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**NCA**

National Crime Agency

# **NCA Performance in Northern Ireland**

**Q1 2020/21 (April – June 2020)**

Leading the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime

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# Introduction

## About the NCA

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The NCA leads the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime (SOC), 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 SOC<sup>1</sup>. 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.

### **The NCA's 20/21 Performance Ambitions**

The NCA's Senior Team and Board are responsible for setting annual ambitions that are routinely tracked through operational and strategic governance forums. This year the NCA highlighted their work in the Devolved Administrations setting an ambition to "Increase the volume of disruptions (both lead and support) in Northern Ireland and Scotland". This ambition will be pursued actively with PSNI, Police Scotland and other partners and demonstrates the NCA's commitment to build even stronger relationships with counterparts in the Devolved Administrations.

## About this report

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The aim of this report is to summarise NCA performance and activity, primarily relating to Q1 2020/21 (April – June 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 categories and organised crime at the border, in particular the work of the NCA's specialist capabilities, and the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce (PCTF). However, the "Official" classification of this report prevents the detailed inclusion of live operational activity and tactics.

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<sup>1</sup> National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime, 2020

The data presented in this report looks at a rolling 12 month picture inclusive of the latest quarter. Due to the protracted and complex nature of much of the NCA’s work, this provides a more accurate reflection of quarterly performance.

# Overall Disruptive Impact

## Across the UK

Disruption Assessment	Total NCA Disruptions						▲▼
	Jul 18 - Jun 19		R12 Total	Jul 19 - Jun 20		R12 Total	
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	43	19	62	114	39	153	▲
Moderate	312	84	396	382	145	527	▲
Minor	1276	328	1604	1324	701	2025	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1631</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>2062</b>	<b>1820</b>	<b>885</b>	<b>2705</b>	▲

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

Comparison of the last two 12 month periods (July 2018 to June 2019 and July 2019 to June 2020) shows that our activity had led to an increase in the number of total disruptions– **more than doubling those in the major category where the biggest impact has been achieved**. These headline figures incorporate both NCA led operations and those in support of our partners, working together to tackle serious and organised crime in communities across the UK and further afield.

Much of the NCA’s work is aligned to threat, risk and harm, agnostic of geography. The criminals we target are sophisticated and work across geographical boundaries in the UK and globally. Our assessment is that such an uplift in disruptive impact will both directly and indirectly effect Northern Ireland. Directly, as demonstrated by the range of examples highlighted in this report, but also indirectly, such as removing dangerous content from the internet, shutting down distribution channels for drugs and guns, creating a hostile environment for SOC criminals to operate in (see VENETIC below) and raising public awareness to provide greater resilience to fraud. Whilst our data cannot track this type of indirect impact in detail, we assess that this ‘UK wide’ success is making communities in Northern Ireland safer.

**599 of our lead disruptions fell directly in Q1 and almost half (48%) of these were against P1-P2 operations** – the organisation’s highest priorities. Our cases are graded using an objective methodology that takes into account threat, harm and risk. This means we have considerable confidence that our biggest wins are closely aligned to investigations targeting the UK’s most dangerous criminals.

## Operation VENETIC

Since 2016, the NCA has been working with international partners to target EncroChat and other encrypted criminal communication platforms by sharing technical expertise and intelligence. This year, the UK’s collaboration with international partners resulted in authorities in France and the Netherlands infiltrating the platform. Without its users knowing, the NCA have been monitoring their activity since under Operation VENETIC - the UK law enforcement response. The EncroChat servers have now been shut down.

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The NCA, Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) and police forces, including PSNI have caused significant impact against the UK organised crime network by arresting 1009 suspects and seizing:

- **Over £57million in criminal cash**
- **81 firearms, including an AK47 assault rifle, sub machine guns, handguns, four grenades, and over 1,800 rounds of ammunition**
- **More than two tonnes of Class A and B drugs**
- **Over 28 million Etizolam pills from an illicit laboratory**
- **55 high value cars, and 73 luxury watches**

In addition, a specialist NCA team, working closely with policing partners, has prevented rival gangs carrying out kidnappings and executions on the UK's streets by successfully mitigating over 200 threats to life.



**VENETIC in Northern Ireland** (Results so far)

The capabilities provided by Op VENETIC have enabled us to target the most harmful crime groups operating in Northern Ireland and updated detail will be provided in the Quarter 2 report.

