds of crime and to tackle money laundering, corruption and terrorist financing.

In addition, I have recently concluded, and am considering the outcome of, consultations on two related issues - one seeking views on proposals for new organised crime offences for Northern Ireland and the other on a new draft Organised Crime Strategy for Northern Ireland. The proposed new offences are part of a wider strategic approach to tackling serious organised crime as set out in the new Organised Crime Strategy.

While it is important that law enforcement has all the tools it needs to tackle organised criminality, it is equally important that any assets seized from criminals and their endeavours are returned to the community. The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) does just that. In Chapter 3 of this Annual Report you can read about the projects which have been assisted with over £920k of ARCS funding. I was particularly impressed by the variety of projects and schemes - schemes targeting young people, like the North West Play Resource Centre "Listen To Us" Project - and impressed too by the way the Projects have adapted their plans to ensure continued delivery of services and projects despite the Covid-19 restrictions.

In anticipation of the new challenges that the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol will bring and the expectation that organised criminals will seek to exploit any changes to tariffs/duties and infrastructure, the OCTF has commenced work to enable the emerging threats to be identified, and mitigations put in place. There is more detail on this in the report.

The work of the OCTF, highlighted throughout this report shows how critical it is that we continue to maximise the collective efforts of all partners to target and disrupt organised criminality.



NAOMI LONG MLA
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

NOVEMBER 2020

EVERYBODY'S HELP IS NEEDED TO COMBAT ORGANISED CRIME...

DON'T SUPPORT IT. REPORT IT!

TELEPHONE NUMBERS

PSNI

101

ACTION FRAUD

0300 123 2040

HMRC HOTLINE

0800 788 887

CONSUMERLINE

0300 123 6262

ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

0800 807060

MODERN SLAVERY

0800 0121 700

CRIMESTOPPERS

0800 555 111

CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland is an independent charity that takes information about crime 100% anonymously via the freephone or by completing a secure anonymous online form.

Professional and trained Contact Centre staff are available 24/7, 365 days a year.

Every day concerned members of the public pass on what they know about crime – providing valuable information that otherwise might never reach law enforcement were it not for the charity's cast-iron guarantee of anonymity.

That promise has been kept since the charity began over 32 years ago.

CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland has made a significant impact over the past year with record number of reports – over 3,500 - being passed to the PSNI. CrimeStoppers also supports high-profile investigations in Northern Ireland with Enhanced Rewards.

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**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

ABOUT THE ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Twenty years on from its inception, the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) continues to be an important strategic forum in the fight against organised crime. The multi-agency forum brings together all those who are engaged in actively seeking out organised criminal groups, bringing them before the courts, and removing their criminal assets.

This Annual Report and Threat Assessment:

- sets out the current assessed threat from organised crime in Northern Ireland;
- highlights some of the activities of member agencies of the OCTF (both individually and collaboratively) to reduce the threat and harm from organised crime;
- provides an overview of the results and successes that have been achieved; and
- provides advice to the public in Northern Ireland about what steps they can take to protect themselves and others from the harm caused by organised crime, and to help secure a safe community in Northern Ireland, where organised criminals and their activities are not tolerated and where we respect the law and each other.

WHAT IS ORGANISED CRIME?

Organised Crime can be defined as planned and co-ordinated criminal behaviour, conducted by a group of two or more people working together on a continuing basis. Their motivation is usually, but not always, financial gain. Organised crime in this and other countries recognises neither borders nor economic interests.

Organised crime takes many forms including cyber-related crime, drug trafficking, modern slavery, counterfeiting, fuel laundering, tobacco smuggling, fraud or money laundering. In some cases organised crime may involve violence or the threat of violence and some organised crime groups in Northern Ireland also have paramilitary connections.

The threats from organised criminality mean we are all vulnerable. Individuals and businesses may suffer financial and reputational loss from fraud, cyber-attack, or from questionable traders offering lower prices by operating outside the law.

The sale of counterfeit goods, cigarettes or alcohol, funds criminal groups' activities, and it is these same groups who are engaged in exploiting young people in our communities, the same groups who are engaged in drug trafficking, and the same groups who traffic and exploit people, often the most vulnerable.

Put simply, the organised criminals who attempt to sell these goods do not care about the people that buy them. They do not care that they can cause harm. For them it is about the reward of money.

Organised crime is able to thrive only because there is a demand for its commodities, whether drugs, cheap counterfeit goods or services provided through human exploitation. Tackling organised crime effectively therefore requires a whole system and societal response. It needs us, both collectively and individually, to recognise the harm that is caused by organised crime, to promote a culture of lawfulness and to take the necessary steps to end the harm.

PROPOSALS FOR NEW ORGANISED CRIME OFFENCES

The Department of Justice has carried out a review of the current law relating to serious organised crime in Northern Ireland. A public consultation took place, from 10 July until 2 October, to seek views on a range of proposals for new provisions to tackle organised crime through the introduction of specific legislative provisions, including a statutory definition of serious organised crime and new offences of ‘*directing*’ organised crime; ‘*participating*’ in organised crime and provision for relevant offences to be ‘*aggravated*’ by a connection to organised crime. The proposals also consider possible tariffs for the offences. The outcome of the consultation is currently being considered.

The policy intent of these proposals is to ensure that law enforcement in Northern Ireland is able to avail of robust and appropriate legislative tools to investigate, disrupt, prosecute and bring to justice those involved in serious organised crime. It aims to send a strong message to criminals that the harm they cause to individuals and communities within Northern Ireland will not be tolerated.

ABOUT THE ORGANISED CRIME TASK FORCE

The OCTF was established in 2000. It provides, in an ever changing environment, an essential forum for strategic leadership and ensuring a collective and collaborative response to the threat posed by organised crime in Northern Ireland.

The current OCTF structure is made up of a Strategy Group which includes senior representation from statutory and law enforcement partners and provides oversight across a number of thematic Sub Groups on criminal finance, drugs, cyber crime, immigration and modern slavery, intellectual property crime, armed robbery and extortion, and smuggling.

Member organisations of the thematic Sub Groups include relevant Government departments, law enforcement agencies, the Public Prosecution Service, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and representatives from the business community¹; An Garda Síochána is also represented to ensure effective cross-border co-operation.

The OCTF provides a space for information, intelligence and expertise to be shared, and it supports the development of operational partnerships. The OCTF also has a vital communications role to inform the public and business community about emerging threats and about the steps they can take to protect themselves and their businesses from the harm of organised crime.

IRELAND / NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL

The OCTF ensures agencies are collectively, as well as individually, alive to emerging threats. In anticipation of the new challenges that the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol will bring, a new Smuggling Sub Group has been established to develop a full strategic picture of smuggling in and out of Northern Ireland. There is multi-agency and cross-border representation on this group. An Analyst Forum is gathering, collating and analysing information to inform the Strategy Group about evolving threats, including, but not exclusively, those resulting from the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol. The Analyst Forum will bring together existing analytical and statistical expertise as well as other expert knowledge and insight in order to inform our collective understanding of the changing organised crime picture in Northern Ireland.

A shared understanding of the nature and scale of the existing and emerging threats facing Northern Ireland from organised crime is essential in helping to inform timely, collaborative and effective strategic and operational responses.

1 A list of OCTF partner organisations is included at Appendix 1.

A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

The work of the OCTF and its partner agencies is informed by the wider strategic context internationally and nationally, and takes account of emerging developments and inter-dependencies within Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland.

The OCTF also complements and aligns with work being taken forward through the delivery of the **Executive Action Plan to Tackle Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime**², as well as with the operational focus of both the cross-jurisdictional **Joint Agency Task Force** and the **Paramilitary Crime Task Force**.

All strategies need to be reviewed and adjusted to reflect new and emerging challenges and threats, and to remain relevant and effective. The Organised Crime Strategy is the roadmap for implementing and achieving our collective vision, to clarify our goals and to define how we will work together to achieve them.

Building on the arrangements already in place, and the good work to date, a refreshed Organised Crime Strategy for Northern Ireland has been drafted by the Department of Justice in partnership with members of the OCTF. It consolidates and enhances the response to existing organised crime threats as well as enabling partners to identify and respond swiftly and effectively to new and emerging crime types. It has been informed by the five priorities of the Department of Justice and as such will help to embed a culture of lawfulness, support safe and resilient communities, address harm and vulnerability, challenge offending behaviour and support rehabilitation, deliver an effective justice system and secure confidence in the justice system.

The Strategy has been developed to reflect synergies with the Outcomes Delivery Plan framework on reducing crime, as well as the strategic responses to tackling paramilitary activity, and Northern Ireland related terrorism. More than ever we must work together across Government, law enforcement, private sector and wider civic society to understand roles and make sure that our collective efforts are maximised.

The draft Strategy also recognises the cross jurisdictional nature of organised crime and as such is aligned, as appropriate to the UK Government's Serious and Organised Crime Strategy and equivalent strategic responses across neighbouring jurisdictions, and to actions under the UK Economic Crime Plan, to ensure a consistent and effective joined up response to common threats that face us all. The Strategy acknowledges interdependencies and links with other work streams both at local and national level.

The Justice Minister launched a public consultation exercise on the draft Organised Strategy for Northern Ireland on 10 July 2020. The consultation period ended on 2 October 2020. The outcome of the consultation is currently being considered.

² Further information on the Executive Action Plan to Tackle Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime is provided at Appendix 2.

RESULT HIGHLIGHTS IN 2019/20

ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS

250

SUCCESSFUL PSNI
INTERVENTIONS



111

POTENTIAL VICTIMS
OF MODERN SLAVERY
RECOVERED

DRUGS SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

PSNI



8,177

Drug
seizures



3,819

Drug-related
arrests

Border Force Seizures



11.7 Kg

Of Class
A drugs



37.2 Kg

Cannabis



63 Kg

Class B and
Class C drugs
(incl prescription tablets)

SEIZURES OF OTHER ILLICIT GOODS BY BORDER FORCE



5.7 million

Cigarettes and 695
Kg of hand rolling
tobacco



65,000

Litres of
alcohol
seized



2,000+

Items of
counterfeit
goods



£65,600

Cash seized



63

Offensive
weapons



Approx £2.2 million
recovered from criminal assets

OTHER FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

PSNI

Cash Forfeitures
£367,000

NIEA

3 Confiscation Orders worth
£40,000

PSNI

Confiscation Orders
£1.3 million





**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

THE THREAT AND OCTF RESPONSE IN 2019/20

CHAPTER 2 THE THREAT AND OCTF RESPONSE IN 2019/20

Partnership and collaborative working is the cornerstone for good practice. It brings access to knowledge, skills, experience and contacts, allows better decision making and moves an organisation more effectively towards its goals.

KEY PARTNERS AND CONTRIBUTORS TO THE REPORT



The Department of Justice (DoJ) is the lead Department for a range of legislative powers relating to devolved policing, and is responsible for the resourcing, legislative and policy framework of the justice system in Northern Ireland. The DoJ is the lead department for the Organised Crime Strategy and supports the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) and its Sub Groups. The Department helps shape the policy context and leads on necessary legislative changes. The Department also funds the provision of analytical support to the OCTF, and administers the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS).



Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is responsible for keeping people safe by investigating a range of offences across the crime spectrum. As such it is a major contributor to the work of the OCTF.

SUB GROUPS

- **Cyber Crime**

The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre is a specialist unit to develop capability, capacity and connectivity in respect to the prevention, protection and detection of cyber crime to keep people safe in Northern Ireland. It is staffed by detectives with specialist technical and forensic capability and detectives who are experienced and knowledgeable concerning the investigation of cyber crime.

- **Drugs**

PSNI works closely with partners to target those who import, supply and use drugs. It is proactive in disrupting and preventing drug dealers operating within our communities.

- **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking**

The PSNI has had a dedicated Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) in place since 2015 and in this reporting period has increased and enhanced capacity in the Unit by significantly increasing detective resources to take account of the number and type of cases being reported and investigated.

The PSNI's entire approach to MSHT is victim-centred with the need to identify, locate and recover any Potential Victims of Trafficking (PVoT) and offer police help and support in line with current legislation. PSNI also aim to frustrate, disrupt or dismantle the organised crime groups (OCGs) involved and detain or detect people involved in the trafficking of people.

• Economic Crime

Money laundering remains a focus for the PSNI, with financial investigation forming a significant line of enquiry in all operations targeting organised criminal activity. PSNI's Economic Crime Unit (ECU) and Organised Crime Unit (OCU) work collaboratively through the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) to combat money laundering and to prevent organised criminals benefiting from their illegal enterprises.

PSNI's Asset Confiscation and Enforcement (ACE) Team provides a dedicated restraint and confiscation service to the organisation and assists partner agencies in identifying criminal assets with a view to preventing criminals benefiting from their illegal activities.

• Intellectual Property Crime

The PSNI has appointed a Lead Officer who is responsible for the strategic oversight of Intellectual Property Crime (IPC) in Northern Ireland. The focus is to improve information sharing amongst partner agencies and to increase the awareness of the harm caused by this crime type. Where there is information that highlights the involvement of an Organised Crime Group (OCG), the intelligence will be developed and when appropriate, the OCG will be allocated to one of the PSNI Organised Crime Units for investigation.

The PSNI supports other OCTF partners to remove counterfeit goods from the market; to reduce the physical harm they can cause; to reduce the impact on legitimate traders; and to prevent earnings being used to fund other forms of organised crime.

• Armed Robbery and Extortion

The PSNI works closely with the cash in transit and banking industries to ensure the safety of employees and to prevent robberies. Extortion remains a prominent crime in Northern Ireland.



The National Crime Agency (NCA) is the UK's national law enforcement Agency operating in Northern Ireland since May 2015. Its mission is to protect the public by leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime (SOC) and its scope extends to crimes committed outside the UK. With the agreement of PSNI, who retain primacy, designated NCA officers are able to exercise the powers of a Northern Ireland constable. NCA supports operational partners including PSNI to tackle serious and organised crime impacting Northern Ireland and help protect Northern Ireland communities from the harm caused by this corrosive threat.



Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), a non-ministerial department of the UK Government, is the UK's tax, payments and customs authority and has a vital purpose collecting the money that pays for the UK's public services and helps families and individuals with targeted financial support.

HMRC helps the honest majority to get their tax right and make it hard for the dishonest minority to cheat the system.

HMRC Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) which has responsibility for civil and criminal investigations into the most serious tax evasion and fraud, works closely with partner agencies locally and across international borders to draw upon and share expertise to tackle organised criminality in Northern Ireland.



Border Force

Border Force is a law enforcement command within the Home Office. Border Force promotes national prosperity by facilitating the legitimate movement of individuals and goods, whilst preventing those that would cause harm from entering the UK. This is achieved through the immigration and customs checks carried out by Border Force staff at ports and airports. Officers work at 140 sea and air ports across the UK and overseas.



Immigration Enforcement

Immigration Enforcement is a Directorate of the Home Office and is responsible for protecting the public by removing immigration offenders and prosecuting the criminals who facilitate immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement carries out operations against document fraud, sham marriages, rogue employers and illegal workers.



Northern Ireland
Environment
Agency
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. The Agency's primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth. The NIEA Enforcement Branch focuses its resources on investigating cases which present a significant risk to the environment and public health, including waste crime.



Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

The Department for the Economy's Trading Standards Service (TSS) delivers consumer protection enforcement in Northern Ireland. TSS delivers a front-line public protection function for the benefit of consumers, businesses and the Northern Ireland economy. That function comprises the twin aims of protecting NI's consumers - particularly the most vulnerable - from illegal and unfair trading practices, and providing support and guidance for NI's businesses (particularly small businesses) so that they can deal effectively with regulation.



Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk

The Department for Communities Benefit Security Division – The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within the Benefit Security Division investigates any incident of potential organised criminality against the benefits system.



PPS | Independent
Fair
Effective

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) receives investigation files and determines if the Test for Prosecution is met and conducts criminal proceedings where appropriate.



Organised Crime Groups are involved in an ever evolving scope of activity but almost all of the Groups exist for the financial benefits.

This section of the Report summarises the OCTF's achievements in 2019/20.

The information has been recorded under each crime type but the case studies and operations included demonstrate how closely the agencies work together and highlights the benefits of partnership working.

Whilst this section sets out data on successes against organised crime groups, it is important to remember that the work also has positive social, economic and environmental effects, not readily quantifiable.

2.1 CYBER CRIME

THE THREAT

The motivations behind cyber-attacks are many and can vary from financial gain, corporate espionage, political interference, personal grudge or attempting to gain kudos amongst peers. The use of technology to facilitate criminal activity remains a prominent feature of crimes reported in Northern Ireland. A digital element continues to feature across a range of criminal offences reported to both the Cyber Crime Centre (CCC) and the PSNI generally. Cyber-enabled (existing crimes that have been transformed in scale or form using the internet) fraud remains a major growth area, whilst insider threats repeatedly feature when cyber-dependant crimes (offences that can only be committed using information technology to commit the crime and to target the victim) are reported.

The global Covid-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the threat posed by cyber criminals and how rapidly they can adapt, using social engineering in order to further their criminality. In line with the national picture the PSNI did not see a dramatic increase in overall cyber-attacks. However, a repositioning was noted with numerous Covid-19 themed online scams rapidly deployed, from selling non-existent PPE equipment by way of newly developed websites, Covid-19 titled phishing e-mails designed to install malware or steal personal information and attempts to exploit Government economic support schemes. Recent cyber-attacks under investigation at the PSNI CCC have highlighted both the technical ability and the ruthless nature of cyber criminals. During the financial year 2019/20, cyber related crime impacted Northern Ireland businesses in a number of ways ranging from individual losses exceeding £100,000, the compromise of business email accounts and the encryption of company networks.

A continuing issue for law enforcement is the known under-reporting of cyber-dependant crime. This may be due to reputational concerns or a reluctance to have the added distraction of evidential requests during an attempted recovery, when focus needs to be on repairing the damage and fixing the vulnerability. The gap between cyber incidents

occurring and those actually reported is assessed to be considerable. This continues to provide a significant challenge in tackling cyber-crime.

Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) are actively targeting businesses and individuals in Northern Ireland. Recent ransomware attacks have demonstrated an extremely high level of sophistication associated with OCGs and business e-mail compromise (BEC) remains an attractive means of generating income. Other common attacks are carried out via:

PHISHING/SMISHING – carefully constructed e-mails and text messages have been reported. These entice recipients to follow a link to a website that looks genuine but is designed to harvest personal information or to download malicious software.

DDoS – Distributed Denial of Service attacks are designed to take down websites or flood networks with spurious traffic leaving them inoperable. Due to the availability of advanced defences, a DDoS attack is more often used as a distraction tactic in combination with a Phishing campaign. A recent report to CCC demonstrated that the criminal activity was being conducted from IP addresses associated with Russia.

RANSOMWARE – A number of recent attacks have left some Northern Ireland businesses unable to function and recovery was not a realistic proposition as their back-ups had also been encrypted. Criminals specialising in ransomware are becoming increasingly selective about who they target and using the ability to exfiltrate data as a means of supporting the expected demand to pay for a decryption key with a threat to sell or make public stolen data if a payment is not made.

The Internet of Things (IoT) relates to the plethora of devices that can connect to the internet, ranging from fridges, TV's and speakers. Generic passwords have enabled cyber criminals to utilize these on mass for DDoS attacks and as the IoT expands to become IoE – the Internet of Everything, (which is the networked connection of people, processes, data and things), cyber criminals will be researching how to also exploit this for their purposes.

EMERGING THREATS

An Insider Threat is a malicious threat to an organisation that comes from people within an organisation such as employees or former employees. The PSNI Cyber Crime Centre (CCC) is progressing a number of investigations involving Insider Threats. These investigations involve former employees or employees in the process of leaving employment. The absence of exit protocols for individuals has been identified as a significant factor with former employees retaining access to work accounts and related passwords, which has enabled them to access sensitive business information either for their own use or to alter it thereby rendering it unusable. In one particular incident investigated by CCC, an employee was able to unlawfully access information for a number of months before leaving their place of employment.

The ability to trade in illegal commodities such as firearms, drugs and stolen personal information has again caused the Dark Web to feature in a number of investigations being progressed by CCC. It is anticipated that criminality facilitated through engagement on the Dark Web will continue to increase given the anonymity provided and inherent on such platforms.

Investigators are currently conducting inquiries into a number of complex and challenging global investigations which include ransomware attacks, unauthorised access, network intrusion and also offences committed on the Dark Web. These investigations by their very nature present significant jurisdictional challenges necessitating global law enforcement partnership. For example a current investigation has involved partnership working with the National Crime Agency as well as law enforcement agencies based in the United States of America and the Netherlands.

In excess of 25% of the cyber-dependant crimes reported to CCC have involved a ransomware attack, many of which have left the local business unable to function as they have suffered total encryption of all computer systems and back-ups. Even when back-up systems escape encryption, losses are incurred recovering from the attack. Blackmail demands often involve payment in BitCoin, an unregulated virtual currency that pose challenges for investigators.

Recent cyber-attacks highlight the technical ability and the ruthless nature of cyber criminals.

PSNI advice is not to pay – one local company did pay a negotiated price in anticipation of all their devices being decrypted, only to find that further payments were demanded to decrypt individual servers which resulted in additional financial losses.

Fraud is one of the main cyber-enabled crimes reported to CCC, most frequently in the form of Business E-mail Compromises (BECs) used to facilitate a Mandate Fraud i.e. a change of banking information designed to have a payment diverted to an account in the control of the criminal. Common themes in these reports are the absence of suitable measures in place to help secure email accounts from this type of attack; staff training on what to look out for and the absence of internal protocols to prevent the diversion of funds. Increasingly the CCC sees business email accounts compromised as a result of phishing emails which have originated from an already compromised supplier or client. However well written or constructed, the sender's address should not be seen as a guarantee the email is genuine; any financial dealings should be verified by a phone call to a known contact. Relatively simple internal protocols combined with the effective use of free tools such as two factor authentication, can thwart a cyber criminal in such cases. This is a key message routinely provided by the PSNI Protect Officer.

