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Findings are produced by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. For further copies contact:

Communication Development Unit  
Room 264,  
Home Office,  
50 Queen Anne's Gate,  
London SW1H 9AT.

Tel: 020 7273 2084  
Fax: 020 7222 0211  
publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

## Tackling organised vehicle crime: the role of NCIS

Rick Brown, Ronald V. Clarke, Bernard Rix and James Sheptycki

In 2000, the Home Office funded the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) to develop an Organised Vehicle Crime Programme. The programme, run by the Organised Vehicle Crime Section (OVCS) in NCIS, consisted of three projects set up to tackle 'ringing' and 'cloning', organised motorcycle theft and the export of stolen vehicles. 'Ringing' refers to the theft and subsequent recycling of a stolen vehicle back into the legitimate market by changing the identity of a vehicle, thereby making it appear to be legitimate. 'Cloning' is a method of ringing a vehicle, which involves re-registering a vehicle by copying the identity of a similar (non-stolen) vehicle already on the road. These projects were completed in December 2002, although additional Home Office funding in 2003 allowed the Organised Vehicle Crime Programme to develop into new areas.

### Key points

- Between January 2001 and December 2002, OVCS received 334 'intelligence logs' i.e., pieces of information (raw data) and intelligence (processed data). 711 logs were disseminated by OVCS to law enforcement agencies – more intelligence logs were disseminated than received because much of the disseminated intelligence arose from research undertaken by OVC officers.
- Between July 2001 and December 2002, 42 law enforcement organisations received intelligence logs from OVCS.
- 45 intelligence 'outputs' – often reports that analysed intelligence logs – were disseminated under the auspices of the OVC Programme. 59% were estimated to have been acted upon by those receiving them.
- During the course of the evaluation, 19 arrests resulting in charges were made by law enforcement organisations. A further 18 were arrested and bailed pending further enquiries.
- 550 vehicles were recovered in police operations with which the OVC Programme was associated.
- An estimated 713 vehicle thefts were prevented, estimated to be valued at £2.7 million.
- Three case studies which tracked the crime reduction impact of operations each showed a positive effect, although the extent of the impact varied.
- Cost-benefit analysis (taking account of police overtime costs) conducted on two operations showed contrasting results – both led to vehicle crime reduction but the cost of one far exceeded the value of vehicle crime reduced. The second resulted in a positive cost-benefit ratio – each £1 saved cost 23p to achieve.

**Table 1 Breakdown of expenditure on each of the three projects funded under the Organised Vehicle Crime Programme, January 2001 to December 2002**

Project	NCIS contribution	Home Office contribution	Total	% of total
Project Contrail: organised motorcycle theft	£70,746	£262,727	£333,473	32%
Project Lucifer: ringing and cloning	£66,461	£247,687	£314,147	31%
Project Verdun: export of stolen vehicles	£97,708	£283,633	£381,341	37%
Total	£234,914	£794,047	£1,028,961	100%

Note: Totals do not always add up as figures are rounded to the nearest £.

### Abbreviations

NCIS: National Criminal Intelligence Service

OVC: Organised Vehicle Crime

OVCS: Organised Vehicle Crime Section

The costs to NCIS of running the OVC Programme between January 2001 and December 2002 amounted to just under £1,029,000 (Table 1). The costs were divided between the three areas of work:

- organised motorcycle theft (Project Contrail)
- ringing and cloning (Project Lucifer)
- export of stolen vehicles (Project Verdun).

A range of methods were used for the evaluation, including:

- interviews with officers in OVCS
- interviews with police officers in a number of police forces in England, Scotland and Wales
- a telephone survey of all forces in England and Wales
- a postal survey of motorcycle theft report recipients
- monitoring intelligence flows and tracking 'intelligence outputs' through to activity by law enforcement organisations.

### Intelligence flows

Monitoring forms were introduced to record information both about the intelligence logs received by the Section and those it disseminated. In the following analysis, no distinction is made between types of intelligence log and no analysis is made of the quality, or utility of the intelligence provided. Nevertheless, this analysis provided an indication of the flow of intelligence logs through OVCS.

#### Intelligence logs received

Between January 2001 and December 2002, 334 intelligence logs were received by OVCS from 45 law

enforcement organisations, of which 184 (55%) were received by Project Verdun, 91 (27%) by Project Lucifer and 59 (18%) by Project Contrail. On average, 14 intelligence logs were received per month. Many of these logs were the result of specific requests made to police forces for items of information. OVCS officers felt that the level of intelligence received by the unit could have been higher.