## Overall disruptive impact in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>

Disruption Assessment	Disruptions impacting on N Ireland		R12 Total	Jul 19 - Jun 20		R12 Total	▲ ▼
	Jul 18 - Jun 19	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	2	0	2	6	2	8	▲
Moderate	14	0	14	19	4	23	▲
Minor	77	7	84	68	9	77	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>108</b>	▲

Figure 2: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland, July to June 2018/19 and 2019/20

Total disruptions undertaken by the NCA with a direct impact in Northern Ireland have remained relatively consistent between the two periods (100 and 108) with the eight additional disruptions relating to support activity.

**Lead disruptions in NI represent approximately 5% of all NCA led disruptive activity.** This figure has remained fairly consistent year on year.

This report will go on to explore this impact in greater detail by threat area.

<sup>2</sup> Where Northern Ireland has been recorded as an area of impact

# Those who dominate communities & chase profits in the criminal marketplace

## Across the UK

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. Between July 2019 and June 2020, the NCA recorded a total of 798 disruptions against these threats, representing a **13% increase** on the preceding period.

Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace							
Disruption Assessment	Jul 18 - Jun 19			Jul 19 - Jun 20			▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	R12 Total	Lead	Support	R12 Total	
Major	20	7	27	66	13	79	▲
Moderate	114	34	148	154	44	198	▲
Minor	478	51	529	345	176	521	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>798</b>	▲

Figure 3: NCA Disruption Volumes, July to June 2018/19 and 2019/20

During Q1 2020/21, our activity to interrupt the supply of guns into the UK and reduce their criminal availability led to the seizure of 20 firearms. With respect to drugs, the NCA, alongside domestic and international partners, seized **8.5 tonnes of cocaine**, **2.4 tonnes of heroin** and **10 tonnes of cannabis** in the UK and overseas.



There is considerable activity we undertake across the UK that, despite not specifically targeting criminality within Northern Ireland, will likely have a profound indirect impact. For example, our work, 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.

The NCA's ability to deliver major impact in the past 12 months has been sustained at an unprecedented level. Major disruptions are those assessed to have tackled the highest harm groups and individuals (and are subject to intense scrutiny and validation before being recorded as such) so we cannot underestimate the significance of an increase from 27 major disruptions to 79. In this quarter, we **arrested 133 individuals** linked to firearms and drugs supply and achieved **103 years' worth of sentences** in these categories (with a number of sentencings imminent). The commonality amongst these offenders is their ability to hurt communities across the UK and the criminals targeted in this space were intent on the borderless distribution of drugs and/or firearms.

We would like to share two notable results with UK-wide impact during this quarter:

- The NCA's International network, in collaboration with a wide range of global partners, developed intelligence on a crew of Montenegrin sailors believed to be

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trafficking commercial quantities of cocaine into Europe from South America. Their ship was identified as having collected a suspicious bulk cargo of sugar as it travelled to Venezuela. On its subsequent leg to Greece, the vessel was intercepted by the Dutch Coast Guard and all crew were arrested with the vessel impounded in Aruba for a detailed search. This resulted in approximately **5.4 tonnes of cocaine being seized** (wholesale price approximately **£189 million**). Liaison is on-going with international partners to support the judicial investigation, both in Aruba and elsewhere, while the crew remain in custody. This result would not have been possible without our extensive maritime intelligence capabilities.

- As a result of intelligence from Operation VENETIC, officers from the NCA and Metropolitan Police's Organised Crime Partnership (OCP) executed a search warrant at an industrial unit in Rochester, Kent in June. Seized at the premises were approximately **28 million Etizolam pills**, (also known as 'street valium') worth approximately £14m. Six subjects were arrested for drugs offences and £10,000 was seized at a separate address. The premises had been used to produce the pills on an industrial scale. This has now been dismantled and is no longer in operation. Etizolam is assessed to be responsible for a number of deaths in the UK over the last 2 years and these arrests will have a significant impact in reducing the harm caused by its distribution and use.