DDoS attacks still feature in reports to CCC and whilst the impact can be devastating for the company involved, recent advances in network defence have resulted in this type of criminality now being more often used as a distraction tactic in conjunction with perhaps a phishing campaign.

Simple internal protocols can prevent cyber crime.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

PSNI Cyber Crime Centre

The PSNI's specialist capability to tackle the increasing threat posed by cyber criminals is provided by the CCC which provides dedicated investigators, supported by digital forensic experts. The CCC contributes nationally and forms part of Team Cyber UK. Team members tackle complex investigations involving cyber-dependant crime and also provide advice on crimes that have a cyber element.

PSNI CCC works with internal and external partners at local and national level and continues to maintain and develop strong links with local businesses and government agencies. However, as cyber criminals actively use international borders to thwart law enforcement activity, PSNI CCC also engages and works in partnership with international law enforcement partners within this complex and challenging investigative arena.

PSNI Prevent

PSNI Cyber Prevent continues to promote the national key messages with emphasis on education and positive objectives for individuals, intervening with offenders when possible before offending becomes an issue that can only be dealt with through the courts.

With the average age of a cyber-dependent crime offender being just 17 years old at time of arrest, young people are the main target audience for PSNI Cyber Prevent. Although adult influencers, such as parents and teachers, being more aware of the details of the cyber prevent programme is just as important.

Serious cyber-dependant offenders often begin with online gaming cheats and modifications, then progress to using illegal online services to knock their opponents from gaming platforms. Cyber offenders often fail to identify with their victims and have a misguided sense of anonymity whilst online.

Because of curiosity, the need to prove themselves to their peers or the desire to solve problems, this can result in a low-level offender progressing to more complicated and serious cyber offending.

Early intervention with low-level offenders is favourable and PSNI Cyber Prevent can make use, when appropriate, of a voluntary informal resolution known as a Cease and Desist notice. This avoids criminalising young people in particular, while providing them with an understanding of how their actions contravene the Computer Misuse Act 1990 and what the consequences would be if they were to continue with such activity. This is balanced with guidance regarding positive alternative pathways in which cyber skills can be used in a positive way such as a career within the cyber security sector.

From its inception two years ago, PSNI Cyber Prevent continues to work closely with internal and external partners, while developing and sharing information relevant to the cyber prevent programme and seeking out new innovative ways to maximise exposure. With the current Covid-19 pandemic, this proactive approach has become more relevant as young people are spending a greater amount of time online. Concurrent with social distancing rules and keeping people safe, cyber prevent interaction has shifted from face to face to virtual engagements online.

Cyber summer schools such as Cyberfirst, that would have provided week long residential courses in Northern Ireland, have now adjusted their format to accommodate new social distancing rules and PSNI's Cyber Prevent will now engage with audiences throughout the UK via webinar presentations followed by Q&A sessions to provide interaction for those involved.

PSNI Cyber Prevent has partnered with the Education Authority and Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre to produce an online cyber educational package which is centred around the key elements of cyber prevent messaging. Whenever the ongoing trial has been completed it will be made available to every teacher in Northern Ireland to use as an additional resource.

Locally, PSNI Cyber Prevent is collaborating with volunteers from the cyber security industry who, in response to the current Covid-19 pandemic, have designed and are providing ongoing online programmes which are designed to take individuals through online cyber security challenges - teaching

them how to remain safe online and highlighting the legalities of their actions.

PSNI Protect

The PSNI CCC has one full time officer dedicated to delivering the national Cyber Protect Programme, a programme led by the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) in support of the UK National Cyber Security Strategy. Alongside counterparts in the Regional Cyber Crime Units in England and Wales and Police Scotland, the PSNI Protect Officer forms part of the NPCC UK Cyber Protect Team and UK Cyber Protect Working Group.

The UK Cyber Protect Team aims to help protect organisations and individuals from common cyber incidents through the delivery of government approved advice and guidance from partners such as the National Cyber Security Centre and Cyber Aware.

The Cyber Protect role within PSNI involves both direct one to one engagement with victims of cyber-dependent crime and support to frontline officers, staff and outside agencies, dealing with victims of cyber-enabled incidents such as fraud or blackmail. Examples of working with victims include:

- Delivery of a cyber-awareness session to board members of a local charity subject to a cyber incident.
- Delivery of cyber awareness sessions over 2 days to staff at a local manufacturing company.
- Protect engagements and support to notified victims of business email compromise.

Working in partnership is key to the success of the Cyber Protect programme both at a national and regional level. The PSNI Cyber Protect Officer has established partnerships with local organisations ranging from NHS Health Trusts, Local Government, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Law Society of Northern Ireland to local charities, business groups, representative bodies and ScamwiseNI.

Examples of this partnership working include:

- Ongoing engagement with regional partners and the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) in the development of a new cyber-dependent online reporting tool.

- Assisting the Law Society of Northern Ireland with the delivery of annual cyber awareness talk to conveyancing members.
- Supporting Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP) cyber events such as the Fermanagh and Omagh business breakfast.
- Adoption of the Little Book of Cyber Scams in conjunction with ScamwiseNI.
- Participation in annual Causeway, Coast and Glens Neighbourhood Watch conference.
- Delivery of cyber-awareness session to local businesses in Mid Ulster at PSNI Crime Prevention and Danske Bank supported event.
- Promotion of Cyber Protect at regional cyber events such as BSides, Belfast.

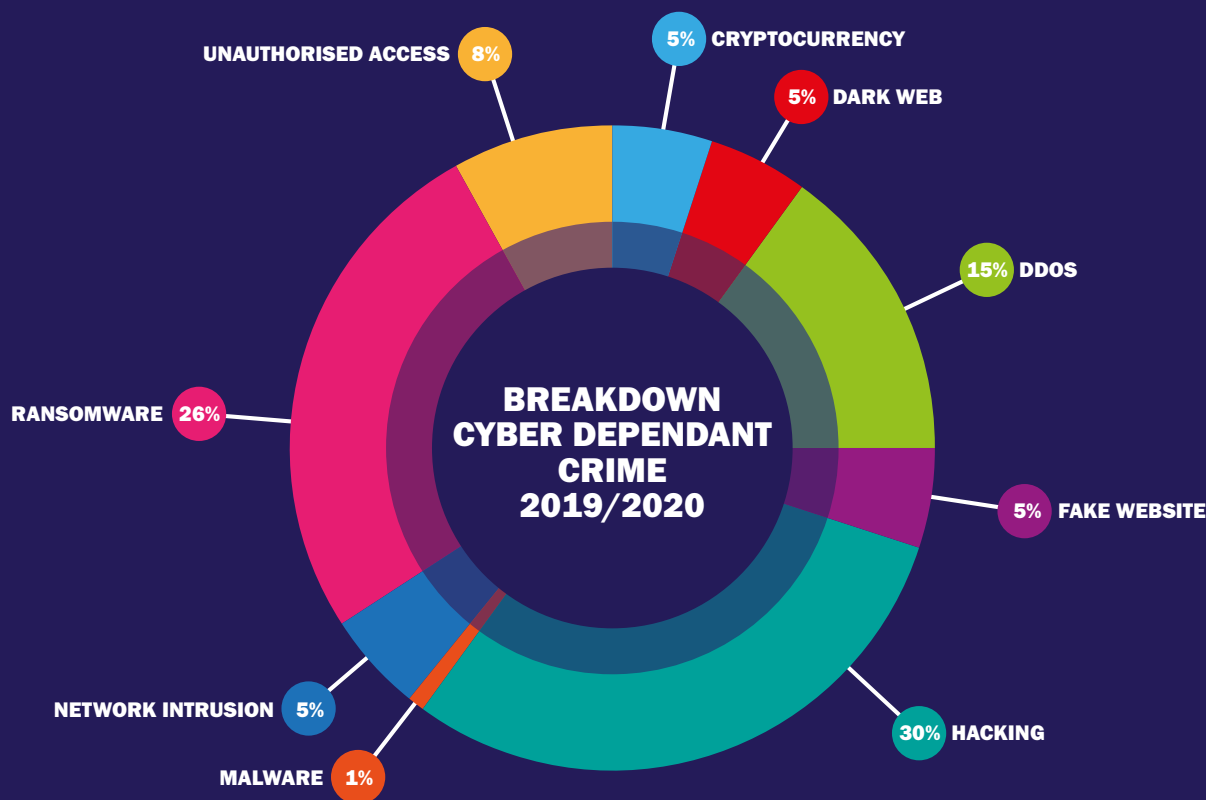
OCTF Cyber Crime Engagement Sub Group

The OCTF Cyber Crime Engagement Sub Group provides a forum for engagement between PSNI, DoJ, private and NGO sectors, academia and the cyber security industry. These sectors routinely work together in order to promote and enhance reporting mechanisms as well as providing a forum for sharing information on cyber incidents which adds to the PSNI's understanding of and response to threats. The group also has a role in raising public awareness and for many years representatives attended the Balmoral Show to promote awareness. With current social distancing restrictions, much of the messaging promoted by PSNI Prevent and Protect has moved to online platforms.

RESULTS

During 2019/20 a total of 3,691 crimes (where a cyber-enabled motivation was recorded) were reported to the PSNI. This is compared with 1,973 during the 2018/19 financial year and represents an increase of 87.1 % due, at least in part, to an increase in reporting and is reflective of the expanding use of technology across a range of crime types.

In the same period, 302 cyber-dependent crimes, resulting in losses of £621,000 were reported from Northern Ireland to Action Fraud.



CASE STUDY

LOCAL SUSPECT IN AN INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATION

PSNI Cyber Investigations Team worked jointly with the NCA's National Cyber Crime Unit investigating a criminal website that boasted of hosting more than 10 billion credentials from approximately 8000 data beaches. Access to the stolen data could be obtained for a period of time for a fee. The investigation was co-ordinated with a European Police Service and also had links to the USA. It is thought that a Northern Ireland based suspect has benefited financially in the region of £115,664.

CASE STUDY

LOCAL COMPANY VICTIM OF A BUSINESS E-MAIL COMPROMISE

One local company who fell victim to a business e-mail compromise involving an employee who paid wages into a third party account. Having benefited from input from PSNI Protect Officer, a similar attempt against the same company was prevented by way of their new robust protocol which ensured that there was no loss because confirmation was sought by telephone and the e-mail found to be bogus.

CASE STUDY

CYBER ATTACK ON A BANK IN MALTA

NCA's investigation into a €13 million cyber attack on a bank in Malta resulted in three arrests, including that of a man in Belfast, by NCA officers supported by the PSNI. The arrests related to the illegal removal of money from accounts in Malta in February 2019 using a strain of malware. The money was transferred to a number of different accounts, including £800,000 transferred to an account in Belfast. In the hours following the transfer, card payments and cash withdrawals totalling £340,000 were made before a block was put in place. These actions have significantly impacted on the OCG, curtailing their participation in cyber attacks and ensuring their entry into the criminal justice system. Two suspects in Northern Ireland remain on bail and three from London are released under investigation. A further suspect from London has been identified.

CASE STUDY

REMOVAL OF WEBSITE CONTAINING PERSONAL DETAILS

The takedown of a website by the National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU), in collaboration with PSNI and international law enforcement partners, that provided cyber criminals access to more than 12 billion personal credentials. The site was believed to be hosting credentials from some 10,000 data breaches used in cyber attacks in the UK, Germany and the US. During the course of the investigation, initiated in August 2019, two individuals based in Northern Ireland and the Netherlands respectively were identified and are believed to have made more than £200,000 profits from the site. PSNI and the East Netherlands Cyber Crime Unit (Politie) subsequently arrested the men in January. Parallel investigations by the German BKA and the FBI effected the takedown of the site on the same day.

FORWARD LOOK

PSNI CCC continues to invest heavily in the development of staff. Training opportunities are progressed to ensure that the PSNI remain capable and competent to deal with complex investigations and adapt in order to be confident in dealing with emerging technologies – for example increased capability regarding Cloud Storage. The CCC contributes by providing presentations to student officers, probationers and police staff to equip them to respond to cyber-enabled crime reports.

The Centre has also assisted across the organisation and spectrum of offences, including but not limited to murder, terrorist offences and child sexual exploitation. Recent restrictions on work and social distancing have seen an explosion in the popularity of video conferencing facilities for work and leisure. Unfortunately, criminals have chosen to taken advantage of vulnerabilities and in some cases presented distressing illegal material to users. Advice on evidential opportunities has been provided by PSNI CCC.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There is a wealth of information available to help you take action to protect your data. Taking some simple steps when choosing passwords, using backups, two factor authentication and updating apps can help prevent the majority of cyber incidents seen across Northern Ireland. Sites that offer up to date advice and tools to help manage the threats include:

Cyber Aware

www.cyberaware.gov.uk

National Cyber Security Centre

www.ncsc.gov.uk

Action Fraud

www.actionfraud.police.uk

Northern Ireland Cyber Security Centre

www.nicybersecuritycentre.gov.uk

www.haveibeenpwned.com

Police Cyber pages:

[www.psni.police.uk/crime/
cyber-crime/what-is-cyber-crime/](http://www.psni.police.uk/crime/cyber-crime/what-is-cyber-crime/)

The Little Book of Cyber Scams

[www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/crime/
cyber-crime/cyber-scams-booklet.pdf](http://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/crime/cyber-crime/cyber-scams-booklet.pdf)

If you have been a victim of actual or attempted cyber- crime, please report it to:

- **Action Fraud** - www.actionfraud.police.uk
- **PSNI Tel 101**
- **Via the PSNI website**
- **CrimeStoppers Tel 0800 555 111**
(anonymously)
- **Via CrimeStoppers-uk.org website**
(anonymously)

If you have received a suspicious email, please forward it to report@phishing.gov.uk and see [www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/
report-suspicious-emails](http://www.ncsc.gov.uk/information/report-suspicious-emails) for more information

2.2 DRUG CRIME

THE THREAT

Substance misuse causes a wide range of harm to individuals, their families and wider society. It includes crime committed to fuel drug dependence, organised criminality, the violence and exploitation that goes hand in hand with production and supply, paramilitary style attacks and irreparable damage and loss to the families and individuals whose lives it destroys.

It remains difficult to ascertain the number of people in Northern Ireland using illicit drugs, or misusing prescription medication, however the rise in risk taking behaviour continues as evidenced by year on year increases in the number of seizure incidents and the number of drug related arrests which have been on an upward trend for over a decade.

A recent Northern Ireland Audit Office³ report has also highlighted the growing issue and increasing financial burden of substance misuse in Northern Ireland, with the Department of Health spending over £1 billion a year dealing with drug and alcohol misuse. Whilst alcohol misuse remains the most prevalent substance issue in Northern Ireland, estimated to cost up to £900 million per year, the number seeking treatment for drug misuse has grown significantly, from 2,107 people in 2007 to 4,183 people in 2019. On average, 200 hospital beds are occupied every day by patients with drug or alcohol related problems.

Long-term and in light of the Covid-19 crisis there is the potential for higher numbers of persons becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol, as those who were typically social users may have increased their intake amount and frequency during isolation, potentially crossing the line to addiction. This will heap further pressure on the already stretched health and support services as well as impacting the local drug market and related criminality such as violent crime offences.

The level of drug seizures can be influenced by policing activities and priorities in response to community concern about drugs. Changing levels of drug seizures may also be reflective of a change in

the nature of the drugs market, including increased accessibility from sources such as the Dark Web and postal and parcel delivery services which continue to be heavily used to facilitate the importation of drugs. Postal importations are also being bolstered by the greater ease with which drugs can be purchased online and this will continue to affect importation levels in the future. Global restrictions on travel and other measures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic had a temporary disruptive impact on the drug market leading to shortages of some drug types. The situation is subject to rapid change and is likely to return to more normal levels in line with the lifting of border restrictions worldwide.

Drug supply and misuse facilitated by technology is ever increasing. Purchases made via the Dark Web continue to feature, with encrypted communications making exchanges easier. Other advances including growing use of crypto-currencies and drone technology may also have an impact going forward.

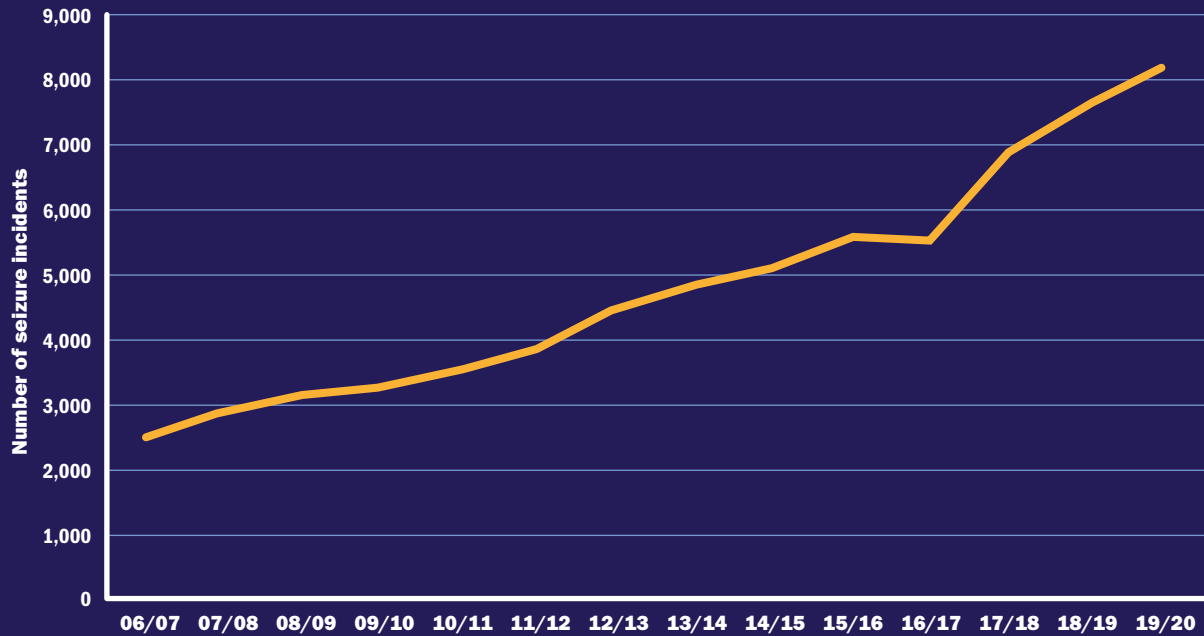
RESULTS

Drugs seizure incidents and drug-related arrests, 2019/20 financial year compared with 2018/19

	Apr'18 - Mar'19	Apr'19 - Mar'20	change between years	% change between years
Drug Seizure Incidents	7,561	8,177	616	+8.1
Drug-related Arrests	3,318	3,819	501	+15.1

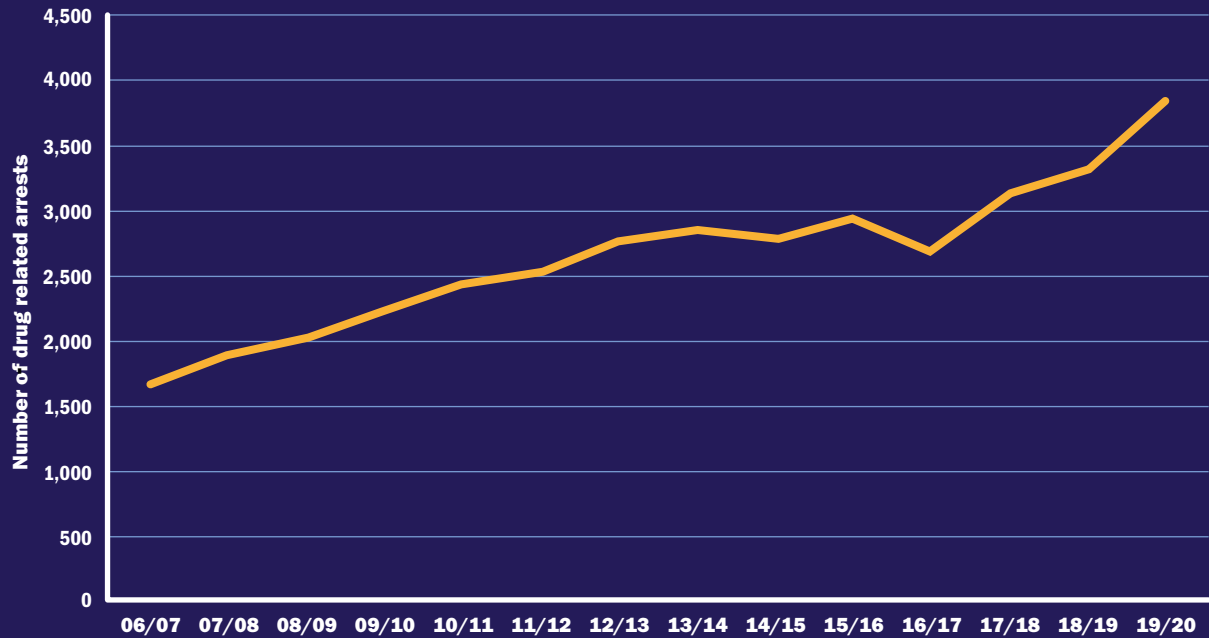
- In the 12 months from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 there were a total of 8,177 drug seizure incidents, an increase of 616 (8.1%) on the previous 12 month period.
- During 2019/20 there were 3,819 drug-related arrests, an increase of 501 (15.1%) when compared with the previous 12 months.