Interviews with 38 officers (including Inspectors, Sergeants, Constables and analysts) in four police forces identified a number of possible reasons for the relatively light in-flow of intelligence logs. Among the most frequently cited reasons were:

- **Low priority given to organised vehicle crime** – while vehicle crime is often a force priority, the focus is usually on tackling higher volume, but less serious, thefts from vehicles and temporary thefts of vehicles.
- **Absence of level 2 and 3 intelligence** (see *Methodological note*) – good intelligence on organised vehicle crime was reported to be relatively rare. The focus on Level 1 criminality could prevent the development of intelligence at the Basic Command Unit level.
- **Capacity to deal with intelligence at lower levels** – intelligence on organised vehicle crime may be addressed at a local Basic Command Unit or force level, without the need for involvement from a central NCIS unit.
- **NCIS as an intelligence 'black hole'** – this was a label given to NCIS as a whole. There was a perception among many of those interviewed that when intelligence was supplied to NCIS, no use was made of it and that therefore there was no point in supplying it in the first place.

#### Intelligence logs disseminated

Between January 2001 and December 2002, 711 intelligence logs were disseminated to law enforcement agencies by OVCS, averaging 36 per month. Between July 2001 and December 2002, 42 organisations received intelligence logs. Organisations that sent intelligence logs to

**Table 2 Intelligence outputs generated by the OVC Programme, their cost and the extent to which they resulted in crime reduction activity**

Intelligence output	Number disseminated	Total cost	Average cost per output disseminated	Number resulting in crime reduction activity	% resulting in crime reduction activity
Strategic assessments	12	£61,041	£5,087	n/a	n/a
Target profiles	11	£139,454	£12,678	3	27
Operational support	6	£25,186	£4,198	6	100
Operational orders	5	£22,536	£4,507	5	100
Problem profiles	3	£9,568	£3,189	2	67
Tactical assessments	2	£1,767	£883	0	0
Other outputs	6	£1,605	£268	n/a	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>£261,157</b>	<b>£5,803*</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>59**</b>

Notes: \* This figure represents the average cost per output. \*\*The denominator for this percentage was 27 – based on 45 (all outputs) minus 18 strategic and ‘other’ outputs where the activity could not be measured.

OVCS were in turn more likely to receive them, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between the Section and the police forces with whom they worked.

#### Intelligence outputs

The National Intelligence Model (NIM) specifies a number of intelligence ‘products’, including strategic assessments, tactical assessments, target profiles and problem profiles. These categories have been used in association with other documents produced (e.g. operational orders/operational support). As a wider classification has been used here, the term ‘output’, rather than ‘product’ has been used, in order to prevent confusion with the NIM product categories.

OVCS produced 45 intelligence ‘outputs’ which were usually detailed reports that often combined information from different intelligence sources and provided a level of analysis not usually found in individual intelligence logs. Table 2 shows that strategic assessments (reports that provided an analysis of a particular form of criminality) accounted for a quarter of outputs disseminated. Target profiles (reports on specific individuals/groups involved in criminal activity) accounted for a further quarter of intelligence outputs disseminated. Much of the work generated under the programme was tactical in nature. Indeed, target profiles, operational orders and operational support were all tactical outputs that focused on detecting individual offenders. Between them, these accounted for 22 (49%) of the outputs disseminated.

As an intelligence-generating organisation, NCIS relies on other law enforcement organisations to act on its intelligence. Therefore, the evaluation included follow-up interviews with recipients of intelligence outputs (at least three months after it had been disseminated) to determine what action had been taken. During the evaluation period, 16 (59%) of the applicable 27 intelligence outputs (see Notes in Table 2) were identified as being acted on by police forces. All of the

operational orders and operational support provided were acted upon. This is because these outputs were directly associated with law enforcement operations. In contrast, neither of the tactical assessments was acted upon.

