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**NCA**

National Crime Agency

# **NCA Performance in Northern Ireland**

**Q2 2020/21 (July – September 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 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, 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 marketplace, 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 within 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 Q2 2020/21 (July – September 2020 inclusive), with a clear focus on activity related to Northern Ireland, and the impact that this has had on protecting communities from SOC. The report encompasses the above three categories as well as 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

Total NCA Disruptions							
Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	48	21	69	120	52	172	▲
Moderate	343	95	438	424	165	589	▲
Minor	1332	456	1788	1404	801	2205	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1723</b>	<b>572</b>	<b>2295</b>	<b>1948</b>	<b>1018</b>	<b>2966</b>	▲

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

During the last two 12 month periods (October 2018 to September 2019 and October 2019 to September 2020) there has been a **29% increase** in the total number of disruptions achieved by the NCA; whilst those in the major category, where the biggest impact has been achieved, are displaying an even greater increase at **149%**. These headline figures incorporate both NCA led operations and those in support of our partners, working together to tackle SOC in communities across the UK and further afield.

Much of the NCA's work is aligned to threat, risk and harm, and is 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 benefit 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 and raising public awareness / driving policy changes to provide greater resilience to fraud. We assess that this 'UK wide' success is making communities in Northern Ireland safer.

**511 of our lead disruptions took place in Q2 and a quarter (26%) 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 proportion is down on the previous quarter (48%); a fact heavily impacted by the high volume of executive action taking place in relation to Operation VENETIC. However, this still shows that a significant proportion of our activity is closely aligned to investigations targeting the UK's most dangerous criminals.

## Operation VENETIC update

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As reported last quarter, the NCA has been working with international partners since 2016 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 ever since under Operation VENETIC and the EncroChat servers have now been shut down. The majority of results took place in Q1, but the latest accumulated figures show that the NCA, Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) and police forces, including PSNI are continuing to cause significant impact against the UK organised crime network by arresting 1,496 suspects and seizing:

- **Over £57million in criminal cash**
- **91 firearms, including an AK47 assault rifle, sub machine guns, handguns, grenades, and over 2,200 rounds of ammunition**
- **More than five tonnes of Class A and B drugs**
- **Over 28 million Etizolam pills from an illicit laboratory worth in excess of £14 million**
- **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.

The operation has yielded huge intelligence dividends to date and the NCA continue to work closely with colleagues across Law Enforcement to identify and pursue intelligence leads generated from Operation VENETIC data. The Agency is also playing a critical role in converting the arrests and seizures earlier in the year to high impact judicial outcomes through the courts.

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

Disruptions impacting on N. Ireland							
Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	2	0	2	7	2	9	▲
Moderate	19	2	21	21	2	23	▲
Minor	103	4	107	44	11	55	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>87</b>	▼

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

Total lead disruptions undertaken by the NCA, with a direct impact in Northern Ireland, are showing a reduction between the last two 12 month periods (October 2018 to September 2019 and October 2019 to September 2020). However, this reduction does not equate to less disruptive impact. This period we have recorded more disruptions assessed as major and moderate, in line with our mission to tackle the highest end of criminality. Furthermore, this quarter which, there were 41 disruptions when compared with a quarterly average of 27 over the past two years, showing a **notable quarter-on-quarter increase**. It is also worth noting that the data is skewed by a successful, high volume project during Q2 2018-19 in which the NCA were responsible for taking down websites and social media relating to the sale of fentanyl in Northern Ireland. However, within this overall reduction in lead disruptions there has been a marked increase in the number of major disruptions.

**Lead disruptions in Northern Ireland represent approximately 4% of all NCA led disruptive activity.** This figure is fairly consistent year on year and taken in the context that NCA-dedicated Northern Ireland funding is less than 1% of the Agency's total spend.

This report will go on to explore the NCA's impact both directly and indirectly in Northern Ireland 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 October 2019 and September 2020, the NCA recorded a total of 840 disruptions against these threats, representing a **9% increase** on the preceding period.

Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace							
Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19			Oct 19 - Sep 20			▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	R12 Total	Lead	Support	R12 Total	
Major	23	9	32	70	18	88	▲
Moderate	124	40	164	153	50	203	▲
Minor	509	66	575	296	253	549	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>840</b>	▲

Figure 3: NCA Disruption Volumes, October to September 2018/19 and 2019/20

During Q2 2020/21, NCA activity to interrupt the supply of firearms into the UK, and reduce their availability to criminals, led to the seizure of **six firearms** in the UK. Our efforts however are also focussed on stopping guns from reaching the UK in the first place. The NCA has supported the seizure of **355 firearms overseas** this financial year to date from supply routes that have the potential to reach UK communities.

With respect to drugs, the NCA, alongside domestic and international partners, seized **22 tonnes of cocaine, 1.4 tonnes of heroin** and **14.7 tonnes of cannabis** in the UK and overseas. Although COVID travel restrictions have made it harder for smugglers to operate, they have not been deterred (see Figure 4 whereby cocaine seizures remain comparable to pre-COVID levels). A relaxation of restrictions has seen supply routes re-emerge and our upstream activity to stop criminal commodities from reaching the UK remains as important as ever.

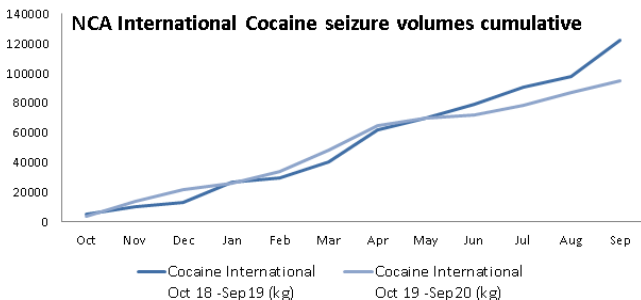


Figure 4: NCA supported Int. Cocaine Seizures

The NCA undertakes considerable activity across the UK that, despite not specifically targeting criminality within Northern Ireland, will likely have a profound impact. For example, our work alongside overseas partners continues to cut off supply routes for illegal drugs and firearms arriving into the UK; protecting communities across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

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As stated in our Q1 report, the NCA's ability to deliver a major impact against these threats 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 32 to 88 major disruptions. In this quarter, we **arrested 76 individuals** linked to firearms and drugs supply and achieved **112 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:

- More than a **tonne of Class A drugs** – 1,196kg of heroin and morphine derivatives concealed in bags of rice – assessed to have been destined for the streets of the UK were proactively recovered from a container ship after it docked at the port of Felixstowe in September. NCA officers used a variety of tactics to trace the movement of the drugs and knew they were aboard the vessel when it docked in the UK. The haul would be worth approximately £21 million to organised criminals at wholesale and in excess of £120 million at street level; representing one of the largest ever of heroin seizures in the UK. A 45 year old man – suspected to be a UK facilitator in the organised crime group – was arrested shortly after. At the same time, Dutch Police – in liaison with the NCA - arrested a further three connected suspects.
- As part of an NCA project seeking to identify European suppliers of UK-prohibited forward venting blank firing (FVBF) handguns, a French firearms dealer - recognised over recent years as a key supplier of FVBFs - will now no longer sell be able to sell items to UK customers and delivery addresses. Following work carried out by the NCA in conjunction with the CPS and our International network, a European Investigation Order (EIO) was served on the owner of the company to seek additional information on sales to the UK; identifying their customers in order to seize and recover weapons illegally held in the UK. To date this has led to the **recovery of dozens of illegal FVBFs** which represent a significant criminal threat given how easily they can be converted to live-firing.
- A **firearms supply network**, operating in Liverpool, has been **dismantled** as a result of a major disruption in July whereby the two UK-based principles were arrested. They had been responsible for the importation of firearms into the UK from continental Europe and are believed to have been the main UK outlet for the criminal enterprise.
- NCA officers, in collaboration with Police Scotland, recently lead a major disruption against a Scottish based OCG where **1.2 tonnes of cocaine** were seized. The drugs were concealed within 48 pallets of bananas on a cargo ship that had arrived in Dover from Ecuador. Two significant arrests were subsequently made, and seven searches of premises were carried out. This was a significant result in removing a large quantity of cocaine destined for communities across the UK.