TRENDS IN DRUG SEIZURE INCIDENTS SINCE 2006/07



- With the exception of a slight fall in 2016/17, the number of drug seizure incidents has increased each year since 2006/07.
- The level recorded in 2019/20 (8,177 seizure incidents) is more than three times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590).
- During the 2019/20 financial year the number of drug seizure incidents was higher in each month when compared with the same month the previous year, with the exception of March 2020 which was 256 lower than March 2019. The impact of Covid-19 should be taken into account when considering the lower level seen in March 2020.
- All but two of the 11 policing districts showed an increase in drug seizure incidents. Belfast City policing district accounts for approximately one third of all drug seizure incidents.
- Possession of drugs and trafficking of drug offences have increased for the third year in a row. During 2019/20 there were 6,920 possession of drugs offences compared to 6,161 during 2018/19, an increase of 12.3%. During 2019/20 there were 923 trafficking of drugs offences compared to 889 during 2018/19, an increase of 3.8%.

TRENDS IN DRUG RELATED ARRESTS SINCE 2006/07



- The number of arrests for drug offences has increased in most of the years since 2006/07.
- There were 3,819 drug-related arrests during 2019/20, an increase of 501 (15.1%) when compared with the previous 12 months and continuing the upwards trend.
- The level recorded in 2019/20 (3,819) is also more than twice that recorded in 2006/07 (1,709).
- The number of drug-related arrests has been higher in each month since April 2019 when compared with the same month the previous year, with the exception of March 2020 which was 101 lower than March 2019. The impact of Covid-19 should be taken into account when considering the fall seen in March 2020.
- Nine of the 11 policing districts showed an increase in drug-related arrests during 2019/20 when compared to the previous 12 month period. Belfast City showed the largest increase and accounted for 41% of all drug related arrests during the 2019/20 financial year.

SEIZURE INCIDENTS BY DRUG TYPE

Number of drug seizures⁴ by class and drug type

Drug class ⁵	Drug type ⁶	Drug seizure incidents		Numbers
		Apr'18-Mar'19	Apr'19-Mar'20 ^{7, 8}	change
Class A	Cocaine	1,031	1,108	77
	Ecstasy	315	229	-86
	Heroin	259	240	-19
	LSD	20	16	-4
	Methadone	5	11	6
	Morphine	9	16	7
	Other Class A4	106	110	4
Class B	Herbal cannabis	4,552	4,815	263
	Cannabis resin	735	507	-228
	Cannabis plants	116	94	-22
	Cannabis, other formats	537	671	134
	Amphetamines	92	87	-5
	Mephedrone	2	14	12
	Other Class B5	91	118	27
Class C	Anabolic steroids	44	33	-11
	Benzodiazepines	1,016	1,197	181
	Other Class C ^{9,10}	185	919	734
Total drugs seizure incidents		7,561	8,177	616

- Higher levels of seizure incidents were seen in overall Class B and Class C drugs, with a slight fall in Class A.
- Cannabis (Class B) remains the most commonly seized drug in Northern Ireland, leading the way in 2019/20 with 5,636 seizures. This is also 141 more seizure incidents than the previous 12 months representing an increase of 2.6%.
- Benzodiazepines (Class C) were the second most commonly seized drug type during 2019/20 with 1,197 seizure incidents. This also represents an increase of 17.8% when compared to 2018/19.
- Cocaine (Class A) seizures accounted for the third largest number of seizure incidents during 2019/20 and levels also increased by 7.5% from the previous 12 months.
- Pregabalin and gabapentin were reclassified as Class C controlled substances in April 2019 and, from this date, they have been included in the drug seizure statistics within 'Other Class C'. Between April 2019 and March 2020 there were 724 seizure incidents involving pregabalin and 59 involving gabapentin. Together, these account for around one in ten drug seizure incidents and for more than 80 per cent of Other Class C drug seizure incidents recorded during 2019/20.

4 As each seizure incident can involve more than one class or type of drug, seizure figures for individual drugs cannot be added together to produce totals as this will sum to more than the total number of seizures.

5 Not all drug seizures are subject to forensic testing to officially confirm the drug type seized. When testing is not applied, the PSNI's drug seizure statistics are classified in accordance with the investigating officer's assessment of the drug type seized based on their experience and knowledge of the illegal drug trade in Northern Ireland.

6 Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as records from 1st April 2019 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication of finalised figures in September 2020.

7 Other Class A drugs include fentanyl/ fentanyl derivatives, oxycodone, psilocin (magic mushrooms) and methamphetamine (crystal meth).

8 Other Class B drugs include cathinone derivatives, codeine/ dihydrocodeine, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), ketamine, barbiturates and synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists.

9 Other Class C drugs include tramadol, buprenorphine, GHB/ GBL and 'Z-class' drugs (zolpidem, zopiclone and zaleplon).

10 Other Class C drugs also include Pregabalin and Gabapentin which were reclassified as Class C controlled substances in April 2019.

DRUG RELATED DEATHS¹¹

In January 2020, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) released the most up-to-date official figures for drug-related deaths covering the 2018 calendar year. There were a total of 189 drug-related deaths in 2018, more than double that recorded a decade ago (89) and an increase of 39% when compared to 2017 which recorded 136 drug related deaths.

Males accounted for 70.4% of the drug-related deaths in 2018 with 133 deaths. In particular, approximately half (95) of the 189 total deaths in 2018 were men aged 25-44.

In terms of all deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2018 (15,922), drug-related deaths accounted for 1.2% of the total. Between 2017 and 2018 the drug-related mortality rate increased for both males and females.

Poly drug use, the mixing of multiple drug types, and the misuse of prescription medication continues to be a prominent feature of many drug-related deaths in Northern Ireland. Figures indicate that half of all drug-related deaths in 2018 involved three or more drugs. This is in contrast to 2008 when almost half of drug related deaths involved one drug.

Consumption of alcohol with drugs is also a very common practice and this combination can have fatal consequences. Almost 23% of all drug-related deaths in 2018 also mentioned alcohol on the death certificate, a proportion which has remained relatively consistent over the last five years.

The recent Audit Office report further highlights the growing problem of misuse of prescription drugs. Pregabalin and diazepam are two prescription drugs that are particularly susceptible to misuse and contribute to drug-related harm in Northern Ireland.

Diazepam was listed in 40.2% of all drug-related deaths in 2018, a similar proportion to that recorded in previous years.

Mixing drugs and misusing prescription medication is a common cause of many drug-related deaths in NI.

Drug-related deaths involving pregabalin have risen consistently since its first appearance in drug death statistics in 2013. The annual number of deaths involving this controlled substance rose from 9 in 2016, to 33 in 2017 and 54 in 2018. 2018 figures show pregabalin appearing in 28.6% of all drug-related deaths. Of note, Northern Ireland prescribes more pregabalin and diazepam per capita than anywhere else in the UK.

The growing availability and use of more serious drugs such as heroin and cocaine across Northern Ireland continues to be a concerning trend.

Since 2010, over half of drug-related deaths each year have involved an opioid. In 2018, a total of 115 drug-related deaths had an opioid mentioned on the death certificate. Heroin and morphine were the most frequently mentioned opioids in 2018, connected to 40 drug-related deaths, up from 24 in 2017 and the highest number on record.

Drug-related deaths involving cocaine increased from 13 in 2017 to 28 in 2018 and is the highest level on record.

The availability and use of more serious drugs, eg heroin and cocaine is a concern.

¹¹ NISRA "Drug related and Drug Misuse Deaths 2008 - 2018". (Date published 16 January 2020).

CASE STUDY

CLASS A AND CLASS B DRUGS SEIZURE

During August 2019 detectives observed a handover of a parcel between two OCG members. Both were subsequently searched under the Misuse of Drugs Act and the parcel was found to contain herbal cannabis with an estimated value of £40,000. Follow up searches recovered cocaine valued at £75,000 from the home under the control of one of the OCG members arrested. Both OCG members were charged and remanded for possession with intent to supply the Class A and Class B drugs.

CASE STUDY

HIGH PURITY COCAINE SEIZED

In April 2019 two OCG principals were charged and remanded in custody after the seizure of £1 million of high purity cocaine in a forest on the Woodhouse Road, Coalisland.

CASE STUDY

LORRY SEARCH AT BELFAST DOCKS

In October 2019 detectives searched a lorry (under the Misuse of Drugs Act), which had arrived at Belfast docks. Three boxes containing herbal cannabis with an estimated street value of £640,000 were located within boxes disguised as legitimate cargo.



CASE STUDY

OPERATION TARGETING IMPORTATION OF CLASS B DRUGS

A PSNI operation, working with Border Force, targeted the importation and large scale supply of Class B drugs. In January 2020 detectives searched a self-storage unit in Carryduff and residential premises in central Belfast. Herbal cannabis worth an estimated street value of £1 million concealed in flooring packaging was seized along with £70,000 cash. In a related intervention a further £30,000 was seized from an individual who was attempting to remove it from the jurisdiction. Three OCG members were charged with possession of an estimated £1 million worth of herbal cannabis and possession of £100,000 as criminal property.



CASE STUDY

COCAINE SEIZURE

In a joint multi-agency operation, Border Force officers, working alongside the PSNI's Organised Crime Unit, seized 3 Kg of cocaine from a Citroën Berlingo Van. The drugs were concealed in a professionally constructed hide within the floor of the vehicle. Three taped packages were recovered during the operation. The detection was passed to the PSNI for further investigation.

Border Force has also had significant success in reducing the supply of drugs on our streets.

In 2019/20 Border Force Northern Ireland recovered:

- 11.7 Kg of Class A drugs
- 37.2 Kg of Cannabis
- 63 Kg of other Class B and Class C drugs (including prescription tablets)

CASE STUDY

OPERATION BOXED

A multi-agency operation involving Border Force, the PSNI's Organised Crime Unit and the PSNI's Ports Policing Unit which targeted Class A drugs and cash movements at Belfast City Airport, Belfast International Airport and Belfast Central train station.

Trains from Dublin were targeted to coincide with Belsonic music festival in Belfast for Class A drugs and cash movements. Selected inbound and outbound flights were also targeted for cash and Class A drugs.

Border Force and the PSNI also provided detector dog support. Class A and Class B drugs were detected during the operation. It also promoted 'think before you buy' initiative, with posters displayed throughout Belfast train stations.

CASE STUDY

COCAINE, CASH AND PROPERTY SEIZED

Cocaine with an estimated street value of £180,000, £39,000 cash and four vehicles were seized during an operation. Property including four vehicles, five greyhounds, a watch, contents of two bank accounts, a building site and a house with a total value in excess of £200,000 is being restrained. Persons were charged with drugs and money laundering offences. Three of these persons remain in custody.

CASE STUDY

COCAINE SEIZED AT SPRUCEFIELD

An operation targeting importation and large scale supply of Class A drugs. In November 2019 detectives stopped a van on the A1 at Sprucefield. Cocaine, with an estimated street value of £180,000, was subsequently seized from an elaborate hide in the body of the van and two OCG members were charged with possession of Class A drugs with intent to supply. Border Force assisted with subsequent specialist vehicle searches.

CASE STUDY

CANNABIS SEIZURE

Border Force officers examined a parcel that had arrived from France at a TNT parcel depot and detected 7.2 Kg of herbal cannabis. The seizure was adopted by the PSNI's Organised Crime Unit and subsequent house searches in Belfast and Larne led to the discovery of a further 28 Kg of herbal cannabis with a street value of £460,000. Two arrests were made, and a car was also seized in the operation.

CASE STUDY

MDMA SEIZURE

Border Force officers detected 1 Kg of MDMA (commonly known as ecstasy) after opening a parcel that had arrived from the Netherlands. The drugs were concealed as washing powder.



CASE STUDY

OPERATION PANGEA

Operation Pangea is an Interpol co-ordinated effort to disrupt the online sale of counterfeit and illicit health products which are subsequently distributed using the postal and fast parcel infrastructure. OCTF partners PSNI, Border Force and the Medicines Regulatory Group worked together in this 13th iteration of the international operation. During the week of action in March 2020 OCTF partners conducted searches at various locations and seized in excess of 100,000 tablets destined for the illicit market in Northern Ireland. Further PSNI and Border Force cooperation on these illicit drugs led to a further 100,000 tablets being seized during follow-up searches conducted in April and May 2020. The removal of these drugs from circulation and the prosecution of those responsible for importing them into Northern Ireland demonstrates OCTF's commitment to reducing the harm and misery caused by the illicit supply of prescription or counterfeit prescription drugs.



CASE STUDY - NCA LED INVESTIGATIONS

IMPORTATION OF COCAINE

The NCA, supported by Border Force, charged a Brazilian national who resided in Northern Ireland. The individual pleaded guilty to the importation of a Class A drug after attempting to smuggle 3 Kg of high purity cocaine, with an estimated street value of £350,000, through Belfast City Airport from Brazil. The seizure was one of the biggest hauls of cocaine ever found at the airport.

WORLD'S LARGEST CASE INVOLVING ILLICIT ANABOLIC STEROIDS

The sentencing of an OCG involved in the world's largest case of importation, production and distribution of illicit anabolic steroids. The OCG illegally imported 42 tonnes of steroids worth an estimated £30m, as well as owning a purpose built laboratory which manufactured an estimated £43m of illicit steroids. The head of the OCG, a CEO of a pharmaceutical company, and other members were sentenced to a total of 18 years between them.

FORWARD LOOK

The OCTF partners, and particularly the Drugs Sub Group, will continue to work collaboratively to identify and tackle the importation, supply and use. Border Force work collaboratively with the PSNI's Organised Crime Unit and the Medicines Regulatory Group in targeting postal depots across Northern Ireland.

The OCTF Drugs Sub Groups will monitor emerging drug trends and PSNI will continue to prioritise drugs as a strategic issue. The full weight of partnerships will be brought to bear on the drug trafficking market within established OCTF structures. The focus will continue to be on reducing the harm drugs cause within our communities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you see or suspect drug dealing in your area help stop it:

- Report it to the police tel 101
- Call CrimeStoppers anonymously on Tel 0800 555 111

Your local policing team is operating 'Silent Guardian' project aimed at tackling drug dealing in your area. Find out more about how you can stop it at:

www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/crime/drugs/documents/rp148-silent-guardian-tri-fold-leaflet.pdf

2.3 MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

THE THREAT

Modern Slavery (MS) is an umbrella term that incorporates both the offence of Slavery, Servitude and Forced or Compulsory Labour and the offence of Human Trafficking (HT). Victims are often afraid or unable to report their ordeal, due to language barriers or because they are held captive. Therefore it is difficult to understand or quantify the true scale of MSHT in Northern Ireland. MSHT is an extremely lucrative criminal activity. The main driver of MSHT offending is the pursuit of profit by coercing victims to provide a service.

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK-wide framework for identifying and referring potential victims of Modern Slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The number of MSHT offences and the number of potential victims identified through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) increased during 2019/20.

Whilst an increase in the number of NRM referrals could be interpreted as indicating an increase in the scale of MSHT, it could also be because of a greater level of awareness leading to increased identification of victims and reporting of suspected cases.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The PSNI's entire approach to MSHT is victim-centred with the need to identify, locate and recover any Potential Victims of Trafficking (PVoT) and offer police help and support in line with current legislation. PSNI also want to tackle the organised crime groups (OCGs) involved and detain or detect people involved in the trafficking of people.

In 2019/20 the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) further improved its capabilities. The Unit;

- engaged two uniformed officers for a 12 month secondment, to provide additional support and to help share new learning and skills at District levels;
- created a 'Protect and Prevent' Officer function within the team to review the implementation of the MSHTU Control Strategy and to provide awareness-raising;
- made use of a Home Office Criminal Financial Investigator (CFI) embedded in the Unit, sharing best practice and identifying opportunities to share intelligence and add to investigations; and
- welcomed two Romanian police officers on a two month secondment facilitated by the Department of Justice.

One of the priorities in the PSNI's response to MSHT is to improve the capacity of PSNI officers to identify and support victims. Notably, with the assistance of Police Learning through Technologies Unit, it has created and released mandatory online training for Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking for police and police staff.

Detectives from the MSHTU have also delivered training to a number of public and private sector groups over this reporting period including: Northern Ireland Street Pastors; the Northern Ireland Prison Service; Financial Institutions; African Women Organization workshop; medical students at Queens University; George Best Belfast City Airport's Airport Safety Week; Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid event in Belfast; and medical staff at Downshire Hospital.

These training events and engagements strengthen links with partner agencies, NGOs and private sector businesses which in turn increases the overall level of skills, knowledge and contacts in areas that can be very relevant in investigating MSHT offences.

Partnership with An Garda Síochána

Working with An Garda Síochána's Human Trafficking Unit is an important partnership. Representatives from An Garda Síochána and the PSNI carried out an Exchange Programme in late 2019. This allowed PSNI and An Garda Síochána to exchange learning on

**Modern slavery
is about using
vulnerable people
for profit.**

the different practices adopted in the areas of Human Trafficking and Organised Prostitution.

In February 2020, the MSHTU and An Garda Síochána's Human Trafficking Investigation and Co-ordination Unit carried out National Days of Action in the border areas under the auspices of the Joint Agency Task Force. The Days of Action were organised and co-ordinated with a view to inspecting a number of car washes for signs of Labour Exploitation and related offences. A multi-agency approach was adopted by An Garda Síochána and the PSNI. An Garda Síochána was assisted by personnel from the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social Protection. The PSNI was assisted by the Department of Communities, Northern Ireland Water, Northern Ireland Electricity, Immigration and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland. The primary purpose of the operation was to inspect each of the premises and engage with persons working there in an effort to safeguard their welfare and to detect any Human Trafficking offences in addition to the detection of any workplace, revenue or welfare irregularities.

Safeguarding Visits

In early March 2020 the MSHTU conducted numerous safeguarding visits to Potential Victims of Human Trafficking by sexual exploitation. Some included working with colleagues in An Garda Síochána when border areas of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland were prioritised and safeguarding visits were conducted to potential victims who have been operating on both sides of the common travel area.

Illegal Working and Modern Slavery

Current priority sectors for HMRC within this area are the hand car wash and construction sectors. There are also high instances of reports in relation to the restaurant/takeaway sector, the agricultural industry and within nail bars. This relates to the UK as a whole rather than Northern Ireland specifically.

Illegal working refers to the employment of those who have no right to be in the UK or who are working beyond their visa restrictions. Modern Slavery offences encompass slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking including facilitating an individual's travel with the intention of exploiting them soon after.

Though interested in protecting victims in all forms of exploitation, within HMRC the priority focus within this broad area is labour market exploitation. This is due to HMRC's role in maximising fiscal revenues, which it contributes to by ensuring that both employees and employers are paying and being paid what they should. HMRC focus compliance activities on those who disadvantage the legitimate members of the labour market by exploiting workers and undercutting legitimate businesses. There is a particular interest in employers who are not paying their workers the National Minimum Wage, as the enforcement of NMW is led by HMRC.

HMRC collaborates in this area with partners such as the Director of Labour Market Enforcement in the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Home Office, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority and the Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre.

RESULTS

The number of NRM referrals in Northern Ireland increased by 88.1% on the 2018/19 referral figures, from 59 in 2018/19 to 111 referrals from 2019/20 financial year. Of the 111 referrals, 53 were female and 58 were males.

Trends in exploitation type remained consistent with last year with slight variances within victim nationalities. Exploitation by securing services was the most commonly referred exploitation type in Northern Ireland closely followed by labour exploitation. Adult Services Website (ASWs) remain a key enabler for sexual exploitation, showing the ever-increasing scale of cyber-enabled organised criminality in Northern Ireland. Of those 111 potential victims referred:

- 28 were in relation to Labour Exploitation.
- 10 were in relation to Domestic Servitude.
- 28 were in relation to Sexual Exploitation.
- 31 were in relation to Securing Services (where the person has been subjected to force, threats, abduction, coercion, fraud or deception), and
- 14 were recorded as "unknown".

Of the 111 referrals, the potential victims had 27 different nationalities.

During 2019/20 the MSHTU;

- conducted eight Warrant Searches and visits/ non-warrant operations;
- conducted 158 screening assessments (a process to safeguard victims through early recognition and subsequent intervention);
- made 22 arrests for MSHT and/or related offences; and
- charged four persons with MSHT and/or related offences and secured two convictions for Human Trafficking under the Northern Ireland Human Trafficking legislation.

Since late March 2020, Adult Service Website (ASW) adverts have been reduced in number by approximately one third on pre Covid-19 numbers. The ASWs are encouraging the use of web cams and phone calls rather than face to face contact with clients and escorts.

In conjunction with the Garda National Protective Services Bureau, the PSNI's MSHTU is sending out safeguarding messages to the sex workers still advertising. The messages provide advice on social distancing and provide telephone numbers if they require help. The messages are being sent out in a number of languages.

CASE STUDY

FEMALE TRAFFICKED TO WORK IN THE SEX INDUSTRY

Border Force spoke with a Romanian female who arrived at Belfast International Airport from Milan, Italy. She admitted to being trafficked into the UK to work in the sex industry. The PSNI's MSHTU attended and adopted the case. The passenger decided voluntarily to return to Romania and was taken to Dublin airport where she was met by An Garda Síochána's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team. Returning home, she was met at Bucharest Airport by Romanian Police Officers at the request of the PSNI in respect of Safeguarding and Crime Prevention.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION FAVET - UPDATE

MSHTU participated in a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) with Police Scotland and Romanian Police in relation to a proactive investigation into suspected human trafficking of Romanian females for Sexual Exploitation by Romanian suspects in Belfast and Glasgow. The aim was to combat the OCG operating across Europe. The JIT was facilitated by Eurojust and Europol. On 30 January 2020, at Laganside Court, the suspect was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment suspended for two years for Human Trafficking and Money Laundering offences.

