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NCA

National Crime Agency

NCA Northern Ireland Performance

Q2 2018/19 (July – September 2018 inclusive)

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1. Introduction

The NCA leads the UK's fight to cut serious and organised crime (SOC), which costs the UK at least £37 billion annually. SOC threatens our critical national infrastructure and economic wellbeing, harms and exploits children and vulnerable adults, brings illicit commodities to our streets and blights our communities.

The NCA works with partners across all sectors, nationally and internationally, to protect the public by delivering a whole system response, targeting the highest harm offenders and networks, disrupting their activities, bringing them to justice and denying them access to their assets.

In Northern Ireland the NCA undertakes the full range of operational activity and provides access to partners, in particular PSNI, to its specialist capabilities and functions. NCA activity is not limited to the PSNI force area, but extends to operations outside Northern Ireland, where organised crime groups (OCGs) have an impact that spreads beyond national boundaries.

2. Overview

UK and overseas

Overall NCA activity during Quarter 2 (Q2) 2018/19 led to 314 disruptions with 271 people arrested and 65 people convicted. During this period, 34 firearms were recovered and 594 children were safeguarded. Approximately 19 tonnes of cocaine and four tonnes of cannabis were seized.

The following are recent examples to highlight the types of activity undertaken by the NCA to tackle threats which could impact on any part of the UK.

Operation SUGATE focused on a people smuggling criminal network. Seven members of the OCG, who used small boats and a jet-ski to smuggle migrants across the Channel into the UK, were sentenced to a total of 48 years and three months' imprisonment following a nine-week trial at the Old Bailey. The plot involved two Albanian organisers who attempted to illegally facilitate Albanian migrants into the UK from northern France. They worked with a Kent-based group who provided transport for the migrants, in the form of fast rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) and other maritime vessels.

Operation JUNONIA is the NCA-led investigation into a South African OCG involved in the manufacture and supply of semi-automatic firearms in south-east England. In August, officers from the NCA's Armed Operations Unit (AOU) were deployed to an industrial unit in Hailsham, East Sussex. Three men were arrested at the scene and two handguns and a quantity of ammunition were recovered. Officers also found machinery and components used in the criminal manufacture of firearms and ammunition, including a number of handguns in various stages of production. The men were charged with offences relating to the possession of firearms and remanded in custody.

Operation REDROOT has targeted a criminal network trafficking vulnerable Nigerian women to Europe. Josephine IYAMU, 51, was convicted after subjecting vulnerable Nigerian women to voodoo rituals before trafficking them to Europe and forcing them into sex work. The conviction is the first successful prosecution of a British national under the Modern Slavery Act involving victims with no connection to UK but were victimised by a UK national. She was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment.

Northern Ireland

During Q2 2018/19, **eight** disruptions were reported by the NCA as occurring in or impacting on Northern Ireland (all classed as minor¹). This is on par with the seven disruptions in Q1 and brings the year to date (April – September 2018) total to **15** (three moderate and 12 minor).

Five of these disruptions related to UK-wide cyber crime threats, whilst two of the remaining three disruptions related to Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML) requests. The final disruption related to support given to counter-terrorism policing-led Operation BIVECTOR in July 2018.

3. Paramilitary Crime Taskforce

The Paramilitary Crime Taskforce (PCTF) was established to investigate organised crime linked to paramilitary groups, to maximise disruption and, where possible, to disband them.

NCA officers within the PCTF are focused on delivering NCA niche capabilities to support PCTF partners. The NCA team is leading a criminal investigation into an OCG importing Class A and B drugs into Northern Ireland from mainland Europe. Part of the drug proceeds funds one of the main paramilitary groups targeted by the PCTF.

Operations MICROSCOPAL and MIDWIFERY are NCA activity under the umbrella of PCTF Operation MOILE - a PSNI referral focusing on senior members of a loyalist paramilitary group believed to be involved in moneylending and drug supply. Following the execution of search and seizure warrants at the individuals' addresses last quarter, the key respondents have now been interviewed. Cash seized in relation to Operation MIDWIFERY has been detained whilst its provenance is investigated.

4. Vulnerabilities

The Vulnerabilities threats comprise child sexual abuse and exploitation, modern slavery and human trafficking, and organised immigration crime.

4.1 Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE)

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the PSNI and the NCA was revised and signed on 14 August. It covers arrangements for the referral of CSAE investigations to the NCA from PSNI and requests for NCA operational assistance from the PSNI. The MoU sets out protocols for the framework under which support will be provided. It does not alter the general oversight arrangements to which both the PSNI and NCA are subject.