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## Impact in Northern Ireland

**Those who dominate communities and chase profits in the criminal marketplace**

Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	1	0	1	5	0	5	▲
Moderate	2	1	3	3	1	4	▲
Minor	33	0	33	8	2	10	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>	▼

Figure 5: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland, October to September 2018/19 and 2019/20

NCA activity relating to this area of criminality assessed as having an impact in Northern Ireland is **lower** in the last 12 months when compared with the preceding 12 months. Again, this can be partly explained by a spike in activity during Q2 2019/20 during the takedown of websites selling fentanyl. Despite the overall reduction, volumes of those assessed as having a **major impact against these threats have increased**. Specific examples in this category include:

### Firearms

- The NCA have been running an investigation into the purchase, importation and onward sale of firearms in Northern Ireland. In December 2019, NCA intelligence led our officers, working as part of the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce, to arrest two individuals connected to the suspected importation and supply of illegal blank-firing guns (which can be easily converted to a live-firing gun) from a Spanish vendor. Working together with partners, the NCA seized **32 firearms in Northern Ireland** along with a significant amount of cash. The investigation is progressing well and during this quarter important overseas evidence has been secured. Following the dissemination of intelligence packages originating from this investigation, Thames Valley Police executed warrants at two addresses in England in May. Two individuals were initially arrested for firearms offences as well as other 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. One of these has now pleaded guilty to four counts of possession of firearms and is due to be sentenced in December 2020.

### Drugs

- An investigation flowing from Operation VENETIC intelligence relates to a Northern Ireland-based OCG who move illicit commodities in and out of the UK using multiple Bulgarian registered tractor and trailer units. In September, two vehicles were stopped, and three arrests were made after an HGV entered the UK via the Channel Tunnel and swapped trailers with a second HGV. A search of the trailers revealed a sophisticated concealment containing **21kg of cocaine**. A third HGV was stopped in the North Wales area on route to Northern Ireland and two occupants were arrested. Follow up searches of



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business premises in Northern Ireland with support from PSNI were conducted along with the addresses of the arrested persons.

- Operation SUBMEDIAN, subject to an operational case study in our Q1 report, is continuing to have an impact. Previously we provided an update on the arrest of Northern Ireland-linked individuals involved in the smuggling of **36 kg of cocaine** and **600 kg of cannabis** in lorry exhaust pipes. Since then we have successfully obtained a restraint order relating to cash seized, other sources of monies identified and high value cars. A further bank account belonging to one of the subject's has been discovered which, having not been disclosed, allowed the NCA to pursue contempt of court proceedings. The subject was sentenced to six months imprisonment as it was believed they were using this account to continue their extravagant lifestyle. Furthermore, a key nominal in this investigation who was directly involved in the importation of cocaine to Northern Ireland has been **sentenced to 15 yrs**. This will be covered in more detail in our next Q3 report.
- In September, UK Border Force, working with the NCA, intercepted 'fast parcels' at the sorting centre in Coventry containing **7kg MDMA destined for Newtownabbey**. Several other postal packages, containing drugs, have been discovered, all are addressed to the same area which is indicative of local drug supply through exploitation of the postal service. **Planning is currently underway for further disruptive activity against this threat.**

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

## Across the UK

In this section we will talk about our continued efforts to investigate and disrupt criminals involved in cybercrime, money laundering and economic crime. Between October 2019 and September 2020, the NCA recorded 391 disruptions against these threats, representing a **35% 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	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	7	2	9	27	8	35	▲
Moderate	54	12	66	75	31	106	▲
Minor	178	36	214	188	62	250	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>391</b>	▲

Figure 6: NCA Disruption Volumes, October to September 2018/19 and 2019/20



This quarter through a range of online campaigns and prevent initiatives, including the targeted use of Google Ads and our Cyber4Summer campaign, an audience of 864k people was reached across the UK and Northern Ireland.