This is the fourth conviction for a Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation offence in Northern Ireland under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Act. This is also the PSNI's second successful "victimless" prosecution for Human Trafficking. The investigation and Court proceedings are continuing in all three jurisdictions.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION FOG - UPDATE

As reported last year, in February 2018 at Belfast Crown Court, 2 members of a Romanian Organised Crime Group (OCG) were convicted of Conspiracy to Human Trafficking five victims for Sexual Exploitation, Controlling Prostitution for Gain of 6 victims and Acquiring and Converting Criminal Property totalling over £165,000. Further to this investigation, in July 2019, at Belfast Crown Court, a 31 year old female, was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, suspended for two years, for the offences of conspiring to traffic a person for sexual exploitation and converting property in relation to almost £3,000 made as a result of her criminal activity between January and April 2017.

CASE STUDY

OPERATION AIDANT

This ongoing Operation involves weeks of intensification of activities around a particular area of exploitation in which the PSNI participate alongside colleagues across mainland GB. This reporting period has seen five weeks of intensification aimed at Labour Exploitation, Child Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, Criminal Exploitation and the final week was a regional focus allowing PSNI to target areas that were affecting live investigations rather than following a national path. Examples of some of the activities include:

July 2019: A Multi-agency car wash operation was conducted in three locations, working with HMRC: follow up action with partners in terms of concerns regarding red diesel/working conditions/breaches in minimum wage and storage of chemicals.

September 2019: Sexual Exploitation focused on Adult Service Websites. MSHTU carried out safeguarding visits over three nights at four addresses and spoke with the females present. Screening forms were completed for each person.

September 2019: Multi agency work with Border Force: The Amsterdam flight is the main hub from Asia into Belfast and where most concerns had been raised. Two flights from Amsterdam to Belfast City Airport were subsequently screened. No Potential Victims of Trafficking were identified.

September 2019: HMRC and PSNI attended a restaurant in County Armagh in relation to possible Labour Exploitation. Joint HMRC/PSNI screening questionnaires were completed by the staff employed at the restaurant.

THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Section 12 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act 2015 requires the Department of Justice to publish an annual strategy, and progress against this strategy is monitored on a quarterly basis by the OCTF Modern Slavery Sub Group. The Department also brings together Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) focussed on tackling MSHT, on a quarterly basis to share information and encourage partnership working.

To ensure that potential victims of trafficking were safeguarded during Covid-19, the Justice Minister, Naomi Long, approved (under section 18(9) of the 2015 Act and in line with the UK jurisdictions), two consecutive periods of temporary extensions of support (including accommodation) to adult victims following a positive conclusive determination.

The extension is also applicable to those individuals receiving support on receipt of a negative conclusive determination (i.e. that they are not a victim of Modern Slavery) in line with timescales agreed by the

CASE STUDY

OPERATION QUEST

Operation Quest concentrated on escorts advertising in the Louth area, in particular the Dundalk and Drogheda areas and on escorts advertising in Derry/Londonderry, Tyrone and Antrim. No offences relating to MSHT were identified but significant intelligence was gathered.

other jurisdictions. This temporary policy decision was made on an administrative basis. It has been confirmed that extended support provisions were not requested or required.

Working with the Department, PSNI and GLAA addressed concerns about the heightened risk of vulnerable, potential victims being exploited in high risk workplaces and assessed the potential for labour exploitation in rural businesses, the food manufacturing and processing industry. An article to raise awareness was published in Farming Life, a weekly magazine with readership across rural society in Northern Ireland.

Strategic Data and Training Co-ordinator

The Department of Justice created this dedicated role to reinforce partnership working between the Department, the PSNI and other partners to deliver a strategic response to MSHT training needs across frontline professionals, with a particular focus on the Health and Social Care sector.

A training needs assessment (TNA) was conducted across Northern Ireland to determine gaps in knowledge about MSHT. As a result social work leads have developed an internal pathway guidance document for the five Health Trusts in Northern Ireland.

The TNA exercise is being extended to include other OCTF partners and public bodies.

Transparency in Supply Chains (TISC)

The Strategic Data and Training Co-ordinator also continued to promote and embed best practice in public procurement in Northern Ireland. Working with Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) in the Department of Finance, and other policy officials, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking clauses were incorporated in new and existing contracts.

In Autumn 2019 supply chain training was rolled out to include universities and public sector Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) professionals.

Work also continued with local councils on the importance of transparency in supply chains and more generally on raising awareness of Modern Slavery.

Other training on MSHT during the year included:

- In November 2019, nearly 100 First Responders from across Northern Ireland attended a workshop led by DOJ, PSNI, the Social Care Authority, Health and Social Care Boards and the Home Office to demonstrate how to use the new digitised NRM referral system using specially designed case studies.
- A range of presentations and awareness sessions delivered by DOJ in partnership with NGO specialist groups and PSNI colleagues at Universities; with procurement practitioners; airport staff; Seafarers Mission; ethnic minority representative groups; medical and social work students.

- Presentations on “train the trainer” were shared with various organisations. This initiative is set to continue into 2020/21 as it equips organisations with an “in house” source of information to raise employee awareness and encourages reporting of potential victims.

In addition, the Department worked with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) who produced and published comprehensive guidance on trafficking and slavery for council workers and Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs).

FORWARD LOOK

New Strategy

A new Strategy for 2021/22, which includes a progress report on delivery of the 2019/20 Strategy, has been issued for public consultation. This Strategy seeks to incorporate the recommendations from the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) inspection of Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, as well as recommendations made by the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner in her Annual Report. An action plan will be published in response to the CJINI Report.

Consultation on two amendments to the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.

A consultation exercise seeking views on two minor amendments to the Modern Slavery provisions in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support For Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (‘the HT Act 2015’) ended on 1 September 2020. The proposed amendments are to:

1. Amend section 12 of the HT Act 2015 to remove the statutory requirement to publish a strategy at least once in every year; and
2. Amend section 18 of the HT Act 2015 to extend support to victims of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour.

Responses to the consultation were overwhelmingly supportive of the amendments and work is in progress to provide for the changes in the Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Are you playing your part to tackle modern slavery?

Could you spot the signs?

Go to www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/human-trafficking to find out more.

If you suspect that someone is a victim, please call:

999 in case of an emergency;

101 about a general situation; or

0800 0121 700 for the Modern Slavery helpline

Do you know about the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority? (www.gla.gov.uk)

- If you are an employment agency, labour provider or gangmaster who provides workers to the sectors listed below, you will need a GLAA licence:
 - Agriculture;
 - Horticulture;
 - Shellfish gathering; and
 - Any associated processing and packaging

Need business advice on keeping your supply chains free of modern slavery? Learn more at: www.stronger2gether.org/

2.4 ORGANISED IMMIGRATION CRIME

Various OCTF partners are working to disrupt organised crime involving the movement of people, goods and money in and out of Northern Ireland.

Immigration Enforcement's mission is to reduce the illegal (migrant) population and the harm it causes. In Northern Ireland, Immigration Enforcement conducts enforcement operations against a range of immigration crime, including facilitation, document fraud, sham marriages, rogue employers and illegal workers. It also has an important role to play in preventing abuse of the Common Travel Area (CTA).

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Immigration Enforcement uses all available powers to intercept, arrest and/or prosecute immigration offenders, including foreign national criminals seeking to circumvent UK immigration controls.

Criminal Investigators are embedded into the PSNI's Organised Crime and Modern Slavery teams to assist with joint investigations. Immigration Enforcement also works closely with Republic of Ireland's criminal investigators on cross border investigations into organised CTA abuse, facilitation and the production and supply of false documentation.

During 2019/20 enforcement activities with OCTF partners has strengthened Northern Ireland's capacity to tackle immigration-related crime and has resulted in convictions of serious criminals.

CASE STUDY

ALBANIAN MIGRANTS

A Northern Ireland-based lorry driver whose cattle lorry was interdicted at Calais and found to contain 13 Albanian migrants was sentenced to six months imprisonment following an NCA-led investigation. Other OCG members were arrested in the South of England and assets worth £500,000 restrained.

RESULTS CASE STUDIES

APRIL 2019

A Polish national who had entered the UK illegally across the land border in breach of a UK Deportation Order was intercepted on route to Scotland. He was found to have previously served prison sentences totalling 9.5 years for offences committed overseas; these included rape and sexual exploitation of children. He was arrested, prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breach – receiving a £300 fine – and deported to Poland.

OCTOBER 2019

Two Slovakian nationals (separate cases), referred by PSNI who were illegally in the UK in breach of their UK Deportation Orders, were prosecuted by Immigration Enforcement for the breaches and received eight month and five month prison sentences respectively.

CASE STUDY

ASIAN MIGRANTS

In March the NCA's operational team based in Northern Ireland, with support from partners, led the disruption of an OCG engaged in organised immigration crime. Officers worked with Belgian law enforcement partners and interdicted a lorry near Bruges containing ten Asian migrants. The driver was arrested and remanded in custody in Belgium awaiting trial. Two other OCG members were arrested in southern England and charged and remanded in custody. A further arrest and search was conducted in Northern Ireland.

MARCH 2020

A Romanian national, who had entered the UK illegally across the land border was intercepted on route to Scotland. He was found to have previously served a 12 year prison sentence in Romania for robbery and false imprisonment. He was arrested and removed to Romania.

MARCH 2020

A Romanian national, who had entered the UK illegally across the land border in breach of a UK Deportation Order, was intercepted en route to Scotland. He was found to have previously served a seven year prison sentence in Romania for rape. He was arrested and deported to Romania.

FORWARD LOOK

In the coming year, Immigration Enforcement will continue to extend its reach, making it increasingly difficult for people to live or stay in Northern Ireland illegally and for criminals to commit immigration related crime.

Immigration Enforcement will continue to intervene upstream through its overseas networks to disrupt organised criminals abroad and provide intelligence to the visa issuing process to prevent inadmissible passengers from travelling to the UK. It will continue to strengthen its relationship with the Republic of Ireland to ensure that individuals who would not be admissible to either jurisdiction are unable to travel to the CTA.

Immigration Enforcement will build on its work with Northern Ireland's OCTF partners and the Republic of Ireland's law enforcement agencies to target foreign national offenders and organised immigration crime. Immigration Enforcement will continue to play its part in the cross border organised crime structures and continue its work with An Garda Síochána and UK Border Force in conducting intensification campaigns to tackle cross border and wider immigration crime.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You have the information needed to improve the intelligence picture, and it couldn't be easier to tell us what you know...

www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime

2.5 BORDER CRIME

THE THREAT

The UK border is a primary defence against a range of threats but it also has a number of vulnerabilities that are known to and targeted by those who seek to undermine the controls in place, either for criminal gain, illegal migration or terrorist activity.

Organised crime groups attempt to use every means possible to exploit border vulnerabilities and smuggle criminal commodities into Northern Ireland. They actively seek any gaps and weaknesses in our ports, airports and transportation services as well as individuals who are willing to facilitate crime through our borders.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Frontline staff in Border Force are provided with training in identifying potential victims of Modern Slavery, and guidance has issued to staff setting out indicators of Modern Slavery, including forced labour. In addition, Border Force also has a network of specially trained Safeguarding and Modern Slavery (SAMS) teams who receive classroom training focussing on the knowledge and skills needed for this area.

A Smuggling Sub Group has recently been established under the OCTF structures, and cross border representation has been invited to contribute to its work. This will go some way to ensuring that opportunities for illicit trade are minimised. The Group will be involved in communicating the message that tax/excise evasion is not acceptable. This is particularly pertinent in an era where all jurisdictions will be endeavouring to rebuild their economies in a post-pandemic landscape.

RESULTS

While mentioned under the specific crime types in this report, it is worth noting the overall Border Force results in 2019/20:

- 5.7 million cigarettes
- 695 Kg of Hand Rolling Tobacco (HRT)
- £65,600 cash seized

- 63 offensive weapons
- 2,042 items of counterfeit goods
- 65,000 litres of Alcohol
- 8 Forged travel documents detected

During the past year Border Force has worked alongside OCTF partner agencies in planned and reactive operational activity.

CASE STUDY

4.869 MILLION CIGARETTES SEIZED

In a joint multi-agency operation at Belfast Docks, Border Force officers worked collaboratively with the PSNI's Ports Policing Unit and HMRC and seized 4.869 million cigarettes after an unaccompanied trailer arrived into Belfast Port originating from Rotterdam. The goods were manifested as "industrial filters" and were destined for an address in County Armagh. On inspecting the load, officers found 27 pallets of President slim-line and king size cigarettes; no cover load was used. Revenue evaded in this case was £1.8 million. HMRC have adopted the case as a criminal investigation.



CASE STUDY**UNDervalUED CAR DETECTION**

A joint operation between Border Force and HMRC at Belfast docks resulted in the outturn of a 40 foot container of goods declared as "personal effects". Officers discovered a Mercedes G Wagon vehicle which was found to be under-valued on the import documentation. Duty evaded was £36,500 plus VAT which HMRC is now seeking to recover. A civil penalty of £2,500 was also imposed on the importer.

CASE STUDY**DUTY-FREE TOBACCO ARREST**

Border Force officers arrested a male passenger who was travelling to Orlando from Belfast. This was at the request of HMRC after the passenger was suspected to be involved in the purchase of 6.6 Kg of duty-free tobacco and passing them onto an unknown person who was not travelling to a Non-EU destination. HMRC adopted the case for investigation.

CASE STUDY**OFFENSIVE WEAPON SEIZURE**

The threat of violence in local streets and communities with offensive weapons being used in attacks is still prevalent.

Border Force is committed to targeting the illegal importation of such items. Seizures have mainly come from Bulgaria as weapons are openly for sale in the popular holiday resorts

In an operation targeting offensive weapons, Border Force officers stopped a passenger who had arrived from Bourgas, Bulgaria. Seven offensive weapons including flick knives, batons, knuckledusters and stun guns were detected. The passenger was arrested, and the case adopted by the NCA for prosecution.

**Alcohol Seizures**

Border Force seized 65,000 litres of alcohol this year. The duty evaded exceeds £1 million.

Any alcohol movements travelling from the EU must have the documentation accompanying the load. The document can only be used once and proves that duty has been paid on the goods. There have been instances where the same paperwork had been used in different consignments.

Border Force refers all seized loads to HMRC to investigate and if applicable, will raise an assessment with penalties.

FORWARD LOOK

Border Force continues to work with other government departments to understand the implications of the Ireland / Northern Ireland Protocol. Along with other law enforcement partners, Border Force is considering the impact of the Protocol on serious and organised crime and how organised crime groups may adapt to vulnerabilities exposed by the Protocol.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have any information regarding the smuggling of goods or people, please contact:

CrimeStoppers on **0800 555111**

Customs hotline on **0800 595000**

2.6 ECONOMIC CRIME

THE THREAT

Financial gain is the principal driver of organised criminality with Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) seeking to generate and benefit from income made through a wide range of illegal enterprises. These illegal enterprises can be wholly within the criminal marketplace such as the supply of controlled drugs or they can involve exploitation of legal markets, for example through selling illicit goods such as tobacco products, alcohol or counterfeit goods.

Regardless of the illegal means by which the income is generated, there remains a need to legitimise and mask its true source, making money laundering a key factor in almost all organised criminality.

Fraud remains the fastest growing crime type within the UK and continues to pose a significant threat to individuals, businesses and the wider economy. The threat associated with fraud continues to increase with the nature of offending becoming increasingly enabled by the use of modern technology which has created new and innovative opportunities for “insider threats” and for ‘bad actors’ (those with malicious intent) to exploit. The use of technology has also made investigations more complex, often introducing cross-jurisdictional challenges.

Official statistics published by the PSNI show fraud in Northern Ireland has increased from 3,535 reported cases in 2018/19 to 4,296 in 2019/20, an increase of 21.5%.¹²

The ability of potential victims to identify a scam or fraud early is extremely important in allowing financial loss to be prevented or minimised. Offenders are very quick to adapt their methods as seen by the upsurge in fraud and scam offences involving Covid-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, thousands of coronavirus-related frauds have been reported to Action Fraud with millions of pounds lost. The majority of the reports relate to online shopping scams where victims purchase goods that were never delivered.

A further risk related to Covid-19 is the potential for fraudulent claims to be made in relation to the various government payment schemes designed to support legitimate businesses and employees through the pandemic.

The following fraud types are amongst the most commonly reported scams:

- **Telephone and Email Fraud** – These are a cyclical problem that appear to effect those most vulnerable in our society, in particular the elderly. The victim receives unsolicited contact from a person purporting to be from an official organisation, for example HMRC or PSNI. The contact type frightens the victim into believing that they owe the organisation money and if it is not paid urgently they will be subject to arrest. The victim normally pays the fraudster using iTunes vouchers, again relying on the lack of knowledge of the victim.
- **Bank Security Department Frauds** – The victim is contacted by the fraudster pretending to be their bank or a police officer investigating bank employees. They may provide information about the account which tricks the victim into believing they are actually speaking to their bank. The victim is told that they are the victim of fraud and need to move their money to a “safe account” quickly, but this account is actually a “mule” account controlled by the fraudster.
- **Sextortion** - these scams are a type of phishing attack whereby people are coerced to pay a ransom, usually by means of a virtual currency, because they have been threatened with sharing a video of themselves visiting adult websites. While these scams can include the obtaining of a video from a victim, recent trends have used unsolicited contact containing plausible technical details, for example a compromised password used by the victim, to add credibility to the scam and encouraging the transfer of funds.
- **Invoice Redirection** – this remains a growing trend and traditionally entails contact to a victim via email from a trusted source asking for payment

¹² Data based on figures supplied by Action Fraud

to go to a new bank account. This is affecting all business, particularly solicitors and those who trade across borders. The email can either appear to be spoofed from a trusted source or may involve the trusted source having their email system compromised. The money is then disbursed via a series of “mule” accounts, typically located in another force area to hinder investigation.

- **Investment and Pension Fraud** - the threat posed by investment scammers continues to grow across the UK, with the most commonly reported scams involving opportunities for victims to invest in shares, bonds or cryptocurrencies. Scammers traditionally make unexpected contact with the victim and use tactics such as time pressure, fake social proof and outline unrealistic returns - encouraging victims to transfer funds.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Financial investigation forms a significant line of enquiry in all operations targeting organised criminal activity in the PSNI. PSNI's Economic Crime Unit (ECU) and Organised Crime Unit (OCU) work collaboratively through the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) to combat money laundering and to prevent organised criminals benefiting from their illegal enterprises.

PSNI's Asset Confiscation and Enforcement (ACE) Team continues to provide a dedicated restraint and confiscation service to the organisation and to assist partner agencies in identifying criminal assets with a view to preventing criminals benefiting from their illegal activities.

The PSNI, as a member of the Scamwise NI Partnership, works with an array of public, private and third sector organisations to raise awareness of fraud and help prevent people falling victim to scammers.

Money laundering is a key factor in almost all organised criminality.

RESULTS

PSNI ACE Team Results in the 12 months from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

	Number	Cash Amount
PSNI Cash Forfeitures	71	£367,304
Restraint Orders	9	£2,078,836
Confiscation Orders	12	£1,343,642

CASE STUDY

INTERNATIONAL MONEY LAUNDERING NETWORK

One of the largest, most complex and protracted money laundering investigations ever undertaken by the PSNI has identified over £85.5 million that has been laundered through a complex web of over 50 companies and over 120 bank accounts throughout the European Union, China, Dubai and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This international money laundering network has utilised the Trade Based Money Laundering (TBML) methodology to conceal and transfer multi-millions of pounds for numerous organised criminal groups. Working collaboratively with the National Crime Agency, Europol and Eurojust, PSNI has established Joint Investigation Teams with Latvia, Belgium, Spain and Germany to obtain and provide vital mutual assistance.

CASE STUDY

ONLINE FRAUD

This is an investigation into the systematic targeting of bank customers by a sophisticated Organised Crime Group (OCG) utilising social media and other online platforms. Multiple victims have reported losses of over £3 million. Collaboration between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána has resulted in recent successful interventions that have frustrated and disrupted the OCG.

CASE STUDY

RENEWABLE ENERGY FRAUD

This operation is a UK wide investigation into suspected investment fraud centred on the renewable energy industry. Over 130 people have reported being victim to the alleged fraud, with their losses being in the region of £8 million. This protracted case continues to be investigated by specialist fraud investigators within the PSNI Economic Crime Unit.

NCA's Civil Recovery and Tax team has also undertaken investigations under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 which impact on Northern Ireland.

CASE STUDY

CIVIL RECOVERY INVESTIGATION

An example of this was in July, when an Unexplained Wealth Order (UWO) was obtained and an Interim Freezing Order at the High Court in London relating to six properties worth approximately £3.2 million - two in Northern Ireland and four in London. The subject of this civil recovery investigation is associated with a Northern Irish-based individual involved in cigarette smuggling who has numerous criminal and terrorism-related convictions. This investigation continues.

CASE STUDY

PROJECT PRINCEKIN

Under Project PRINCEKIN, in July the PSNI arrested and charged 13 individuals and seized £130,000 as a result of intelligence received from the National Economic Crime Centre (NECC) regarding third party cash deposits at a bank branch in Belfast. In total, £15.9 million is suspected to have been passed through the accounts of these individuals via 8,000 transactions.

CASE STUDY

COUNTERFEIT CASH

In December 2019, following an NCA investigation into an attempt to import almost 500,000 counterfeit pound coins into the UK, an individual from Newry was found guilty of conspiring to import fake currency and was sentenced to 50 months in prison. The same operation led to an investigation by the Dutch Fiscal Information and Investigation Service, which resulted in the identification of the factory making the coins, and those involved being prosecuted and convicted. The criminal group in the Netherlands was linked directly to the subject in Northern Ireland.

