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 ***News Release***

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**Five arrested in suspected £5.5m tax fraud investigation**

An international investigation into a suspected £5.5 million VAT and money laundering fraud has led to the arrest of five people in, Armagh, Merseyside and Birmingham.

The three men and two women were arrested as part of a multi-agency investigation, headed by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), linked to the export of cars from the UK to Ireland.

HMRC officers carried out searches at three private addresses in Merseyside, two in County Armagh and one in Birmingham. Officers from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Merseyside and West Midlands forces assisted in the operation. Simultaneous searches by officers from An Garda Síochána took place in County Louth in the Republic of Ireland.

Sandra Smith, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“HMRC takes tax fraud extremely seriously and anyone deliberately choosing to evade the taxes they owe should expect not only a heavy fine, but possibly a criminal prosecution as well.

“Anyone with information about people who may be involved in tax fraud can contact the Tax Evasion Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Computers, mobile phones, paperwork and almost 1 million cigarettes were seized as part of the operation. Investigations into the suspected fraud are ongoing.

**Notes for Editors:**

1. Details of the arrests:

A man, aged 65, was arrested at an address in the Birmingham area and a residential property was searched.

A man, aged 48, and woman aged 43, were arrested at an address in the Formby area of Merseyside and a residential property was searched.

A man, aged 44 was arrested at an address in the Huyton area of Merseyside and a residential property searched.

A residential property in central Liverpool was searched.

A woman, aged 43, was arrested at an address in County Armagh and two residential properties searched during which 949,000 cigarettes were seized.

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