

DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics

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Key Findings

- Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24th March 2020, meaning no tests were conducted during April and May. The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1st June, accounting for 49 tests conducted during June. The testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20th July, along with further additional categories from 1st September.
- DVLA (Swansea) registered just over 14,500 new vehicles in Northern Ireland during January to March 2020. This is 28.2% lower than the figure recorded for the same period in 2019 and the lowest quarter-four total for more than a decade. The most popular new private-car was Volkswagen (13%); with grey the most popular colour (21%) and petrol the most popular fuel-type (59%).
- There were 1,201,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 31st March 2020, a decrease of 0.6% on last year. The overwhelming majority (83%) were cars.
- Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all theory testing from 20th March, and only resumed on 6th July. During quarter one, only a handful of 'key-worker' tests were conducted.
- Similarly, all driver testing was suspended from 20th March, and so no practical driving tests were conducted during the quarter. Motorcycle testing resumed on 6th July, whilst tests for drivers of buses, tractors and module 4 CPC tests for lorry, bus and coach drivers commenced on 20th July.
- On 27th March, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications, and directed their limited resources towards the provision of essential and 'key-worker' services. As such, during quarter one 2020-21, the DVA carried out approximately 31,400 licensing transactions, a decrease of 46.1% compared to 2019-20.
- At the 30th June 2020, there were almost 1,110,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement. This was a decrease of 0.9% compared with the previous quarterly total.
- At the 30th June 2020, there were approximately 9,400 licensed taxi drivers, down by 6.9% when compared with the same point of 2019, and the lowest figure in our series. Conversely, there were over 8,700 licensed taxi vehicles, an increase of 1.7% when compared to June 2019, although more than 7% lower than June 2015.
- Due to various measures introduced due to COVID-19, DVA Enforcement activities were constrained during the quarter. Accordingly, only 49 vehicles were spot-checked.
- As only limited testing took place between April and June 2020, there are no updates to either the vehicle or driver testing performance metrics. For driver licensing in the twelve-months to June 2020, online application performance was 98.2% processed within five days, whilst paper application performance was 84.3% processed within ten days, both against a target of 95%.

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Key Findings	2
Introduction	4
1. Vehicle Testing	5
2. Vehicle Licensing and Registration	6
3. Driver Theory Testing	9
4. Driver Practical Testing	10
5. Driver Licensing	11
6. Road Transport Licensing	14
7. Enforcement & Compliance	16
8. DVA Target Monitoring	17
Notes	18

Introduction

This is the twenty-third 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 one of 2020-21. This covers the period from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 2020. Due to the transfer of vehicle licensing functions to DVLA, the data in the corresponding section (page 6) is from 1st January 2020 to 31st March 2020.

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

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

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 two.

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 and Vehicle Agency* (DVA) is an executive agency within the *Department for Infrastructure* (DfI). The DVA was formed on 1st 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).

1 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.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24th March 2020, and began issuing three-month TECs (temporary exemption certificates) to all customers (extended to twelve-month TECs, from May 2020). The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1st June, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20th July. Priority vehicle groups include taxis and buses due a first time test, vehicles not previously registered in Northern Ireland, vehicles with an MOT expired by more than 12 months (that includes vehicles previously declared SORN), and those sold by car dealerships. Testing of further vehicle categories began on 1st September, including four-year-old private cars and motorcycles, three-year-old light goods vehicles, all heavy goods vehicles, and trailers.

As vehicle testing was suspended for the entirety of quarter one, we have removed this section for this edition of the report. The back-series tables are still available in the Excel file.

For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the MOT and Vehicle Testing page on the NIDirect website¹.