FORWARD LOOK

As the Justice Minister referenced in her Foreword, the Home Secretary has been asked to commence the Northern Ireland provisions in the Criminal Finances Act 2017 (CFA 2017) as soon as possible. The CFA 2017 makes legislative provision to provide law enforcement agencies and partners with new capabilities and powers to recover the proceeds of crime and to tackle money laundering, corruption and terrorist financing.

The additional powers will significantly enhance existing powers and tools to tackle criminal finances and associated serious organised crime in Northern Ireland.

2.7 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY CRIME (IPC)

THE THREAT

Buying counterfeit or fake products is often seen as a minor crime, victimless, with little or no impact. However, the reality is that counterfeit products can cause physical harm in terms of cosmetic and personal hygiene products causing burns and skin reactions; counterfeit toys containing toxins harmful to children; and fake electrical goods posing the risk of electric shock or fire. Purchasing counterfeit goods also affects and stifles local business and investment. The sale of counterfeit and illicit goods may help to fuel further harm to communities and individuals through other forms of criminality such as drug trafficking, and those involved in IPC are often linked to various forms of serious organised crime.

The world has become smaller in terms of product availability and this is true of both legitimate and illicit products. The scale and distribution of IPC continues to grow through the use of the internet, with goods frequently advertised for sale via social media, auction sites and online classifieds. There are also thousands of websites dedicated to the sale of counterfeit goods. While these websites often give the impression of being secure and trustworthy, by using these sites and providing their personal and banking details, consumers are leaving themselves open to becoming victims of identity fraud or having their devices compromised by malicious software and potentially used for other types of criminality. This, again, is evidence of the digital footprint of most crime types.

The most common types of counterfeit goods being seized in Northern Ireland include clothing, alcohol, tobacco, cosmetics, sunglasses, handbags, footwear, DVDs, CDs and electrical items.

Similar to trends in the importation of drugs, the postal system and parcel courier services are heavily used for the importation of counterfeit and illicit goods, mainly cigarettes. In addition to funding further organised crime, this evasion activity is adding to the UK tax gap which is already billions of pounds in uncollected taxes, money needed to fund public services.

The issue of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) remains one of the main IPC concerns in Northern Ireland. Rising costs of subscription TV and streaming services will encourage more people to turn to these illegal services. This is even more likely now given the number of individuals financially impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. Using these services places individuals at high risk of being hacked and having their details stolen and as such this may result in higher levels of fraud and cyber crime offences.

As is the case with counterfeit Covid-19 medication/cures, criminals have also infiltrated the market with counterfeit Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). A number of these items were seized globally during the recent Interpol-led Operation Pangea. Although there has been nothing specifically noted in Northern Ireland to date, it is possible that sub-standard face masks and hand sanitisers may make their way into the local supply chain. Criminals are also cashing in on the public's fear of Covid-19 by selling fake testing kits. It is suspected that the importation of these kits will increase throughout the duration of the pandemic.

The economic downturn and upsurge in unemployment due to Covid-19 may increase demand for counterfeit goods and illegal streaming services as people try to maintain their usual lifestyle on a much smaller budget.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Trading Standards Service (TSS) has continued its work in relation to counterfeit goods throughout 2019/20.

Through its continued work with other law enforcement agencies and OCTF partners TSS has carried out seizures and shared intelligence, ensuring that the most effective action is taken against rogue traders.

The sale of counterfeit and illicit goods can help fund other criminal activity.

TSS also continues to work closely with trade mark holders and licensees in gathering intelligence and information on IP crime and those perpetrating it with the aim of making them amenable to the courts.

The Service continued to develop working relationships with internet service providers and e-commerce platforms (including social media websites) to establish protocols and processes for interventions, particularly relating to online markets.

The recent lockdown as a result of Covid-19 has had an impact on work practices and criminality. As the supplies of counterfeit goods have moved online, TSS staff have focused their attention to this environment and are working with platform providers to identify offenders and have offending sites, accounts and items removed from the site.

DOORSTEP CRIME

Doorstep crime (DSC) affects a large volume of consumers across the country and has been highlighted as a priority issue for many years. This type of crime is often aimed at elderly and vulnerable consumers and cuts across other existing priorities, which include scams, product safety and e-crime. Doorstep crime is considered to be “low risk” to many criminals, has become attractive to Organised Crime Groups, and is seen as an additional revenue stream for other criminality. It is carried out by callous, unscrupulous criminals who deliberately prey on the most vulnerable in society, predominantly older people. Doorstep criminals are mobile, working throughout Northern Ireland, GB and across into the Republic of Ireland.

The impact on victims of doorstep crime can be devastating; they can lose trust in those who are close to them, shutting people out of their lives. There is evidence that suggests that some victims never get over what has happened to them and they move into assisted accommodation sooner, as they are no longer able or confident to live alone. In some instances, entire life savings are wiped out to pay for often unnecessary work, leaving the victim penniless and a once independent individual can find themselves having to rely on others and the state for support.

There is also the impact that doorstep crime has on legitimate traders, drawing trade away from genuine local businesses who can help bolster the local economy. Doorstep crime builds up a degree of mistrust with a knock on impact being felt by the legitimate trade.

CASE STUDY

PENSIONER “BEFRIENDED” – LOSING £37,500

A “cold-caller” targeted a vulnerable pensioner who agreed to have paving work completed at a cost of £1000. The victim was having counselling following the death of his mother and had received money from her estate. It appears he relayed this information to the cold callers who ‘befriended’ him. Over the next few weeks further work was completed with the pensioner paying a total of £37,500 to the trader. An independent report of the work showed that although it was of a satisfactory standard it was valued at £3,200.

CASE STUDY

93 YEAR OLD TARGETED BY A COLD CALLER

A 93 year old man was “cold-called” by a persistent DSC offender. He paid a total of £12,000 cash upfront to have repointing, painting and general maintenance work completed at his home. The trader took the pensioner to the bank on several occasions and used the victim’s bank card. An independent report showed the work was so poor it was negative in value.

TSS has worked on tackling OCGs involved in doorstep crime, most notably through:

1. Working in partnership with PSNI on a number of prosecutions and joint cases in which elderly victims have paid thousands of pounds for work that wasn't carried out.
2. Forging excellent relationships with the PSNI and other enforcement partners, the financial sector through the 'Banking Protocol', the third sector and, most importantly, victims of doorstep crime.
3. Working with partner agencies to increase awareness and reduce the impact of doorstep crime while developing preventative actions to disrupt problem traders and reduce consumer detriment.
4. Raising awareness of doorstep crime and participating in national and regional prevention activities, such as the 'Friends Against Scams' campaign which includes information on Doorstep Crime.
5. Liaising with PSNI Crime Prevention officers and a local Community Banker – providing a series of video-conference presentations to church leaders, neighbourhood watch coordinators and community groups highlighting current Covid scams including doorstep crime.
6. Printed fliers 'Wash your hands of Corona Virus Scams' (created by Friends against Scams) and had it delivered with over 18,000 food parcels that were being distributed to the elderly and those self-isolating. Several thousand were also hand delivered by TSS officers within their local communities where they believed the residents may be more vulnerable to scams and cold callers. PSNI Crime Prevention Officers also distributed leaflets within their relevant districts.

SCAMS

TSS also works to tackle mass marketing scams and disrupt the operations of perpetrators behind mail scams. It works in partnership with agencies across the country and with the National Trading Standards Scams Team to identify and support victims of mass marketing fraud and reach out to all the known scam victims in Northern Ireland, who are listed as people that have sent money off to scammers.

In the majority of cases victims have lost thousands of pounds and have been identified as incredibly vulnerable. TSS officers continue to visit victims (until lockdown) and provide invaluable advice and support to each person as well as investigating the scammers and taking enforcement action, where possible. Ongoing criminal investigations, as well as a robust education and awareness-raising policy, has brought the problem of scams to the fore of the public's attention. TSS continues as a member of the Scamwise NI partnership which shares intelligence and helps formulate strategy and policy on protecting vulnerable consumers in the NI from being caught out by sophisticated and extremely detrimental scams.

In 2019/20 pro-active work to combat mass-marketed scams included:

1. Issuing a warning advising people to remain vigilant following a rise in reports of coronavirus-related scams that seek to exploit the public's concern and uncertainty over Covid-19. Commonly reported scams include:
 - Fake lockdown fines - People were warned not to fall for a bogus text message saying they have been fined for stepping outside during the coronavirus lockdown. The scam message claimed to be from the Government, telling the recipient their movements have been monitored through their phone and they must pay a fine or face a more severe penalty.
 - Fake companies offering to obtain refunds for individuals who have had their holidays cancelled.
 - Online shopping scams where people order protective face masks, hand sanitiser and other products that are never delivered. Fake products that are delivered can often be dangerous and unsafe and not gone through the proper testing.
 - Coronavirus-themed phishing emails which try to trick people into opening malicious attachments on emails that can allow fraudsters access to sensitive personal information, such as passwords, email logins and banking details

- **Investment scams** - fraudsters sending investment and trading advice in an attempt to convince readers to take advantage of the coronavirus economic impact
 - **Business scams** - people are working from home more than ever. Increased stress, reduced opportunities to talk to colleagues and a different working environment are all things that criminals are using to their advantage to commit fraud, particularly on government grant and loan scams.
2. Working with advertisers to try and stop scammers from posting adverts through take downs;
 3. Providing evidence/intelligence to the National Trading Standards Scams Team, which has enabled them to undertake investigations and disrupt scams e.g. this has led to the shutting down of PO Boxes, which had been used by scammers.
 4. Undertaking educational work with social workers, carers, dementia groups to help them identify a scam victim. This has already proven to be very worthwhile in that scam victims have been identified by care workers. This has resulted in referrals to TSS that has enabled the service to provide the victims with one to one advice and to persuade them to stop responding to scam mail.
 5. Continuing participation in the 'Friends Against Scams' initiative rolled out across Northern Ireland;
 6. Highlighting Covid related scams through a social media video for Scams Awareness week.
 7. Providing continued support to chronic scams victims that are isolated during lock down.
 8. Working with the business community to raise awareness of the 'Businesses Against Scams' initiative.

RESULTS

A number of TSS enforcement visits resulted in many products being seized; as diverse as parts and accessories for mobile phones to poster-sized stickers for walls. The investigations are ongoing and prosecutions are the likely in most cases.

During the period of this report Border Force seized 2,042 counterfeit items. Goods included counterfeit trainers, tee shirts, football kits, beauty products, sunglasses and car hub caps. Items detected are referred to the rights holders who decide what course of action will be taken against the importer.



Seizure of counterfeit football kits

CASE STUDY

COUNTERFEIT GOODS AND CONTRABAND TOBACCO PRODUCTS

PSNI, HMRC and An Garda Síochána worked together to target paramilitary organised criminals involved in the supply of counterfeit and contraband goods. These search operations resulted in the recovery of counterfeit and contraband goods, including over 70,000 cigarettes, 16.5 Kg of tobacco as well as a large quantity of counterfeit clothing, 200 DVDs and 400 packs of hand rolling tobacco.

CASE STUDY

SALE OF COUNTERFEIT ELECTRONIC GOODS

Following receipt of information a search operation was conducted of a business premises in Belfast. This operation resulted in the seizure of a significant quantity of suspected counterfeit goods. The items seized included mobile telephones, telephone cases and chargers, as well as a range of other telephone components. Police have collaborated with brand experts from Apple, Marvel and Disney to verify the nature of the goods seized and the investigation is ongoing.

CASE STUDY

INTERNET PROTOCOL TELEVISION (IPTV)

As part of an ongoing operation by South Wales Trading Standards into the unlawful supply and use of Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) services, the PSNI and Trading Standards conducted a search and arrest operation in the Portadown area. This collaborative operation lead to the recovery of several electronic devices and other evidential material required to further the Trading Standards led investigation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Think about the cost - price is usually a good indicator as to whether goods are likely to be counterfeit.

Be wary about buying branded goods particularly online and outside of usual retail premises. Markets, fairs and car boot sales are prime locations for counterfeit goods, as is social media.

Many counterfeits are difficult to spot but for goods that consumers are able to inspect first hand, consumers should look out for poor packaging, bad spelling or printing, photocopied instructions and lack of regulatory markings.

Online photographs of genuine items can be used to promote items but the delivered goods may well be counterfeit.

Report your suspicions to:

PSNI Telephone **101**

Trading Standards at
[www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/
consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service](http://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service)

**If it looks too
good to be true,
it probably is!**

2.8 ARMED ROBBERY AND EXTORTION

THE THREAT

Cash in Transit (CIT) robberies continue to be rare occurrences in Northern Ireland due to increased security measures and the continued level of partnership working between CIT companies and law enforcement. There was just one attack during the 2019/20 financial year, down from three in 2018/19.

The notable series of ATM rip out attacks and bunker type attacks which featured heavily during the 2018/19 financial year continued into 2019/20. However, this was to a lesser extent and incidents have now greatly subsided mainly due to the excellent collaborative work between PSNI, CIT companies, banks and other financial institutions.

Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) employed differing methodologies when targeting the ATMs. One of the OCGs focused predominantly on ATMs located at rural filling stations. The majority of these attacks involved offenders stealing plant machinery (specifically diggers) that they would then use to forcibly remove an ATM from business premises. These attacks led to substantial damage being caused to the premises and forced businesses to close for prolonged periods of time in order to conduct repairs. During these periods local communities were left without vital services. Substantial quantities of cash were often stolen in these attacks, leading to some ATM companies permanently withdrawing services from rural areas.



The result of a digger attack on business premises

Methods of attacking ATMs also include “gas attacks” – where the ATM’s vault is injected with combustible gas (often combined with oxygen) and ignited, or Black Box attacks (where holes are cut into the ATM to gain access to its internal infrastructure and then the cash dispenser is bypassed and connected to an external device to withdraw cash without the need for a card).

As with previous years, these type of attacks continue to occur throughout mainland UK and Republic of Ireland but they have so far not been seen to the same levels in Northern Ireland.

Extortion remains a prominent crime in Northern Ireland. It is assessed that paramilitary groups (both loyalist and republican), or individuals claiming to be from these groups, continue to be actively involved in extortion attempts, particularly the racketeering of small businesses and building sites in towns and cities across Northern Ireland. It is believed that significant under-reporting continues due to an unwillingness of victims to come forward to police. Online extortion continues to grow with criminals seeking money by threatening to damage the reputation of an individual or business. In particular sextortion offences continue to feature prominently with victims being persuaded to perform intimate acts on camera and then threatened with the release of these images or information as a means of coercion to get victims to pay the ransom demands.

This is also believed to be a highly under-reported crime type with victims often too embarrassed to report, and some often paying the ransom. Therefore it is likely much more of an issue than current reported levels would suggest. With more people spending longer periods of time online and an increase in online activity due to the Covid-19 restrictions there will be ever growing opportunities for online extortion attempts.

Extortion is a prominent crime in NI.

Illegal money lending/loan sharking happens in Northern Ireland; however, it is also rarely reported to police. Paramilitaries and criminal gangs target vulnerable individuals by providing unregulated loans. Profits from illegal money lending can be used to fund further criminal activity, for example, the purchase of weapons and drugs. It can also give the groups “control” of a community and make vulnerable citizens even more vulnerable. PSNI’s ongoing engagement with debt advice charities suggest that the issue is widespread in local communities, with victims often preferring to seek assistance from charities rather than going to the police due to fear of reprisals.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Members of the OCTF Armed Robbery and Extortion Sub Group continue to work collaboratively with the CIT industry to ensure the safety of its employees and to prevent robberies. Various target hardening measures have been introduced with best practice from across Europe being adopted and new technologies being harnessed to deter attacks. These measures have been implemented with the principal intent of preventing robberies from taking place. However, when robberies do occur the measures are further intended to increase the likelihood that offenders will be apprehended, as well as ensuring that any cash stolen is rendered unusable by the thieves.

RESULTS

The OCG focused predominantly on ATMs located at rural filling stations used detailed planning to carry out their criminal activities. However, after long and painstaking investigation, officers from the PSNI’s Crime Operations Department mounted a successful intervention that resulted in the arrest and charge of three people suspected of committing the attacks. Further investigation also resulted in a further four people being arrested and charged in relation to the ATM attacks.

Another Organised Crime Group (OCG) operating during the same period in the greater Belfast area was targeting ATMs by way of burglary. Offenders would force entry to the bunker housing an ATM and

then break into the ATM itself to steal the contents. After extensive investigation four suspects were identified, arrested and charged with nine attacks on ATMs.

During this same period other ATMs were subject to ‘copycat-style’ attacks unconnected to organised crime. Investigations into these incidents resulted in three suspects being arrested and charged in connection with these incidents.

In addition, an OCG believed to originate from Northern Ireland is suspected of committing several ATM attacks in Republic of Ireland using heavy plant machinery. Collaboration between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI has led to several arrests and suspects being charged in connection with these offences.

FORWARD LOOK

The OCTF Armed Robbery and Extortion Sub Group continues to work effectively in partnership to proactively identify and address crime trends, to identify and champion the use of new technologies and to deter attacks from Organised Crime Groups. The Group’s activity continues to focus on crime prevention, reducing the risk of harm and ensuring that services to the community are protected. Members share valuable information and monitor changing trends and evolutions in the modus operandi being employed by Organised Crime Groups across the UK and Ireland.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The public are asked to remain vigilant around banking institutions, cash-in-transit vehicles and ATM sites.

Any suspicious activity should be reported to police using the **101** number unless the circumstances justify an emergency call to the 999 system.

Alternatively information may be reported anonymously through to the independent Crimestoppers charity on **Tel 0800 555 111**.

2.9 EXCISE EVASION AND TAX FRAUD

THE THREAT

The UK tax gap is 4.7% which represents an estimated £31 billion in uncollected taxes, money needed more than ever to fund public services.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

Offshore Structures

HMRC recently assessed the highest impact mechanisms of transferring and storing UK taxable wealth offshore as:

- The use of corporate structures;
- Electronic transfers through business and personal bank accounts;
- Movement of cash both physically and through money service bureaux; and
- The use of trusts to disguise and protect assets.

Working with international partners confirms that these mechanisms are not only a threat to the UK but are common across the international tax landscape. These threats are applicable to the UK as a whole and are all equally as applicable in Northern Ireland.

The UK has played a leading role in driving changes and improvements to offshore tax compliance with the help of partners at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and recently through the J5 tax coalition. As a result of these improvements HMRC is now better able to understand the threats posed by those who seek to evade UK taxes offshore, including the mechanisms and enablers that facilitate offshore non-compliance.

HMRC now operates the world's largest network of international tax treaties which allow for tax information to be requested and exchanged, where it is useful for tax compliance purposes. This includes the automatic exchange of tax information from the Common Reporting Standards (CRS) and the Foreign Accounting Tax Compliance Act (FATCA). These agreements have highlighted the scale of UK nationals who have an offshore interest, with the UK receiving 5.67 million records in 2018 on UK taxpayers' offshore financial accounts. HMRC will continue to assess how the response to international tax crime is changing evader behaviour, already noting that some evaders have chosen to create evermore complex corporate structures and displace to jurisdictions or invest in tangible assets outside of international tax agreements. In doing so these evaders make law enforcement intervention increasingly complex and more difficult.

Organised Labour Fraud (OLF)

OLF is the deliberate abuse of the supply of labour through contrived supply chains, where Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) primarily steal VAT, Income Tax and National Insurance Contributions. OLF OCGs also use labour fraud supply chains to exploit government initiatives. OLF consists of three strands: Labour Fraud in Construction (LFIC), Payroll Company Fraud (PCF) and Mini Umbrella Company Fraud (MUCs).

LFIC OCGs create convoluted supply chains where tax liabilities are pushed down through layers of companies with the final company in the chain going 'missing' and defaulting on its tax liabilities. This is facilitated through abuse of the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS), Gross Payment Status (GPS) and VAT.

PCF is the outsourcing of payroll and labour relating to genuine employees to fraudulent companies that either do not declare or pay, in full, the correct taxes owed to HMRC (Income Tax, National Insurance Contributions (NICs) and VAT.

MUCs fraud is the unnecessary disaggregation of a workforce into separate companies to abuse government initiatives for small businesses, such as the Employment Allowance and the VAT Flat Rate Scheme.

The UK tax gap is 4.7% which represents an estimated £31 billion in uncollected taxes, money needed more than ever to fund public services.

Electronic Sales Suppression (ESS)

HMRC tackles many different forms of tax evasion across a wide range of sectors. HMRC's operational experience suggests that ESS is a growing area of tax evasion, although precise estimates of the scale of evasion are difficult to calculate given the concealed nature of this activity. While not unique to Northern Ireland, this evasion methodology has been seen across the UK.

Electronic sales suppression is where businesses manipulate electronic sales records, either during or after the point of sale, in order to hide or reduce the value of individual transactions. This is undertaken to reduce the recorded turnover of the business and corresponding tax liabilities, whilst providing what appears to be a credible and compliant audit trail. The taxes at risk from this type of evasion are VAT, Income Tax and corporation tax, although other taxes may also be affected.

Some business sectors appear to be a higher risk than others, with examples suggesting that ESS is particularly evident in small independent retailers, takeaways, and the hospitality sector.

CASE STUDY

COMPLEX STRUCTURES

One civil fraud case featuring multiple risks including residency, offshore companies, intellectual property, global software sales and manipulation of VAT Groups settled for £11 million and has been referred as an industry lead case to profile similar fraud and avoidance schemes of this nature.

CASE STUDY

VAT EVASION

This was an investigation into the fraudulent evasion of Value Added Tax (VAT) and money laundering offences. The subject, a 51 year old County Armagh man, was registered for VAT since 1995 as a beef farmer and his wife, a book-keeper, was responsible for keeping the business records and submitting VAT returns.