In September, under Operation SORAGE, a suspect appeared at Belfast Magistrates' Court and was charged with four counts of making an indecent image of a child

¹ Disruption definitions:

Major	Significant, long term disruptive impact on the capability of the OCG or individual and/or similar impact on the community, criminal market or NCS threat/vulnerability.
Moderate	Noticeable, medium- term disruptive impact on the capability of the OCG or individual and/or similar impact on the community, criminal market or NCS threat/vulnerability.
Minor	Minimal, short term disruptive impact on the capability of the OCG or individual and/or similar impact on the community, criminal market or NCS threat/vulnerability.

(IIOC). An update on the prosecution of this individual will be provided in the next edition of this report.

Operation FLUTY is a joint investigation by NCA and PSNI targeting individuals possessing and distributing IIOC. The operation is nearing conclusion with one defendant awaiting prosecution. At a preliminary inquiry hearing in August, the matter was transferred to Belfast Crown Court. The subject has intimated guilty pleas to all charges except one, which relates to extreme pornography. The judge adjourned the matter for the prosecution and defence to come to an agreement in relation to the disputed charge. A further adjournment for pre-sentence reports is anticipated.

The **NCA CSE Referrals Bureau (CSE RB)** is the central point in the NCA for the receipt of referrals from industry of information relating to online child sexual exploitation, predominantly via the US National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). During Q2 2018/19, the CSE RB made 30 disseminations to PSNI, which compares with 47 in Q1 2018/19.

The **NCA CEOP Education Team** attended the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) e-Safety Forum on 4 September. This forum discusses the latest developments, research, member activity and trends within Northern Ireland regarding online safety. The Education Team updated the forum on NCA activity, developments and resources, including the new Thinkuknow resource for 4-7 year-olds, "Jessie & Friends". The team is also working with members of the forum as part of the Task and Finish Group to develop a Northern Ireland version of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCIS) *Sexting in schools and colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people*.

Two schools signed up for the Parent Information service² during this quarter. To date, there are approximately 160 trained CEOP ambassadors in Northern Ireland.

4.2 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT)

There were no requests from PSNI for tactical advice from the NCA Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) this quarter.

The MSHTU continues to have a seat on the Department of Justice Northern Ireland (DOJNI) Organised Crime Task Force – a sub-group focusing on the MSHT threat and convening on a quarterly basis.

In Q2 2018/19 PSNI participated in phase 12 of Project AIDANT, a period of NCA-led operational intensification focusing this time on child trafficking. PSNI carried out proactive intelligence development to identify vulnerable potential child victims with a view to conducting safeguarding visits. An investigation into trafficking allegations regarding a child who had been physically assaulted by suspects in order to force his/her parents into labour exploitation is ongoing.

The AIDANT 13 intensification activity took place between 17 and 30 September and focused on sexual exploitation. PSNI's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit participated, along with other UK forces and agencies. Four people were arrested for immigration offences and deported from Northern Ireland.

² The Parent Information Service is part of ThinkuKnow - an education programme developed by the CEOP Command, providing high quality education about sex, relationships and the internet aimed at reducing the vulnerability of children and young people to sexual abuse and exploitation.

A continuous professional development day for officers in the Public Protection Branch was held in order to improve the National Referrals Mechanism process for minors.

4.3 Organised Immigration Crime (OIC)

The threat posed by OIC and its impact on Northern Ireland continues to be assessed and actively investigated by NCA Project INVIGOR.

During July, counter-terrorism policing undertook a multi-agency intensification under Operation BIVECTOR, involving Border Force and the NCA, which explored the threat of potential exploitation of the common travel area (CTA) by individuals involved in terrorism and SOC. The details of the findings from this intensification are still being compiled and will be reported in the next quarter.

4.4 Vulnerabilities – General

The **NCA UK Missing Persons Unit (UKMPU)** received nine missing person reports (comprising three high-risk, five medium-risk and one low-risk) from PSNI during Q2 2018/19. Of the nine reports, seven remain open (two of which are deemed high-risk). The UKMPU also received one unidentified body report, which has since been identified.

The **NCA UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU)** identified ten suspicious activity reports (SARs) relating to suspected vulnerable persons, eight relating to suspected child exploitation and one relating to suspected human trafficking for fast-tracking to PSNI.

5. Prosperity

The Prosperity threats comprise cyber crime, money laundering, bribery, corruption and sanctions evasion, fraud and other economic crime.

5.1 Money Laundering

On 23 August, an individual was stopped by Border Force officers at Belfast International Airport, attempting to board a flight to Spain with approximately €23,000 in his luggage. The individual was subsequently charged by the NCA with money laundering offences, namely attempting to transfer criminal property out of the jurisdiction, and was remanded in custody. He is resident in the Republic of Ireland with significant links to drugs importation.