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

Vehicle Licensing and Registration

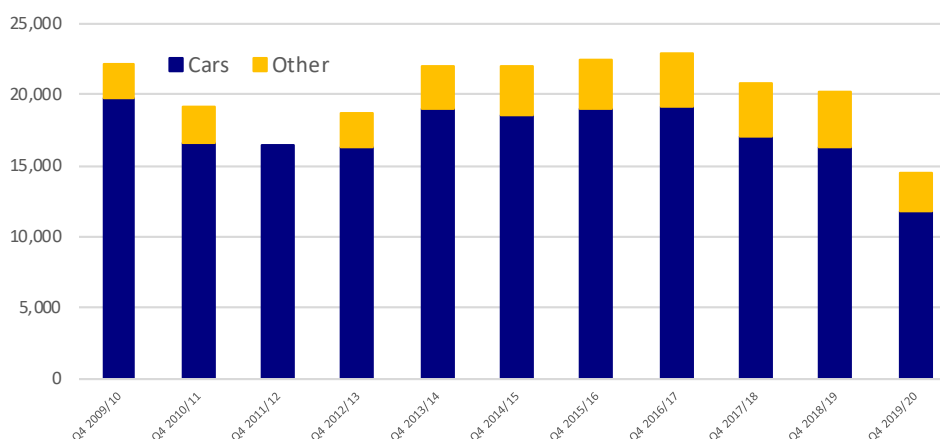
Vehicle Licensing is the responsibility of DVLA in Swansea, following the transfer of this work from DVA in July 2014.

Vehicle Registrations

During January to March 2020, the DVLA registered just over 14,500 new vehicles for the first time in Northern Ireland. The number of new vehicle first registrations showed a decrease of 28.2% from the same period in 2019 and is the lowest quarter-four total for more than a decade. Private car first registrations accounted for the majority of this decrease, down by 27.7% when compared to 2019 (table 2.1).

The COVID-19 lockdown heavily influenced this decrease, as vehicle dealerships had to close in late-March 2020. March is typically the peak month for new registrations (related to the release of a new license plate in Great Britain); however the lockdown caused a reduction of over 50% compared to March 2019 (8,234 new registrations in March 2019 versus 3,960 in March 2020).

Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations

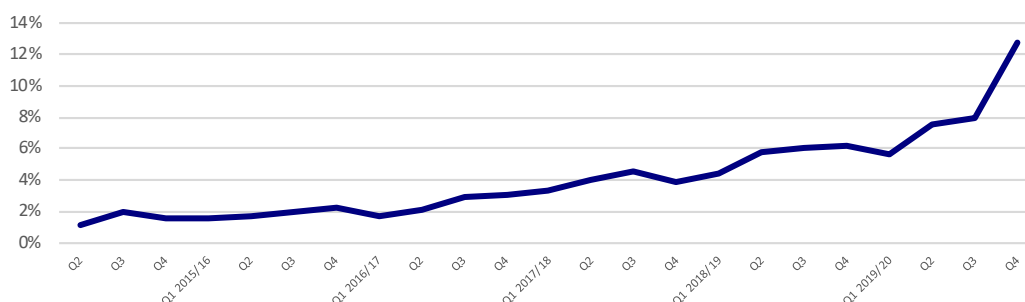


* Other Registrations split into new and used for quarter four 2011-12 are unavailable

The top make for cars registered for the first time during January to March 2020 was Volkswagen, accounting for 1,412 registrations. This is the first time in nearly five years that Ford has not been at number one, as first time registrations of Fords dropped by a third compared to the same period last year (1,867 in 2019 versus 1,251 in 2020) (table 2.3). This decrease in Ford registrations was also the largest drop amongst makes in the top ten for new car first registrations, as each of the top ten recorded a decrease when compared to the equivalent period in 2019.

Grey was again the most popular colour for new cars, accounting for 21.0% of all new registrations. Blue (20.1%), white (19.1%), black (15.0%), and red (12.6%) are the next most popular.

Figure 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 diesel cars, down from 52.0% of cars in 2014-15 quarter four to 28.1% this year (9,662 vehicles in 2014-15 Q4 down to 3,304 vehicles in 2019-20 Q4). Conversely, the number of alternative-fuel² cars being registered continues to increase, rising from 287 cars in 2014-15 quarter four (1.5% of new car registrations) to 1,499 in the same period this year (12.8% of new car registrations).

