

# **DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics**

## **Quarter Four: January to March 2020**

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## **Key Findings**

- During January to March 2020, the DVA conducted approximately 145,000 vehicle tests, a decrease of 49% on the same period last year, and the lowest quarterly total on record. Whilst the COVID-19 shutdown prevented any testing during the final week of March, the primary cause for this decrease was the lift-maintenance issues severely reducing testing-capacity for the majority of the quarter.
- For the 2019-20 financial year, the DVA conducted just over 999,000 vehicle tests, an 8.3% decrease on last year's record high. Excluding the abnormal events of quarter four, the DVA had conducted 5% more vehicle tests during the first nine months of 2019-20 than during the equivalent period in 2018-19. The pass-rate for full tests in 2019-20 was 82.1%, an increase on the 81.8% last year, and the highest pass-rate on record.
- DVLA registered approximately 50,300 new private cars in Northern Ireland during 2019. This is 2.5% lower than the figure recorded for the same period in 2018 and the lowest total since 2012. The most popular new private-car was Ford (13%); with grey the most popular colour (22%) and petrol the most popular fuel-type (59%).
- There were 1,212,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, an increase of 2.3% on last year. The overwhelming majority (83%) were cars.
- The number of theory tests conducted during 2019-20 decreased by 3.5% compared to last year, from nearly 72,300 to approximately 69,700. The pass-rate for private-car theory tests was 46.3%, a small increase of 0.9 percentage points on the record low in 2018-19.
- The DVA conducted approximately 55,400 driving tests during 2019-20, a decrease of 4.3% from 2018-19 and the lowest total for five years. The pass-rate for these tests was 57.9%, down by 0.9 percentage points on last year, but broadly unchanged over the past five years.
- Over 240,000 licensing transactions were carried out by the DVA during 2019-20. This represents a decrease of 4.6% in comparison with the volume carried out in 2018-19. As the period of validity of a driving licence changed from 3 years to 10 years in 1985, this has resulted in a significant cyclical pattern with a peak renewal period during the middle of each decade.
- At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were almost 1,121,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement. This was a rise of 1.3% compared with the total twelve months ago.
- At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were approximately 9,600 licensed taxi drivers, down by 6.6% when compared with the same point of 2019, and the lowest figure in our series. Similarly, there were nearly 8,600 licensed taxi vehicles, a decrease of 2.1% when compared to March 2019, and nearly 10% lower than March 2014.
- During 2019-20, DVA Enforcement staff spot-checked just under 4,500 vehicles, of which 38% were heavy goods vehicles. This was 11% less than last year, and is the lowest annual total since our time series began in 2012.
- For the 2019-20 financial year, Agency performance against both the vehicle testing and driver testing measures was below the target level of 92%. Vehicle testing missed target for the seventh consecutive quarter and finished 2019-20 on a record low of 69.2%. Driver testing decreased for the ninth consecutive quarter, similarly ending on a record low of 77.4%. For 2019-20, the DVA has split its driver-licensing target into two categories: online applications and paper applications. For online applications, performance was 98.0% processed within 5 days; whilst for paper applications, performance was 75.5% processed within 10 days, both against a target of 95%.

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## **Introduction**

This is the twenty-second edition of the quarterly publication '*DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics*'. The statistics reported within this publication include summary key business volumes and transactions for drivers, vehicles, and operators and in the area of regulation and enforcement during quarter four of 2019-20. This covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. This publication also includes final year-end statistics for the 2019-20 financial year. Due to the transfer of vehicle licensing functions to DVLA, the data in the corresponding section (page 9) is from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019.

This release presents statistical information for the volumes of activities under the following business areas:

- Vehicle testing;
- Vehicle licensing & registration;
- Driver theory testing;
- Driver practical testing;
- Driver licensing;
- Road transport licensing (i.e. buses, heavy goods vehicles and taxis);
- Enforcement & compliance;
- DVA target monitoring; and
- Driver & rider instructor registration.

DVA systems provide the majority of data, although we also source some from within the wider Department for Infrastructure. In addition, while the DVA is no longer responsible for vehicle registration and licensing with the transfer of those functions to DVLA in Swansea in July 2014, statistics relating to these areas are presented in section 2.

For further information and guidance on this publication, please see the User Guidance document, available on our website:

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/driver-vehicle-agency-activity-statistics>

## **Background**

The *Driver & Vehicle Agency* (DVA) is an executive agency within the *Department for Infrastructure* (DfI). The DVA was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 as part of the Review of Public Administration, through a merger of two existing Agencies, namely the *Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency* (DVTA) and *Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland* (DVLNI).

## **Vehicle Testing**

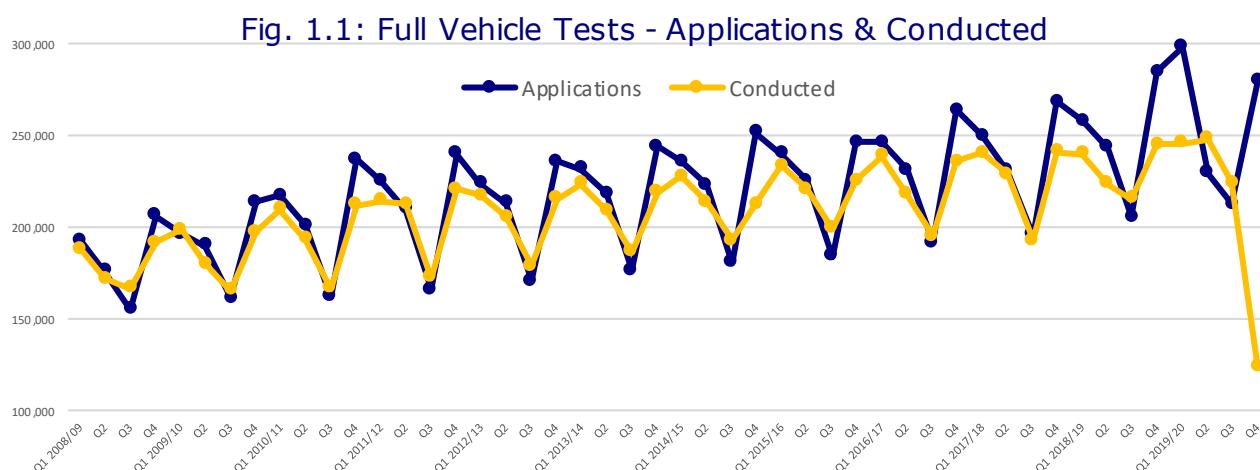
Vehicle testing forms the most significant aspect, in terms of volumes, of the work of the Operations Directorate in DVA, and by extension, the DVA as a whole.

On 27th January 2020, the DVA reported a significant maintenance problem with its vehicle lifts across the majority of the region's test centres, and immediately removed these lifts from operation. This severely reduced the DVAs capacity to conduct vehicle tests, and as such, the agency began issuing '*temporary exemption certificates*' (TEC) to some customers to reduce the impact. These certificates exempted the vehicle from the need for a test for four months, although legislation only allowed the DVA to provide these to owners of private cars and light goods vehicles that had been previously tested by the DVA. The Agency continued testing of all other vehicles as normal.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, and began issuing three-month TECs to all customers (extended to twelve-month TECs, from May 2020). Vehicle testing will remain suspended until 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020 and will resume when it is safe to do so. For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the MOT and Vehicle Testing page on the NIDirect website<sup>1</sup>.

### Vehicle Test Applications

From January to March 2020, the DVA received approximately 300,000 applications for vehicle tests, down by 7.2% compared to the same three-month period in 2019, and the lowest quarter-four total since 2016 (table 1.1). The vast majority (93%) of these were for full tests rather than re-tests. This decrease was primarily because of a reduction of 16,400 (-50.0%) applications for private-car re-tests. Due to the cancellation of the majority of private car and light goods tests in February and March, this had the knock-on effect of reducing the number of re-tests required as fewer vehicles had failed their initial test. For full tests only, application volumes reduced by 1.8% compared to Q4 2019, although this is still the second-highest quarter four total on record.



For the 2019-20 financial year, the DVA received approximately 1.17 million applications for vehicle tests, an increase of 0.9% on last year, and the highest figure in our series. This marks the seventh consecutive year-on-year increase in vehicle test applications. Compared with a decade ago, the number of applications has risen by almost 27%, an increase of almost a quarter of a million additional applications.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-motoring>

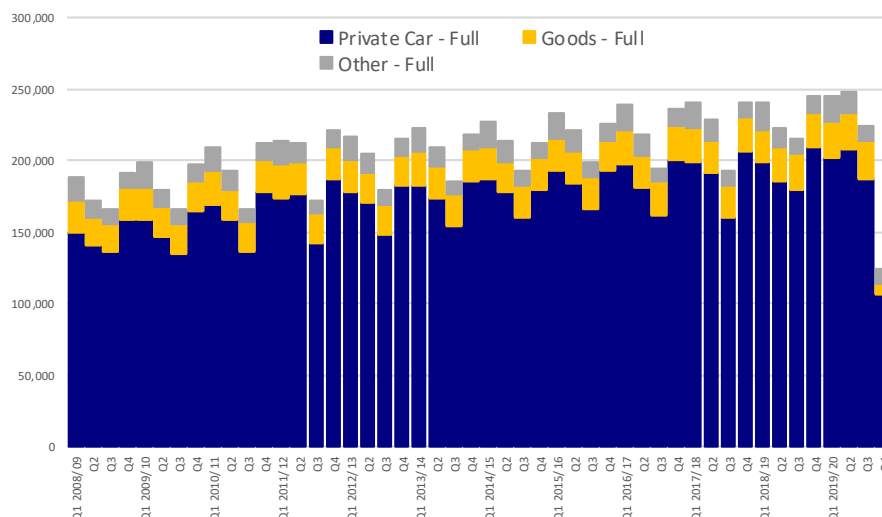
Note that the figures for vehicle test applications include taximeter tests (circa 1,100 tests per quarter), in contrast to the figures for vehicle tests conducted, which do not.

