

Press release: HMRC announces top 10 prosecutions of 2018

This year's list once again demonstrates HMRC's relentless pursuit of tax criminals and shows the lengths some will go to steal money destined to support important public services.

It demonstrates the sheer diversity of crimes HMRC deals with, including stealing Gift Aid money from charities, smuggling illicit tobacco in fridge freezers, breaching weapons of mass destruction controls and buying top-end sports cars with the proceeds of crime.

From high-flying business people to tax consultants, church leaders to organised criminals, HMRC's fraud investigations have led to 671 people being convicted over the last 12 months for their part in tax crimes. In addition, HMRC has charged another 919 people and taken on 746 new criminal investigations.

This year's top 10 prosecutions include:

- [one of the UK's most wanted tax fugitives](#), who spent more than 11 years on the run and owes more than £53 million, ending up behind bars after he was caught in Canada
- [five fraudsters who falsely claimed £13 million in tax repayments](#) and facilitated around 900 bogus visa applications, and were sentenced to a total of more than 31 years in jail
- [an 8-strong tobacco smuggling gang](#) that brought more than 2 million illegal cigarettes into the North East hidden among fridge freezers – its members were jailed for a total of more than 26 years
- [a tax consultant, who fled the UK](#) before he could be arrested for masterminding a conspiracy to steal £6.9 million from construction workers' pay packets, going to prison. David Michael Hughes travelled to Chile, Dubai and Cyprus to evade justice and was eventually arrested at Heathrow airport after arriving from Istanbul
- [father and son tax fugitives](#) who are finally behind bars after being captured in Spain and extradited to the UK. The £1 million VAT fraudster son tried to avoid jail by fleeing to France in a light aircraft, while his accomplice father escaped by ferry, before they both headed to Spain
- [a company boss](#) who was jailed for trafficking fighter jet parts to Iran

in violation of weapons of mass destruction controls. Alexander George shipped military items, including Russian MiG and US F4 Phantom parts, to Iran through various companies and countries

- [the manager of a well-known male stripping troupe](#), who was sentenced in her absence for tax and benefit fraud and is behind bars after more than a year on the run
- [a church leader from Luton](#) who lied about charity donations to fraudulently claim £150,000 Gift Aid repayments, and was jailed for 4 years
- [a high-flying businessman](#) who masterminded a sophisticated £9.8 million international VAT fraud to fund his lavish lifestyle of flash cars and a luxury Spanish home, and was jailed for 9 years. Jason Butler used money from the fraud to fund his collection of supercars, including a Ferrari Fiorano FI, a Ferrari 360, a Mercedes SL350 and a Lamborghini Murcielago. He also owned a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow, a speedboat, a luxurious home in Marbella, Spain, and 96 properties in Leeds
- [a Hemel Hempstead company director](#) who funded his hobby, racing high-powered sports cars in races across Europe, through a £450,000 tax scam. Simon Atkinson was already under investigation by HMRC for anti-money laundering offences when officers unearthed the 6-figure tax fraud, which he used to finance his passion for racing Lamborghinis in competitive motor tournaments

HMRC's Fraud Investigation Service continues to bring in around £5 billion a year through civil and criminal investigations.

Mel Stride, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

HMRC's investigative teams have been working hard to crack down on tax crimes in the UK, and hold those who would cheat the public revenue to account. The range of cases in this year's list demonstrates how HMRC will always tackle fraud and can prosecute anyone who steals from the public or breaks the rules – from smugglers to potential arms dealers.

Simon York, Director of the Fraud Investigation Service, said:

As these cases show, HMRC can and will tackle the most serious tax crime and breaches of sanctions whether committed by organised criminals, professional advisors or wealthy individuals.

We remain resolute and relentless in our determination to level the

playing field and bring tax criminals to justice on behalf of the majority of citizens who pay their tax to fund vital public services.

HMRC uses the full range of both criminal and civil powers to investigate tax cheats and continues to be successful in around 90% of criminal cases it brings to trial. However, work doesn't stop there – HMRC always looks to recover the proceeds from any crime committed to secure the funds for the public purse.

[News story: Recruitment of 6 new members of the ASC](#)

Do you want to be part of a committee playing a key role in advising the government on a range of issues relating to the welfare of animals used in research?