## Impact in Northern Ireland

Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace							
Disruption Assessment	Jul 18 - Jun 19		R12 Total	Jul 19 - Jun 20		R12 Total	▲▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	0	0	0	5	0	5	▲
Moderate	2	0	2	2	2	4	▲
Minor	14	0	14	26	2	28	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>37</b>	▲

NCA activity relating to this area of criminality assessed as having an impact in Northern Ireland is approximately **100% higher** in the last 12 months than in the preceding 12 months. Specific examples in this category include:

### Firearms

- Following the dissemination of intelligence packages originating from a PCTF firearms importation investigation, Thames Valley Police executed warrants at two addresses in England. Two individuals were initially arrested for firearms offences and later rearrested for further offences, including conspiracy to murder. **Five firearms, a stun gun, a samurai sword, a baton, documentation relating to bomb making** and a quantity of **cash** were seized.
- The NCA's International Liaison Officer in Spain has liaised with a Spanish based retailer, operating online, which is involved in the sale of blank-firing firearms, other weaponry and accessories. A large number of items deemed illegal have been stopped by Border Force from entering the UK, including Northern Ireland, over recent months from this supplier. As a result of this liaison the company's website now includes a warning when picking the UK as a shipping destination advising customers to check with UK authorities about the legality of such an

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item. This change to the website is a positive step to discouraging purchasers by placing the onus is on them to check local legislation. This will also remove the ability for future purchasers to claim that they did not know the UK legal position.

- The NCA undertakes a **system leadership role** for SOC with an important part of this role being promoting a partnership approach to tackling key issues. In April, the NCA's Firearms Threat Lead and Belfast Branch Commander chaired a high level meeting with the PSNI Senior Leadership Team to examine the latest threat assessment on firearms within Northern Ireland. This explored what the agency could do help improve understanding of the trends and commonality between SOC and paramilitary groups. Intelligence requirements have been set and the NCA and PSNI will work collaboratively in developing these.

## Drugs

### Operational Update

#### Operation SUBMEDIAN

We would like to provide an operational update on the progress of a long running investigation that has achieved considerable success in this reporting period directly linked to NI. This operation relates to a case concerned with the importation of Class A drugs and Organised immigration Crime

To date there have been **13 successful interdictions** throughout the UK and Europe, resulting in **26 arrests**, with more to come in the near future.

The totals of the seizures/ successes to date are:



**37 Migrants rescued**



**118 kg Class A seized**  
**883 kg Class C seized**



**£1.3m seized**

These results have been achieved through collaborative working with partner agencies, International Liaison Officers and local police forces. Although many of these disruptions have occurred in mainland UK and at times in Europe, they will undoubtedly have a major impact on the criminal supply of commodities in NI. In the three cases of organised immigration crime, which led to the 37 migrant rescues, all of the main people involved were from Northern Ireland. Most of these interdictions have been followed up with search activity and investigative actions in NI.

Most recently, in April 2020, three arrests were made after a HGV was stopped in Dover Port. A search of the vehicle uncovered a sophisticated hide with **36kg of cocaine** concealed. The arrests included a NI based lorry driver and it is believed the drugs were destined for the NI market.

A further three arrests were made in Northern Ireland following a proactive operation across the UK in partnership with PSNI. A search of an HGV associated with a key

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OCG member led to the seizure of **600kg Cannabis** (street value **£12 million**) secreted in a load of vegetables. A number of house searches were carried out following the seizure. This is a significant quantity of drugs for the NI market and is in fact the largest NCA led operation in NI to date. This seizure and the subsequent arrests of criminal hauliers is assessed to have had a significant impact on the drugs market in NI.

Additional updates from this quarter include:

- The NCA's decryption of criminal communications through Operation VENETIC has led to the identification of high harm groups involved in the importation and supply of Class A drugs, firearms and money laundering within NI. These groups had been using the encrypted devices to plan and execute associated criminal activity. In direct response to this, seven search warrants were executed in NI with support from PSNI uncovering one encro device and seizing various amounts of cash. The investigation is ongoing and updates will be provided in subsequent reports.
- We are currently investigating criminal hauliers based in NI, suspected of significant importations of controlled drugs from Europe to the UK and NI. Working closely with colleagues in PSNI, we have identified members of the OCG who are key facilitators in the movement of these commodities from Europe, into the UK
- In April, UK Border Force, working with the NCA, intercepted two 'fast parcels' at the sorting centre in Coventry. Both boxes contained 42kg benzocaine and were bound for Northern Ireland.

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

## Across the UK

We continue to investigate and disrupt criminals involved in cybercrime, money laundering and economic crime. Between July 2019 and June 2020, the NCA recorded 358 disruptions against these threats, representing a **36% increase** on the previous year. This has been achieved through an increased focus on illicit finance, following the establishment of the National Economic Crime Centre (NECC)<sup>3</sup>, and the use of new powers in the Criminal Finances Act<sup>4</sup>.