## Vehicle Tests Conducted

During quarter four, the DVA conducted approximately 145,000 vehicle tests (full tests and re-tests), a decrease of 48.8% compared to the equivalent quarter last year. This was the lowest quarterly number since our time series began in 2008, due to the impact of the lift-cancellations and COVID-19. Compared year-on-year, January 2020 decreased by 10% from 2019, February by 54%, and March by 72% (table 1.14). As usual, the vast majority of these (73%) were full tests for private-cars (table 1.7).

For the 2019-20 financial year, the DVA conducted approximately 999,000 vehicle tests, a decrease of 8.3% on the series high last year, and the lowest annual total since 2012-13. However, if we strip out quarter four due to the abnormal events and simply look at the first nine months of the financial year, the DVA had conducted 5% more vehicle tests during 2019-20 than during the equivalent period in 2018-19.

Fig. 1.2: Full Vehicle Tests Conducted



The increased level of vehicle test applications seen in the trend series can, in the main, be explained by the increasing number of licensed vehicles in Northern Ireland, which has risen by 11.6% over the past five years (see table 2.13). In addition, owners seem to be keeping their vehicles for longer, as the proportion of vehicles of MOT -age has risen by nearly 3% over the past four years, whilst the average age of a licensed vehicle has risen from 7.8 to 8.2 years over the same period. Together, this has resulted in approximately 82,000 (12%) additional private cars requiring a test in 2019 compared to 2015.

Note that additional Sunday opening at some test centres began during June 2019, which will account for some of the increases seen in 2019.

## Cancellations and Temporary Exemption Certificates (TEC)

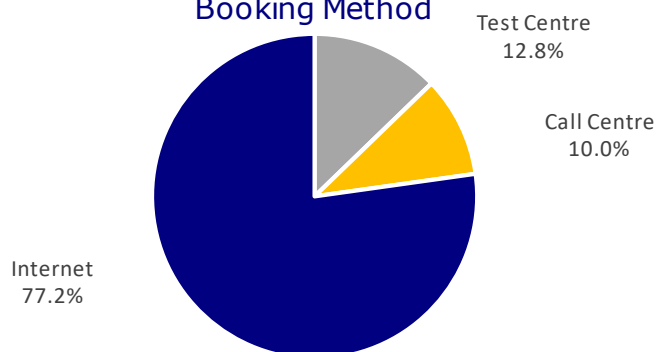
Whilst the DVA is still processing refunds for this period (due to the outbreak of COVID-19 impacting operations), it is estimated that in the region of 104,700 appointments were cancelled during Q4 (approximately 13,300 in January, 36,700 in February, and 54,700 in March). In comparison, less than 2,800 tests were cancelled during the equivalent period in 2019. We estimate that 85% were cancelled (primarily) due to the lift-issues and 15% due to COVID-19.

Due to the automation of this process during May 2020, we are currently working on producing formal statistics on this subject. Detailed figures for TECs will be included in our Q1 report.

## Booking Method

The most popular booking method for vehicle test applications was the internet booking system, which received 77.2% of all applications. Applications via the internet have consistently trended upwards over the past five years, up by over 20 percentage-points since our time series began in 2015 (table 1.4).

Fig. 1.3: Vehicle Test Applications by Booking Method

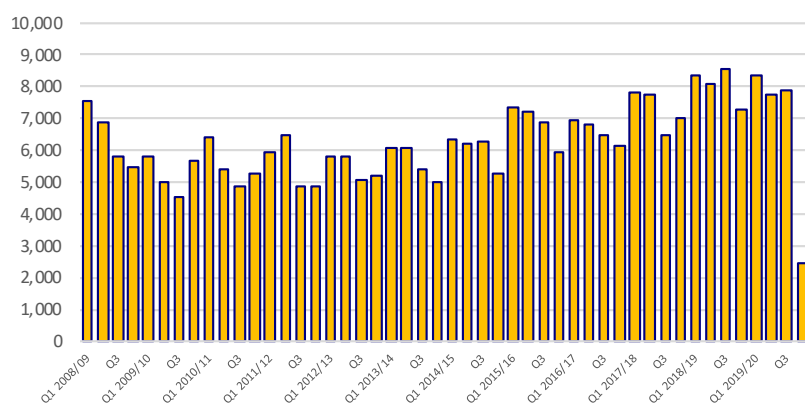


## Failed To Attend

Approximately 2,500 vehicles failed to attend for a booked test during the quarter, a 66% decrease on the equivalent period last year (table 1.10). These equate to 1.6% of the conducted tests during the quarter. This decrease was an expected consequence of the cancellation of tests: as the DVA

expected fewer vehicles to attend for testing, so it follows that there is less chance of non-attendance. Note that where the DVA has issued a TEC, the test does not count as failed to attend; instead it is counted as cancelled.

Fig. 1.4: Failed to Attend



For the full financial year, just over 26,500 vehicles failed to attend, a decrease of 18% from 2018-19. These tests equate to nearly 9,000 working-hours of time lost.

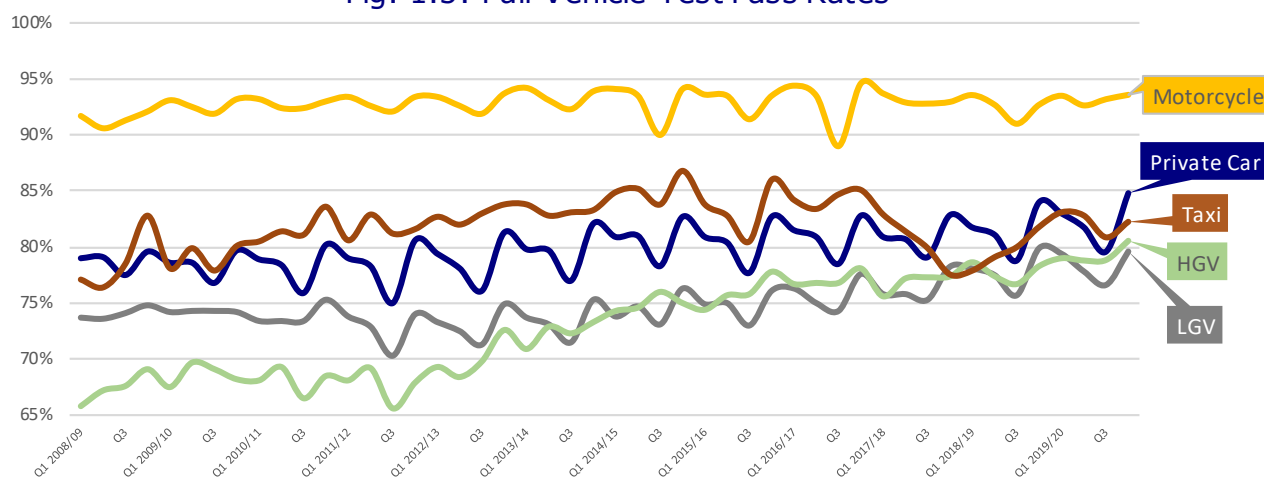
## Vehicle Test Pass-Rates

In quarter four, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 84.5%, an increase on the pass-rate of 83.7% recorded in the same period last year, and the highest quarter-four pass-rate since the time series began in 2008. However, we need to be careful with this comparison, as due to the cancellations in 2020, the mix of vehicles tested was substantially different from previous quarters (age and body type in particular).

For the full financial year, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 82.1%, the highest annual pass-rate on record. This annual full test pass-rate varied by test category, from 78.2% for large goods vehicles to 93.2% for motorcycles (for those categories where there were greater than 2,000 full tests) (table 1.11).

The pass-rate for re-tests during quarter four was 93.8%, a decrease when compared with last year. Similar to full tests, the re-test pass-rate varied by category, from 89.5% for trailers to 94.5% for taxis (for categories where there were greater than 200 re-tests) (table 1.12). For the complete 2019-20 financial year, the re-test pass-rate was 93.8%, a small decrease on the 94.3% recorded last year.

Fig. 1.5: Full Vehicle Test Pass Rates



### Vehicle Tests by Test Centre

The busiest test centre was Belfast (Balmoral), which conducted over 19,700 tests during the quarter, although this is mainly due to the greater number of vehicle lifts available during February and March compared to other test centres. In comparison, the quietest centre was Downpatrick, having conducted approximately 5,750 tests during the January to March period (table 1.14).

Whilst the overall pass-rate for private-car full tests during quarter four was 84.8%, by test centre this ranged from a high of 87.9% in Belfast (Balmoral) to a low of 81.2% in Cookstown (table 1.14). This was the thirtieth consecutive quarter (i.e. more than seven years) that Belfast (Balmoral) had the highest pass-rate, although it was the first time that Cookstown had the lowest. As with the overall pass-rate, we need to be careful making comparisons due to the different mix of vehicles that were tested during this quarter.