Set out below is an example of a long-term UK-wide civil recovery investigation with links to Northern Ireland that is now nearing conclusion.

- **Properties worth an estimated £17 million have been recovered** following our investigations into a prolific organised crime group. The NCA conducted four linked civil recovery investigations over an eight-and-a-half-year period into dozens of individuals who were suspected of financial or familial links to drug dealers in the Midlands. NCA officers established that the properties were acquired using the proceeds of crime from heroin importation, fraud and money laundering. The criminals in this instance had been using family members and associates to hold properties on their behalf in an attempt to conceal their source of funds. A total of 59 properties were recovered with the majority being private residential properties, which were rented out, in

<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.

Birmingham. Three further properties were located in Bangor in Northern Ireland.

It is important to recognise that this success is due to strong collaboration between the NCA and PSNI; with the NCA adopting the first civil investigation into this OCG following a referral from PSNI in December 2011. This initial investigation led to the NCA recovering 11 properties and cash totalling £1.75m in January 2017; after the two subjects and their associates failed to refute allegations that the cash and assets were the proceeds of crime. In October 2016, a second civil investigation resulted in the NCA recovering 11 properties valued at £1.8 million from two other subjects and their associates. The two businessmen were believed to be laundering money for the group. Two properties in Birmingham worth £900,000 were then recovered following a court order in July 2018. A further recovery order was granted in November 2018, for 33 properties, with a total value of £12.5m; and in June 2019, a final recovery order was granted for two further properties in Birmingham. **The NCA is in the process of selling the last of these properties with the proceeds from the sales being paid into the public purse.**

## Impact in Northern Ireland

Those who undermine the UK's economy, integrity, infrastructure and institutions							
Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	1	0	1	1	2	3	▲
Moderate	11	0	11	8	1	9	▼
Minor	63	2	65	21	4	25	▼
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>37</b>	▼

Figure 7: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland, October to September 2018/19 and 2019/20

There has been an overall **reduction** in NCA disruptive activity in this area over the last 12 month period, although there have been **3 incidents recorded as having a major impact**. It should be noted that in addition to these disruptions, where an impact on Northern Ireland has been specifically designated, there have been an additional 32 disruptions against these threats in the last 12 months; further assessed as having a global impact. These are predominantly cyber disruptions that cannot be attributed to any specific geography but, by implication, are likely to have had impact on Northern Ireland. An example of this from Q2 relates to the arrest of two subjects with links to the moderator of a dark web criminal marketplace. The moderator had been arrested previously as part of an NCA National Cyber Crime Unit operation and the website was closed down. One of the subjects arrested in September is believed to have close links with the moderator and involved in phishing campaigns against marketplace users all over the world; leading to the **theft of hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of cryptocurrency**. His arrest has **prevented further losses to victims** and **severely limited his capability to engage in further phishing campaigns**.

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In Q2 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. **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 EU Programme Body which was discovered when a staff member logged into a personal VPN when working from home and accessed multiple company servers. After logging into each server, a ransom note message was displayed which stated that all company files had been encrypted.
  - A ransomware attack on a hardware fittings company in mid-July. The company maintains multiple servers and over 300 computers on which approximately 50 systems run, and the ransomware initially rendered the victim's entire network inoperable.

