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NCA

National Crime Agency

NCA Performance in Northern Ireland

Q4 2019/20 (January – March 2020)

Date: 29 April 2020

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Introduction

The NCA leads the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime, a chronic and corrosive threat which affects more UK citizens, more often, than any other national security threat. There are 4,772 known organised crime groups mapped in the UK, with over 350,000 individuals estimated to be involved in SOC¹. The latest estimated social and economic cost of SOC to the UK of approximately £37 billion is assessed to be a significant underestimate of the true cost.

Our approach is the identification and disruption of high-harm or high-impact criminals and organised crime groups, diminishing their capability, infrastructure and influence. In particular, those who:

- Dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal market place, through criminal reputation and/or the use of violence in the supply of drugs and firearms.
- Undermine the UK's economy, integrity, infrastructure and institutions through their criminality.
- Exploit the vulnerable through child sexual abuse and exploitation, trafficking, servitude, fraud and other forms of abuse.

Meeting the challenges of the changing nature of the SOC threat is a critical objective for the NCA and wider law enforcement community, and there have been substantial developments in SOC's complexity, scale and volume.

Aim, Purpose & Scope

The aim of this report is to summarise NCA performance and activity, primarily relating to Q4 2019/20 (January – March 2020 inclusive), with a clear focus on activity specific to Northern Ireland, and the impact that this has had on protecting communities from SOC. It encompasses the above three threat areas and organised crime at the border, in particular the work of the NCA's specialist capabilities, and the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce. However, the "Official" classification of this report prevents the detailed inclusion of live operational activity.

Overall Context - UK-Wide

During 2019/20, our activity had led to an increase in the number of disruptions, with the year-end total being the highest the NCA has ever recorded. The majority of illicit finance metrics also increased, influenced by a greater focus within the NCA and improved understanding and use of the new powers in the Criminal Finance Act. This demonstrates the impact that we are having, with partners, to tackle serious and organised crime both in communities across the UK and further afield.

¹ National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime, 2020

Disruption volumes Comparison				
Rolling year comparison to previous rolling year	Apr 18-Mar 19	Apr 19-Mar 20	% Change	Trend
		1,866	2,396	28%

Figure 1: Comparison of NCA Disruptions, 2018/19 and 2019/20

Impact in Northern Ireland²

Disruption Assessment	2018-19		2018-19 Total	2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	2	0	2	4	2	6	▲
Moderate	11	1	12	21	4	25	▲
Minor	46	9	55	89	7	96	▲
Grand Total	59	10	69	114	13	127	▲

Figure 2: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland

The volume of both lead and support disruptions undertaken by the NCA, with an impact in Northern Ireland, increased in FY 2019/20 when compared with the previous year.

THOSE WHO DOMINATE COMMUNITIES AND CHASE PROFITS IN THE CRIMINAL MARKETPLACE

UK Wide Context

We continue to work with partners to tackle the threat to communities in the United Kingdom posed by the criminal use of firearms and the illicit drugs trade. In 2019/20, the NCA recorded a total of 786 disruptions against these threats, representing a 21% increase on the previous year.

Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace

Disruption Assessment	2018-19		2018-19 Total	2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	20	5	25	45	11	56	▲
Moderate	115	26	141	135	42	177	▲
Minor	448	35	483	417	136	553	▲
Grand Total	583	66	649	597	189	786	▲

Figure 3: NCA Disruption Volumes, 2018/19 v 2019/20

Impact in Northern Ireland

Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace

Disruption Assessment	2018-19		2018-19 Total	2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	0	0	0	3	0	3	▲
Moderate	2	0	2	0	2	2	▼
Minor	2	0	2	32	1	33	▲
Grand Total	4	0	4	35	3	38	▲

Figure 4: NCA Disruption Volumes, Impact in Northern Ireland, 2018/19 v 2019/20

² Where Northern Ireland has been recorded as an area of impact

NCA activity assessed as having an impact in Northern Ireland increased in 2019/20 when compared with the previous year.

During Q4 2019/20, our activity to interrupt the supply of guns into the UK and reduce their criminal availability led to the seizure of 18 firearms. Specific operational success against the firearms threat in Northern Ireland included:

- The seizure of two firearms and a quantity of ammunition during a house search in Carrickfergus, resulting from information developed and shared by the NCA with PSNI. The suspect was linked to loyalist paramilitary groups; enquiries remain ongoing.