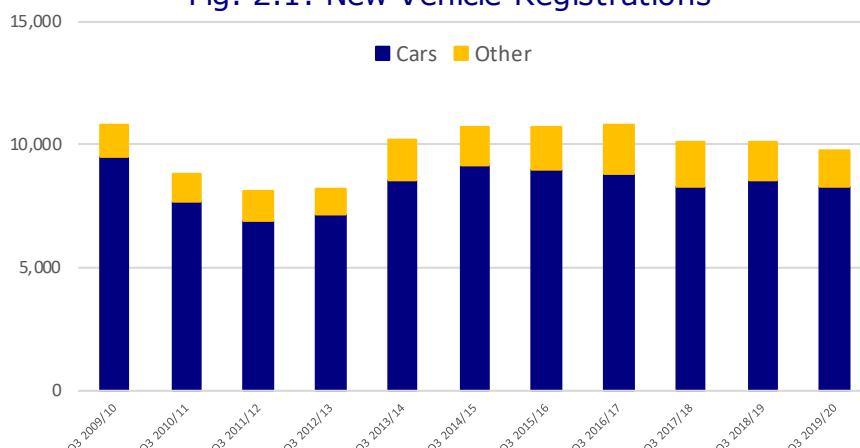


### Vehicle Registrations

During October to December 2019, the DVLA registered approximately 9,800 new vehicles for the first time in Northern Ireland. The number of new vehicle first registrations showed a decrease of 3.5% from the same period in 2018 and is the lowest quarterly total since 2012. Private car first registrations accounted for the majority of this decrease, down by 2.7% when compared to 2018 (table 2.1).

For the 2019 calendar year, there were nearly 50,300 new private car registrations in Northern Ireland. This is 2.5% less than the figure registered during 2018, and the lowest annual total since 2012.

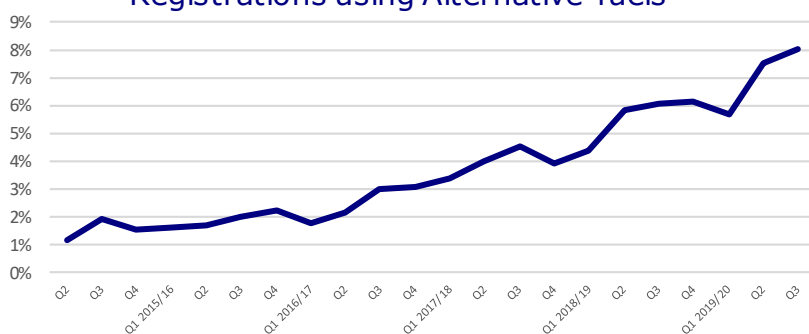
Fig. 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations



The top make for cars registered for the first time during October to December 2019 was Ford, accounting for 1,080 registrations. This marks the nineteenth quarter in a row that Ford has been at number one. The second largest make was Volkswagen accounting for 920 registrations (table 2.3). Of the makes in the top ten for car first registrations during the period, the largest increase when compared to the equivalent period in 2018 was for Mercedes (+27%, from 266 to 338) and the largest decrease was for Vauxhall (-19%, from 534 to 433). Ford was also the most popular make over the full 2019 calendar year, accounting for 12% of all new private cars registered.

Grey was the most popular colour for new cars, accounting for 22.0% of all new registrations. White (20.0%), blue (18.7%), black (15.9%), and red (11.0%) are the next most popular.

Fig. 2.2: Proportion of New Car Registrations using Alternative-fuels



Over the past five years, there has been a decline in the proportion of newly registered cars fuelled by diesel, down from 54.6% of cars in 2014-15 Q3 to 33.2% this year (5,011 vehicles in 2014-15 Q3 down to 2,757 vehicles in 2019-20 Q3). Over the same time-period, the number of alternative-fuel<sup>2</sup> cars newly registered in Northern Ireland more than tripled, from 177 in 2014-15 quarter 3 to 665 in 2019-20 quarter 3.

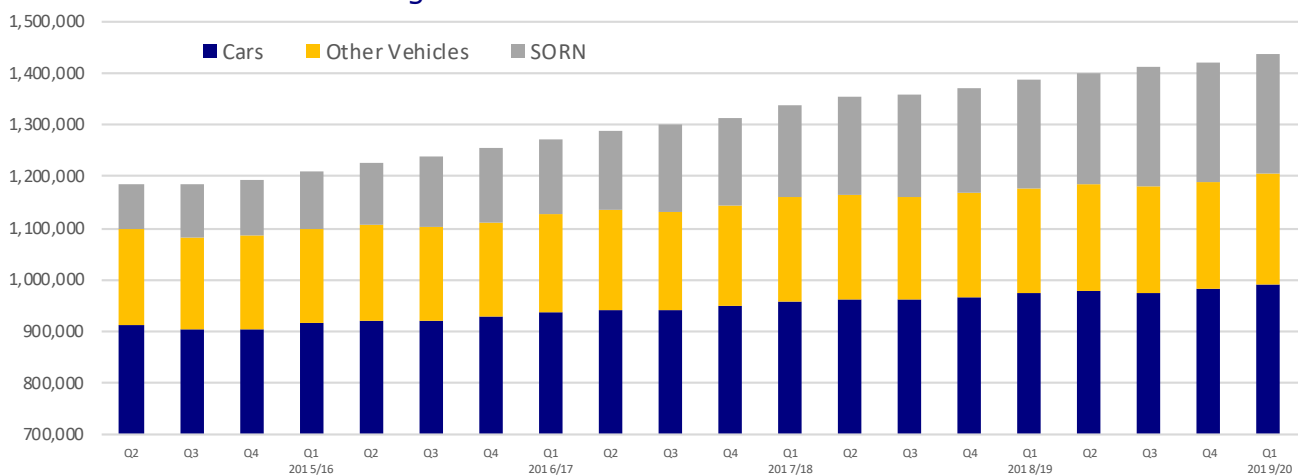
<sup>2</sup> Alternative-fuel vehicles are those able to use a range of alternatives to purely petrol or diesel fuel, including gas, electricity, or a combination such as gas bi-fuel and hybrid-electric.

## Licensed Vehicles

There were approximately 1,208,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, an increase of 2.3% compared with the previous year, and 11.6% compared with five years ago (table 2.13). Of these, 82.5% (995,872) were cars, and 12.2% (147,369) were goods vehicles (including both light and heavy). The most popular licensed vehicle was, again, the Volkswagen Golf, followed by the Ford Fiesta and the Ford Focus (table 2.15).

Approximately 260,000 vehicles had a *Statutory Off-Road Notification* (SORN) at the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, representing 17.7% of the total vehicle stock (table 2.13). The number of SORN vehicles in Northern Ireland increased by almost a seventh (13.0%) from the same date in 2018; in comparison to an 8.4% increase in Great Britain. It should be noted that since December 2013, *continuous SORN* was introduced so a SORN declaration from then onwards lasts until the vehicle is re-taxed, sold, permanently exported or scrapped. This has resulted in significantly higher year-on-year increases from Q3 2013/14 onwards, both in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

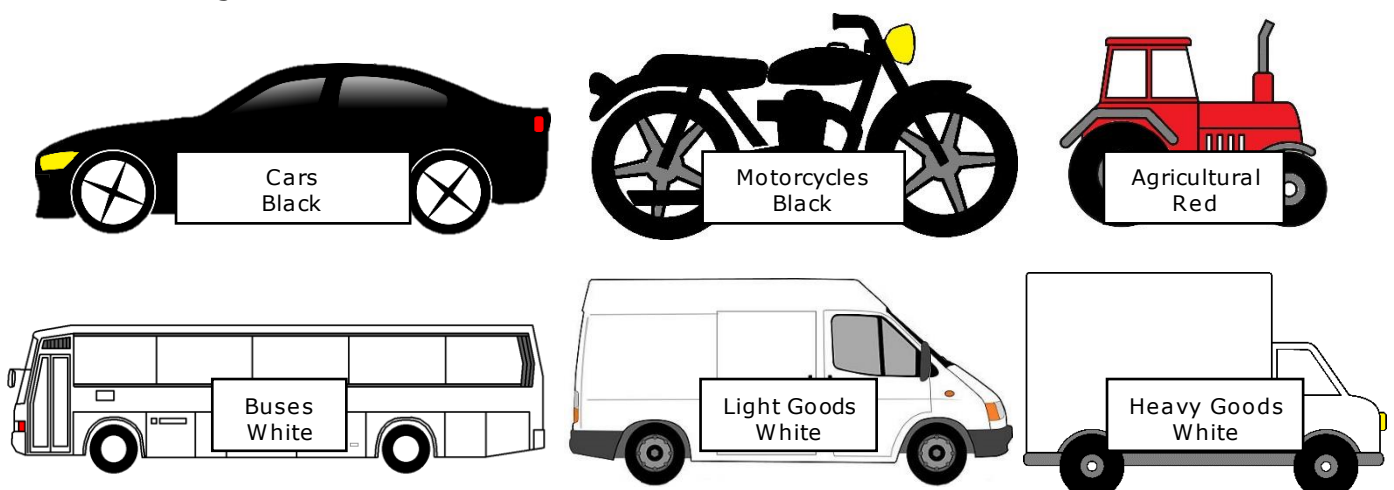
Fig. 2.3: Northern Ireland Vehicle Stock



As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 8.7 years. However, there is some variance in average age for different body-types:

- Cars – 8.2 years;
- Motorcycles – 13.4 years;
- Light Goods – 8.2 years;
- Heavy Goods – 9.8 years;
- Buses – 10.3 years;
- Agricultural – 21.3 years;
- Other – 10.1 years.