### *Economic Crime*

- Operation PUMPLESS is the NCA-led investigation into allegations of **fraud, bribery** and **corruption** arising from the sale of the Republic of Ireland's, National Asset Management Agency's (NAMA), Northern Ireland loan book. The property loan book was valued at around £4billion and was subsequently sold to a US-based company for £1.23billion. This investigation is vast in scale and has been running since July 2015. Two case files have been submitted to prosecutors to date, including a voluminous main file reporting eight suspects. In August 2020, the Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland issued a directive in relation to offences reported. One subject will be charged with fraud by failure to disclose and fraud by false representation. Another will be charged with fraud by false representation, one count of making an article for use in fraud and two counts of concealing, disguising or transferring criminal property. This relates to a so called multi-million-pound success fee payment made to a

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Belfast based Solicitors firm. This is an ongoing investigation and further submissions of evidence will be delivered in due course.

- The NCA's Civil Recovery and Tax team are continuing to pursue assets acquired with the proceeds of crime, both in conjunction with our partners in the Paramilitary Crime Taskforce and as part of the Agency's core business within Northern Ireland. This relates to six live investigations that cannot be commented on in great detail at this classification; however, we can share that this work is aimed at targeting the proceeds of drugs criminality, extortion, illegal money lending, excise evasion and other profits associated with participation in criminal and paramilitary activity. Three of these investigations are assessed at the second highest priority on the agency's priority matrix (P2).
- Our UK National Central Office (UKNCO) for Counterfeit Currency has processed and analysed **47 seizures** submitted by PSNI this period. The UKNCO further assisted with 16 witness statement requests to support prosecutions and investigations. Direct support was also provided in September 2020 when it was identified that counterfeit £20 polymer Danske Bank notes and Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) notes were circulating within Northern Ireland. Liaison is ongoing with PSNI in the affected areas – Carrickfergus and Belfast - to secure intelligence around the production and distribution of these notes. It would also appear that the Bank of Ireland polymer £20 note has also been counterfeited as of the beginning of October 2020; albeit no notes have been received at the UKNCO. This has implications for Northern Irish commercial issuers and will impact upon the banks and members of the public. The UKNCO will be working with PSNI to tackle this.
- The NCA's Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT) has been supporting a PSNI investigation into an OCG involved in drugs and firearms importation and the subsequent money laundering. In Q2, three accounts previously not known to the case team were identified through JMLIT and a new line of enquiry overseas was identified. Furthermore, three Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) orders have been granted in relation to the subjects of this JMLIT request.
- The NCA's UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU) disseminated **23 terrorist finance-related Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs)** to PSNI. The UKFIU also allocated **186 Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML)<sup>5</sup> requests** to PSNI and NCA CRT Belfast for advice. This represents a **27% increase** from the previous quarter's 147 requests. The unit also issued six international requests on behalf of PSNI, in relation to the importation of drugs, fraud, money laundering and counterfeiting. In September, the UKFIU fast-tracked a SAR to PSNI in relation to an elderly vulnerable person and PSNI has initiated an investigation into potential fraud/theft.

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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.

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# Those who exploit the vulnerable

## Across the UK

The NCA has a core role in detecting and taking 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 October 2019 and September 2020, we recorded 626 disruptions against these threats, a **7% increase** compared with the preceding period.

Those who exploit the vulnerable							
Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	12	8	20	18	9	27	▲
Moderate	141	31	172	144	60	204	▲
Minor	324	69	393	274	121	395	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>626</b>	▲

Figure 8: NCA Disruption Volumes, October to September 2018/19 and 2019/20

Two examples of our activity that had a 'borderless' impact are as follows:

- The NCA has been running the **Online Safety at Home Campaign** which began a day after the lockdown was announced by the UK Government. This was in response to a potential impact on children and young people's education, and their increased vulnerability to online harms. The Education Team within our Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) command created a tailored and co-ordinated response to ensure that online safety education was not lost. Every two weeks, activity packs for children and young people, and advice for professionals, parents and carers, were launched and disseminated through our professional network and via social media channels; ensuring they reached children and young people at home with their families. In addition, five 15-minute online safety activity sheets were created for different age groups, focussing on social media; alongside short films for parents and carers, introducing them to Thinkuknow<sup>6</sup> and providing key messages for keeping their children safe. Feedback from parents and carers indicated that the campaigns caused them to change their online safety habits and talk to their children about the potential risks; encouraging them to seek help if they need it. The

<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.

national campaign reached over **100,000 visits** to our website and, the activity packs and parent help sheets, were downloaded nearly **15,000 times**.