The Animals in Science Committee are seeking 6 new members to deliver policy advice to ensure that government is best placed to maintain the highest standards in the welfare of animals used in research.

Location: Central London.

Time commitment: The expected time commitment is 10 to 15 days per year.

Remuneration: Unremunerated; however, travel and subsistence expenses will be reimbursed.

The ASC is an independent, advisory non-departmental public body that provides independent, impartial and objective advice to the Home Office on issues relating to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (as amended) and its functions under it.

As well as providing impartial and objective advice to government, the ASC also advises animal welfare and ethical review bodies on issues relating to the 1986 Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act and their functions under it. On an international level, the ASC also has a role in the exchange of information and exploring possibilities for collaboration with 'national committees for the protection of animals used for scientific purposes'.

To complement its existing skills and knowledge, the ASC is seeking up to 6 new members with demonstrable expertise in one, or more, of the following areas:

- veterinary science
- neuroscience

- industry (pharmaceutical/toxicology)
- animal technology/welfare/3Rs
- legal expertise (regulatory)

You will possess the ability to think logically and objectively in analysing complex information, from diverse sources, in order to identify key issues and make effective decisions. You will also have a clear understanding of the breadth and depth of ethical issues in relation to the use of animals in science, along with an awareness of how the views of the scientific community and the public are changing politically and socially.

This will be a 3 year appointment with the possibility of re-appointment.

Read [more information and details of how to apply](#)

The closing date for applications is 11pm, Monday 28 January 2019.

We value and promote diversity and are committed to equality of opportunity for all and appointments made on merit.

[Press release: In-cell phones for more prisons in drive to cut crime](#)

- family ties are a vital part of rehabilitation, an important link over the festive period, and ultimately help to cut the number of future victims of crime
- restricted in-cell phones will also reduce both tension on the wings and demand for the illicit mobiles which fuel violence
- roll-out is part of wider efforts to bring stability to prisons and boost inmates' prospects of rehabilitation

More prisoners will get phones in their cells to help them maintain family ties and significantly boost their chances of rehabilitation, Justice Secretary David Gauke announces today (Friday 28 December).

As families come together to celebrate Christmas and new year, the Justice Secretary unveils plans for a further £10 million roll-out of in-cell landline telephones to help prisoners preserve relationships with their own loved ones and reduce tension on prison wings.

This will ultimately improve their chances of rehabilitation and help to reduce reoffending which currently costs society £15 billion every year. The importance of family to rehabilitation is underlined by research, with studies showing that prisoners who receive family visits are 39% less likely to reoffend.

All calls on in-cell phones are recorded and can only be made to a small number of pre-approved numbers. In the event that they are suspected of being used for criminal activity, calls can be monitored, and governors have the power to remove the phones of those who have misused them.

In-cell phones allow prisoners to make calls in private at a time which fits with their families' schedules, and are currently installed in 20 prisons in England and Wales. The latest roll-out has been funded by the additional £30 million allocated to prisons in the last Budget and will allow 50 prisons to have the phones by March 2020.

As well as helping prisoners connect with their families, the phones also give them easier access to support services such as the Samaritans and MIND, therefore reducing their risk of self-harm – another major challenge for jails.

The phones help the government's wider drive to bring stability to the prison estate by reducing the tension which can arise from queuing to use communal phones and providing an alternative to illicit mobiles which fuel crime and violence.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

At this time of year more than any other we're reminded of the importance of family, and there can be few groups that this applies to more than prisoners.

In-cell telephones provide a crucial means of allowing prisoners to build and maintain family relationships, something we know is fundamental to their rehabilitation.

Introducing them to more prisons is a recognition of the contribution I believe in-cell telephones make to turning prisons into places of decency where offenders have a real chance to transform their lives.

The latest roll-out builds on the expansion of in-cell telephones announced over the summer as part of a £30 million package of measures to boost safety, security and decency across the prison estate.

A major review by Lord Farmer last year found that close ties between prisoners and key family members can significantly reduce the risk of reoffending.

Other measures taken by government to tackle mobile phones in prisons include new security measures such as body scanners and improved searching techniques – part of an additional £70 million investment in safety and decency in prisons announced this year.