Similar to the new registrations above, in the Northern Irish stock of licensed vehicles the most popular colours for each body-type are notably monochrome, with only the stereo-typical 'big red tractor' bucking the trend:



The DVA has responsibility for the theory test element of the overall driving test process. Pearson VUE administers the test in Northern Ireland under contract with the DfI through DVA.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all driver testing from 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, until further notice. For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the Driver Theory Testing page on the NIDirect website<sup>3</sup>.

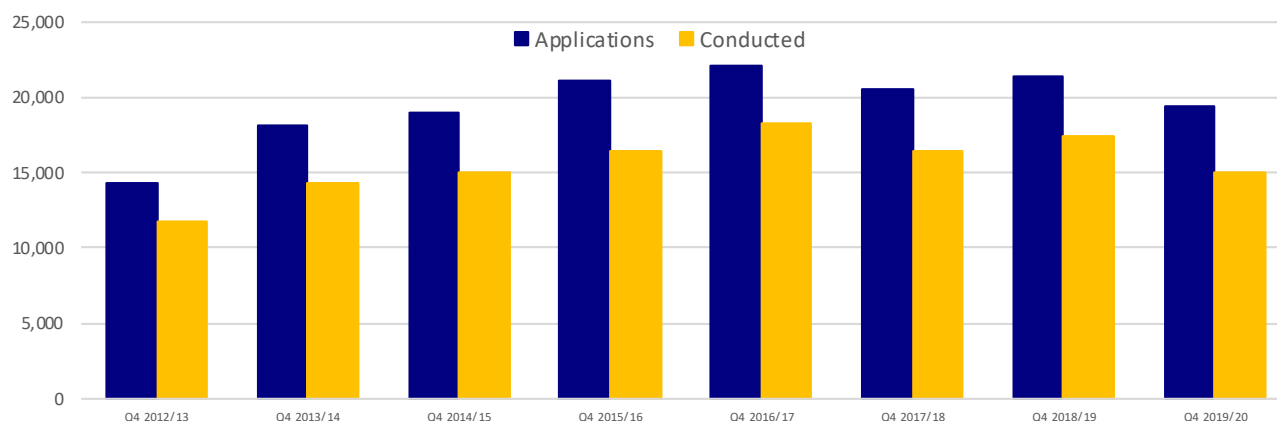
### Theory Test Applications and Tests Conducted

From January to March 2020, the DVA received approximately 19,400 theory test applications. This marks a decrease of 9.2% from the 21,400 recorded in the same quarter last year (figure 3.1).

Similarly, during the same period the number of theory tests conducted decreased substantially from nearly 17,500 to just over 15,000 this year (table 3.2). This is solely due to the impact of COVID-19, which resulted in the cancellation of nearly 2,500 tests at the end of March. This is the lowest quarter four total for five years.

For the 2019-20 financial year, the DVA conducted approximately 69,700 theory tests, a decrease of 3.5% compared to last year, and the lowest annual total since 2014-15.

**Fig. 3.1: Theory Tests - Applications & Conducted - Quarterly Comparisons**



During quarter four, there were 1,402 tests where the individual failed to attend, a decrease of 14.7% on the equivalent period in 2019 (table 3.3). These account for over 8.5% of the conducted tests during the quarter, the lowest quarterly total since our time-series began in 2015. Despite this, the total for the financial year was approximately 6,960, a small decrease of 0.7% on last year and broadly unchanged over the past four years.

### Theory Test Pass-Rates

The theory test pass-rate for private-cars in quarter four showed a 2.6 percentage-point increase to 47.4% when compared with the previous quarter (table 3.4). This is an improvement from the record low seen in quarter one of 2019-20, although the current trend is approximately three percentage-points below the trend six years ago. The theory test pass-rate for motorcycles remains substantially higher, at 72.2%, reflecting the fact that those taking the motorcycle test will usually have already taken the private-car test. Whilst not directly comparable due to the nature and purpose of the tests, the pass-rate for the taxi theory test was 31.3%, unchanged from the preceding quarter, substantially higher than the 21.0% recorded in quarter four 2015-16. A

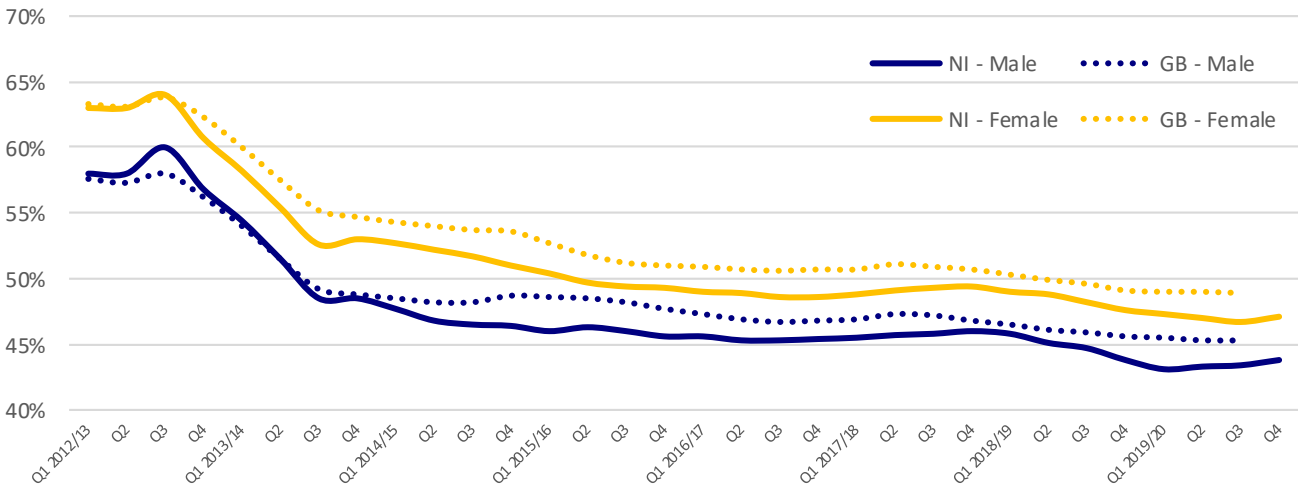
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-theory-test>

reduction in the Hazard Perception pass-mark in September 2018 will have had some influence on this upwards trend.

**Theory Tests by Gender**

Using a four-quarter rolling average, the theory test pass-rate by gender for private-car drivers showed that females consistently have a higher pass-rate than males (table 3.7). For the latest quarter, the pass-rates were 47.1% for females and 43.8% for males. The figures for both genders have been gradually decreasing at the same rate since 2012. This 'gender-gap' in pass-rates is nearly identical to that seen in Great Britain (figure 3.2).

**Fig. 3.2: Private Car Theory Test Pass-Rates - by Gender and Region**



In general, from early in 2013, Northern Ireland theory test pass-rates for private-car drivers have been lower than the Great Britain pass-rates by approximately two percentage-points, although this gap has fluctuated. Also of note is that the declining trend in the pass-rate seen in Northern Ireland is nearly identical to the trend seen in Great Britain.

## 4 Driver Practical Testing

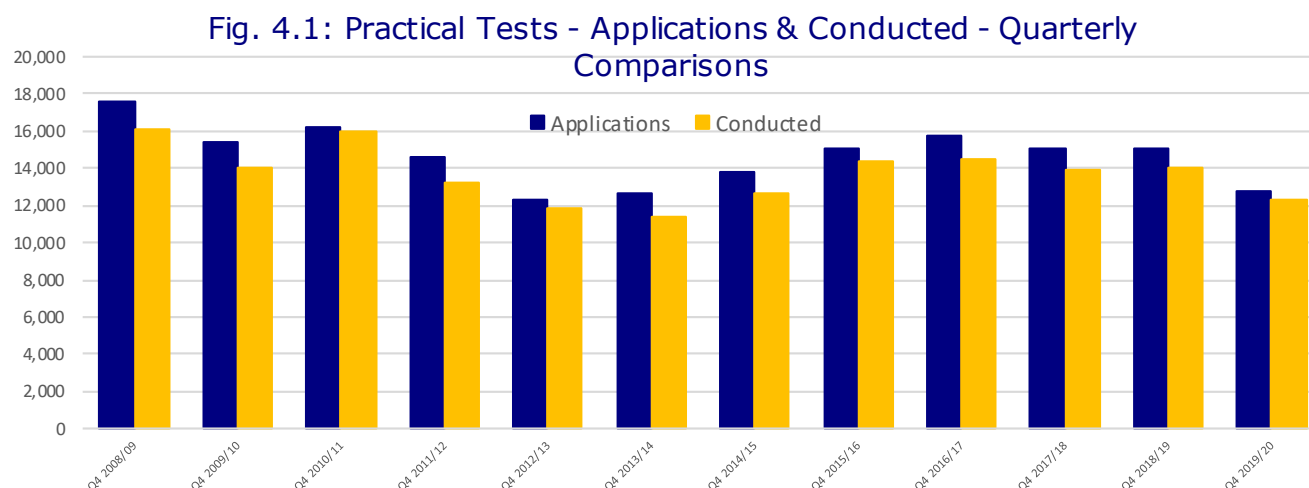
DVA provides a wide range of driving test categories for testing learner drivers and motorcyclists to ensure that they meet the required standard of competence necessary to drive safely on public roads.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all driver testing from 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Driver testing will remain suspended until 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020, at the earliest. For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the Practical Driving Test page on the NIDirect website<sup>4</sup>.

### Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

From January to March 2020, nearly 12,800 driving test applications were submitted to the DVA, a decrease of 15.0% on the equivalent quarter in 2019 (table 4.1). During the same three-month period, the number of driving tests conducted also decreased by 12.5% to approximately 12,300 (table 4.3 & figure 4.1). Compared year-on-year, January 2020 increased by 3% from 2019, and February by 0.4%; however March decreased by 70% (table 4.6). Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the trends for both applications and tests conducted over the past five years had remained relatively steady.

For the 2019-20 financial year, the DVA conducted over 55,400 driving tests, a 4.3% decrease from last year, and the lowest annual total for since 2014-15. However, if we strip out quarter four due to the abnormal events and simply look at the first nine months of the financial year, the DVA had conducted 1.7% more practical driving tests during 2019-20 than during the equivalent period in 2018-19.



For both driving test applications and driving tests conducted, tests for private-cars account for over four fifths of all applications or tests conducted.

During quarter four, there were 270 appointments where the individual failed to attend (FTA), representing a 4.3% decrease on the same quarter last year, and the smallest quarterly figure since 2017 (table 4.4). These account for over 2.1% of the conducted tests during the quarter, a proportion broadly unchanged over the past five years. For the full 2019-20 financial year, the total was over 1,200, a 4.7% increase on last year, and the highest figure in over a decade.

The most popular booking method for a driving test application was the internet booking system, which received 76.1% of all applications, up 1.3 percentage-points on the previous year (table 4.2).

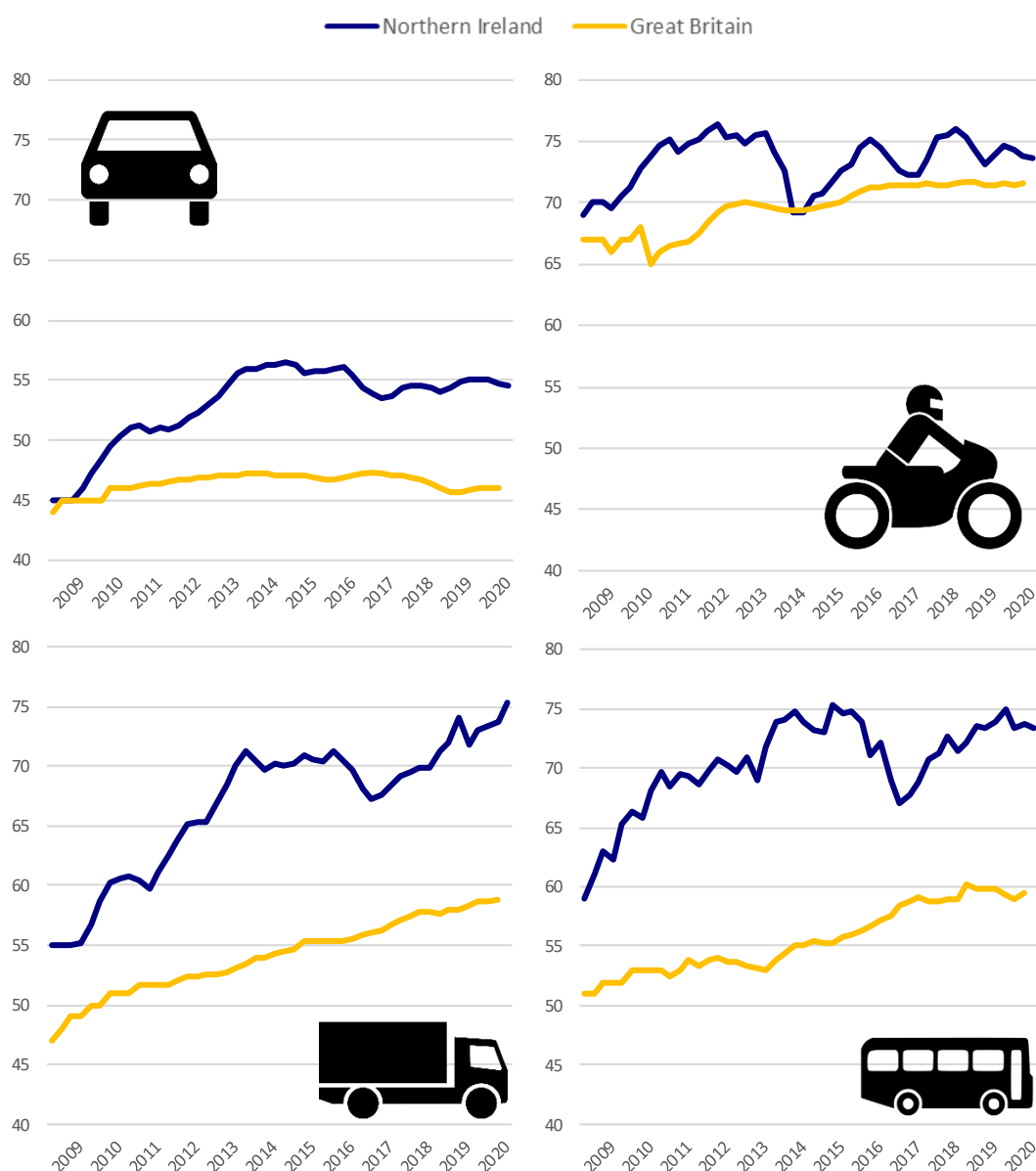
<sup>4</sup><https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/book-your-practical-driving-test-online>

## Driving Test Pass-Rates

For January to March 2020, the pass-rate for all categories of driving tests was 58.3%, down 0.4 percentage-points on the 58.7% recorded in the equivalent quarter last year (table 4.5). Pass-rates for all categories of vehicle remain broadly unchanged over the past five years.

In general, Northern Ireland pass-rates across all four main vehicle categories are higher than the pass-rates in Great Britain (table 4.10 & figure 4.2). Part of the difference between NI and GB pass-rates may be attributable to regional driving conditions including the volumes of traffic and complexity of available road networks for testing.

Fig. 4.2: Driving Test Pass-Rates – Rolling 4-Quarter Average



## Driving Tests by Test Centre

The test centre that conducted the most private-car driving tests during the January to March 2020 period was, again, Belfast (Balmoral) (1,281 tests). The Enniskillen centre conducted the fewest, with 270 tests during the quarter.

The overall pass-rate for private-car driving tests during the quarter was 55.0%, ranging by test centre from 41.8% in Newtownards to 75.1% in Downpatrick (table 4.6). This was the first time Newtownards had lowest pass-rate, whilst this marked the seventh year that Downpatrick had the highest or second highest pass-rate. At least part of the difference between test centres will be due to the differential driving ability and experience of candidates presenting for testing, while other relevant factors will be specific to the test centre such as local driving conditions.

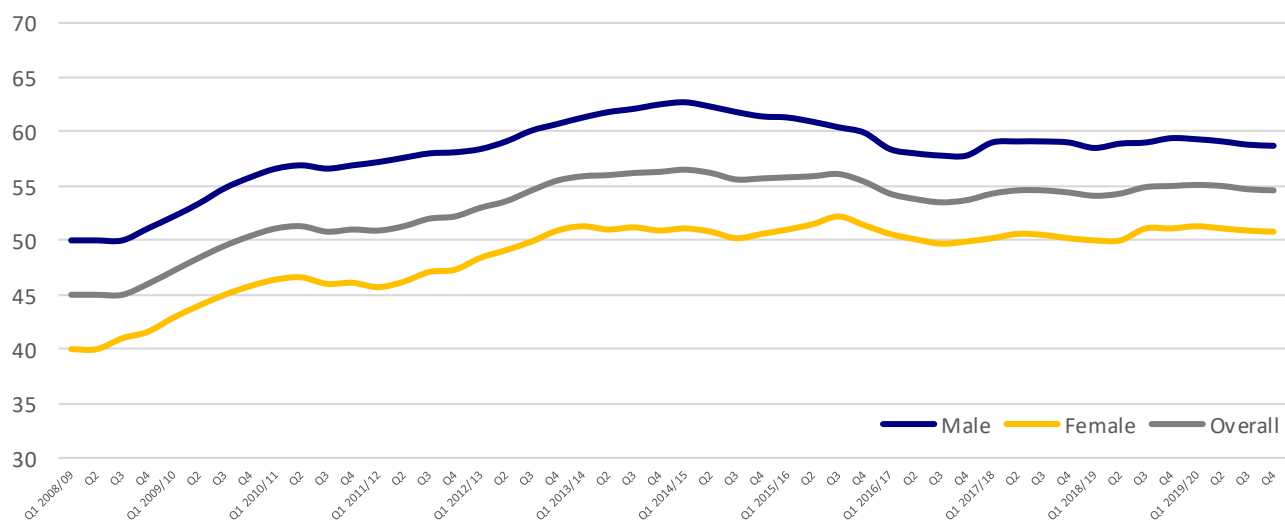
**Driving Test Pass-Rates by Gender**

A clear ‘gender-gap’ is apparent in Northern Irish test pass-rates, using a four-quarter rolling average (table 4.10 & figure 4.3). In the latest quarter, males had a 7.9 percentage-point higher pass-rate compared to females for the private-car driving test. This gap has remained relatively consistent over the past three years, although it is noticeably narrower than the 11.6% gap reported in 2014.

