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***News Release***

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**Grocer with plenty to chew on as he’s jailed for £120,000 VAT fraud**

A London man who set up fake companies to steal nearly £120,000 VAT has been jailed.

Alaina Imponge, 52, of Hartnoll Street, Holloway, N7, registered seven companies for VAT and between 30 March 2011 and 28 April 2014 made 85 claims – the majority of them were fraudulent.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) officers began after investigating after becoming suspicious when most of the 85 VAT returns Imponge submitted were repayment claims.

They found two of his companies never traded and the others did very little business, except for A & B Grocery Ltd in Holloway Road which was a legitimate concern. The companies included a used car business, jewellery shop and a holiday villas firm.

Imponge used fake invoices to hugely inflate the companies’ expenses and claim VAT repayments. Some £125,742.98 was repaid to the seven companies, of which £118,217.98 was fraudulent.

Daren Cooley, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“Imponge deliberately stole money which should be used to fund our public services, to prop up his grocery business and his personal lifestyle. He pocketed money equivalent to the salary of four new nurses in London.

“We will continue to pursue criminals who think it is acceptable to charge their customers VAT and pocket the money for their own benefit. Anyone with information about tax fraud should report it to HMRC online or contact our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

On 10 October 2018 at Southwark Crown Court Imponge pleaded guilty to being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of VAT during the period 30 March 2011 to 28 April 2014 in order to make a monetary gain.

He was jailed for three years on 12 November 2018 at the same court.

Information about any type of tax fraud can be reported to HMRC online at <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business>.

**Notes to Editors**

1. Aliana Imponge, DOB 28/04/1966, of Hartnoll Street, London, N7 admitted VAT fraud and was sentenced to three years in prison at Southwark Crown Court on 12 November 2018.
2. The starting salary for a new nurse in London on Band 5 of the NHS Agenda for Change Pay Rates is £27,627.60. <http://www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/pay-and-reward/agenda-for-change/pay-scales/including-hcas>
3. Follow HMRC Press Office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice.
4. HMRC's Flickr channel: [www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk](http://www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk).

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