Suspensions were raised and the case was referred to the Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) after the trader cancelled a number of routine compliance inspections and was unable to produce records to substantiate the level of VAT repayments claimed.

In February 2016, HMRC executed search warrants at the home address and arrested and interviewed both suspects. Both denied involvement in the offences and stated VAT returns had been completed by a third party, who had since died and all business records which had been provided to the deceased were destroyed.

In the period July 2011 to March 2015, the trader had reclaimed VAT totalling £634,000. However, following a lengthy financial investigation, including Production Orders served on a number of financial institutions in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, FIS Officers could only identify legitimate VAT reclaimable of £18,000, leaving a balance over £600,000 which could not be accounted for.

Both suspects maintained their innocence until October 2019, when after a number of abortive trial dates at Newry Crown Court, both entered guilty pleas to VAT and money laundering charges.

In November 2019, the farmer was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment and his now ex-wife, to 15 months imprisonment. The farmland, vehicles and bank accounts were subject to a Restraint Order and confiscation proceedings to recover the fraudulently claimed VAT are currently ongoing.

CASE STUDY

TAX CREDITS

This case was an investigation into suspected fraud concerning Tax Credit claims over a 6-year period totalling over £80,000. Following the birth of their first child a husband and wife submitted a joint claim for tax credit and this continued until the wife notified HMRC of a household breakdown and separation from her partner. A single claim was then awarded and was renewed in subsequent years.

The case was referred to Fraud Investigation Service by Benefits and Credits Compliance, as initial enquiries made by them, indicated that the partner still lived at the same address as the family.

Throughout the investigation HMRC believed that the wife should have continued to make a joint claim with her husband and should not have submitted a single claim. She was arrested on suspicion of committing tax credit offences and interviewed under caution. During the search of premises, evidence that the husband was indeed living in the premises was uplifted and photographed. The wife subsequently pleaded guilty to tax credit fraud and was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment suspended for 3 years.

Alcohol Fraud

Alcohol fraud carried out by organised crime groups is a serious problem although estimated losses to the UK purse have been reduced to £0.6bn in the latest published tax gap figures from their peak of £1.9bn in 2014-15.

A major part of tackling fraud is working with trade sectors to improve their knowledge and to identify and counter fraudulent activity across their trades.

In the alcohol sector as part of the Tackling Alcohol Fraud at Source HMRC initiative, contact has been made with a number of large producers with interests/supply chains in Ireland. In terms of wider alcohol fraud – various excise warehouses/crime

groups in the Republic of Ireland are involved in facilitating transit fraud activity – acting as conduits for goods travelling to/from continental Europe which are diverted to the UK market.

Under EU law, alcohol can be brought into the UK untaxed ('duty suspended'), if certain conditions are met. These include ensuring duty is paid when the alcohol is sold in the UK, recording movements of duty suspended alcohol, and storing it in approved premises. Criminals circumvent these controls, using duplicate documents to bring consignments of alcohol into the UK (known as 'mirror loads') and diverting them into wholesale and retail supply chains without payment of duty.

The profits to be made are considerable; the duty differential between a lorry- load of beer (roughly 2,000 cases) duty paid in the UK and France is approximately £18,000. Much of the diverted alcohol is originally produced in the UK and exported to the near continent before being brought back. The contribution of other modes of fraud such as counterfeiting or abuse of the excise duty repayment systems are thought to be less significant.

The Alcohol Wholesaler Registration Scheme (AWRS) was launched in January 2016 to prevent criminals from introducing illicit goods into retail supply chains via wholesalers. UK wholesale alcohol transactions are now subject to supply chain verification via an online look-up service. AWRS has introduced strict compliance requirements in this previously unregulated sector but has been generally well-received by the trade. Overall UK revenue protected through HMRC enforcement activity has increased from £300m in 2014/15 to over £800m last year. This reflects HMRC's increasing focus on tackling the profitability of the crime, including through disruption activity such as revocation of approvals.

Fuel Fraud

While fuel laundering has historically been the main crime associated with fuel fraud HMRC has witnessed an element of displacement into what has become known as Designer Diesel fraud. Originating primarily in eastern EU states this product is produced by blending different oil types, generally lubricant, vegetable and base oils with unmarked gas oil in a way that is designed specifically to ensure the end product falls outside the specification and therefore the control measures in place for diesel. Whilst sufficiently off-spec this product remains suitable for misuse in road vehicles either in its manufactured state or through the extension of duty paid diesel once delivered. Detection of Designer Diesel is hindered as its supply chain involves transportation through several EU national borders before it is shipped to the UK with a tariff classification code which does not attract excise duty. Once past port controls the product is then entered into the legitimate fuel supply chain primarily distributed among commercial users such as haulage and distribution companies. So far HMRC have seized approximately 1 million litres of this product.

Fuel laundering is still taking place and Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) teams, supported by intelligence colleagues, detected and dismantled three illegal laundering plants this year and carried out substantial testing across a range of fuel storage sites. This resulted in 74 seizures of fuel which, together with detections of illegal movements of fuel, led to just under 400,000 litres of illicit fuel seized overall. 230 vehicles were seized from the public for fuel misuse.

Fuel laundering continues to blight the local environment affecting communities through the illegal dumping of waste by-products which endangers the environment. Additionally, attempts to launder the Accutrace marker introduced in 2015 has seen criminals using highly volatile methods involving intense levels of heat. HMRC is aware of such attempts that have resulted in buildings and vehicles sustaining severe damage as a result of uncontrolled fire. This shows a total disregard for public safety particularly when these dangerous unregulated plants are located near local communities.

CASE STUDY

SMUGGLED FUEL

In June 2019, following a joint investigation with Irish Revenue Commissioners, HMRC Officers, supported by PSNI, conducted a search and arrest operation at a fuel storage depot close to the Irish land border.

This action dismantled an Organised Crime Group responsible for smuggling commercial quantities of illicit fuel from Europe via Dublin and Belfast Ports. HMRC arrested two individuals at the scene, seized vehicles, an Iso Tank container and 24,000 litres of illicit fuel.

Follow up action led to the seizure of a further 240,000 litres and ten Iso Tank containers at Belfast Port and 120,000 litres and seven Iso Tank containers at Dublin.

On 27 January 2020, two of the four individuals reported to the Public Prosecution Service received 18 month and 7 month sentences (suspended) for their roles in the fraud. Two other men are still sought in connection with the offence(s).

CASE STUDY

LAUNDERING PLANT

This investigation related to the evasion of excise duty contrary to the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 in relation to commercial quantities of diesel. HMRC Officers with support from PSNI entered a shed in the Jonesborough area under the authority of a search warrant.

On arrival at the premises HMRC and PSNI Officers noticed the roller door was slightly open; officers made themselves known and asked if anyone was there - there was no response. Several minutes later a PSNI Officer noticed a male hiding behind the wheel of one of the lorries. A short time later another male was discovered hanging onto the drive shaft of the other lorry inside the shed. Both were initially detained by PSNI Officers and then arrested by HMRC staff.

Upon examination of the large shed, HMRC Officers discovered a fully functional fuel laundering plant consisting of two heavy good vehicles, bleaching earth (filtering agent) 27 intermediate bulk containers (IBC's), compressor, one steel cylindrical tank, one steel rectangular tank, fuel pump and two male individuals.

Also found were 24 tonnes of laundered fuel waste along with the 42,000 litres of Republic of Ireland rebated fuel.

All fuel, associated equipment and vehicles were seized and the laundering plant dismantled.

Both men subsequently pleaded guilty to fuel laundering offences and were sentenced to six months custodial suspended for twelve months.

Tobacco Fraud

In 2019/20, the smuggling of counterfeit cigarettes was assessed as the main threat within tobacco fraud targeting the UK, followed by the smuggling of cheap white cigarettes, UK-based counterfeit tobacco production and the smuggling of genuine but non-UK duty paid (NUKDP) tobacco products.

The volume of counterfeit production targeting the UK remains high, despite numerous successful interdictions against illicit facilities across Europe in 2019/20. Production remains common across Central and Eastern Europe, but there is increasing evidence of a shift towards production in Western Europe; an increasing number of factories are being identified in Belgium, Holland and Spain, largely operated by Eastern Europe OCGs. There is also an increasing risk from counterfeiting of UK sensitive brands in Central and South East Asia.

In addition to continental Europe, counterfeit cigarette facilities have been identified operating in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There has been an increase in identification of such factories over the last two years, potentially as part of the trend for illicit production moving into Western Europe.

Such factories are often collaborative criminal ventures between local OCGs and groups from Eastern Europe.

Cheap white cigarettes manufactured in Eastern Europe, particularly from Belarus, remains the most commonly identified on the UK market. There is also a significant threat from cheap whites sourced from the Middle East, with manufacturing sites in free ports within the UAE the key source.

While a large proportion of genuine NUKDP smuggling is unrelated to OCG activity, there are specific risks from the large scale smuggling of hand rolling tobacco (HRT) from the Benelux region, particularly the Turner brand, as well as the large scale smuggling of genuine cigarettes from Eastern Europe.

The methodology for large scale tobacco smuggling remain consistent, with roll-on/roll-off freight, both accompanied and unaccompanied, being the most prevalent method of smuggling, particularly for European produced tobacco products. HMRC has observed an increasing use by OCGs of groupage movements for smuggling, with illicit tobacco being smuggled among other legitimate deliveries.

Containerised importations are the next most common method, primarily used for the smuggling of tobacco products sourced from the Middle East and Asia. The use of post and fast parcel services also remains consistent as a 'little and often' method, most frequently used by OCGs sourcing products from China.

During the period of this report the most seized recorded brands were Richmond at 152.8 million sticks, Mayfair at 51 million sticks and NZ (a Belarussian cheap white) at 39.4 million sticks. The large majority of the Richmond and Mayfair seized will have been counterfeit.

CASE STUDY

TOBACCO FACTORY

In November 2019 HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service (FIS), supported by the PSNI, entered premises in the Silverbridge area where they discovered a hidden chamber behind a concealed doorway which contained commercial scale cigarette production machinery which industry experts estimated would have been capable of producing between 1 and 1.4 million cigarettes per day.

Two foreign nationals believed to be engineers were arrested at the site. They were subsequently charged in connection to that machinery and are currently on remand.



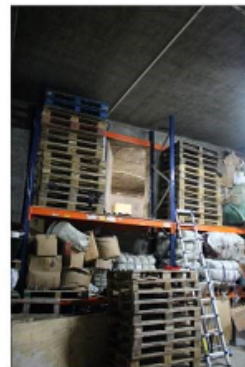
Industrial scale cigarette manufacturing machinery, in later stages of construction.

Source: CHC001 v1.0 (10/10/2019)
Project Name: HMRC v1.0 (10/10/2019) | 15



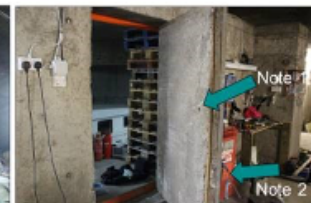
Concealed Doorway – approximately 10 feet off the ground

Source: CHC001 v1.0 (10/10/2019)
Project Name: HMRC v1.0 (10/10/2019) | 16



Underground bunker doorway opened – metal framed, with plywood plastered over to disguise.

Source: CHC001 v1.0 (10/10/2019)
Project Name: HMRC v1.0 (10/10/2019) | 17



Note 1 – A keyhole in the wall.
Note 2 – A strap used to pull the door closed.

RESULTS

In the financial year 2019/20, Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) Northern Ireland prosecuted 44 people for a range of criminal offences relating to Income tax and PAYE fraud, National Minimum Wage, Excise Evasion, falsely claiming tax credits and associated offences under the Fraud Act 2006 and money laundering legislation.

In addition, the Belfast Proceeds of Crime (POC) team recovered;

- £6,013 through Confiscation Orders;
- £314,536 Confiscation Order obtained
- £13,280 cash seized
- £38,666 seized cash forfeited.
- £106,001 through civil tax interventions; and
- £477,798 through Insolvency

FIS Organised Crime civil investigation teams also settled 242 cases associated to a range of risk areas including Missing Trader Intra Community (MTIC), Labour market, Supply Chain Fraud, Civil Fraud, Oils and securities totalling £98.4 million including interest and penalties.

FORWARD LOOK

Covid-19 Related Schemes

Organised Crime Groups (OCG) and non-compliant businesses alike have attempted to fraudulently exploit the UK Government Chancellor's measures, as is the case with many of HMRC's tax and payment systems.

In respect of HMRC facing organised crime risks, such as excise fraud, Covid-19 has had an impact due to the lockdown imposed on travel, goods movements and the population with OCGs having some short-term impacts (e.g. being unable to distribute illicit commodities/profits as freely or supply chains being impacted by overseas lockdowns).

EU Transition

With regards to EU Transition, the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol (within the Withdrawal Agreement) outlines the future relationship for Northern Ireland with both mainland Great Britain and the rest of the European Union (EU). As with any new system or controls being put in place, it is almost certain that criminals will seek to exploit any vulnerabilities within UK government and law enforcement capability or response to its implementation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have concerns or suspicions, call:

HMRC HOTLINE
0800 788 887

2.10 ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

THE THREAT

Waste crime is a growing threat throughout the UK which presents a significant risk to a fragile environment and public health.

Like every industry the waste sector has its weaknesses. As population levels continue to grow throughout the UK so too does the volume of waste produced. This is compounded with the continued reduction in landfill capacity and increasing costs of legitimate waste disposal which has resulted in organised criminal activity infiltrating the waste sector.

Those involved in such criminality have done so primarily to gain illicit profits by undercutting honest competitors through the avoidance of legitimate landfill taxes and associated costs.

Unlike other forms of criminality the damage caused by environmental crime does not always cease when the perpetrator is caught. Illegally deposited waste can have a long-lasting and significant impact on the environment and human health. Illegal waste deposits can take many years to decompose, slowly releasing harmful pollutants into the environment damaging the water supply and land resources.

The impact of this criminal activity can also place a significant burden on the public purse through the clean-up and remediation costs of illegal waste deposits.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) Enforcement Branch focuses its resources on investigating cases which present the most significant risk to the environment and public health.


In high risk cases NIEA will utilise powers, primarily contained within the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, to seek criminal prosecution against those responsible. This is often coupled with confiscation proceedings under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 which aims to deprive those convicted of the proceeds from their criminal conduct.

The ability to pursue Confiscation Orders through the courts remains a vital tool for the NIEA disrupting and preventing organised crime infiltrating the legal economy thus protecting the environment. Successful prosecution and confiscation proceedings have a number of positive outcomes including the creation of a living, working, active landscape which can be valued by all citizens. It also deprives those convicted of the means to further offend and contributes to the rebalance of economic disadvantage caused from their criminal activity.

The pursuit of criminals who seek to exploit the waste industry cannot be tackled by the NIEA alone. Multi-agency working and continued operational cooperation between government agencies is vital to address the threat environmental crime presents. The NIEA recognises the benefit of partnership working and continues to develop and maintain effective working relationships with other government agencies and interested parties to tackle this criminality.

Throughout the reporting year the NIEA has remained an active member of the Five Nations Waste Crime Group which is represented by government agencies throughout the UK and Republic of Ireland. Through a co-ordinated approach of sharing information, policy and operational trends this group has been able to collectively fight criminality within the waste sector.

Through the sharing of information and operational support the NIEA has strengthened its partnership with the PSNI. This close working relationship between agencies has enabled the NIEA to target, disrupt and dismantle groups involved in illegal waste activity throughout Northern Ireland.



Illegally deposited waste can have a long-lasting and significant impact on the environment and human health.

The agency has also strengthened its partnership with HMRC through the sharing of information and referral of incidents for consideration of civil action where civil penalties are likely to have a more positive outcome compared to pursuit of confiscation which would not be appropriate and/or cost effective.

RESULTS

The NIEA's ability to successfully tackle environmental criminality has been achieved through positive collaboration with other OCTF agencies. Effective partnership working has strengthened NIEA's capabilities to confront the threat posed by those who seek to exploit our precious environment.

During the period of this report NIEA'S Enforcement Branch received and investigated 835 reports of Environmental Crime which ranged from low risk to high risk incidents which had the potential to pose a significant threat to the environment and human health.

Over the past year, NIEA secured eight convictions relating to waste offending. Sentencing outcomes resulted in fines ranging between £300 and £10,000 and also included one sentence of 150 hours of community service. In addition to secured convictions Enforcement Branch issued 29 Fixed Penalty Notices which had a combined value of £14,400.

During the same period the NIEA secured three Confiscation Orders totalling approximately £40,000. This sum represents criminal benefit obtained by defendants through the avoidance of payment of gate fee, landfill tax and VAT at licensed waste facility, (a loss to the revenue and to legitimate licensed waste facilities).

From February 2016 the NIEA has made a total of 130 referrals to HMRC regarding suspected environmental tax evasion. Of these, 24 referrals were made between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.

CASE STUDY

COUNTY TYRONE WASTE OFFENCES

In December 2019, a County Tyrone man was fined £10,000 for a series of waste offences committed over a two year period involving organised and persistent unauthorised dumping of waste - primarily end of life vehicles, construction and demolition waste, tyres and plastics.

The offending involved the unauthorised treatment, keeping and disposal of wastes without the appropriate authorisations and infrastructure with potential for environmental damage and pollution and avoiding the relevant cost and payment of taxes related to the activity.

CASE STUDY

COUNTY ANTRIM WASTE OFFENCES

In August 2019, a County Antrim man was fined £7,500 and sentenced to a five month term of imprisonment (suspended) for a series of waste offences committed in 2008/09. The offences arose out of the defendant's operation of an illegal skip hire company, committing environmental criminality by illegally dealing in waste. The defendant pleaded guilty at Court in 2010, then did not return for sentencing. An arrest warrant was then issued but the defendant absconded, evading justice in the intervening years.

As a result of a joint operational approach by NIEA and PSNI, the defendant was arrested on warrant and brought before the Courts to face justice for his criminal offending. The case underlines the continuing and persistent cooperative efforts between NIEA and law enforcement partners to bring offenders before the courts to face justice for their environmental offending.

FORWARD LOOK

Environmental crime is an ever-changing landscape which is not immune to social, economic and environmental change including the recent Covid-19 pandemic which is likely to present additional challenges to the NIEA going forward.

The current pandemic and impact of the national lockdown is already having a significant impact on the UK economy. Any contraction in the economy may lead to an increased demand for cheaper waste disposal services - opening opportunities for criminals to undercut legitimate operators and increase the incidents of illegal waste disposal. There is also a UK requirement to continue the reduction of waste being sent to authorised landfill. Whilst this is aimed at encouraging recycling rates it may also increase the risk of illegal disposal.

The NIEA recognises that early intervention is key to stopping and reducing the impact of environmental crime and will continue to work with all OCTF partners through the sharing of information, data and resources to improve understanding of the issues facing Northern Ireland and target early interventions.

The NIEA will continue to pursue the 'polluter pays' principle to ensure that the burden and costs of remediation of damage and pollution to the environment is placed upon those responsible.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you have any information regarding waste crime this can be reported to the NIEA's incident hotline on **0800 807060**.

Alternatively you can contact the NIEA's Enforcement Branch by email at:
environmentalcrime@daera-ni.gov.uk

or

Tel: **02890569453**

You may also report environmental crime through CrimeStoppers hotline on tel **0800 555 111**.

2.11 NATIONAL SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

THE THREAT

The NCA is responsible for leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime and its mission is to protect the public and communities affected by this corrosive, yet ever-changing and increasing threat.

Serious and organised crime (SOC) continues to impact more on UK citizens than any other national security threat; affecting all parts of the UK and having a daily impact on individuals, communities, businesses, public services and national infrastructure. The latest cost estimate of SOC to the UK economy is **£37 billion a year** – which is likely to be an under-estimate.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The NCA leads a whole-system approach harnessing the collective powers of law enforcement, government, the voluntary sector and industry to deliver the coordinated response we need to protect our communities and counter the escalating and rapidly evolving threat from SOC.

The NCA's national priorities remain targeting those who:

- Exploit the most vulnerable in society: tackling offenders who perpetrate modern slavery and human trafficking, people smuggling and child sexual abuse and exploitation;
- Dominate communities: disrupting and dismantling wholesale drugs networks and the illegal firearms trade; and
- Undermine the UK's economy and infrastructure: responding to criminality relating to cyber crime, money laundering and economic crime.

The NCA remains committed to ensuring that its activity in Northern Ireland takes account of the specific and differing legislative, operational and political requirements; respecting the primacy of the PSNI whilst maximising its ability to operate with them and other partners to tackle SOC threats impacting Northern Ireland.

The Agency works closely with PSNI to better understand how SOC affects communities in Northern Ireland and develop opportunities for closer collaboration. Together, targeted activity ensures the greatest impact on the SOC threat in Northern Ireland.

The NCA continues to play an active role in the Organised Crime Task Force at all levels, as well as the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) and the Cross Border Joint Agency Task Force. NCA is focused on strengthening its relationship with all of the participating stakeholders.

Internationally, NCA uses its footprint, reach and established collaboration with partners to secure the most effective upstream activity and tackle the threats before they reach the UK.

RESULTS

The volume of both lead and support disruptions undertaken by the NCA, with an impact in Northern Ireland, increased in 2019/20 when compared with the previous year (an increase to 127 disruptions from 69 the previous year).