Every test centre offering private-car driving tests also showed this same disparity, to varying degrees, from 16.6 percentage-points at the Lisburn centre (80.4% v 63.8%) to 2.9 percentage-points at the Newtownards centre (45.9% v 43.1%) (table 4.7b).

Whilst similar gender gaps in favour of males are also apparent in Great Britain for cars and motorcycles, in contrast to Northern Ireland, the GB pass-rates for large goods vehicles are higher for females. Without a detailed understanding of the profile of candidates presenting for these categories of tests, it is difficult to contextualise why these differences by gender and UK location may occur. It should also be noted the small numbers of females presenting for testing on large goods vehicles and passenger carrying vehicles in Northern Ireland.

**Fig. 4.3: Northern Ireland Private-Car Practical Test Pass-Rates – Rolling 4-Quarter Average**



The DVA's Driver Licensing division is responsible for licensing drivers in Northern Ireland. The DVA issues and, where appropriate, withdraws licences in respect of drivers of cars, motorcycles, goods vehicles, buses, and other vehicles.

Whilst the lockdown for COVID-19 in late March 2020 caused changes to the divisions working practises, it did not affect the statistics for this quarter. For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the COVID-19 page on the NIDirect website<sup>5</sup>.

## Driver Licensing Transactions

The number of ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter four 2019-20 (6,523) was 9.2% higher than the figure for those issued during the same period in the previous year (5,975 licences) (table 5.1), although this figure is broadly unchanged over the past decade. During 2019-20, the DVA issued over 26,600 provisional licenses, a 3.3% increase on the record low seen last year.

The DVA carried out just under 58,700 ordinary licensing transactions during January to March 2020 (figure 5.1). This represented a decrease of 5.7% in comparison with the volume carried out in the corresponding quarter of 2019. For the full financial year, the DVA carried out over 241,000 transactions, a 4.6% decrease on last year, and almost 19% less than the peak volume seen during 2017-18. As the period of validity of a driving licence changed from 3 years to 10 years in 1985, this has resulted in a significant cyclical pattern with a peak renewal period during the middle of each decade. Whilst this would usually have reduced by early 2017, the introduction of the new driver licensing IT system (*Driver Licensing System*) resulted in a backlog until late 2017.

Fig. 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions

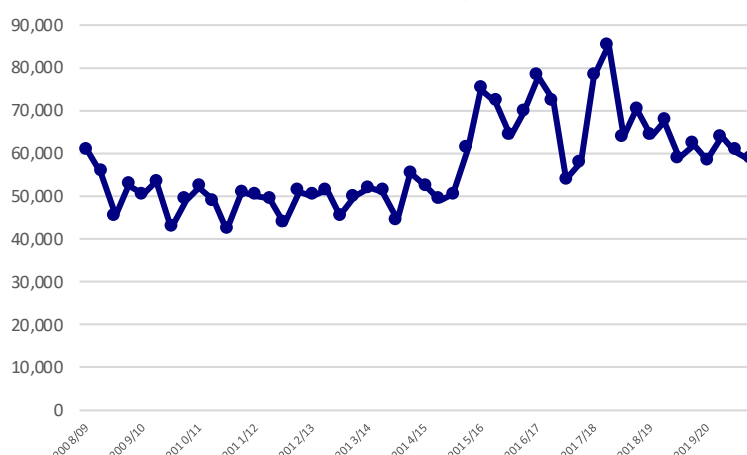
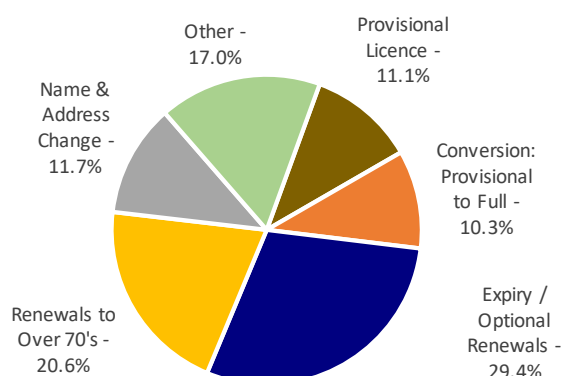


Fig. 5.2: Driver Licence Transactions Q4 2019-20, by Type



During quarter four 2019-20, the DVA carried out 4,236 vocational licensing transactions, a decrease of 2.6% on the corresponding period in 2019 where the figure stood at 4,348 (table 5.2). During 2019-20 as a whole, the DVA completed over 18,600 vocational transactions, a 2.1% decrease compared to the series peak of over 19,000 seen in 2018-19.

In other licensing activity, the DVA issued 4,590 letters of entitlement during the quarter, an increase of 14.3% over the equivalent period in 2019 (table 5.3). Over the same time, the volume of identity checks also increased by 16.7% from 7,105 to 8,291.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-motoring>



Driver Licence Stock

At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were almost 1,121,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement, a rise of 1.3% compared with the total twelve months ago (table 5.9 & figure 5.4). Conversely, the number of people holding a provisional licence for private-cars / light vans fell by 0.5% compared with a year ago. The number of people aged 65 and over holding a full licence increased by over 6,400 in the past twelve months, with the total now approximately 216,000 individuals. In addition, those licence holders aged 65 and over now account for a larger proportion of the driver licence stock: as of March 2020, they made up 19.3% of the total, a rise of 0.5 percentage points compared to eighteen months ago, reflecting the nature of Northern Irelands aging population.

An estimated 76.5% of Northern Ireland’s adult population (i.e. aged 17 or over) had a full and eligible licence for private cars / light vans, based on the 2018 Mid-Year Population Estimates<sup>6</sup> (table 5.8i). For males, the estimated figure was 79.9%, which is nearly seven percentage-points higher than the 73.2% seen for females.

Fig. 5.3: Proportion of Population with a Full & Eligible Private Car Licence - by Age

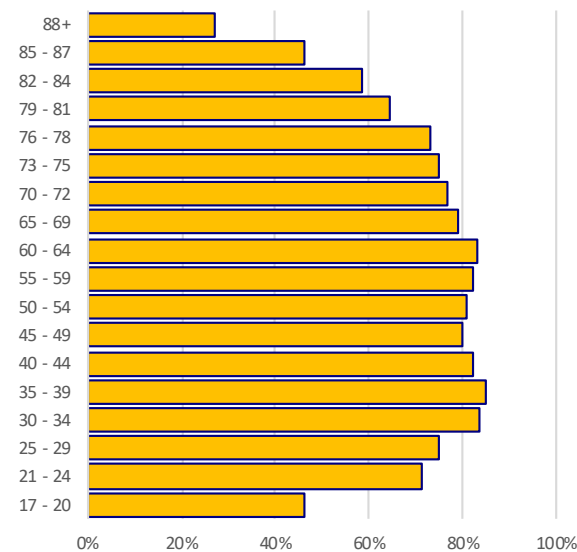


Fig. 5.4: Full & Eligible Private Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

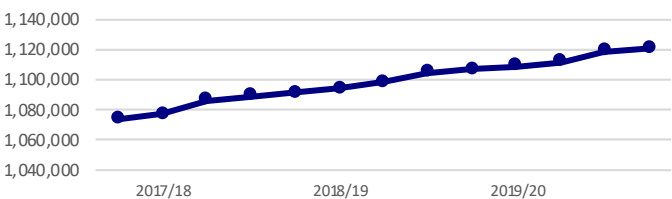
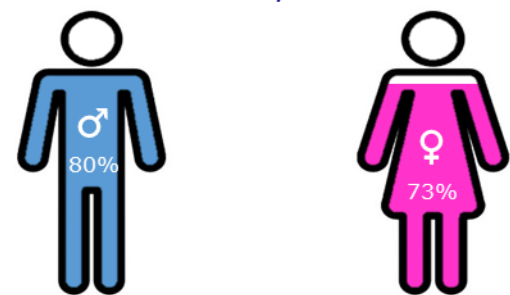


Fig. 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full & Eligible Private Car Licence - by Gender



<sup>6</sup> Available from NISRA at <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/population/mid-year-population-estimates>.

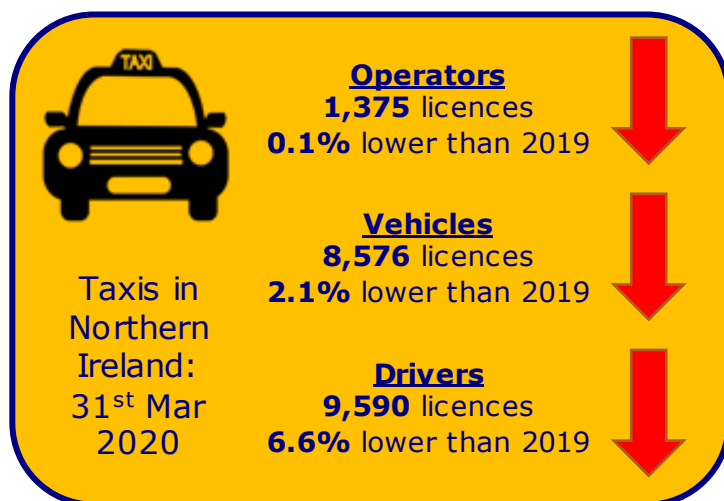
## **6** **Road Transport Licensing**

The Passenger Transport Licensing division in DVA is responsible for issuing (and where appropriate, withdrawing) licences in respect of taxi drivers and bus operators. Goods licensing is the responsibility of the Transport Regulation Unit in DfI.