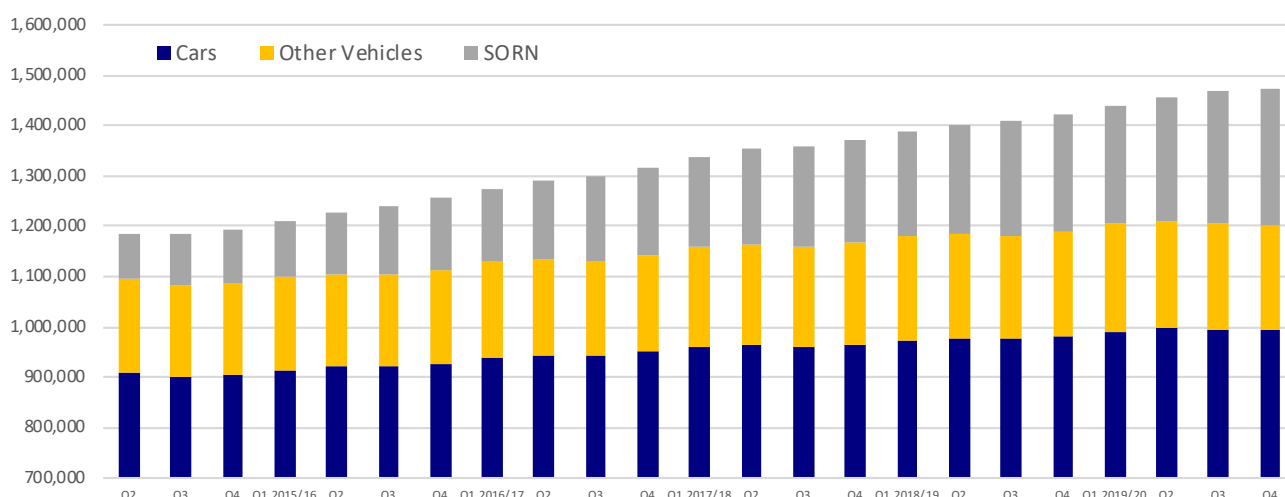
However, it is possible that this relates to how electric vehicles are purchased, rather than a substantial change in the underlying trend. Electric vehicles are more likely to be delivered directly to customers rather than through dealerships and so will have been less affected by the COVID-19 lockdown.

Licensed Vehicles

There were approximately 1,201,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 31st March 2020, a 0.6% decrease compared with the previous quarter, and the second consecutive quarterly decrease since the series-peak of 1,212,000 in September 2019. All body types, apart from Agricultural, saw a decrease in licensed vehicles, although the decreases in HGVs (7.0%) and Buses (16.6%) were the most substantial. These decreases mostly correspond to higher than usual increases in SORNed (*Statutory Off-Road Notification*) vehicles, potentially due to keepers (particularly commercial keepers noting the HGV and Bus changes) opting to SORN their vehicle during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Approximately 273,400 vehicles had a SORN at the 31st March 2020, representing 18.5% of the total vehicle stock (table 2.13). The number of SORN vehicles in Northern Ireland increased by over a sixth (18.1%) from the same date in 2019 (the largest annual increase in our time series); in comparison to a 17.0% 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 quarter four 2013-14 onwards, both in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Figure 2.3: Northern Ireland Vehicle Stock

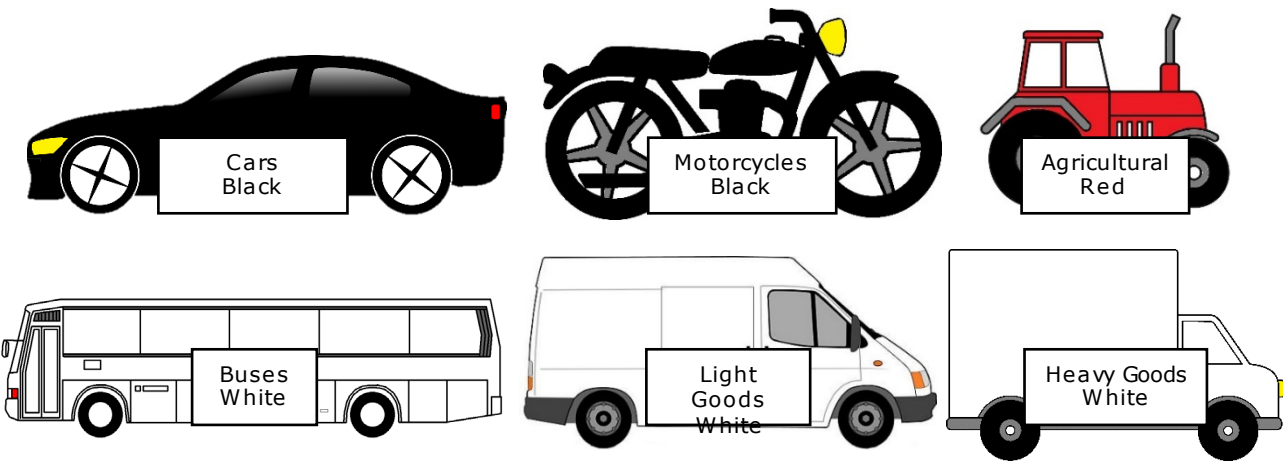


As of 31st March 2020, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 8.7 years. However, there is some variance in average age for different body-types:

- Cars – 8.2 years;
- Motorcycles – 13.4 years;
- Light Goods – 8.3 years;
- Heavy Goods – 9.8 years;
- Buses – 10.1 years;
- Agricultural – 21.4 years;
- Other – 10.1 years.