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) and Organised Immigration Crime (OIC)

NCA continues to work closely with PSNI and other partners to disrupt those who exploit the vulnerable through child sexual abuse and exploitation, trafficking, servitude and other forms of abuse:

- Welcome to Video (W2V), a website that sold images of child sexual abuse was previously taken down by an international taskforce set up by the NCA. The Agency identified users of the site and assisted in the server takedown and arrest of the subject running the site. Eighteen UK investigations were developed as a result of intelligence gathered from the site. Seven individuals were convicted, including one from Belfast who downloaded 37 indecent images of children (IIOC) (many in the most serious category – Category A). An individual was convicted at Belfast Magistrates Court of four counts of making IIOC and

sentenced to a Probation Order for three years. He was also issued a five year Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHPO) which included no unsupervised access to persons 16 and under.

- In 2019/20 the NCA made 276 child sexual abuse disseminations to PSNI, an increase of 63% from 2018/19.

Firearms

NCA's ongoing work with partners to tackle the threat to communities posed by the criminal use of firearms and the illicit drugs trade has resulted in some key disruptions this year:

- The interception of an AR15 assault rifle and two handguns destined for a Northern Ireland address. The package, intercepted at a UK-based parcel hub, was also found to contain the firearms and other related material. In November, NCA officers obtained a search warrant for an address in Newtownards which resulted in the seizure of over 20 firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunitions. A man was interviewed and released under investigation.
- In December, NCA intelligence led to officers working as part of the PCTF, arresting two individuals in Northern Ireland connected to the suspected importation and supply of illegal blank-firing guns (which can be easily converted) from a Spanish vendor. Working together with partners 32 firearms were seized in Northern Ireland along with a significant amount of cash. As a result of this operation, intelligence was passed to Thames Valley Police who took action against two men who were suspected to be customers of the Northern Ireland suspect. Two further firearms were recovered and both men were charged and remanded in custody for other serious offences.

FORWARD LOOK

As the threat changes and grows, the NCA will continually adapt its approach to tackling SOC. As outlined in the NCA's Annual Plan, in 2020/21 we will enhance our response by:

- working with law enforcement partners and across all sectors to deliver a whole system approach to serious and organised crime, based on an enhanced intelligence picture of the SOC threats to the UK;
- operating proactively at the high end of high risk, undertaking investigations that result in the disruption of threats by the most effective means;
- leading, tasking, co-ordinating and supporting activity against the most serious groups and individuals;
- working with partners to develop, deploy and maintain specialist capabilities where this is best done nationally, to benefit all UK law enforcement; and
- providing our officers with the right skills, facilities, technology and data to operatively productively and effectively

NCA's activity in Northern Ireland will continue to reflect the specific serious and organised crime threats as they impact on Northern Ireland and its communities and our determination to tackle them and protect the public in collaboration with partners.

The Agency will contribute to the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Strategy and work in partnership with PSNI and other law enforcement agencies towards achieving these objectives, recognising the specific legislation and regulations in place.

The Agency will also continue to play an active role in the OCTF, PCTF and Cross Border Joint Agency Taskforce and look to strengthen our partnerships with participating stakeholders.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Click CEOP

If a child has been a victim of sexual abuse online or you are worried this is happening to a child you know, report it safely and securely via the Click CEOP online reporting portal at www.ceop.police.uk.

For general online safety advice please visit: www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Beware of Fraud - Verifying an NCA officer

If someone has contacted you claiming to be an NCA officer and you are in any doubt as to their identity, you can verify their identity by calling the NCA Control Centre on 0370 496 7622. Or call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040.

An NCA officer will NEVER:

- Ask for remote access to your computer via phone, email or online
- Ask you to verify your personal details such as passwords, account numbers or card details via phone, email or online
- Ask you to transfer or hand over money via phone, email or online or on the doorstep
- Speak or act in a threatening manner

2.12 SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFIT FRAUD

THE THREAT

Activities to counter fraud within the benefit system remain a high priority for the Department for Communities (DfC). The Organised Fraud Unit (OFU) within Benefit Security Division investigates any incidence of potential organised criminality against the benefit and National Insurance Number (NINO) systems, including tackling potential risks to the Department's systems through false and hi-jacked identities. The focus on organised fraud continued in 2019/20.

RESPONDING TO THE THREAT

The OFU completed investigations into serious and complex fraud allegations. These included:

- Examination of false employment documents provided as evidence to support claims for Social Security Benefits, either as proof of low income for Housing Benefit and Tax Credits or to satisfy the Habitual Residence Test;
- Issuing of Intelligence Reports to other law enforcement agencies in order to detect and prevent criminality;
- Multi-agency joint operations and investigations with partners aimed at disrupting criminals who seek to exploit the NINO Gateway and the Social Security system through hijacked identities, counterfeit documents and identity fraud;
- Joint operations with partner law enforcement organisations to identify individuals in receipt of benefit under an assumed identity, or those who have circumvented the NINO Gateway with a false identity in order to avoid prosecution or deportation; and
- Joint operations with partner law enforcement organisations aimed at the unregulated car wash industry in Northern Ireland. Activities during these joint operations involved the identification of potential identity fraud involving the NINO Gateway and potential benefit fraud. OFU also provided information and advice to individuals on how to correctly apply for a NINO through the Department and also directed individuals to 'Make the Call' where a potential entitlement to benefit was identified.

The OFU continued to maintain and strengthen working relationships with other law enforcement agencies which has led to joint operations with PSNI, HMRC, Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), and the Home Office. These joint operations have allowed for the sharing of intelligence and disruption of criminality.

The OFU also maintains close working relationships with colleagues from both the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection with regard to possible cross border/jurisdictional benefit frauds.

RESULTS

During 2019/20 the Department's Benefit Security Division carried out almost 2,400 benefit fraud investigations. During the same period 211 convictions were secured through the courts for benefit fraud, alongside seven formal cautions and a further 155 Administrative Penalties being applied (similar to a fine).

The Benefit Security Division referred 153 cases to the Department's Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) for consideration. During the year the FIU secured four Confiscation Orders to the value of £43,740 and received voluntary repayments amounting to £118,952, giving a total recovery of £162,692.

CASE STUDY 1

An allegation was received by the Department that an individual was claiming means-tested benefits but owned various other residential properties in Northern Ireland. A thorough joint investigation was conducted by the Department's Organised Fraud Unit (OFU), PSNI and HMRC. OFU used all appropriate avenues of investigation and intelligence gathering which included the acquisition of financial and land registry documentation, the PSNI also carried out searches at addresses linked to the individual. The individual was arrested and interviewed under benefit fraud offences, converting criminal property and evasion of Income Tax and was released on police bail pending further investigation. An overpayment in excess of £50,000 in benefit was raised against the individual. The individual was sentenced for the benefit fraud offences and received two years imprisonment suspended for 3 years on each count, the other PSNI/HMRC offences are still outstanding.

CASE STUDY 2

The Financial Investigation Unit obtained a Confiscation Order for £17,749 against a man who failed to declare that he held a balance in excess of £50,000 in his bank account, whilst claiming social security benefits. The man claimed benefits on the basis he was unable to work, with no savings and no other source of income. Assets identified by the Financial Investigation Unit included equity in property and monies held in bank accounts.

CASE STUDY 3

The Financial Investigation Unit obtained a Confiscation Order for £11,320 against a woman who failed to declare that she held a balance in excess of £35,000 in her bank account, whilst claiming social security benefits. The woman claimed benefits on the basis she was a lone parent, with no savings and no other source of income. Assets identified by the Financial Investigation Unit included monies held in bank accounts, hidden assets, tainted gifts and a vehicle.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can report social security benefit fraud on:

The Northern Ireland Fraud Hotline on
0800 975 6050

Textphone **028 9055 6991** (not a free call)

online at – www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/report-benefit-fraud-online

2.13 PROSECUTION DECISIONS

One function of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) is to apply to the High Court for a restraint order under section 190 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) to prohibit any specified person from dealing with any realisable property held by him provided that a criminal investigation has been started in Northern Ireland.

The PPS has provided an example of such a case:

CASE STUDY

The PPS was advised that a criminal investigation had begun in relation to possible drugs offences and that during the search of a property some high value assets had been identified. Upon an application by the PPS to the High Court, a Restraint Order was granted against two defendants prohibiting them from dissipating their assets, namely high value vehicles. Defendant one pleaded guilty before Downpatrick Crown Court to cultivating cannabis, contrary to Section 6 (2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, possession of a Class B drug with intent to supply contrary to section 5 (3) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and converting criminal property to the value of £214,989 contrary to section 327 (1) (c) of POCA.

On the same date that pleas were entered the PPS applied to the court for a Confiscation Order under section 156 of POCA. Confiscation proceedings adjourned to allow the financial investigator to make further enquiries regarding the financial status of defendant one. It was during these enquiries that the PPS became aware that a significant asset restrained by virtue of the High Court order was no longer in the possession of

either of the defendants, and that in fact, it had been sold on the day that defendant one had pleaded guilty. Since the principal purpose of the restraint order was to preserve the assets in order to be able to satisfy payment of any Confiscation Order granted, the PPS considered that by disposing of the asset restrained by the order, both defendants were in contempt of court.

The PPS applied to the High Court for orders against both defendants to be committed to prison for contempt of court by reason of their alleged failure to comply with the order with the said default being the disposal of an asset without approval by the PPS of the Court.

The High Court granted leave to bring contempt of court proceedings against both defendants. On the day of hearing both defendants accepted the evidence submitted by the PPS and the court found that both were in contempt of court. Defendant one was sentenced to three months imprisonment to be served consecutively to the sentence imposed by the Crown Court and defendant two was ordered to pay a fine in the sum of £500.

Files Received with a complaint relating to the Relevant Offence Groups

(based on Files Received between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2020)

Offence Group	Number of Cases	Number of Suspects
Money Laundering	285	372
Controlling Prostitution	4	4
Child Prostitution	5	8
Drugs	5,030	5,533
Drugs (excluding simple possession)	942	1,183
Human Trafficking	-	-

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

Files Received from NIEA or HMRC

(based on Files Received between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2020)

File Source	Number of Cases	Number of Suspects
NIEA	32	45
HMRC	22	49

Decisions Issued for offences relating to the Relevant Offence Groups

(based on Most Serious Decision Issued between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2020)

Offence Group	Indictable Prosecution	Summary Prosecution	Diversion	No prosecution	Total
Money Laundering	131	84	0	56	271
Controlling Prostitution	0	0	0	7	7
Child Prostitution	-	0	0	4	#
Drugs	360	3,655	794	463	5,272
Drugs (excluding simple possession)	293	306	20	210	829
Human Trafficking	0	0	0	3	3

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

"#" refers to a number >=3 which has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Decisions Issued on Files from NIEA or HMRC

(based on Most Serious Decision Issued between 01/04/2019 and 31/03/2020)

File Source	Indictable Prosecution	Summary Prosecution	Diversion	No prosecution	Total
NIEA	3	33	0	-	#
HMRC	26	19	0	7	52

"-" refers to a count of less than 3.

"#" refers to a number >=3 which has been suppressed to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

PPS Statistics and Research May 2020

From 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 there were as follows:

- 11 Restraint requests received; and
- 22 Confiscation Orders totalling £1,786,051.



**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

ASSETS RECOVERY

ARIS AND ARCS FUNDING



CHAPTER 3

ASSETS RECOVERY – ARIS AND ARCS FUNDING

One of the most common incentives that drives the activities of organised crime groups is the desire to make a profit and accumulate wealth. Law enforcement agencies respond to this by pursuing the proceeds of crime using asset recovery powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA). Under this legislation the proceeds of crime can be recovered with criminal confiscation (this first requires a conviction), civil recovery, cash seizure and taxation powers. Taking profits that fund crime is a helpful disruption tool, breaking the cycle of criminal activity to prevent further offences occurring. Removing the ill-gotten gains from organised crime sends out a clear message that in the end crime does not pay.

Criminal confiscation is the most commonly used power under POCA. Confiscation proceedings can be brought following a criminal conviction involving financial gain or the laundering of criminal assets. Any criminal financial gain will be calculated during proceedings and the Court may make a Confiscation Order. In Northern Ireland, money surrendered to the courts under Confiscation Orders is allocated to the Northern Ireland Assets Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (NI ARIS Scheme).

WHAT HAPPENS WITH CONFISCATION ORDER PAYMENTS?

Payment against Northern Ireland Confiscation Orders are transferred to the Department of Justice under the Northern Ireland ARIS Scheme. These funds are split 50-50 on an annual basis.

50% of the total Northern Ireland ARIS pot is shared between the agencies responsible for investigating, prosecuting and administering successful confiscation cases (see the table below) and is used to **invest in measures to support the recovery of criminal assets and proceeds of crime to disrupt criminal activity and the further funding of crime and deprive people of their proceeds of crime.**

50% is allocated to the Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) to provide funding for projects often delivered in community settings with the aim of **preventing crime or reducing the fear of crime.**

ARCS funding is allocated under a grant application process run by the Department of Justice.

The total value of criminal recovery receipts paid under Confiscation Orders during the 2019/20 financial year in Northern Ireland was in excess of £2.2 million.

ASSETS RECOVERY INCENTIVISATION SCHEME

The Table below sets out the value returned to each law enforcement agency and the PPS and Courts Service under the ARIS scheme in 2019/20.

Agency	ARIS Payments 2019/20
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	£416,510
HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	£1,352
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)	£52,214
Department for Communities (DfC)	£18,774
Public Prosecution Service (PPS)	£488,851
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS)	£108,633
Total Paid	£1,086,337

During 2019/20 the agencies used their incentivisation allocations for a number of purposes including:

PSNI

ARIS funding was used by PSNI to support the Financial Investigator and Forensic Accountancy provision. In addition, it helped with the provision of body-worn video technology for specialist activity; support to the Cyber Crime Centre in relation to specialist technology to assist investigations; training, surveys and an animation to assist in the prevention of crime, as well as supporting the “Get Safe Online” scheme.

HMRC

HMRC invested nationally in their capabilities to recover assets through further exploitation of technology and identification of illicit finances, supported initiatives developed through the Joint Chiefs of Global Tax Enforcement (J5) particularly in the area of cyber crime and further developed intelligence resource to support partner agencies. In June 2019 members of Northern Ireland's Financial Investigation Service Digital Investigation Team attended a 3 day Cyber Crime Seminar held during the J5 conference in Washington.

NIEA

The Asset Recovery Incentivisation Scheme (ARIS) monies were used by NIEA to drive up asset recovery and fight crime through the funding of training, services and equipment detailed below:

- Financial analysis software licensing;
- NCA registration for Investigators;
- NCA Training courses;
- Gas Monitoring equipment for use in intrusive survey work;
- Interview recording equipment for investigators;
- Imaging of seized computer equipment; and
- Property valuation work in support of major criminal investigation.

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES (DFC)

DfC uses ARIS monies to fund the post of Financial Intelligence Officer (EO2) within the Financial Investigation Unit (FIU) to support continued investigation and the recovery of proceeds of crime.

PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE

Incentivisation receipts are directed towards staff and operational costs to support the conduct of prosecutions and restraint and confiscation proceedings in organised crime cases.

ASSETS RECOVERY COMMUNITY SCHEME (ARCS)

The Assets Recovery Community Scheme (ARCS) seeks to re-invest in projects to prevent crime or reduce the fear of crime. Projects supported through ARCS need to demonstrate how they will benefit one or more of victims, communities and the environment.

The last call for applications was in August 2018 and funding made available for short-term projects and longer term strategic justice projects – for a period up to the end March 2021.

Following an Assessment Panel's review of all 187 applications, 50 projects were offered funding, ranging from one year to three years in duration. Thirteen projects were scheduled to end after year one and the remaining 37 projects continued to be funded throughout 2019/20.

In addition, a further 12 projects were funded from December 2019 – March 2020 to deliver short-term initiatives, three of which had an environmental focus. This funding was possible due to confiscation receipts being greater than the original 2019/20 funding commitment.

In total, for the period April 2019 to March 2020, DoJ made payments to community-based projects totalling £924,268.

ARCS has funded and continues to fund a range of activities, including drug support projects, restorative justice initiatives, awareness and diversionary projects for young people and supporting older or vulnerable people. Some projects were affected more than others at the end of the 2019/20 year because of Covid-19 lock-down rules, however many adapted well and continued using alternative methods of communicating and delivering to clients and have re-directed resources to better meet these ever changing needs.

Examples of some of the projects supported during 2019/20 are set out below, as is a comprehensive list of the projects funded across the three year period.

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

The “Positive Action for Communities and Environment” (PACE) Project was allocated ARCS funding of £6,600 for a four month period.

Through an active programme of first-hand, positive experiences of nature and the environment, the PACE project demonstrated to young people the benefits of a healthy, well cared for environment for people, wildlife and the economy. It involved them in learning some basic practical skills needed to maintain and enhance that environment. The project provides diversionary, outdoor environmental experiences to those who are currently involved in, or at risk of involvement in anti-social behaviours or more serious crime.

Part of the project’s activities involved “bird box building workshops” at Portmore Lough reserve and RSPB’s Window on Wildlife in the Harbour Estate, Belfast. Some of the boxes were specially designed for tree sparrows, a species of conservation concern and are established as a breeding species at Portmore. Others, which are now situated in Larne Lough, were assembled to accommodate terns.

The group of young men were shown how to use power tools safely and basic joinery instruction was given in constructing the ‘flat-pack’ nest box kits.



Photographs Caelan Donnelly

A young men’s group from Youth Action took part in a litter pick at the North Foreshore in Belfast (during Storm Jorge), which proved particularly challenging when chasing litter. The group of 14 were well kitted out for the weather conditions and managed to fill several bags of litter, making a big contribution to the team of volunteers on the site.



Photographs Terry Goldsmith

These activities not only benefit the environment, but the young people develop an understanding of how to work as part of a team, develop their listening skills and learn how to follow instructions. In many cases they feel a sense of achievement and self-worth; this positive experience can help divert young people away from further offending behaviour.

North West Play Resource Centre

The “Listen To Us” Project was allocated ARCS funding of £66,770 over three years.

The project uses screenplays to explore a number of themes including “stop and search”, impact of bonfires and issues relevant to the LGBTQ community, eg non-reporting of crime.

The screenwriters work with stakeholders and relevant young people, including those from LGBTQ community during the developmental stages of the screenplays. Working together, the aim is to explore the different issues around relationships with the police, attitudes towards reporting of homophobic crime, how young people are drawn into bonfire culture by older members of their community whose motivations are political and/or criminal.

Approximately 40 young people with experience of LGBTQ issues were able to vocalise their experiences and views to the screenwriter who incorporated this material into the final screenplay that explores the non-reporting of crime.

A further group of young people with experience of sectarian bonfires in their community were able to vocalise their experiences and views to the screenwriter who incorporated this material into the

final screenplay that will explore themes of bonfires, paramilitary coercion and educational attainment. This meant the young people felt listened to and empowered.

Much of the work was completed on time but in some cases filming will resume later in 2020, as Covid-19 restrictions allow.

All these films aim to provide valuable educational film resources that can be used by justice professionals in their work with young people.

The Advantage Foundation - MUGSHOTS

The "Impact" Project was awarded ARCS funding totalling £10,860 for this short-term (4 month) project.

The project created opportunities for young people in the justice system to interact with business owners and senior management from across Northern Ireland. The objective was for young people to showcase skills they have gained in order to look towards employment.

The project has been working virtually with 18 students to achieve a qualification and a further 10 have registered an interest. Hydebank Wood College is a key partner in this project and the support of the staff there helped to reinforce the message to employers that young people in custody can pursue positive outcomes, given the opportunity and guidance.

Business in the Community (BITC) are also a key partner in the delivery of the project. They are piloting "Ban the Box" campaign in Northern Ireland. "Ban the Box" calls on UK employers to give ex-offenders a fair chance to compete for jobs by removing the tick box from application forms and asking about criminal convictions later in the recruitment process. The plan is to continue working with BITC after the "Impact" project ends to keep building those ever important connections with employers.



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"I realised I
am capable of
doing things I
wasn't able to
before.

I now feel
confident
to start work
or further
training.