Whilst the lockdown for COVID-19 in late March 2020 caused changes to the divisions working practises, it did not affect the statistics for this quarter.

### Taxi Licensing

The number of taxi driver licences in force at the end of March 2020 (9,590) was down by 6.6% on the previous year (table 6.2), and is the lowest number recorded in our time series. This is the eighth consecutive "lowest-ever" as the trend continues to decline. The number of taxi drivers has



now fallen by over a third in just five years. This reduction may have been caused, in part, by the introduction of a new taxi driver theory test, introduced on 31<sup>st</sup> Oct 2014. For 2019-20, the DVA issued 5.3% fewer taxi driver licenses than during 2018-19, and the second-lowest annual total in our time series. Of these taxi drivers, 96% were Male, whilst their average age was 51.

Just under 2,000 vehicle licences for taxis were issued during January to March 2020, 3.5% lower than the number issued in the corresponding quarter in 2019 (table 6.1). At the 31<sup>st</sup>

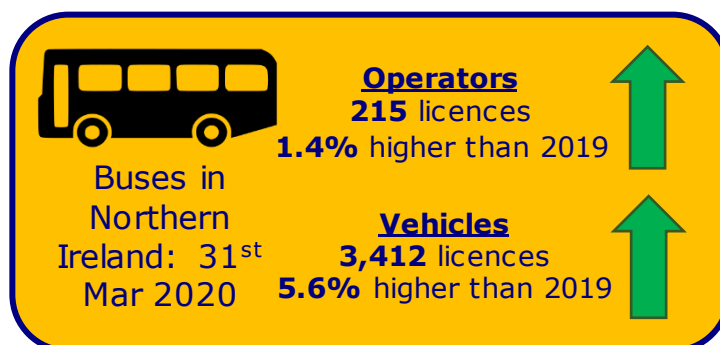
March 2020, there were approximately 8,600 licensed taxi vehicles in Northern Ireland, a decrease of 1.2% when compared to the preceding quarter, and 8% lower than five years ago. Whilst the total number of taxi vehicles has continued to fall, the number of PSV licenses issued during 2019-20 actually increased by 1.6% compared to the record low issued in 2018-19.

These taxi vehicles were affiliated to 1,375 licensed taxi operators, of which 87% were classified as small operators, i.e. can only list up to two taxis on the licence. Similar to the number of drivers and vehicles, the number of taxi operators has decreased by over a quarter compared to the figure recorded five years ago and it is the third-lowest figure recorded in our time series.

### Bus Licensing

The number of licensed buses at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 was 3,412, up 5.6% on the figure on the equivalent date in 2019 (table 6.3) and the second-highest figure recorded in our time series. The DVA issued 818 bus vehicle licences during the quarter, down 9.2% on the equivalent quarter in 2019 (table 6.1). For the financial year, the DVA issued 3,581 bus licenses, up 7% on last year's previous record.

At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were 215 bus operator licences in force, up from the amount as recorded one year ago (212). During January to March 2020, the DVA processed 50 bus operator licences, essentially unchanged from the 51 recorded in the same period last year.



**Goods Licensing**

The number of goods vehicle operator licences in force as at the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 was 5,355, a decrease of 5.8% on last year, and a drop of almost a fifth (19%) on seven years ago (table 6.4). Whilst the total



has decreased over this period, within this, the number of standard international licences continues to increase, with the figure of 1,828 accounting for a series high 34% of all goods vehicle operators.

Associated to these operators, again as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, were 21,725 heavy goods vehicles. This is a decrease of 2.0% when compared with the same point in 2019, and a decrease of 5.8% when compared with 2018.

DVA Enforcement falls within the Agency's Compliance & Enforcement directorate. Roadside Enforcement is responsible for the enforcement of legislation pertaining to roadworthiness standards and licensing requirements at the roadside.

Whilst the lockdown for COVID-19 in late March 2020 caused changes to the divisions working practises, it did not affect the statistics for this quarter.

### Enforcement Activities

During January to March 2020, DVA enforcement staff checked 1,216 vehicles; of these, the largest volume was for heavy goods vehicles, accounting for over a third of all vehicles checked (table 7.1 & figure 7.1).

For the 2019-20 financial year, the DVA inspected almost 4,500 vehicles, 11% lower than last year, and the lowest annual total in our time series.

Fig 7.1: Enforcement Spot-Checks, by Quarter

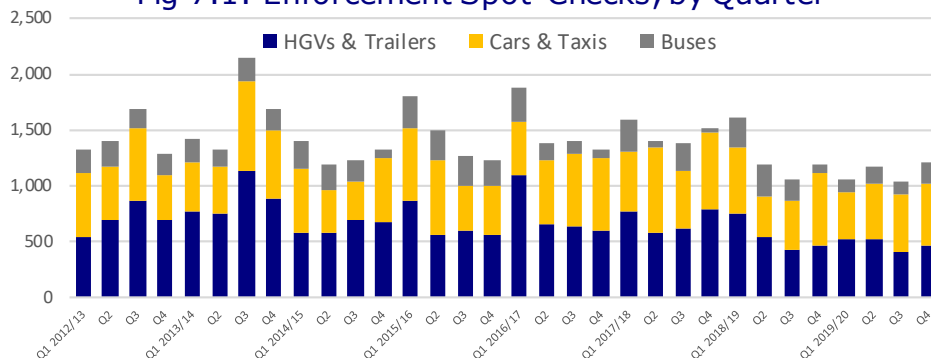
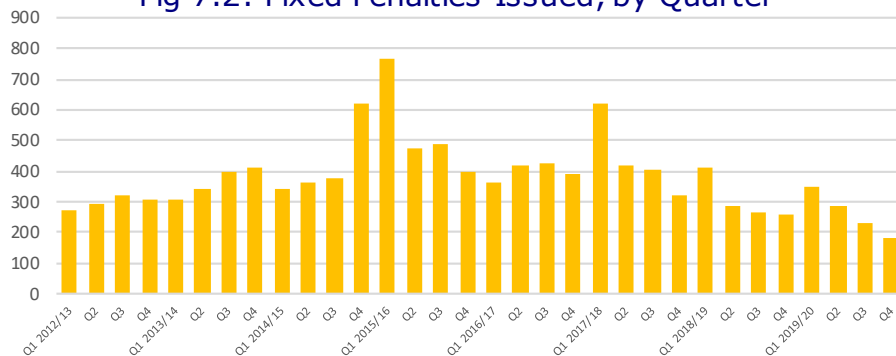


Fig 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued, by Quarter



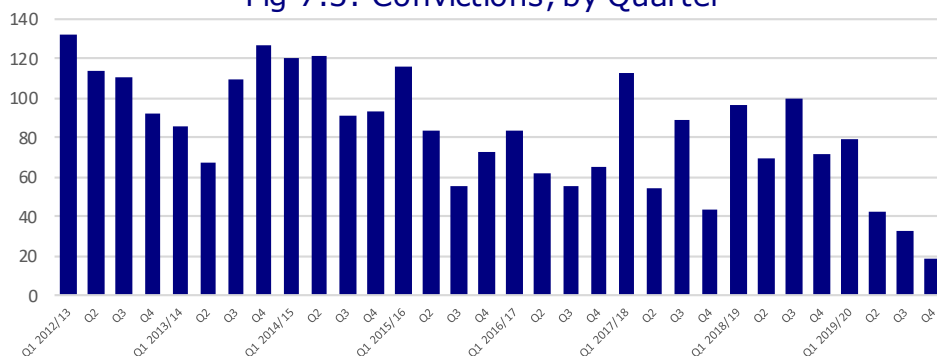
DVA enforcement officers issued 180 fixed penalty notices during quarter three (table 7.2 & figure 7.2), the lowest quarterly total since our time series began in 2012, and approximately a third of the series peak in 2015-16 Q1. The total value of these fixed penalties issued was £26,290.

The DVA issued 1,041 fixed penalties during the financial year, a 15% decrease on 2018-19, and the lowest total in our time series.

There were 19 successful convictions during the quarter, accounting for 56 offences. From these cases, the DVA received £6,580 of Court fines & costs.

For the third quarter in a row, this is the lowest number of successful prosecutions since our time series began in 2012. In addition, the 173 successful convictions for 2019-20 was the lowest figure since our time series began in 2012.

Fig 7.3: Convictions, by Quarter



During January to March 2020, enforcement teams carried out 9 joint operations with the PSNI (table 7.3 & figure 7.4). They also carried out 8 cross border operations in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority in Ireland, along with PSNI and An Garda Síochána.

For 2019-20, the total number of joint operations (35) was a record low for our time series, whilst the total number of cross border operations (32) was the joint highest annual figure.