In Q4 2019/20, the NCA, alongside domestic and international partners, seized 26.4 tonnes of cocaine, 16 tonnes of cannabis and 1.2 tonnes of heroin in the UK and overseas. Of the cocaine seized, some 12 tonnes were recovered during March 2020 in the Caribbean and South America. Joint operational activity with PSNI on drugs-related operations in this quarter included:

- A PCTF investigation into a Northern Ireland-based drug trafficking OCG paying protection money to the Irish National Liberation Army. On 18 February, one member of the OCG was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment for Class B drug offences. A referral to Social Services also led to the safeguarding of three children.

Activity has continued into this quarter, with approximately 36 kilos of cocaine seized in late April and two arrests made in connection with a Northern Ireland based OCG.

More generally, our activity, alongside overseas partners, continues to cut off supply routes for illegal drugs arriving into the UK, protecting communities across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. Notable results with UK-wide impact during this quarter include:

- Two men who hid £60 million worth of cocaine on a yacht travelling from South America to the UK were jailed for a total of 33 years for drug smuggling, and had their assets restrained. In August 2019, the NCA, working closely with the Spanish National Police, identified the SY Atrevido as carrying a large cocaine shipment. The vessel was escorted into Fishguard port where NCA officers and Border Force's Deep Rummage team carried out a search, discovering 751 kilos of cocaine with a purity of up to 83%, a wholesale value of around £24 million and a potential street value of £60 million. As part of the parallel financial investigation, the NCA seized the SY Atrevido, as well as a second sailing yacht believed to have been used by the OCG.
- The arrest of a second man in connection with cocaine worth £10million seized at Newhaven ferry port. He was detained on suspicion of conspiring to import Class A drugs in a joint operation with Hampshire Police. The arrest follows the discovery of 97 kilos of cocaine concealed in a consignment of frozen fish on a refrigerated van. The driver was arrested at the scene and awaits trial.

THOSE WHO UNDERMINE THE UK'S ECONOMY, INTEGRITY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONS

UK Wide Context

We continue to investigate and disrupt criminals involved in cyber crime, money laundering and economic crime. In 2019/20, the NCA recorded 329 disruptions against these threats, representing a 48% increase on the previous year. Furthermore, we have achieved increased results through an increased focus on illicit finance, including the establishment of the National Economic Crime Centre (NECC)³, and the use of new powers in the Criminal Finances Act⁴.

Those who undermine the UK's economy, integrity, infrastructure and institutions

Disruption Assessment	2018-19		2018-19 Total	2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	12	1	13	17	5	22	▲
Moderate	37	14	51	63	22	85	▲
Minor	124	33	157	175	47	222	▲
Grand Total	173	48	221	255	74	329	▲

Figure 5: NCA Disruption Volumes, 2018/19 v 2019/20

Impact in Northern Ireland

Those who undermine the UK's economy, integrity, infrastructure and institutions

Disruption Assessment	2018-19		2018-19 Total	2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	1	0	1	1	2	3	▲
Moderate	4	0	4	15	1	16	▲
Minor	39	3	42	44	3	47	▲
Grand Total	44	3	47	60	6	66	▲

Figure 6: NCA Disruption Volumes, Impact in Northern Ireland, 2018/19 v 2019/20

NCA disruptive activity assessed as impacting in Northern Ireland increased in FY 2019/20 when compared with the previous year.

In Q4 2019/20, the NCA's activity impacting on Northern Ireland included:

- The taking down of a website, by our National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) in collaboration with PSNI and international law enforcement partners, that had provided access to more than 12 billion personal credentials to cyber criminals. The investigation was initiated in August 2019 against the site which was believed to be hosting credentials from some 10,000 data breaches used in cyber attacks in the UK, Germany and the US. Two

³ The National Economic Crime Centre (NECC), based within the NCA, is a collaborative, multi-agency centre, bringing together law enforcement agencies, government departments, regulatory bodies and the private sector with the shared objective of driving down serious and organised economic crime (SOEC).

⁴ Whilst these powers do not currently apply in Northern Ireland, we have aimed to use the new powers to take action against crime groups either based in or affecting Northern Ireland whose assets are held elsewhere in the UK.

individuals, based in Northern Ireland and the Netherlands respectively, were identified during the course of the operation who 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 on 15 January 2020. Parallel investigations by the German BKA and United States FBI effected the takedown of the site on the same day.