² 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.

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:



3 **Driver Theory Testing**

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.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all driver theory testing from 20th March 2020, and resumed on 6th July.

As theory testing was suspended for the entirety of quarter one, bar the exception of a handful of 'key-worker' tests, we have removed this section for this edition of the report. The back-series tables are still available in the Excel file.

For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the Driver Theory Testing page on the NIDirect website³.

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

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.

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the DVA suspended all driver testing from 20th March 2020. Motorcycle testing resumed on 6th July, whilst tests for drivers of buses, tractors and module 4 CPC tests for lorry, bus and coach drivers commenced on 20th July. Testing for drivers of private cars (category B) and lorries (category C) resumed on 1st September.

As driver testing was suspended for the entirety of quarter one, we have removed this section for this edition of the report. The back-series tables are still available in the Excel file.

For further guidance and background, plus the latest news and updates, please visit the Practical Driving Test page on the NIDirect website⁴.

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

5 Driver Licensing

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.

On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and closed down the driver licensing office. The decision was taken to protect staff and help fight the spread of COVID-19, allowing the DVA to direct their limited resources towards the continued provision of essential services. In this period, the DVA continued to process paper applications for Group 2 (heavy goods and/or bus) driving licences, given their critical role during this crisis. In addition, with staff working remotely, the DVA was able to process applications for Group 1 (private car/motorcycle) renewal licences submitted through the online service.

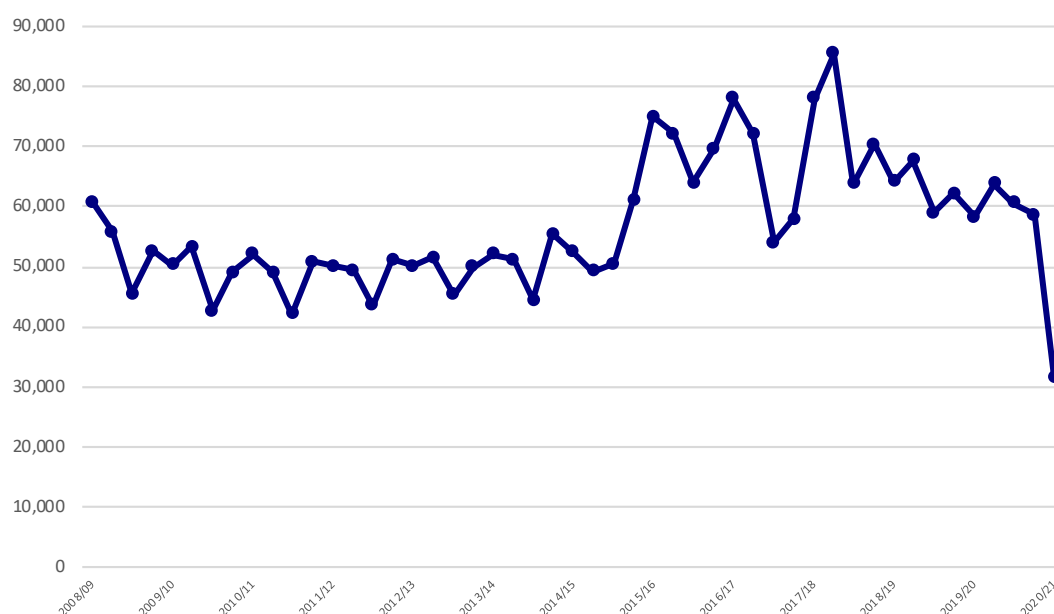
On 26 May 2020, the Minister for Infrastructure, Nichola Mallon, announced plans to extend expiring driving licences for an additional seven months from the expiry date. The new arrangements came into effect on 4 June 2020, when the new EU Regulation became law, and applies to driving licences expiring between 1 February and 31 August 2020.

DVA has been gradually resuming driver licensing services and is now working to process all applications it receives. However, the decision to close down the licensing services and the focus on applications from key-workers, has affected the volume of transactions processed and on the delivery of those services against the performance measurement targets.