Fig 7.4: Joint or Cross-Border Operations, by Quarter

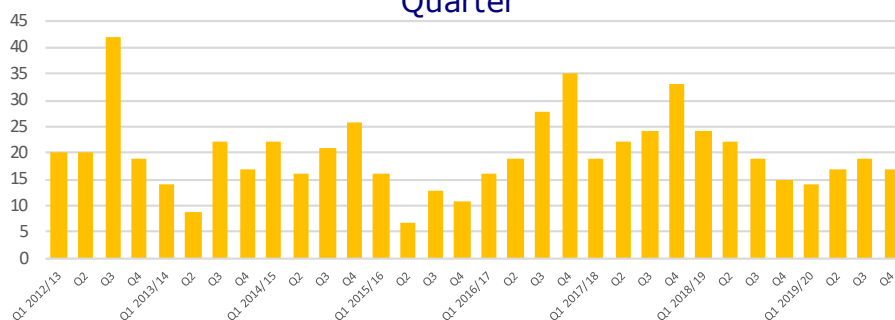
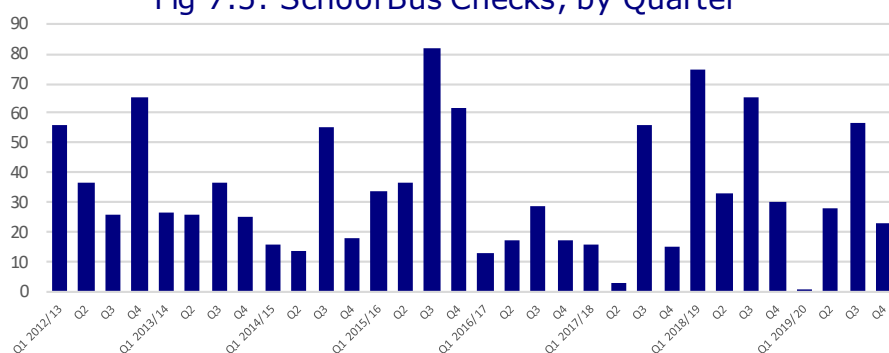


Fig 7.5: School Bus Checks, by Quarter



The DVA conducted 23 school bus checks during the quarter (table 7.4 & figure 7.5). These spot checks discovered 12 offences.

109 buses were inspected during 2019-20, during which 20 offences were discovered, a record low for the time series.

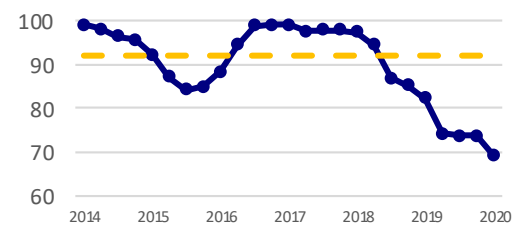
## **DVA Target Monitoring**

The DVA monitors performance through four targets:

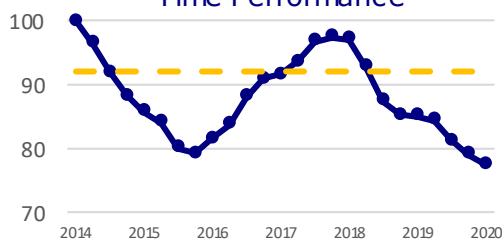
1. *Vehicle Testing* - Appoint 92% of vehicle test applications within 21 days or later on request;
2. *Driver Testing* - Appoint 92% of practical driving test applications within 28 days or, on request, at a later date;
3. *Online Driver Licensing* - Process 95% of complete online driver licensing applications within 5 working days;
4. *Paper Driver Licensing* - Process 95% of complete paper driver licensing applications within 10 working days.

Vehicle testing waiting time performance for the 2019-20 financial year was 69.2%, a decrease of 4.6 percentage-points on the position reported in the preceding quarter, and 22.8 percentage-points below the Agency target. This is the lowest financial year figure in our time-series (table 8.1) and reflects the challenging impacts of both the exceptional demand for tests during summer 2019 and the lift-maintenance issues in 2020.

**Fig. 8.1: Vehicle Test Waiting Time Performance**



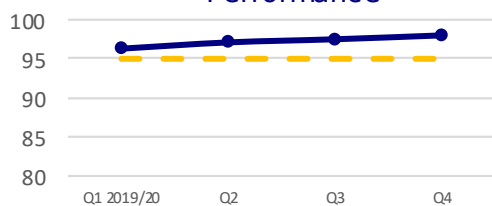
**Fig. 8.2: Driver Test Waiting Time Performance**



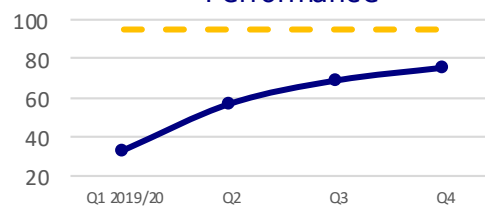
Driver testing waiting time performance for the 2019-20 financial year was 77.4%. This is a 1.6 percentage-point decrease on the position in the previous quarter, and 14.6 percentage-points below the current Agency target of 92% (table 8.1). This is the lowest reported figure since our time series began in 2014.

For 2019-20, the DVA has split the reporting for driver licensing into two: one target for online applications (5 days) and another for paper applications (10 days). Neither of these is directly comparable to the previous *all-in-one* target. Online application performance for 2019-20 was 98.0%, exceeding the Agency target of 95%. Paper application performance was 75.5% for the 2019-20 financial year, 19.5 percentage-points below the Agency target of 95%.

**Fig. 8.3: Online Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance**



**Fig. 8.4: Paper Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance**



(Note that the third and fourth indicators in this section do not yet have National Statistics accreditation, although continue to have Official Statistics status).

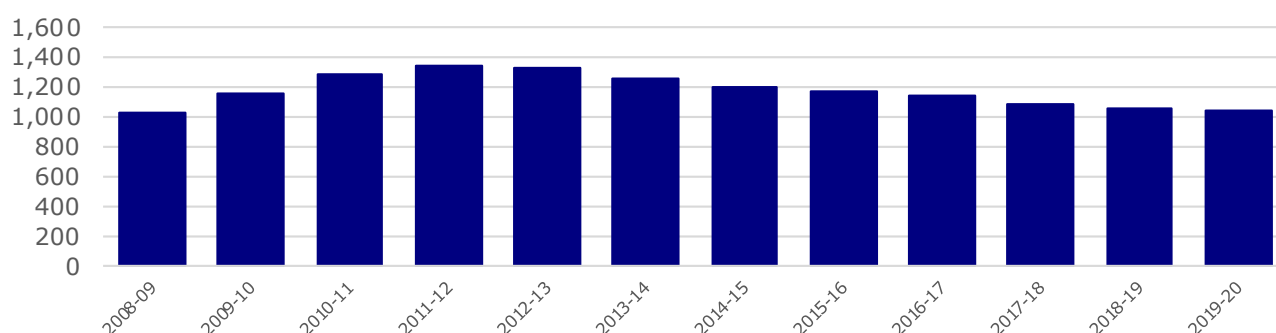
The DVA carries responsibility for the maintenance of the Approved Driving Instructor (ADI) register and the Approved Motorcycle Instructor (AMI) register.

Whilst the lockdown for COVID-19 in late March 2020 caused changes to the divisions working practises, it did not affect the statistics for this quarter.

## Volumes

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, there were 1,043 Approved Driving Instructors registered in Northern Ireland, representing a 1.8% reduction on the number registered a year ago. This is the eighth successive fall in numbers, from the peak of 1,344 registered in 2011-12. Of these Driving Instructors, 85% were male: a proportion that is broadly unchanged over the past ten years. There were 18 new registrants this year, a fall of 28% on last year, and the smallest number recorded in our time series. Falling numbers taking the driving test (table 4.3) from 2008/09 to 2011/12, combined with the economic climate, increasing motoring costs, and demographic changes may all have contributed to a lower demand for instructors.

**Fig 9.1: Approved Driving Instructors in Northern Ireland**



The number of Approved Motorcycle Instructors remains substantially lower, with 48 registered as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 19% reduced from the peak in 2012-13.

## Test Volumes & Pass-Rates

The numbers undertaking each exam-element, remain low compared to the peaks seen in 2010-11. In 2019-20, 81 candidates attempted the Theory & Hazard Perception test (down 6% on 2018-19), 43 attempted the Driving Ability test (down 7%), and 51 attempted the Instructional Ability test (down 4% on last year).

The pass-rate for the Theory & Hazard Perception test in 2019-20 was 28%, which is the lowest pass-rate recorded in our time-series. In 2019-20, the pass-rate for the Driving Ability test was 79%, an increase on the 74% recorded last year, and the highest figure in our series for the second consecutive year. Finally, the pass-rate for the Instructional Ability test was 35% this year, broadly unchanged on nine years ago (33% in 2011-12), although lower than the peak figure of 44% in 2016-17.

Note that large movements in pass-rates from year to year may be due to the small numbers sitting each of the individual tests.

## **Notes**

### **National Statistics**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2015, the UK Statistics Authority designated this series as National Statistics. This means the Authority has certified them as compliant with its Code of Practice for Official Statistics. You can find both the assessment report and letter of confirmation on the UK Statistics Authority website at <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/driver-and-vehicle-statistics-in-northern-ireland>.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality, and public value. DVA statisticians produce them free from any political interference and undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They were awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is a producer's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The Department further demonstrates its commitment to the Code of Practice by publishing a series of supporting statements related to its use of administrative data, publication strategy, confidentiality arrangements, revisions policy, customer service and complaints procedure. For further details, see <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/code-practice-statistics>.

Note that since the report achieved National Statistics accreditation, we have added four new target-monitoring indicators. We have discussed these with the Office for Statistical Regulation (OSR), and it has been agreed that both the Vehicle Testing and Driver Testing Waiting Time targets fully comply with the National Statistics standard. However, whilst the two Driver Licensing processing time targets meet many aspects of the Code of Practice, more investigation of the processes and quality checks associated with the new *Driver Licensing System* would be required before the OSR could deem them fully compliant. In the interim, these indicators will continue to have the status of Official Statistics and this has been highlighted in the relevant section of the report.

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