The government is also supporting the Interference with Wireless Telegraphy Bill, which received Royal Assent on 20 December 2018. This legislation will

enable prisons to use interference technology to disrupt mobile telephone signals and prevent illegal use of mobiles by prisoners.

Notes to editors

- Ministry of Justice (MOJ) research shows that if a prisoner receives visits by a partner or family member (one measure of family ties) the odds of reoffending are 39% lower than for prisoners who had not received such visits.
- For more information please contact the MOJ Press Office on 0203 334 3536.

[Press release: PHE Health Harms campaign encourages smokers to quit](#)

Public Health England (PHE) has released a new film showing the devastating harms that come from smoking, and how this can be avoided by switching to an e-cigarette or using another type of quit aid.

The film has been released as part of [PHE's Health Harms campaign](#), which encourages smokers to attempt to quit this January, by demonstrating the personal harm to health from every single cigarette.

The film features smoking expert Dr Lion Shahab and Dr Rosemary Leonard, visually demonstrating the high levels of cancer-causing chemicals and tar inhaled by an average smoker over a month, compared to not smoking or using an e-cigarette.

The results of the demonstration visually illustrate the stark contrast between the impacts of smoking and vaping. Research estimates that while not risk-free, vaping is at least 95% less harmful than smoking.

Around 2.5 million adults are using e-cigarettes in England, and they have helped thousands of people successfully quit – but many smokers (44%) either believe that vaping is as harmful as smoking (22%) or don't know that vaping poses much lower risks to health (22%).

Professor John Newton, Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England, said:

It would be tragic if thousands of smokers who could quit with the help of an e-cigarette are being put off due to false fears about safety. We need to reassure smokers that switching to an e-cigarette would be much less harmful than smoking. This demonstration highlights the devastating harms caused by every cigarette and helps people see that vaping is likely to pose only a

fraction of the risk.

We want to encourage more smokers to try and quit completely with the help of an e-cigarette, or by using other nicotine replacement such as patches or gum, as this will significantly improve their chances of success. If you're trying to stop smoking, our free online [personal quit plan](#) will help you find the support that's right for you.

Dr Lion Shahab, leading smoking cessation academic from University College London, said:

The false belief that vaping is as harmful as smoking could be preventing thousands of smokers from switching to e-cigarettes to help them quit. I hope this illustrative experiment helps people see the huge damage caused by smoking that could be avoided by switching to an e-cigarette.

Research we and others have conducted shows that vaping is much less harmful than smoking and that using e-cigarettes on a long-term basis is relatively safe, similar to using licensed nicotine products, like nicotine patches or gum. Using e-cigarettes or nicotine replacement such as patches or gum will boost your chances of quitting successfully.

Smoking increases the risk of developing more than 50 serious health conditions, including cancer and heart disease, and doubles the risk of dying from a stroke. Of the 6.1 million smokers in England, 6 in 10 want to quit, but many try to quit using willpower alone – or going 'cold turkey' – despite this being the least effective method.

The most successful quit attempts use a combination of effective stop smoking support methods. Recent research suggests that smokers who quit with the help of an e-cigarette are less likely to start smoking again.

Public Health England's [personal quit plan](#) is a quick, free and easy-to-use digital tool to help smokers find the right support to help them quit, taking into account how much they smoke, and any quitting support used previously.

Dr Rosemary Leonard, an NHS GP, said:

I wanted to be involved in this experiment because every day I see the devastating impact that smoking has on people's health, but I rarely get the opportunity to actually show people what is happening inside their bodies when they smoke.

I regularly give patients advice about quitting and when I recommend e-cigarettes, I am often surprised to hear the misconceptions some people have about them. The results of this

experiment clearly show that every cigarette you smoke causes tar to enter your body and spreads poison throughout your bloodstream. Vaping is much less harmful than smoking and I really hope this experiment will encourage smokers to make a quit attempt. No matter how old you are, it's never too late to stop.

To find out more about the range of free support and tools available to help people quit smoking, visit the [Smokefree website](#).

Background

1. The campaign includes a range of downloadable [Smokefree films and images](#).
2. Local smoking prevalence figures and additional local data is contained in [PHE's Tobacco Control Profiles](#).

