

Economic crime is going uninvestigated as police hide behind the veil of Action Fraud

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Fraud is going uninvestigated by police who are "hiding behind the veil" of the Action Fraud national crime reporting agency.

In his paper published this week in *Policing*, Professor Mark Button, director of the Centre for Counter Fraud Studies at the University of Portsmouth argues that, Action Fraud, which has been widely derided, has become a useful veil from which the [police](#) can hide their inadequate response.

Figures from Action Fraud, the arm of the police responsible for recording scams and [fraud](#), show that between 2019 and 2020, over 800,000 people reported being a victim of fraud, with £2.3bn finding its way into criminal hands. However, Professor Button calculated just 0.6 per cent of police officers are dedicated to investigating fraud.

The research focused on reviews and investigations carried out over the past 20 years and found that these have consistently highlighted the low priority given to the investigation of financial crimes in England and Wales. In 2018 the House of Commons home affairs committee said that "the proportion of fraud cases being investigated is shockingly low".

Professor Button says that "Action Fraud is in reality a call center provided by a private company under contract to the City of London Police.

"The staffs it employs are largely low-skilled and paid at around the minimum wage. It has no capacity to investigate. However, even in the area it does have responsibility for there is an evidence of areas in need of improvement."

"Considering fraud and computer misuse [crime](#) amounts to a third to half of all crime against individuals this is a huge mismatch".

Professor Button suggests radical change is required to address the investigative gap through either a move towards regional investigation of economic crime or a national solution, through a National Economic

Crime Agency.

Economic crime is the most common type of crime and costs society billions of pounds. In the current policing structures economic crime will always be the 'Cinderella' crime falling behind other policing priorities and lacking the resources required for agencies to effectively tackle it. Much of economic crime requires specialist knowledge.

The [paper](#) aims to start a debate around the future structures of policing for economic crime centered around a national body or regional forces rather than the traditional local forces.

More information: Mark Button, Hiding behind the Veil of Action Fraud: The Police Response to Economic Crime in England and Wales and Evaluating the Case for Regionalization or a National Economic Crime Agency, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.1093/police/paab022](https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paab022)

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