Table 2 also shows that only three of the 11 target profiles were acted upon during the life of the evaluation. These were also the most expensive form of output, at more than twice the average cost of an intelligence output. Interviews with recipients of target profiles revealed that these were generally felt to be of a high quality, providing accurate information on criminal enterprises. However, a number of possible reasons for the lack of action on target profiles were identified, including:

- **Changing clientele** – the natural home for OVCS intelligence outputs would have been specialist Stolen Vehicle Units in police forces but a telephone survey of all police forces in England and Wales showed that Units had declined from 18 to 13 during the life of the OVC Programme.
- **Local nature of policing/a lack of priority given to tackling organised vehicle crime** – only one of four target profiles disseminated to Basic Command Units was acted on. Resource implications and the Basic Command Unit’s primary focus on Level 1 criminality (see Methodological note) means that acting on an NCIS intelligence report (which may have little impact on local detection rates) may be difficult to justify for a Basic Command Unit Commander.
- **Content of target profiles** – much of the intelligence analysis relied on sources that could be gathered and analysed centrally. There was often a delay in obtaining, analysing and reporting this information to the recipient police force. On receiving a target profile, some police forces also felt a need to reproduce all the information presented in the profile to confirm its current relevance.

**Table 3 Outcome related achievements of the Organised Vehicle Crime Programme, January 2001 to December 2002**

Intermediate outcome	Project Contrail (organised motorcycle theft)	Project Lucifer (ringing and cloning)	Project Verdun (export of stolen vehicles)	Total
Number arrested and charged	2	5	12	19
Number arrested and bailed pending further enquiries	2	14	2	18
Number receiving custodial sentence	1	4	2	7
Number receiving other sentence	1	1	0	2
Number of vehicles recovered	56	219	275	550

- **Cold calling with target profiles** – although agreement in principle to act on intelligence may have been sought by OVCS officers, the extent to which these forces were ‘signed up’ as full partners in such work appeared to be limited. Once the target profile was ready to be disseminated, OVCS officers had to effectively ‘sell’ it to the recipient police force.

### Change of emphasis

Due to the difficulties of encouraging police forces to take action on the tactical intelligence reports they were given, OVCS transformed its style of operation. In the autumn of 2002, the programme began to focus on providing more support for ‘live’ operations, rather than producing detailed documents. This involved using OVCS officers’ specialist vehicle crime knowledge and analytical capabilities on a real time basis to help shape vehicle crime investigations being undertaken by police forces. As fieldwork for the evaluation was completed in February 2003, the extent to which the work of OVCS shifted in emphasis and the impact this had on its way of working could not be assessed.

### Outcomes

As funding for OVCS was intended to assist with meeting the Home Office vehicle crime reduction target, the outcomes examined are in terms of impact, rather than ‘process’ developments (such as assisting DVLA to implement the National Intelligence Model).

Table 3 shows the outcome related achievements by the end of the evaluation. Of the 19 arrested and charged (Project Verdun had the highest number with 12), court cases had been concluded on nine. All pleaded guilty or were found guilty. Six received custodial sentences and two community service orders. One received a supervision order, but later received custody for offences related to outstanding warrants. 550 vehicles were recovered (56 for Project Contrail, 219 for Lucifer and 275 for Verdun).

However, it should be noted that the programme’s benefits may be understated as there may be further successful outcomes after completion of the evaluation.

### Crime reduction

The achievements outlined above might all be described as intermediate outcomes – they do not relate to actual crime reduction but are potential mechanisms by which a reduction in crime could be brought about. Four case studies were carried out where crime reduction activities associated with the work of the OVC Programme had been undertaken. Table 4 summarises three of these studies. It should be noted that assessing the impact on crime was difficult, partly due to how the added value of OVCS activity can be determined. In some cases, it was unclear whether a local police force would have acted any differently had no intelligence been supplied. Also, intelligence outputs had to be tracked to assess whether any crime reduction activity had been undertaken by law enforcement organisations and if this had resulted in actual crime reduction. The three case studies shown in Table 4 were:

- **Operation A** – OVCS received intelligence that well known motorcycle thieves from a nearby city intended to target a motorcycle event in a seaside town. OVCS produced an operational order for the policing of the event and assisted the force during the event. Intelligence suggested that vehicle crime would increase as a result of the event. That this did not happen was attributed to the additional crime prevention and detection effort made by the police.
- **Operation B** – two problem profiles were produced that linked a number of stolen vehicles. The subsequent investigation by a police force stolen vehicle unit identified a criminal enterprise involved in stealing and re-selling cars – predominantly Ford Fiestas and Ford Mondeos. The operation resulted in the arrest and charge of five individuals involved in ringing and selling the stolen vehicles. All pleaded guilty – four received custodial sentences; one received a community service order.