- A new unit of UK and French law enforcement officers have been working together to tackle organised immigration crime; arresting almost **100 suspected people smugglers** in France since July 2020. The Joint Intelligence Cell (JIC) has also played a part in stopping around 500 migrants from making the crossing in small boats. UK officers in the JIC come from the National Crime Agency and Immigration Enforcement working side by side with their French counterparts. In the last two months at least four boats have been prevented from departing from French beaches as a direct result of our intelligence; while a number of suspected people smugglers have been identified for investigation. Of the 98 arrested at least **10 have already been convicted** in France, with the others awaiting trial.

## Impact in Northern Ireland

Those who exploit the vulnerable							
Disruption Assessment	Oct 18 - Sep 19		R12	Oct 19 - Sep 20		R12	▲ ▼
	Lead	Support	Total	Lead	Support	Total	
Major	0	0	0	1	0	1	▲
Moderate	4	1	5	9	0	9	▲
Minor	1	0	1	9	2	11	▲
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>21</b>	▲

Figure 9: NCA Disruptions with Impact in Northern Ireland, October to September 2018/19 and 2019/20

NCA disruptive activity assessed as impacting in Northern Ireland, has increased almost four-fold in the last 12 months. There have also been an additional 18 disruptions against these threats in the last 12 months where the impact has been assessed as global. These are predominantly online CSA disruptions where the exact geographic impact is difficult to ascertain but, by implication, these are likely to have had an impact on Northern Ireland.

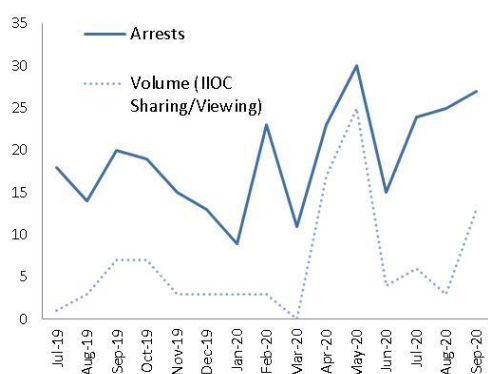


Figure 10: IIOC offences vs IIOC Arrests

**Online CSA** has been brought into sharp focus by the effects of lockdown as offending has migrated onto the internet. There was a corresponding spike in offences that the Agency responded; establishing a number of operations targeting high-harm online methodologies such as sexual grooming, blackmail, indecent image creation and distribution, and other offences that have impacted on hundreds of victims across the UK.

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Activity explicitly impacting Northern Ireland during Q2 includes:

### **Child Abuse**

- The NCA continues to run a project seeking to identify real world CSA offenders operating on the **Dark Web**. During Q2, two disseminations have been made to PSNI following the successful de-anonymisation of suspects. A third case, linked to this project, was investigated by NCA officers based in Belfast leading to the arrest of a 34 year old male in August. The male does not live at the identified subscriber address but frequently visits and brings a laptop. Twelve digital devices were seized for forensic analysis and two children (aged 5 and 6) have been safeguarded.
- **15 arrests** were reported by PSNI following disseminations from the NCA Child Sexual Abuse Referrals Bureau (CSA RB). A further seven suspects have attended voluntarily for interview. 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 Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) in the US. The CSA RB made 77 disseminations to PSNI during Q2, compared with 127 disseminations in the previous quarter.
- A spin-off operation from an investigation into the distribution of indecent images of children (IIOC) using a sophisticated file sharing platform, led to the identification of an account being used to transfer illegal files. NCA officers carried out a search of a dwelling in Northern Ireland and arrested one person in early September 2020; 15 electronic devices were seized for examination and one child was safeguarded.
- As previously reported, 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 examination has identified 96 videos of IIOC on the subject's mobile phone. The subject returned for interview in September and was charged with possessing IIOC. A Sexual Offender's Prevention Order has been obtained through Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland and will be finalised once the trial has been completed.
- Our UKFIU's identification of 44 SARs for fast-tracking to PSNI featured **13 SARs** relating to suspected child exploitation.
- A total of **206 Thinkuknow Ambassadors** have been trained in Northern Ireland. Each ambassador is a professional engaged in the education and wellbeing of young people and are equipped to deliver key messages and training to increase resilience towards child abuse. Two schools signed up for the Parent Information service during Q2, bringing the total in Northern Ireland to 86. This service enables school websites to directly host information provided by our CEOP department that contains advice and guidance for parents and carers.