I have gained a
lot of confidence
in myself"

ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2019/20

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	ARCS Award £
1st Rathfriland Boys Brigade	Safety in Numbers	Educational/information events for young people vulnerable to becoming involved in crime with parent / family / community interventions.	12,584
AGE North Down & Ards	PACE – Partner Anti-Crime Events	Address anti-social behaviour in young people and the fear of crime felt by older people in local urban and rural areas across Ards and North Down.	12,600
Barnardo's	Families Matter - Beyond The Gate	Support for families as a parent moves towards pre-release from prison with a focus on the needs of the child.	49,161
Belfast Community Sports Development Network	Community Sports Support Hub	Establish a post-prison Community Sports Support Hub, with the aim of reducing re-offending and supporting rehabilitation.	85,117
Belfast Street Pastors	Home Safe and Sound	Work with police to assist young people to get home safely following any intervention with PSNI in West Belfast area.	3,672
British Red Cross	Promoting Reporting in the Refugee Community	To reduce crime within the refugee and asylum seeker community through direct engagement with vulnerable people, delivery of crime awareness training. Encourage positive engagement with the police.	8,253
Children's Law Centre	Support for young people in Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre	Training, information and advice to support young people in the Juvenile Justice Centre.	31,391
Community Intercultural Programme	Empowered to be Free	Interventions to support vulnerable individuals who are at risk of being exploited or in fear of being controlled in the labour market.	58,000
Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJ)	South & East Belfast CRJ Engagement Project	Develop full-time presence in the local area to help empower and support local communities to actively participate within the justice family.	182,402
Corpus Christi Youth Centre	Ballymurphy Community Development	Reduce offending behaviour in young people through courses on substance abuse, drug and alcohol awareness, IT, sports, digital media and soft skills.	26,700

ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2019/20

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	ARCS Award £
Dialogue For Diversity	Support and Encouragement for Ex-Prisoners Through Mentoring	Mentor ex-prisoners to encourage and support them and refer to other support agencies, post release interventions to reduce re-offending.	15,033
East Belfast Community Development Agency	Street by Street Youth Work Engagement Project	Targeted street-based youth work in East Belfast to prevent and respond to anti-social behaviour.	26,466
Edgarstown Residents Association	Rising of Edgarstown	Community relations project with young people including personal development, health and well-being interventions and social development.	32,038
Feeny Community Association/ Feeny Youth Group	Youth Activity Programme	Initiatives to prevent alcohol, drugs and substance abuse among young people.	7,400
Hillcrest Trust	Law and Order Programme	Address anti-social behaviour by targeting disengaged young people.	2,666
Leafair Community Association	Safer Communities	Inter-generational work including educational awareness about crime. Environmental regeneration to discourage anti-social behaviour.	20,000
Life Change Changes Lives	No Lost Cause	Reduce offending, through inter-generational diversionary and therapeutic community programme, including counselling for addictions and working with offenders and victims of crime.	144,920
Ligoniel Improvement Association	Ligoniel's Greater Assets	Early intervention for young people to reduce anti-social behaviour, based on developing skills, progressing to accreditation and internships.	9,842
Men's Action Network	Breaking the Cycle	Assist offenders, including those still in the prison system, to understand criminal behaviour effects and lasting negative impact.	10,960
Mid & East Antrim Agewell Partnership (MEAAP)	MEAAP Friends Against Scams Campaign	Create local business SCAM champions and identify and support older people at risk of falling victim to scams.	21,844
Northern Ireland Alternatives	PACE Project (Policing and Community Engagement	Empower local people to problem solve creatively and build partnerships within local communities through training, forums, volunteerism and advocacy.	120,346

ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2019/20

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	ARCS Award £
North West Play Resource Centre	Listen To Us (Crime Prevention Films)	A film-making project engaging 'at risk' young people, to encourage improved relationships with the PSNI and understanding around issues of stop and search and reduce fear and intimidation and the influence of paramilitaries in the long term.	66,770
Off the Streets (OTS) Community Youth Initiative	OTS City Centre Street Work Provision	Weekend youth workers will support and deliver informal learning opportunities to help reduce crime and disorder.	57,627
Parenting NI	RESPECT Parenting Project	Multi-disciplinary support project - including a Parenting Helpline and workshops and materials for parents.	83,532
Poleglass Community Association @ Sally Gardens	Safer Communities	Tackle anti-social behaviour by delivering OCN accredited qualifications and a providing a mentoring programme to "at risk" young people.	37,200
Prison Arts Foundation	Community Braille Service	Provide a low-cost Braille printing and transcribing service, staffed by ex-offenders to help prevent reoffending.	46,000
PSNI Older Persons Acquisition Group	Cold Calling & DNA Marking Scheme	Crime prevention advice for older people and supply of crime prevention items within high risk areas, areas with higher concentration of older people - spread over rural, urban and Border areas.	16,672
PSNI, on behalf of Scamwise NI Partnership	Scamwise NI	Scam prevention advertising messaging.	90,000
Redeeming Our Communities (ROC)	ROC Community Action Groups	Capacity-building in 8 communities with low capacity to empower residents, agencies, churches and faith groups to work together towards safer, stronger communities.	65,175
SOS NI	SOS Supporting a Safer City	First aid training and provision of costs associated with running the SOS Bus in Belfast in support of crisis intervention for vulnerable people and work towards safer communities in partnership with community/resident associations.	62,604
St. Peters Immaculata Youth Centre	Tackling Self-Harming Behaviours	Project targeting young people involved in, or likely to become involved in crime through substance abuse in the Divis area.	23,333

ARCS PROJECTS FUNDED DURING 2019/20

Applicant	Project Title	Description of Project	ARCS Award £
The Turnaround Project	Turnaround Grounds Maintenance Social Enterprise	Work experience and employment opportunities for people serving custodial or community sentences.	93,717
The Y Zone - Portadown Elim Church	Youth-hut Initiative	Work with and mentor disaffected young people engaged in anti-social behaviour in local hotspot areas, including outreach Saturday evening services.	11,780
Top Ten Women's Drama Group	Outside In	Working with a group of young people on an anti-social behaviour project to capture community stories and produce a DVD resource.	20,828
Upper Springfield Resource Centre	Families Bereaved Through Car Crime (FBTCC) Youth Education Project	Deter young people becoming involved in car crime by producing training materials and awareness DVD for schools.	17,200
Vineyard Compassion	Link to Work	Supervised work placements and mentoring for NI Prison Service and Probation Board NI referrals.	93,188
ZKJ Ltd	Fight2Unite	Use mixed martial arts to engage with young people not in employment, education or training on a cross- community basis to reduce antisocial behaviour and risk of falling into crime.	7,500
Total			1,674,521

NB Award totals above are for the duration of the project, ie 1, 2 or 3 year periods).

ADDITIONAL 12 SHORT TERM PROJECTS

Applicant	Project title	Description of Project	ARCS Award £
Active Communities Network	Youth Intervention Network	Reducing crime and reoffending, promoting reconciliation and respect. Youth engagement with intensive support and diversionary activities for young people in West Belfast and Shankill.	9,900
Armoy Community Association	Armoy Learning Together	Offering skills development opportunities including cooking, DIY, customer service etc. It will also promote being valued by the community and confidence building as well as building intergenerational connections.	3,200
Belfast Activity Centre	BAC Adventure Investigator - Protecting the Environment	The project promotes the importance of protecting wildlife and the environment through an outdoor adventure based investigation scenario. This will be achieved by offering opportunities for the community to work together through challenging activities.	22,508
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership	Colin Community Adolescent Counselling Service (CCAS)	To provide counselling to adolescents with mental health needs who are resident or attend school in the Colin area.	3,120
Craic Theatre	Internet Safety, Scams and Vlogging	Through the medium of drama, deliver workshops and drama classes providing a diversionary activity for young people that will explore the dangers of the internet.	3,900
RSPB NI	Positive Action for Communities and Environment (PACE)	With partner organisations provide a programme of outdoor, challenging, environmental activities for young people who may be at risk of coming into contact with the Youth Justice Agency (YJA).	6,600
Strabane Training Services Ltd	Youth Intervention Programme	Youth intervention programme targeting 14-24 year olds in area of high deprivation. It aims to offer diversionary activities, personal development and educational workshops.	2,900
SPACE (Supporting People and Community Enterprise)	SPACEWALK	Address root causes of anti-social behaviour in young boys who may be at risk of offending or being removed from mainstream school.	20,000
The Advantage Foundation	The Impact Project	Restorative Justice project to give young people in the justice system the opportunities to interact with business owners and senior management. The objective was for young people to showcase skills they have gained in order to look towards employment and reduce barriers to employment.	10,860

ADDITIONAL 12 SHORT TERM PROJECTS

Applicant	Project title	Description of Project	ARCS Award £
The Cabbage Patchers	Tidy Up Tuesday	To equip young people, mainly from Youth Justice Agency (YJA), with the skills to work with the community to provide older and vulnerable people with a garden clean up and maintenance service and in so doing divert the young people from the justice system at earliest stage.	2,700
Irish FA Foundation	Stay Onside - Reducing Offending Partnership	Engage vulnerable or marginalised participants using football as a hook to upskill and prepare them for employment by using pathways into football.	10,000
Saints Youth Centre		The aim is to divert young people from engaging in anti-social and criminal behaviours. Diversion will be achieved by actively working on the streets and will focus on young people not currently involved in Youth Services, thereby creating a safer space for residents.	12,180
TOTAL			107,868

NB Funding was for up to four months, ie December 2019 March 2020.





**ORGANISED
CRIME**
TASK FORCE

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND TRAINING EVENTS



CHAPTER 4: PUBLIC OUTREACH AND TRAINING EVENTS

It is important that the work of the Organised Crime Task Force [OCTF] remains targeted on the issues most affecting people and communities. It is also important that the work of OCTF is communicated through stakeholder groups, public outreach opportunities and other events.

OCTF AT BALMORAL SHOW IN 2019

The OCTF joined with the Rural and Business Crime partnerships at the Balmoral Show in May 2019.

The event gave the opportunity for the Department of Justice, law enforcement agencies and the private sector to engage directly with the public to raise awareness of criminal activity and to help individuals, communities and businesses to protect themselves against crime.

In addition, Organised Crime Branch enabled volunteers from No More Traffick, one of the Department's NGO partners on the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) Engagement Group, to attend the Show and raise public awareness of the issue.

No More Traffick used an "escape room" experience which required participants to solve clues (all the while learning about MSHT) to break the code and escape the room.



OCTF partner agencies represented at the Balmoral Show.



OCTF partners launch of the 2018/19 Annual Report.

LAUNCH OF THE OCTF ANNUAL REPORT AND THREAT ASSESSMENT 2018/19

The 2018/19 OCTF Annual Report and Threat Assessment was published on 18 September 2019. To highlight its publication the Director of Safer Communities in the Department of Justice, chaired a multi-agency media briefing to help inform the public about the work of the task force and the results of its operational partners.

As well as highlighting OCTF successes, the report provided advice and guidance to the general public about the practical steps that they can take to protect themselves from organised crime and to mitigate against the harm it causes to businesses and communities.



Garda Commissioner, AGS; Minister for Justice and Equality (RoI); Chief Constable, PSNI; Permanent Secretary, DoJ (NI).

ORGANISED CRIME CROSS BORDER CONFERENCE

Peter May, Permanent Secretary, DOJ was one of four key speakers at the 2019 Cross Border Conference on Organised Crime. The Conference, which was held in the Slieve Russell Hotel in Ballyconnell, Co Cavan, aimed to enhance existing co-operation and build networks of expertise between law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border in relation to organised crime.

Collaborative working, so clearly demonstrated at events like this annual event continue to be the cornerstone of building networks of expertise to combat and thwart crime. The Minister for Justice and Equality in the Republic of Ireland was also in attendance and he paid tribute to the law enforcement agencies north and south of the border for their continuing commitment to working collectively to combat organised crime and protect communities.

The topics discussed were diverse and included how law enforcement agencies use digital technology to fight crime; case studies on how the dark web is used by criminals and how to investigate it; and how the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) works with Europe. The break-out sessions also considered how OCGs work across the border and where there are international connections; how to prevent OCGs operating, as well as how to protect communities from OCGs.

As it has always done, the conference attracted the media - representing a wide range of broadcast and print outlets from both north and south of the border.

Financial Investigators Conference

The Financial Investigators Conference, held in the Park Avenue Hotel in October 2019, provided OCTF partner organisations with the chance to bring together many of their Financial Investigators, Senior Investigating Officers and Financial Investigator Managers. Approximately 100 delegates attended, representing HMRC, PSNI, NCA, PPS, NIEA, DfC and DoJ.

The Conference provided an opportunity for sharing best practice; identifying opportunities to share intelligence and learn from other regions' experiences, as well as ensuring consistency in approaching investigations. The key objective of the Conference was to build knowledge and enhance the skills of Financial Investigators across the wide range of law enforcement agencies. It also gave individuals a forum to network and improve co-operation between agencies.

APPENDIX 1

OCTF PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

-
- Allied Irish Bank
 - An Garda Síochána
 - Anti-Counterfeiting Group
 - Bank of Ireland
 - Belfast City Council
 - Border Force
 - BskyB
 - Centre for Secure Information Technologies, QUB
 - CiSP
 - Citi
 - Charity Commission NI
 - Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
 - Confederation of British Industry
 - Criminal Assets Bureau
 - Cyberrisk
 - Cyphra
 - Danske Bank
 - Deloitte
 - Department for Communities
 - Department for the Economy
 - Department of Finance
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Justice
 - DIAGEO
 - Federation Against Copyright Theft
 - Federation of Small Businesses NI
 - Foods Standards Agency
 - Forensic Science Agency NI
 - Fujitsu
 - Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA)
 - GetSafeOnline
 - Group 4 Security
 - Health and Safety Executive NI
 - Health and Social Care Board
 - HM Revenue and Customs
 - Home Office Immigration Enforcement
 - Intellectual Property Office
 - Invest NI
 - Japan Tobacco International
 - Law Society
 - Migrant Help
 - National Crime Agency
 - National Cyber Security Centre
 - NI2C
 - NI Chamber of Commerce
 - NI Courts and Tribunal Service
 - NI Cyber Cluster
 - NI Environment Agency (DAERA)
 - NI Policing Board
 - NI Prison Service
 - NICVA
 - Philip Morris International
 - Police Service of Northern Ireland
 - Post Office Limited
 - PriceWaterhouseCoopers
 - Public Health Agency
 - Public Prosecution Service NI
 - Queen's University Belfast
 - Retail NI
 - Revenue Commissioners
 - RMS Cash Management
 - Royal Bank of Scotland
 - Royal Mail
 - Safer Cash
 - Security Industry Association
 - Sky
 - Supergroup
 - Tobacco Manufacturers Association
 - UK Human Trafficking Centre
 - Ulster Bank
 - Ulster University
 - Women's Aid
- (contacts with others not listed when appropriate)

APPENDIX 2

PARAMILITARY CRIME TASK FORCE - EXECUTIVE ACTION PLAN AND OPERATIONAL RESULTS

The Executive Action Plan is a series of 38 commitments from the Northern Ireland Executive aimed at tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime.

The programme is the Executive's response to the 2016 Panel Report which was set up following the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015 to make recommendations on the disbandment of paramilitary groups.

A total of £50 million has been pledged over five years to support delivery of the Action Plan. It involves Government Departments, law enforcement agencies, local councils and community and voluntary sector partners working together.

The focus is on robust law enforcement, implementing long term prevention measures, addressing social issues that affect communities, and building confidence in the justice system?

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

The programme has four outcomes:

- paramilitarism has no place;
- a society where citizens and communities feel safe and confident;
- the public support and have increasing confidence in the justice system; and
- support is available for those who wish to move away from paramilitary activity and structures.

PROGRESS TO DATE

The programme is now in its fifth year and, over that time there has been substantial progress across four main delivery approaches: long term prevention; building capacity to support transition; strategies and powers to tackle criminal activity; and building confidence in the justice system.

Long term prevention

- Over 500 young men aged between 16 and 30 have benefitted from new Probation Board programmes which provide intensive mentoring support and boost rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.
- 1,121 young people have been engaging in the Youth Outreach Programme, START (Steer Teenagers Away from Recurrent Trouble) which is aimed at supporting vulnerable young people in communities most impacted by paramilitarism and coercive control.
- CCEA (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) has created educational resources for post primary schools aimed at encouraging Active Citizenship.

Building capacity to support transition

- More than 500 women, across 26 areas, completed Phase 1 of the Women Involved in Community Transformation project (WICT) by 2018, with 439 women completing Phase 2 in 2019. 500 women have been recruited for Phase 3 and 4 to be completed by March 2021. This programme will empower and enable them to become involved in community development work.
- Work is continuing to help support those areas most vulnerable to paramilitary activity and coercive control as part of the Communities in Transition (CIT) project.
- The CIT Project commissions appropriate delivery partners to carry out specific interventions and deliver required outputs for each of the eight identified areas. The tender process for longer term project activity commenced in September 2019. At 31 March 2020, a total of 29 tender opportunities for project activity, across seven key themes, had been published and lead partners have been appointed to deliver 28 of these.
- The Department for Communities has been working with voluntary and community sector partners to deliver three lawfulness initiatives - the Northern Ireland National Citizen Service (NI NCS) Programme, Redeeming our Communities (ROC), and Volunteer Now.

Strategies and powers to tackle criminal activity

The Paramilitary Crime Task Force, which includes PSNI, NCA and HMRC, has*:

- charged or reported 220 people to the Public Prosecution Service;
- carried out 573 searches and arrested 274 people;
- prevented a total revenue loss of £4.454m;
- seized/detained £403,256 cash and secured £614,343 cash forfeited;
- seized £978,824 of drugs;
- seized 43 vehicles; and
- seized 172 weapons.

*These statistics are from April 2016 to March 2020 and are subject to change.

Building confidence in the justice system

- The Northern Ireland Policing Board and PSNI launched a consultation in August 2018 to seek views on the future delivery of local policing. There were over 4,300 responses and 87 engagement events. An Action Plan was launched by the Chief Constable and Chair of NIPB in November 2019 and an implementation plan was submitted to NIPB in February 2020. Almost 3,000 people have completed a training programme for police and community partners which supports new approaches to problem solving and policing with the community.
- Local policing initiatives are being delivered to promote engagement, problem solving and visibility of policing, tackling issues such as drugs and anti-social behaviour.
- Local police have been working on a project to prevent vulnerable young people from becoming involved in paramilitary activity. 140,000 'Ending the Harm' leaflets were distributed to 22 specifically targeted areas at the start of 2020 to increase community awareness of the public campaign, promote a culture of lawfulness and undermine the narrative of paramilitaries.
- Improved processes have been introduced to speed up the justice system for cases involving serious assaults, serious drug offences, attempted murder and taking banned items into prison. The average time to complete these cases has

decreased significantly; as at September 2019, approximately 206 cases in the 'Indictable Cases Pilot' had concluded with the average processing time between the date an incident is reported to police until the case is disposed of at court is estimated to be between 387 days, compared to 561 days (Crown Court average for previous 12 months up to Quarter 2 2019/20).

Raising public awareness

In October 2018, the public awareness campaign "Ending the Harm" was launched as a follow on from the "I am Your Money" campaign, which was first launched in 2016.

The hard-hitting multi-media campaign about the brutal reality of so-called paramilitary style attacks (PSAs) is aimed at highlighting the devastating impact of PSAs on victims, their families, local communities and wider society, by telling the story of a shooting from the points of view of the victim, his mother, the paramilitary gang member and a witness.

The campaign also focusses on highlighting the coercive control of paramilitary groups within some local communities; challenging the levels of implicit acceptability and complacency on the issue; and encouraging a public conversation.

There is a bespoke website linked to the campaign (www.endingtheharm.com) which has a number of sections including some real-life stories and information on where people can go for help and support.

There were substantial shifts in attitude between 2017 and 2019 on whether people agreed/strongly agreed with the following statements:

PSAs are justified / justified in certain circumstances

2017: 35%
2019: 19%
Change: - 46%

PSAs just involved a good kicking

2017: 25%
2019: 18%
Change: - 28%

PSAs deliver swift justice

2017: 34%

2019: 15%

Change: - 56%

A PSA is a good way of giving an offender a warning

2017: 35%

2019: 17%

Change: - 51%

There is normally a good reason for a PSA

2017: 44%

2019: 20%

Change: - 55%

How do I find out more about the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme?

You can find out more about the programme by visiting the Northern Ireland Executive website:

www.northernireland.gov.uk/articles/executive-programme-tackling-paramilitary-activity-and-organised-crime-0

You can read our newsletters at:

www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/tackling-paramilitarism-programme-newsletters

For more information on the

“Ending the Harm” campaign, visit:

www.endingtheharm.com

You can also follow us on Twitter

[@endingtheharm](https://twitter.com/endingtheharm)

APPENDIX 3: OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Organised Crime Task Force

www.octf.gov.uk

Border Force

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/border-force

CrimeStoppers Northern Ireland

crimestoppers-uk.org/in-your-area/northern-ireland

Department for Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

Department of Justice

www.justice-ni.gov.uk

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

www.hmrc.gov.uk

Immigration Enforcement

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/immigration-enforcement

www.gov.uk/report-immigration-crime

National Crime Agency

www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

PSNI

www.psni.police.uk

Trading Standards Service

www.economy-ni.gov.uk/topics/consumer-affairs/trading-standards-service



Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

**Trading
Standards
Service**

Consumerline Know Your Rights

Call or click for consumer advice on



**Scams and
Doorstep
Crime**



**Poor
Workmanship**



**No
Refunds**



Fake Goods



Faulty Goods



**Wrongly
Described
Goods**



0300 123 62 62



www.nidirect.gov.uk/consumerline

WASH YOUR HANDS OF CORONAVIRUS SCAMS!

**FRIENDS AGAINST SCAMS AIMS TO PROTECT AND PREVENT
PEOPLE FROM BECOMING VICTIMS OF SCAMS.**

Be AWARE of people offering or selling:

- ▶ Virus testing kits - these are only offered by NHS.
- ▶ Vaccines or miracle cures – there is currently no vaccine or cure.
- ▶ Overpriced or fake goods to protect yourself from coronavirus such as anti-bacterial products.
- ▶ Shopping or medication collection services.
- ▶ Home cleaning services to remove Covid-19 bacteria.

PROTECT yourself and others:

- ▶ Don't be rushed into making a decision. If it sounds too good to be true it probably is.
- ▶ Only purchase goods from legitimate retailers and take a moment to think before parting with money or personal information.
- ▶ Don't assume everyone is genuine. It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.
- ▶ If someone claims to represent a charity, ask them for ID. Be suspicious of requests for money up front. If someone attempts to pressurise you into accepting a service they are unlikely to be genuine. Check with family and friends before accepting offers of help if you are unsure.

CONTACT

For advice on scams call
Consumerline on

0300 123 62 62

To report a scam call
Action Fraud on

0300 123 2040

Contact your bank if you
think you have been
scammed.

Be a good friend,
help to protect
your family, friends
and neighbours
from scams.

**Read it.
Share it.
Prevent it.**

**#Coronavirus
#ScamAware**



Department for the
Economy
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

**Trading Standards
Service**



To learn more about the different types of scams visit **www.FriendsAgainstScams.org.uk**
and **www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus-scams**



Help make Northern Ireland a safer place for you and your family.

Tell us what
you know about
crime in your area.

crimestoppers-uk.org

Crimestoppers Trust is a registered charity.
UK Registration Nos. 1108687/SC037960.

Northern Ireland

CrimeStoppers.

0800 555111

100% anonymous. Always.