- Leadership of Team Cyber UK (TCUK) in delivering the response to a high-impact and extremely prevalent ransomware strain targeting the US and Canada. We are working closely with international partners (in particular the FBI) to build our collective understanding of the ransomware, the actor/s involved and to identify and implement collective threat response solutions. In response, we have so far tasked 23 malware investigations across Team Cyber UK, undertaking coordination and centrally assessing and sharing intelligence and investigation dividends across our operations. We are supporting a total of 56 UK-based victims across 22 different industries via a 4P approach with partners, including PSNI.
- Our investigation into a 13 million euro 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 some £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.
- The NCA's Civil Recovery and Tax team in Northern Ireland, working closely with HMRC and PSNI and deployed within the PCTF, is progressing nine investigations and targeting some £2.5million in assets. The following two cases illustrate the benefits of using civil powers as an alternative disruption strategy; both individuals had previously been subject to conventional law enforcement investigations which had not been successful. Furthermore, both cases were linked to illegal moneylending, identified as a key source of funding for paramilitary organisations.
 - In January 2020, the High Court granted a Recovery Order against an individual suspected of illegal moneylending and money laundering on behalf of south-east Antrim UDA. The defendant has six months to sell his home property, paying the first £120,000 of equity to the NCA in settlement of both a Civil Recovery and a Tax investigation under Parts 5 and 6 of POCA respectively. The NCA's civil recovery and tax case was predicated primarily on fraudulent declarations to a mortgage provider, and a comparison of the individual's lifestyle with funds withdrawn from a bank account.
 - Tax assessments under Part 6 of POCA were issued to an individual suspected of occupying a senior position within south-east Antrim UDA and engaged in illegal moneylending and mortgage fraud.

Including the tax liability, interest and penalties, the total due was assessed as £198,000. A review of the individual's bank statements and business records identified income not previously declared to HMRC.

- The Civil Recovery and Tax team also secured a Possession Order against a residential property in Bangor subject to a Recovery Order granted at the High Court in England in January 2017. The defendants residing at the property had frustrated recovery efforts to date, but have now been ordered by the High Court in Northern Ireland to vacate the property.
- Support by the NECC's Expert Laundering Evidence (ELE) cadre to PSNI in relation to a £215m trade-based money laundering case - the largest in Northern Ireland's history - concerning monies moved through shell company accounts across the globe. In January, several members of the ELE cadre (drawn from the NECC, NCA and HMRC) assisted PSNI search teams at premises connected to the setting up of shell companies and bank accounts for money laundering. These experts maximised evidential opportunities by ensuring the seizure of relevant evidence. Nine arrests, including that of the OCG principal, were made by PSNI. The investigation is focusing on some 55 shell companies, with over 150 bank accounts involved.
- The NECC's Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) continues to provide support to a PSNI investigation into groups trafficking women within Northern Ireland for sexual exploitation.
- Our UK National Central Office (UKNCO) for Counterfeit Currency's analysis of 39 such seizures submitted by PSNI. The UKNCO further analysed 22 witness statement requests submitted by PSNI to support prosecutions and investigations. Direct support was also provided by the UKNCO to a PSNI C1 investigation relating to the counterfeiting of a broad range of Northern Ireland notes, in both identification and their means of manufacture.
- The NCA's UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU) disseminated 18 terrorist finance-related SARs to PSNI. The UKFIU also allocated 137 requests for a Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML) to PSNI and NCA CRT Belfast for advice. This represents a 57% increase from the previous quarter's 87 requests. The UKFIU exercised its power under POCA to refuse one DAML request and grant 36 DAML requests during the quarter. The unit also issued two international requests on behalf of PSNI, in relation to the importation of drugs and firearms, and money laundering.

THOSE WHO EXPLOIT THE VULNERABLE

UK-Wide Context

We continue to detect and take action against those engaged in the exploitation of victims through child sexual abuse, modern slavery and organised immigration crime. Our activity against child sexual abuse is particularly focused on those individuals at the high end of high harm. This includes those operating

on the dark web and whose offending escalates from accessing indecent images of children to contact abuse, including offenders in positions of trust.

We also focus on people smugglers targeting the UK, who often employ high-risk methods of transporting and concealing migrants, and modern slavery cases which are often complex, combining the investigation of serious and organised crime and addressing victim safeguarding needs.

In FY 2019/20, we recorded 519 disruptions against these threats, a 4% increase compared with the previous year.

Those who exploit the vulnerable

Disruption Assessment	2018-19			2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support		
Major	14	10	24	12	6	18	▼
Moderate	91	29	120	128	37	165	▲
Minor	313	43	356	266	70	336	▼
Grand Total	418	82	500	406	113	519	▲

Figure 7: NCA Disruption Volumes, 2018/19 v 2019/20

Impact in Northern Ireland

Those who exploit the vulnerable

Disruption Assessment	2018-19			2019-20		2019-20 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support		
Major	1	0	1	0	0	0	▼
Moderate	2	1	3	6	1	7	▲
Minor	0	0	0	5	0	5	▲
Grand Total	3	1	4	11	1	12	▲

Figure 8: NCA Disruption Volumes, Impact in Northern Ireland, 2018/19 v 2019/20

NCA disruptive activity assessed as impacting in Northern Ireland increased in FY 2019/20 when compared with the previous year.