Driver Licensing Transactions

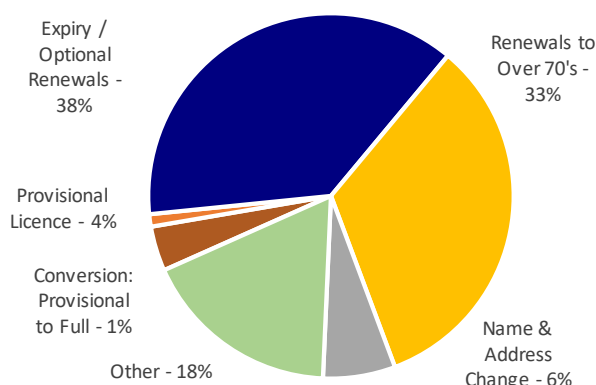
The DVA carried out approximately 31,400 ordinary licensing transactions during April to June 2020 (figure 5.1). This represented a decrease of 46.1% in comparison with the volume carried out in the corresponding quarter of 2019.

Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter one 2020-21 (1,247) was 80.0% lower than the figure for those issued during the same period in the previous year (6,220 licences) (table 5.1), although this trend has been broadly unchanged over the past decade.

Figure 5.2: Driver License Transactions by Type, 2019-20 Quarter Four



During quarter one 2020-21, the DVA carried out 2,312 vocational licensing transactions, a decrease of 45.4% on the corresponding period in 2019 where the figure stood at 4,233 (table 5.2).

In other licensing activity, the number of letters of entitlement issued during the quarter (3,074) was 41.7% lower than in quarter one 2019-20, and was the lowest quarterly total in six years (table 5.3). Similarly, the volume of identity checks (1,705) is 77.2% lower than last year, and is the smallest figure in our time series.

Driver Licence Stock

At the 30th June 2020, there were approximately 1,110,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement, a decrease of 0.9% compared with the previous quarterly total (table 5.9 and figure 5.4). This is the first quarterly decrease seen in our time series began in 2017, and is most likely caused by the temporary cessation in processing paper applications during the COVID-19 lockdown. The suspension of practical driving tests will have also reduced the number of people applying to convert their provisional license to full. Conversely, the number of people holding a provisional licence for private-cars / light vans (just under 97,000) increased by 0.7% compared with the previous quarter, and by 1.0% on the series-low recorded a year ago. The number of people aged 65 and over holding a full licence increased by over 4,000 in the past twelve months, with the total now approximately 215,000 individuals. In addition, those licence holders aged 65 and over now account for a larger proportion of the driver licence stock: as of June 2020, they made up 19.3% of the total, a rise of 0.3 percentage points compared to twelve months ago, reflecting the nature of Northern Ireland's aging population.

An estimated 75.3% 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 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimates⁵ (table 5.8i). For males, the estimated figure was 78.6%, which is six percentage-points higher than the 72.1% seen for females.

⁵ Available from NISRA at <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/population/mid-year-population-estimates>.