Those who undermine the UK's economy, integrity, infrastructure and institutions							
Disruption Assessment	Jul 18 - Jun 19			Jul 19 - Jun 20			▲▼
	Lead	Support	R12 Total	Lead	Support	R12 Total	
Major	7	2	9	22	7	29	▲
Moderate	46	11	57	66	26	92	▲
Minor	160	38	198	180	57	237	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>358</b>	▲

Figure 5: NCA Disruption Volumes, July to June 2018/19 and 2019/20



This quarter the NCA removed **49 domains** that distributed CSA material, Covid related fraud, hosted ransomware or DDOS tools. This content can no longer be accessed by the public and criminals in Northern Ireland.

An example of our use of the Criminal Finances Act:

- Following an NCA Investigation, **£6.4 million** was successfully forfeited in May 2020 after being held in suspended status by a bank for over 10 years. The money had been held under an Account Freezing Order granted in October 2019 and was part of a fund operated for the purpose of tax evasion, money laundering, bribery and corruption. Working in partnership with the bank, NCA investigators were able to secure and analyse over 10 years-worth of data which established that the account had been set up using fake identities. This sent a strong message that the NCA will proactively target illicit financial flows and restrict access to criminal funds.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

## Impact in Northern Ireland

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

Disruption Assessment	Jul 18 - Jun 19		R12 Total	Jul 19 - Jun 20		R12 Total	▲▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	1	0	1	1	2	3	▲
Moderate	8	0	8	11	1	12	▲
Minor	58	2	60	28	3	31	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>46</b>	▼

Figure 6: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland, July to June 2018/19 and 2019/20

There has been an overall reduction in NCA disruptive activity relating to this area of criminality between the last two 12 month periods, although the activity is assessed to have had a greater impact with **increases in volumes at major and moderate**.

In Q1 2020/21, the NCA's activity impacting on Northern Ireland included:

### Cyber Crime

- The agency's National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) leads the Team Cyber UK (TCUK) in delivering the response to ransomware attacks and we are actively working with international partners to build our collective understanding of criminal methodologies. **Ransomware continues to be the main cyber threat** facing the Public Sector, business and industry in the UK and the impact of such attacks continues to cause significant business disruption across victim organisations. In addition the nature of ransomware attacks and the groups which undertake them, is changing. It is becoming increasingly prevalent for ransomware attacks to involve some form of data exfiltration which is often used to add extra leverage against the victim to pay the designated ransom.
- The NCCU coordinate and provide specialist investigative capabilities to lead the national response in partnership with PSNI who lead investigations and support victims within their jurisdiction. Victims of this ransomware have been impacted across 25 different industries and we are supporting these with a 4P approach with partners. The unit is recording and responding to multiple new cases each week.
- The NCCU are providing specialist support to a number of PSNI operations with research and assessment resource, including;
  - A ransomware attack on an auto parts company who currently have no administration, invoicing or HR function, and are unable to access their backups, which have also been encrypted;
  - A ransomware attack against an electrical contractors. The type of ransomware is yet to be determined but PSNI has established the access vector and methods used to obtain entry;
  - A credential stuffing attack against a retail website with preparatory activity being undertaken ahead of the attack. At this time, the suspect is believed to be in PSNI jurisdiction based on forensic analysis of the attack data;
  - A possible Network Intrusion against an independent health care provider. The victim was aware of the issue and had locked the account

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down. The victim estimates that around 500 e-mails were sent from the compromised account.

### *Economic Crime*

- The NCA's Civil Recovery and Tax team continues to work alongside HMRC and PSNI colleagues within the PCTF, using civil powers to disrupt criminal finances. The team is currently pursuing assets worth over **£2million linked to the proceeds of drug trafficking, extortion, illegal money lending and other criminality associated with paramilitary groups**. In June 2020, the NCA obtained a property freezing order (under the Proceeds of Crime Act) over three properties in the West Belfast area, valued at around £200,000. The order was served on the defendant during a search of his home address, during which mobile devices, documentation and a quantity of cash was seized.
- Our UK National Central Office (UKNCO) for Counterfeit Currency's analysed five seizures submitted by PSNI. The UKNCO further assisted with 10 witness statement requests submitted by PSNI to support prosecutions and investigations. Direct support was also provided in June when the UKNCO supplied intelligence to PSNI in relation to a postal **interception of counterfeit €20 bank notes** which had been sent from Amsterdam destined for premises in Coleraine. As a result, PSNI were able to secure a search warrant to progress the matter. The UKNCO are providing ongoing evidential support to this PSNI investigation and have updated Europol and Dutch Authorities.
- The NCA's UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU) disseminated **16 terrorist finance-related SARs** to PSNI. The UKFIU also allocated 147 requests for a Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML)<sup>5</sup> to PSNI and NCA CRT Belfast for advice. This represents a **7% increase** from the previous quarter's 137 requests. One DAML refusal allowed PSNI to make a restraint for £3,898 whilst two further refusals resulted in HMRC obtaining Account Freezing Orders totalling £31,898. The unit also issued two international requests on behalf of PSNI, in relation to the importation of drugs and firearms, and money laundering.