Activity involving known impact in Northern Ireland during Q4 2019/20 included:

- The disruption of an OCG engaged in organised immigration crime by the NCA’s operational team based in Northern Ireland. In March, officers worked with Belgian law enforcement partners and interdicted a lorry near Bruges containing 10 Asian migrants. The driver was arrested and was remanded in custody in Belgium awaiting trial. Two other members of the OCG were arrested in southern England and also charged and remanded in custody. A further arrest and search was conducted in Northern Ireland.
- Fourteen arrests reported by PSNI following disseminations from the NCA Child Sexual Abuse Referrals Bureau (CSA RB). The CSA RB is the central point within the NCA for receipt of referrals of information relating to online child sexual exploitation from industry, predominantly via the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the US. The CSA RB made 116 disseminations to PSNI during Q4, compared with 124 disseminations in the previous quarter.

We continue to collaborate closely with PSNI and Essex Police in the investigation that followed the deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants in a refrigerated lorry in October 2019. The NCA and PSNI are sharing relevant intelligence, deploying specialist resources to support each other and, having de-conflicted operational crossovers, agreeing next steps.

The NCA is also working closely with PSNI in the ongoing investigation into an OCG engaged in organised immigration crime, drugs trafficking and money laundering. Enquiries continue in relation to the four suspects from Northern Ireland arrested in Calais in October 2019, following the detection of 13 migrants concealed in a Northern Ireland-registered HGV. The close working includes intelligence-sharing and the deployment of specialist assets in support of agreed operational objectives.

Our UKFIU's identification of 43 suspicious activity reports (SARs) for fast-tracking to PSNI featured 31 relating to suspected vulnerable persons, seven to suspected child exploitation and two to suspected human trafficking.

A total of 206 Thinkuknow⁵ Ambassadors have been trained in Northern Ireland. Seven schools signed up for the Parent Info service during Q4, bringing the total in Northern Ireland to 82. This service enables schools' websites to directly host information provided by our CEOP (Child Exploitation and Online Protection) department that contains advice and guidance for parents and carers.

PSNI continues to be fully engaged in the strategic governance arrangements to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation, including regular submission of management information to the Online CSA Pursue Threat Board. PSNI is also engaged in the NCA-chaired working group developing online CSA risk assessment tools.

NCA SPECIALIST CAPABILITIES

The NCA-led UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS) provided 122 new instances of support to PSNI during Q4 and continues to provide ongoing assistance.

Our Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) team provided advice and support to PSNI in 15 instances, and deployed officers into force on eight occasions. The cases related to murder, sexual offences, suspicious deaths and missing persons.

- One of the cases related to the death of a five-year-old girl in her home in Newtownabbey in December 2019. She had suffered significant injuries, contrary to the accounts provided by the parents who have subsequently been charged with her murder. The case nevertheless posed significant challenges and prompted the support of MCIS; engagement took place in January and February where specialist operational advice was provided. The case continues to progress towards prosecution.

⁵ Thinkuknow is the national online safety education programme run by the CEOP Education Team, which aims to protect children and young people from sexual abuse and exploitation.

- Another case concerned the murder of a 71-year-old male found with significant and multiple injuries at his home in Bangor. The nature of the injuries and behavioural elements of potential suspects prompted the support of MCIS. A suspect has since been identified and, whilst the COVID-19 lockdown has impacted, further support will be forthcoming.

The NCA's Anti-Kidnap and Extortion Unit (AKEU) is the national repository for kidnap, blackmail and sextortion complaints. Details of suspects are checked against reports from other forces and, where possible, linked and disseminated to the jurisdictions in which they reside. In Q4, the AKEU provided these services to PSNI on 47 occasions, comprising nine in relation to kidnap, eight for blackmail and 30 concerning "sextortion" blackmail.

The NCA's UK International Crime Bureau (UKICB) acts as a conduit between law enforcement partners both at a national and international level, managing European Arrest Warrants (EAWs) in its role as the UK's Competent Authority. PSNI made two arrests and five surrenders for persons sought on EAWs. Conversely, PSNI sent five cases to the NCA for onward dissemination, with six arrests and three surrenders taking place.

In one such case, an EAW for parental abduction was received by the UKICB, with concerns for the welfare of the wanted subject and the accompanying child due to the threat from Irish paramilitaries. Swift action was taken to circulate the warrant, and early engagement with the NCA's liaison officers in Madrid and Malaga led to the subject being taken into custody where welfare and risk could be properly assessed before her release.