**Table 4 Impact of vehicle crime associated with case studies**

Operational name	Operation A	Operation B	Operation C
Nature of criminality	Motorcycle thieves from neighbouring force area targeting a motorcycle event	Theft, ringing and cloning and re-sale of mass market cars	Theft and export of cars and vans to West Africa
OVCS output	Operational order/support	Problem profile	Target profile
Cost of OVCS output	£4,507	£6,378	£12,678
Cost of police operation	£15,000	£221,000	£599,000
Impact of operation	Level of motorcycle theft (which was low to start with) remained unchanged. Action was taken prior to the event is thought to have reduced thefts	17 fewer thefts of Ford Mondeos in the year following the operation	713 fewer thefts of Nissan Cabstars, Nissan Pick-Ups and Mercedes 200 Series vehicles

- **Operation C** – involved the large-scale theft of vans and cars from seven police force areas. These were gathered at a salvage yard, loaded onto lorry trailers and exported to West Africa, via a nearby port. OVCS coordinated the exchange of intelligence between police forces and produced a target profile. The operation, run by a local Basic Command Unit, resulted in the arrest and charge of 17 individuals (two were named in the OVCS target profile). The same two individuals both later pleaded guilty and each received a custodial sentence.

### Cost-effectiveness

A cost-effectiveness analysis was undertaken on the work of OVCS and on two of the case studies. Analysis of daily timesheets maintained by each member of OVCS staff allowed an estimate of the total amount of time devoted to each intelligence output to be calculated. Similar exercises were conducted in relation to case studies, Operation B and Operation C. The overall costs were calculated on the basis of analysis of timesheets/interviews with officers. It should be noted that a large percentage of costs relating to each operation were incurred by police overtime costs and not directly by NCIS.

For Operation B, 779 days of police time were estimated to have been used at a cost of £221,000. £6,000 was added for the two problem profiles produced by OVCS, giving a total cost of £227,000. The value of the 17 prevented thefts of Ford Mondeos was estimated to be £30,000. The negative cost-benefit ratio was that £7.56 was spent to each £1 saved.

Operation C was more resource intensive with almost 20,000 hours of police time, at a cost of £599,000. The total cost including the cost of producing the target profile was estimated to be £612,000. The estimated value of the 713 vehicle thefts prevented was £2.7 million giving a

positive cost-benefit ratio – £1 saved in terms of crime prevented, costing 23 pence to achieve (this may have been due to the larger scale of the operation).

### Conclusions and recommendations

There were a number of factors that inhibited the flow of intelligence into OVCS and that limited the utility of the tactical intelligence outputs that were disseminated. These factors made the processing and distribution of vehicle crime intelligence a relatively expensive practice. The shift by the OVCS to more of a support/service provider role, rather than the 'report provider' role it performed in the early stages of the programme was a response to these pressures.

The study showed that operations undertaken by law enforcement organisations, in which OVCS intelligence played a role, resulted in a number of arrests, convictions and vehicle recoveries. The extent to which these proved cost-effective in terms of crime reduction varied.

NCIS is an intelligence agency and as such relies on operational teams from police forces, the National Crime Squad and HM Customs and Excise to arrest and prosecute the subjects of target profiles. During the period of review, the OVCS invested time and money in developing target profiles that were subsequently 'not actioned' by police forces (usually due to conflicting priorities within the force). It is therefore recommended that an operational team is identified at an early stage of any NCIS target profile development in order to ensure that it will be actioned before significant resources are committed.

### Methodological note

The National Intelligence Model (NCIS, 2000) divides criminality into three levels: Level 1 describes local issues, usually dealt with by a Basic Command Unit or small force area; Level 2 describes cross-border issues, either affecting a number of Basic Command Units or a group of forces; Level 3 describes serious and organised crime at the national and international level.

Brand and Price (2000) calculated that the average cost of vehicle theft is £4,800. This included an average vehicle value of £3,800 and £1,000 when other costs are factored in. However, an average of £1,200 is retained in the event of the vehicle being recovered. The average value of the vehicles stolen in Operation B was £1,125, but it was assumed that none of these would be recovered had it not been for the operation. This led to the following calculation:  $(4800 - 3800 + 1200 + 1125) \times 9 = £29,925$ . The same calculation was carried out for Operation C but the average cost of each vehicle was estimated to be slightly higher.

### References

Brand, S. and Price, R. (2000). *The Social and Economic Costs of Crime*. Home Office Research Study 217. London: Home Office.

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*Rick Brown is a consultant with Evidence Led Solutions. Ronald V. Clarke is Professor at Rutgers, State University of New Jersey. Bernard Rix is an independent consultant specialising in police and criminal justice matters. James Sheptycki is Associate Professor of Criminology at York University, Toronto.*