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<sup>5</sup> A DAML can be requested from the NCA where a reporter has a suspicion that property they intend to deal with is in some way criminal and that by dealing with it they risk committing one of the principal money laundering offences under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

# Those who exploit the vulnerable

## Across the UK

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.

Between July 2019 and June 2020, we recorded 572 disruptions against these threats, a **4% increase** compared with the preceding period.

Disruption Assessment	Jul 18 - Jun 19		R12 Total	Jul 19 - Jun 20		R12 Total	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	14	9	23	18	5	23	▲ ▼
Moderate	127	30	157	118	52	170	▲
Minor	312	57	369	283	96	379	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>572</b>	▲

Figure 7: NCA Disruption Volumes, July to June 2018/19 and 2019/20

During lockdown, the NCA pursuit of high-risk online child sexual abuse offenders has been unrelenting, and we are operating at fullest possible capacity to address the CSA threat, through both operational activity and educational messaging to children, parents and carers through our #OnlineSafetyAtHome campaign.

In Q1 the NCA executed **58 warrants** making **58 arrests** while safeguarding **143 children**. This includes the arrest of an individual who was subsequently charged for 94 offences relating to 49 boys whose ages range from four to 14. This individual was operating across multiple geographic boundaries throughout the UK.

Furthermore, since the launch of the NCA's #OnlineSafetyAtHome campaign, based on Thinkuknow products, there have been **406,498 downloads**, **347,307 unique visitors**. We will continue to evaluate the impact of this campaign and are aiming to influence behaviour change throughout the UK, creating a vast community of young people, parents and carers who have increased resilience to the threat posed by CSA.

## Impact in Northern Ireland

Disruption Assessment	Those who exploit the vulnerable						▲▼
	Jul 18 - Jun 19		R12 Total	Jul 19 - Jun 20		R12 Total	
	Lead	Support		Lead	Support		
Major	1	0	1	0	0	0	▼
Moderate	3	0	3	4	1	5	▲
Minor	1	0	1	6	0	6	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	▲

Figure 8: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland, July to June 2018/19 and 2019/20

NCA disruptive activity assessed as impacting in Northern Ireland increased in the last 12 months compared with the preceding 12 month period.

Activity involving known impact in Northern Ireland during Q1 2020/21 included:

### Child Abuse

- Nine arrests were 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 127 disseminations to PSNI during Q1, compared with 116 disseminations in the previous quarter.
- The NCA has been running an operation in response to the “Zoom Bombing” phenomena occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020 UK police forces, NCA Child Sexual Abuse Referral Bureau (CSA RB) and NCA CEOP Public Reports started to receive reports that innocent video conferences being held via the Zoom platform were being ‘hacked’ by unknown individuals who were streaming child abuse material, most believed to be of Category A level. It quickly became apparent that this type of incident was being reported internationally and we are in regular contact with our counterparts, particularly in the US, Canada and Australia. Zoom usually provide very detailed ‘charter reports’ when such abuse is reported however, due to COVID19, their conference participants increased from 10 million a day to 300 million a day meaning they were unable to resource the uplift in complaints. In Q1, the NCA has been made aware of 248 separate “Zoom Bombing” incidents across the UK and Ireland. PSNI received four reports. The NCA has coordinated all reports in the UK, worked with US partners to look for commonalities in order to prevent further events and to identify, trace, locate and bring offenders to Justice. This investigation continues to develop at pace and we have made a further arrest of a UK-based suspect in the last fortnight. Updates on this matter will be provided in our Quarter 2 report.
- During Q1 the NCA has led a project seeking to identify real world CSA offenders operating on the Dark Web. **Two disseminations have been made to PSNI following the successful de-anonymisation of suspects.**
- In May 2020, a search warrant was executed at an address in Lisburn where a male was arrested and a number of items were seized for examination. During interview, the subject admitted to a number of CSA offences. Forensic

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examination has identified **96 videos of indecent images of children** (IIOC) on the subject's mobile phone. The investigation is continuing.