Figure 5.3: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Age

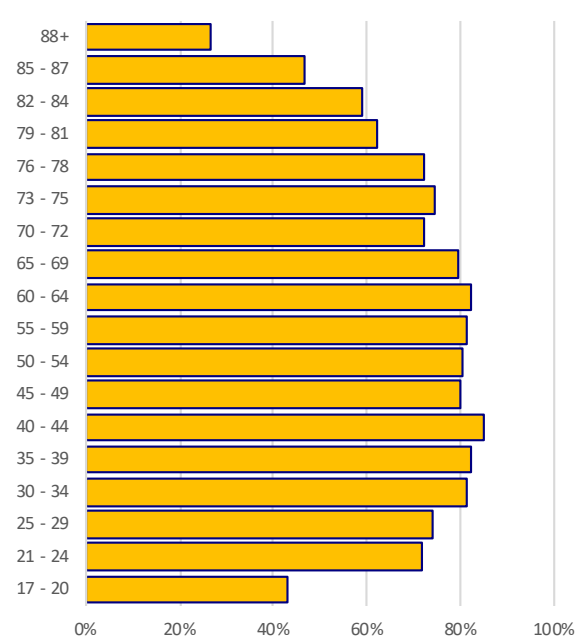


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

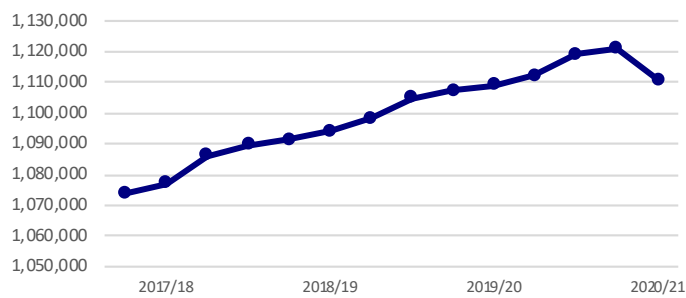
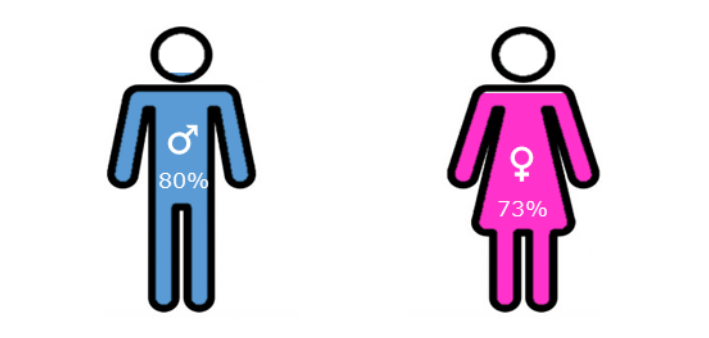


Figure 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Gender



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 majority of the division has continued to operate during the COVID-19 lockdown, the DVA suspended the division's reception and counter services on 27 March 2020. This was a necessary, precautionary measure to protect staff and customers, and to adhere to government guidelines on social distancing.

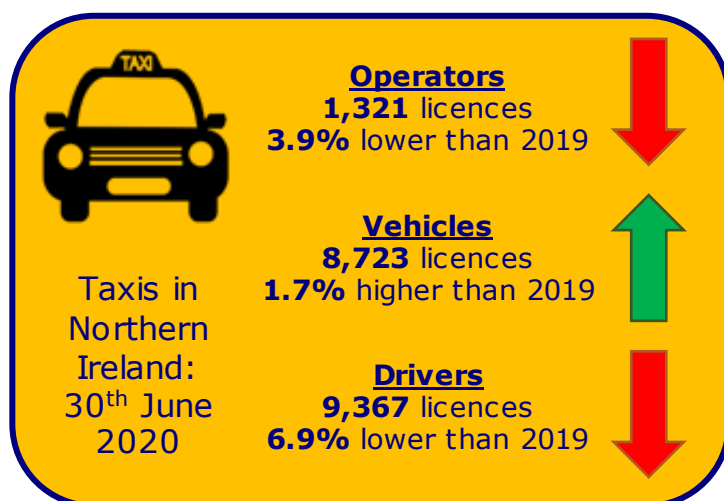
On 10 April 2020, the Minister for Infrastructure, Nichola Mallon, announced the automatic renewal of taxi vehicle licences for an additional six months from the expiry date. This applies to all taxi vehicle licences expiring between 10 March and 9 October 2020. The Department also made a determination to renew existing bus vehicle licences, and issued twelve-month licences automatically to affected vehicles during the lockdown period. From 1 July, the division gave priority to applications for new bus or taxi vehicle licences, and further, made it possible for these applications to be submitted electronically from 20 July.

Taxi driver licensing continued to operate during this period, as the government designated taxi drivers as key workers. Renewal-applications with no medical conditions were able to renew without a medical report (on condition that the DVA may ask them to provide a medical report in the future). Additionally, the division provided online training courses to enable taxi drivers to complete their mandatory training hours. Unfortunately, first-time applicants who had not successfully passed their practical test were unable to apply.

The DVA maintained bus and taxi operator licensing services throughout the COVID-19 lockdown.

Taxi Licensing

The number of taxi driver licences in force at the end of June 2020 (9,367) was down by 6.9% on the previous year (table 6.2), and is the lowest number recorded in our time series. This is the ninth 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 31st Oct 2014. Of these taxi drivers, 96% were Male, whilst their average age was 51.

