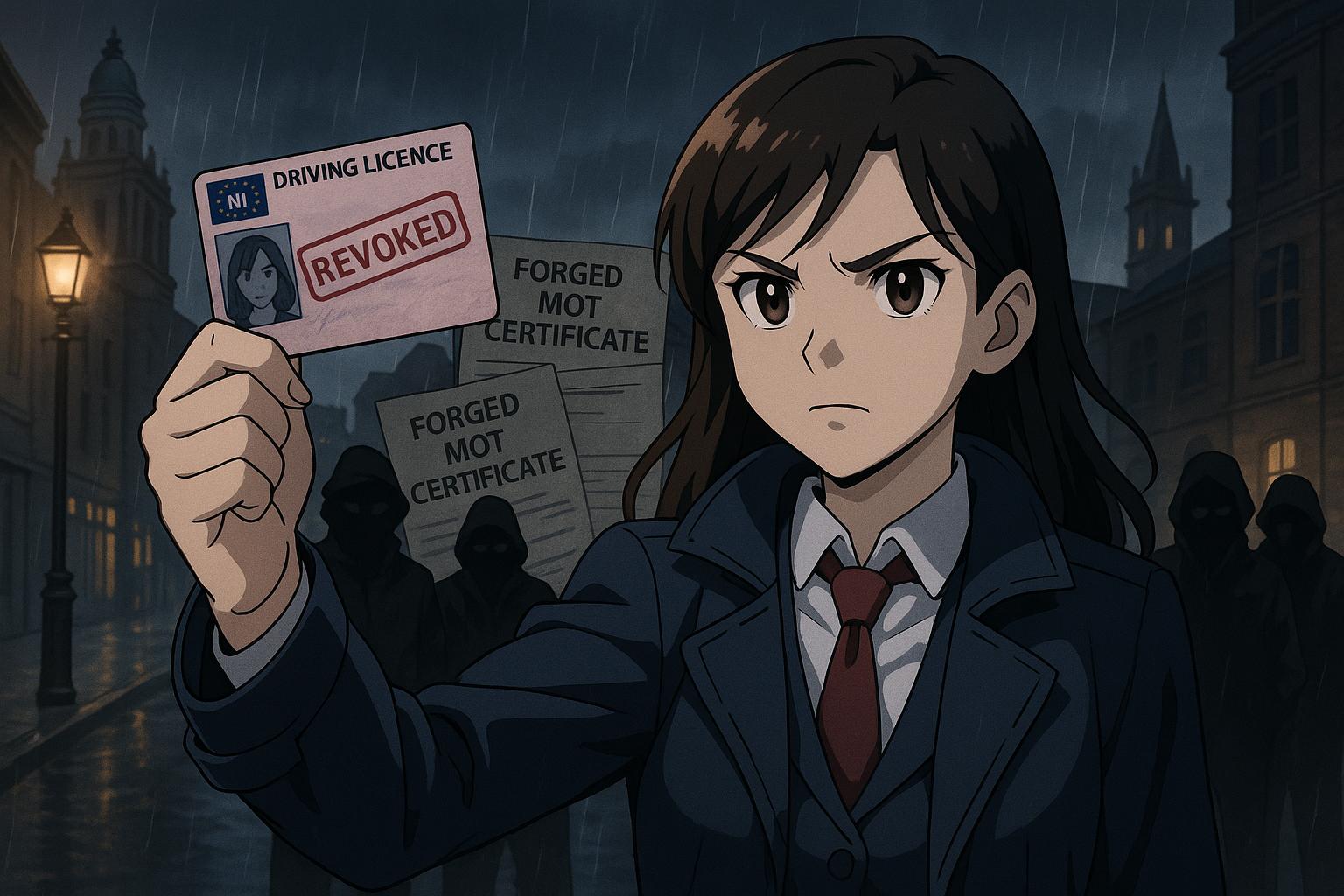
# Fake driving licences and MOT certificates expose Northern Ireland roads to unsafe drivers and vehicles



A disturbing revelation concerning a criminal gang involved in a 'cash-for-licence' driving scam has emerged, with implications that extend far beyond mere paperwork. Reports indicate that this operation not only targeted the integrity of driving licences but also provided fraudulent MOT (Ministry of Transport) certificates. The ramifications of this illegal activity pose significant risks to public safety, placing countless drivers—potentially untrained and operating unsafe vehicles—on the roads of Northern Ireland.

Investigation into this criminal scheme began recently when around 80 fake driving licences were revoked, raising alarm over the ease with which some individuals had obtained them without undergoing any requisite tests. More troubling is the unsettling revelation that fake MOT certificates were similarly available for purchase, with prices around £150, for vehicles that had never passed a formal inspection. This systematic flagrant disregard for vehicular safety means that not only are there unqualified drivers operating vehicles, but many of these vehicles may also be fundamentally unfit for the road—an issue underscored by Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins' expressed concern regarding the integrity of the driving system in Northern Ireland.