- Our UKFIU's identification of **59 suspicious activity reports** (SARs) for **fast-tracking** to PSNI featured ten relating to suspected child exploitation. In addition, a SAR received by the UKFIU was fast-tracked to PSNI under the vulnerable persons (VP) work stream. **Within 24 hours of dissemination the victim was visited and a subject arrested.** Investigations into the offences are ongoing.
- A total of **206 Thinkuknow<sup>6</sup> Ambassadors** have been trained in Northern Ireland. Two schools signed up for the Parent Info service during Q1, bringing the total in Northern Ireland to 84. 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 (CSA), including regular engagement with the Online CSA Pursue Threat Board. PSNI is also engaged in the NCA chaired working group developing online CSA risk assessment tools. At the June Pursue Board, PSNI confirmed that its capacity to respond to online CSA was not detrimentally affected by COVID-19.

There are also 3 new CSA investigations currently being run by NCA Belfast targeting individuals involved in the distribution of high harm indecent imagery. These will be reported on in our Q2 document.

### **Missing Persons**

- In May 2020, an elderly couple from the Belfast area were reported missing by a neighbour. PSNI believed they may have visited Hong Kong. The agency's UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU) assisted in providing advice on conducting checks with Hong Kong authorities to confirm if they were safe and well. UKMPU conducted travel checks and sought advice from the NCA International desk to confirm the current political situation in Hong Kong and whether this would impact on our risk assessment. Following this advice, the UKMPU liaised with Interpol to assist in locating them. The case remains open whilst enquiries are being confirmed with Hong Kong.

### **Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking**

- NCA continues to work extremely closely and in collaboration with both PSNI and Essex Police following the tragedy at Purfleet where 39 Vietnamese migrants were found to have died in the back of a refrigerated container in October 2019 as a result of being smuggled from Europe into the UK by a significant OCG.

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

# Supporting partners with our Specialist Capabilities

The National Crime Agency leads the UK SOC response through a combination of intelligence development, enforcement and investigation. Within this, the Agency has developed a range of niche capabilities, from advanced analysis to technical solutions, that service both our investigations and those of our partners. A snapshot of how these have impacted on delivery against the SOC threat in NI is below:

## UKPPS

- The UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS), an NCA function that provides protection to people judged to be at risk of serious harm, supported PSNI in **125 instances** this quarter.

## MCIS

- Our Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) team provided advice and support to PSNI in 16 instances, and deployed officers into force on **22 occasions**. The cases related to murder, sexual offences, suspicious deaths and missing persons.
- One case related to the rape of a 25 year old female in October 2019 by a stranger near to the centre of Omagh. The local Rape Investigation Unit currently manage the enquiry and sought support from MCIS in relation to identifying further lines of enquiry. Several meetings have taken place led by the team's National SIO Adviser (NSIOA) and other specialist advisers and strategic and operational advice continues to be provided. Although an arrest has now been made it is anticipated that support of MCIS will continue. The Agency's Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS) has also been providing analytical support.
- Another case relates to the murder of a 47 year old male who was found with multiple injuries within his own home in Carrickfergus in January 2020. This is a challenging investigating with a number of community based and paramilitary issues. In June 2020, the SIO requested support from MCIS due to the complexities and a number of virtual meetings have taken place and attended by the team's National SIO Adviser (NSIOA), Crime Investigation Support Officer (CISO) and National Interview Adviser (NIA) where several aspects of the case were discussed and a report offering investigative suggestions submitted.
- One case reported previously, relates 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 has taken place throughout this investigation where strategic and operational investigative advice have been provided by the team's National SIO Adviser,

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NSIOA and supporting capabilities as the case continues to move towards prosecution.

### ***Anti-Kidnap & Extortion***

- 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 Q1, the AKEU provided these services to PSNI on **56 occasions**, comprising three in relation to kidnap, nine for blackmail and 44 concerning "sextortion" blackmail. In addition, support was provided to PSNI regarding an Interpol sextortion request with a Filipino nexus.

### ***International Crime Bureau***

- 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 four arrests and one surrender for persons sought on EAWs. Conversely, PSNI sent six cases to the NCA for onward dissemination, with three arrests and two surrenders taking place.

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