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## *Organised Immigration Crime*

- NCA continues to work extremely closely and in collaboration with both PSNI and Essex Police following the tragedy at Purfleet; where, in October 2019, 39 Vietnamese migrants were found to have died in the back of a refrigerated container after being smuggled from Europe to the UK. The driver and key OCG members are Northern Ireland residents. NCA support includes provision of niche capabilities through the NCA International network, and the development of the wider intelligence picture around the OCGs involved. The trial in relation to this case is due to commence in Q3.
- As a result of intelligence emanating from the Purfleet investigation, the NCA pursued a Warrington-based haulier with business interests across Ireland. The investigation established this individual as a significant international facilitator concerned in smuggling illegal commodities via HGV's. Using our international capabilities, and in collaboration with PSNI and Garda Siochana, we were able to seize a quantity of cash and drugs that led to us charging this individual with conspiracy to commit offences in another country (namely, **importation of Class A drugs into Ireland**) and money laundering (totalling **1.2 Million Euros**). In September this year they pled guilty to all charges and are pending sentencing.
- Following the Essex tragedy, the Agency's National Assessments Centre (NAC) is looking to refresh its understanding of the criminal use of hauliers, and its Assessment report is due for publication in Q3. The NAC has liaised with law enforcement partners and the wider- NCA, to build upon the original intelligence and look at methodologies, operating models, routes, nationalities and the potential impact of EU Exit on this type of threat.

# Supporting partners with our Specialist Capabilities

The NCA 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 Northern Ireland 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 **122 instances** during Q2.

## **MCIS**

- Our Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) team provided advice and support to PSNI in 17 instances; deploying officers into force on **10 occasions**. The cases related to murder, sexual offences, suspicious deaths and missing persons.
- One case related to a long running investigation into deaths at the Dunmurry Care Home in Belfast. Since opening in 2014, the home has accommodated 180 residents who have additional care requirements; from general nursing needs to dementia. Following concerns, The Commissioner for Old People in Northern Ireland (COPNI) conducted a review of the home, which resulted in reports being submitted to the Secretary of Health, who referred the circumstances to the PSNI. The investigation is now well advanced, and in July, a series of virtual meetings took place with MCIS representatives to discuss support in terms of experts, investigative strategies and lines of enquiry. Further support will continue as the investigation evolves.
- Another 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 and supporting capabilities as the case continues to move towards prosecution. Further requests for support were made this quarter; specifically, in support of decision making and preparation for post-charge interviews of the parents who both remain in custody awaiting trial. National Injuries Database (NID) also provided support with a requirement for medical experts.

## ***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 Q2, the AKEU provided these services to PSNI on **62 occasions**; three in relation to kidnap, nine for blackmail and 50 concerning "sextortion" blackmail.

## ***International Crime Bureau***

- The NCA's UK International Crime Bureau (UKICB), is the UK's competent authority, acting as a conduit between law enforcement partners, both at a national and international level, managing European Arrest Warrants (EAWs). PSNI made nine arrests and three surrenders for persons sought on EAWs. Conversely, PSNI sent six cases to the NCA for onward dissemination, with five arrests and seven surrenders taking place.