[Press release: A record year for culture in the Northern Powerhouse](#)

- Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport figures show that between April and October 2018 there were 912,468 (21.5%) more visitors across the 9 venues compared to the same period last year.
- It is the highest number of visitors across these museums and galleries in the April to October period since comparable records began in 2011-12.
- National Museums Liverpool attracted 2,885,842 visitors between April and October, a 39% increase on the same period last year and their best Apr-Oct on record.

Museums and galleries sponsored by the government in the Northern Powerhouse are enjoying a record year in 2018 with visitor numbers topping 5 million for the first time.

Between April and October, there were 5,141,165 visitors across the 9 institutions in the Northern Powerhouse region – an increase of 912,468 (21.5%) on the same period last year.

It's also the highest number of visitors across these Northern museums and galleries in the Apr-Oct period since comparable records began in 2011-12.

Five museums saw an increase in visitor numbers compared to the same period in 2017-18.

National Museums Liverpool attracted a record-breaking 2,885,842 visitors between April and October, a 39% increase on the same period last year and their best April to October to date.

Tate Liverpool saw visitor numbers up 14.6% to 480,271 – their best April to October for a decade.

Imperial War Museum North in Salford welcomed 210,572 visitors, up 35% on April to October 2017-18 and the best for this period since 2014-15.

More than 537,000 people visited The National Railway Museum in York, an increase of 11% on same period last year.

The Science and Industry Museum in Manchester attracted 433,508 visitors, up 3.6% on the same period last year.

The government is continuing negotiations of a proposed Tourism Sector Deal, to help attract more domestic and overseas visitors and drive major economic growth across the UK.

And £15 million has been invested in cultural regeneration projects across the North to help showcase the region as a great place to live, work, visit and invest in – a key pillar of the government's Northern Powerhouse strategy.

Minister for the Northern Powerhouse Jake Berry MP, said:

This is more good news for the culture of the North coming on the heels of the Rochdale bells being broadcast to the nation by the BBC on Christmas Eve.

I congratulate the world-class museums and galleries of the Northern Powerhouse for attracting so many visitors with their outstanding exhibitions in 2018.

This government continues to support culture across the North through the Coastal Revival Fund which has provided £4.7 million to revive more than 100 heritage sites around the country and by investing £8 million in new venues for Blackpool and Bradford.

As we look forward to 2019, I'd encourage more people to join the 5 million who have already seen why the North's rich art, culture and heritage is at the heart of the UK's history and its future.

Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, Michael Ellis MP said:

Our museums and galleries are world famous for their outstanding collections and are visited by millions every year.

From the Terracotta Warriors in Liverpool, the Poppies at IWM North and Stephenson's Rocket at the National Railway Museum, our

Northern museums have had an excellent year, which I hope they will build on in 2019.

Laura Pye, Director, National Museums Liverpool, said:

We opened China's First Emperor and the Terracotta Warriors in a wonderful year of culture for Liverpool, which also saw another great Biennial and Tate Liverpool's 30th birthday. Huge public events such as The Giants have celebrated 10 years since we were the Capital of Culture.

We're so proud to be part of the fabric of Liverpool's rich culture and to have delivered the Terracotta Warriors exhibition for our visitors this year. Congratulations to our colleagues across the city on coming together to deliver a fantastic year-round offer and keeping us at the top of the UK's cultural calendar.

Judith McNicol, Director of the National Railway Museum (part of the Science Museum Group), said:

It's fantastic to see 2 museums in the Science Museum Group experiencing such positive growth in visitor figures.

At the National Railway Museum this growth can be attributed to a renewed focus on customer service and the presentation of our museum spaces, the launch of popular new exhibitions and our smart new branding. As well as the history of the railways, we're increasingly telling contemporary stories of innovation and engineering in collaboration with the current rail industry.

We have also seen the benefits of working in partnership with other organisations across the city and beyond. We will continue to work hard to maintain this increase into next year, as we launch the next phase of our ambitious and exciting Vision 2025 master plan which we hope will transform the museum to deliver an even better visitor experience.

Statistics on the [number of visits to government sponsored museums and galleries](#) are published every month.

The National Railway Museum in York and The Science and Industry Museum in Manchester are both part of the Science Museum Group.