On 5 July an individual was stopped at Belfast International Airport travelling to Amsterdam with €4,000 cash in his possession. The cash was seized under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) 2002 and a forfeiture hearing was held on 18 October. The €4,000 was forfeited and the individual was given 30 days to appeal.

During Q2 2018/19, there were a total of 69 Defence Against Money Laundering (DAML) requests under POCA legislation allocated to the PSNI by the **NCA's UK Financial Intelligence Unit (UKFIU)** for advice, based on the location of the suspect, victim or other geographical factors. They constituted part of a total of 7,219 DAML requests handled by the UKFIU during this period. The UKFIU exercised its power under POCA to refuse five and grant 48 of these requests. The UKFIU issued four international requests on behalf of PSNI relating to drugs/money laundering and fraud investigations.

5.2 Fraud and Other Economic Crime

At a hearing at Downpatrick Crown Court on 19 September, seven defendants pleaded guilty to conspiracy offences involving counterfeit currency. The total loss comprised £560,900 and €438,320 from the counterfeiting of Ulster Bank and Bank of Ireland £20 and €20 notes respectively. Banknote counterfeiting equipment had been found during a search of premises by the PSNI in Northern Ireland in March 2015. The **NCA UK National Central Office for Counterfeit Currency (UKNCO)** provided substantial assistance to the PSNI including advice, coordination of expert evidence, and analysis of counterfeit notes. Sentencing will take place on 16 November.

During Q1 2018/19, the PSNI submitted 32 counterfeit currency seizures to the UKNCO for processing and analysis. Witness statements were provided by UKNCO to support police investigations or prosecutions for 15 counterfeit currency seizures.

5.3 Cyber Crime

NCA National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU)

The NCCU provided support to PSNI in the following cases:

- A reported DDoS³ attack against a local administrative body. The NCCU provided oversight to determine if this was linked to other recent DDoS attacks against similar bodies.
- An NCCU forensic examiner to support a PSNI investigation into a data breach/network intrusion which company's servers.
- Deconfliction checks in relation to a potential paramilitary activist.
- A PSNI investigation into a spear phishing⁴ incident at the Indian outlet of a company based in Northern Ireland.

6. Commodities

The Commodities threats comprise firearms and drugs. The NCA has a mandated responsibility to investigate the importation of illicit goods such as drugs, weapons and firearms to the UK, as set out in the Customs and Excise Management Act (CEMA) 1979. The NCA collaborates with PSNI to ensure that associated intelligence and investigative opportunities are developed and exploited where the importations are identified as being destined for Northern Ireland.

6.1 Firearms and offensive weapons

No NCA operational activity reported in Q2 2018/19.

6.2 Drugs

On 31 July NCA officers charged a Portuguese national with the illegal importation of a quantity of cocaine following his arrest by Border Force officers having travelled from Faro to Belfast City Airport. The individual had swallowed 35 capsules - approximately 280 grams - of cocaine. He was remanded in custody and the investigation continues. The case is listed at Laganside Magistrates Court on 26 October.

Asset Denial

³A Dedicated Denial of Service cyber attack seeks to make a machine or network unavailable to its intended users

⁴ Fraudulent practice of sending emails from an apparently known or trusted sender to seek confidential information

The **NCA Proceeds of Crime Centre (POCC)** has provided regulator guidance on diverse POCA matters arising from operational cases, including liaison with the Ministry of Justice to ensure the implementation and publication of some aspects of criminal finance legislation applicable to Northern Ireland.

7. Other Activity

NCA Major Crime Investigative Support (MCIS) provided advice and support to PSNI on 27 instances during Q2 2018/19, in cases including suspicious deaths, non-accidental injuries, rapes and murders.

There was one kidnap case relating to Northern Ireland reported to the **NCA Anti Kidnap and Extortion Unit** during Q2 2018/19. No demand or deadline was received and the hostage was subsequently located, having been assaulted. 48 blackmail cases involving sextortion were notified in the period.

The **UKFIU** disseminated eight counter-terrorism related SARs to PSNI in Q2 2018/19.

The **NCA Central Services Unit** provides, as part of the UK Protected Persons Service (UKPPS), operational support to the PSNI Protected Persons Unit which is aligned to the UKPPS. In this quarter, the UKPPS provided 10 new instances of support on behalf of PSNI.

The **NCA UK International Crime Bureau** processes European Arrest Warrants (EAWs) for law enforcement agencies within the UK and EU. During the reporting period there were ten arrests and four surrenders made by PSNI for persons sought by EU partners on an EAW. Two new cases were received for persons wanted by PSNI, with seven arrests and two surrenders.

A subject sought by PSNI in relation to a grievous bodily harm offence was arrested in Spain following the dissemination of intelligence via the NCA's international liaison officer network. Following receipt of the EAW at the end of July, the subject was arrested on 23 August and surrendered on 25 September.