The operational network appears to be linked to dissident republican elements within west Belfast. Sources familiar with the situation suggest that the gang took advantage of the Covid-19 pandemic, exploiting the constraints imposed on the public and shifting many services online. One insider remarked, “This was a well thought-out criminal enterprise,” indicative of a premeditated strategy to manipulate the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) licensing system during a period of heightened vulnerability.

Historically, the involvement of paramilitary factions in counterfeiting and fraud is not new. In fact, as far back as 2002, similar counterfeiting operations tied to senior members of the Provisional IRA were uncovered, further illustrating a longstanding tradition of illicit activity among these groups. They were known to produce forged driving licences and other documents, demonstrating the depth of their criminal enterprises.

In 2013, a report from the Organised Crime Task Force highlighted that dissident republican groups continued to be engaged in numerous illicit activities, including armed robbery and extortion, despite their public denouncements of organised crime. Their financial dealings from operations like fuel laundering and tobacco smuggling showcase a reliance on illegal methods for funding, mirroring the current fraudulent activity surrounding driving licences and MOTs.

In this instance, not only the police, but the DVA itself has opened an internal investigation as well, signifying the serious nature of this breach. One DVA employee has already lost their position amid the ongoing probe, as the DVA has now established a dedicated unit to investigate these scams further. The implications, as highlighted by Assembly member Deborah Erskine of the DUP, extend significantly to public safety: “Effectively that means that, right now in Northern Ireland, there are potentially people who are driving with a licence without having sat their test,” she stated, voicing widespread concerns about the integrity of transportation safety across the region.

As the saga unfolds, the DVA has begun notifying those suspected of obtaining licenses fraudulently. Recipients are instructed to return their licenses, and some have already reapplied and successfully passed their driving tests. However, these individuals were reportedly not required to take the theory test, raising further questions about the laxity of the initial processes and the ongoing ramifications for road safety.

With many untrained drivers potentially back on the road and unsafe vehicles in circulation, the urgent questions surrounding the effectiveness of operational safeguards and regulatory bodies in Northern Ireland remain. Public reassurance and swift action are essential as authorities strive to rebuild faith in a system that is currently flagged as compromised.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/criminal-gang-linked-to-fake-licences-were-also-selling-bogus-road-certificates/a1863940624.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/forged-licence-scam-link-to-ira/28142456.html> - In December 2002, Gardaí in Dundalk uncovered a counterfeiting operation involving forged driving licences, insurance certificates, tax discs, and currency. The operation was linked to senior members of the Provisional IRA, who are believed to have provided false documents before the Good Friday Agreement. The counterfeit items were sold to unsuspecting motorists across Ireland, highlighting the extensive nature of the scam.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/jun/15/northernireland> - A 2003 report revealed that former paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, including loyalist and republican factions, were involved in sophisticated counterfeiting and smuggling operations. Collaborating with international criminal organisations like the Russian and Italian mafias, these groups generated significant revenue from counterfeit goods, with Northern Ireland becoming a major hub for such activities.
4. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/dissident-republican-groups-heavily-involved-in-crime-report-finds-1.1443329> - A 2013 report by the Organised Crime Task Force highlighted that dissident republican groups in Northern Ireland were heavily involved in various criminal activities, including armed robbery, extortion, and drug trafficking. Despite publicly denouncing organised crime, these groups relied on illegal rackets to fund their operations, generating significant sums from activities like fuel laundering and tobacco smuggling.
5. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/gardai-believe-counterfeit-racket-had-ira-links-1.1107962> - In December 2002, Gardaí in Dundalk uncovered a counterfeiting operation involving forged driving licences, insurance certificates, tax discs, and currency. The operation was linked to senior members of the Provisional IRA, who are believed to have provided false documents before the Good Friday Agreement. The counterfeit items were sold to unsuspecting motorists across Ireland, highlighting the extensive nature of the scam.
6. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/psni-probing-mot-pass-for-cash-allegations-after-businessmans-warning/35563327.html> - In 2017, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) launched an investigation into allegations that Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) staff were accepting bribes to pass vehicles for MOT tests. A businessman reported that vehicles were being given certificates without full tests in exchange for cash, raising concerns about public safety and the integrity of the MOT testing process.
7. <https://www.northernirelandworld.com/news/crime/police-warn-over-fake-driving-licences-1373421> - In January 2020, police in Northern Ireland issued a warning about a scam involving fake driving licences. They cautioned that individuals offering these licences were scammers who would take money and personal details without providing the promised documents. Victims were unlikely to receive the licences, and reporting the issue to police was challenging due to the illegal nature of obtaining a fake licence.