Almost 4,700 vehicle licences for taxis were issued during April to June 2020, more than double the number processed in any previous quarter, albeit the vast majority of these were 6-month exemption certificates rather than normal licenses (table 6.1). At the 30th June 2020, there were approximately

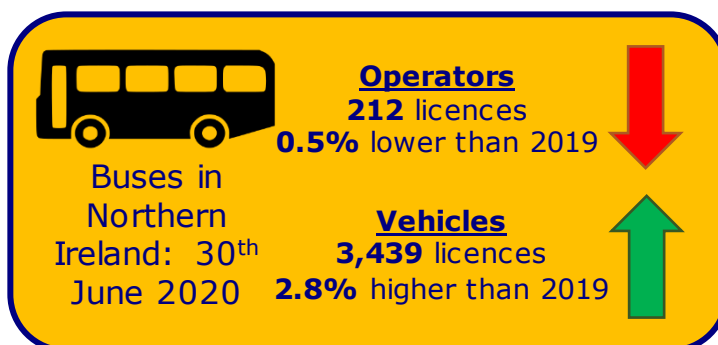
8,700 licensed taxi vehicles in Northern Ireland, an increase of 1.7% when compared to the record low in the preceding quarter, although still 7.4% lower than five years ago.

These taxi vehicles were affiliated to 1,321 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 nearly a third compared to the figure recorded five years ago and it is the lowest figure recorded in our time series.

Bus Licensing

The number of licensed buses at the 30th June 2020 was 3,439, up 2.8% 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 1,324 bus vehicle licences during the quarter, all of which were 12-month exemption certificates rather than normal licenses (table 6.1).

At the 30th June 2020, there were 212 bus operator licences in force, broadly unchanged from the amount as recorded one year ago (213). During April to June 2020, the DVA processed 31 bus operator licences, half the number recorded in the same period last year.



Goods Licensing

The number of goods vehicle operator licences in force as at the 30th June 2020 was 5,352, a decrease of 4.4% on last year, and a drop of almost a tenth (9.7%) on six 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 1,830 accounting for a series high 34% of all goods vehicle operators.

Associated to these operators, again as at 30th June 2020, were 21,632 heavy goods vehicles. This is a decrease of 2.0% when compared with the same point in 2019, and a decrease of 5.1% when compared with 2017.

7 **Enforcement & Compliance**

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

COVID-19 has presented an unprecedented challenge for DVA Enforcement with the division developing and implementing a range of temporary and constrained operational solutions to enable a limited enforcement service to be undertaken whilst protecting enforcement officers, drivers, and operators from the risk of infection.

Despite a number of new procedures being implemented, in line with similar neighbouring enforcement jurisdictions, the overall effectiveness of enforcement has been constrained by a requirement for officers to exercise 2m social distancing at all times. This meant that drivers must remain at the controls of their vehicles with minimal checks conducted by enforcement officers. The DVA is continuing to develop risk assessments to ensure the safety of staff, drivers, and operators in line with the latest PHA advice and guidance as we strive to reinstate routine enforcement operational activities over the coming weeks.

Due to the substantial reduction in enforcement activities during quarter one, we have removed this section for this edition of the report. The back-series tables are still available in the Excel file.

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.

As only limited Vehicle testing took place between April and June 2020, there is no update on the performance measure to report for quarter one. Similarly, there is no update on the Driver testing performance measure. Therefore, figures 8.1 and 8.2 only show performance up to March 2020.

Figure 8.1: Vehicle Test Waiting Time Performance

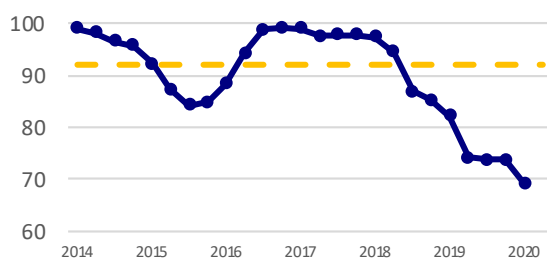
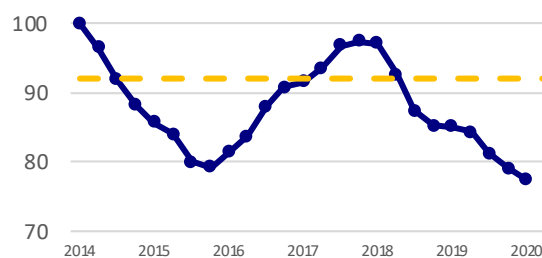


Figure 8.2: Driver Test Waiting Time Performance



From 2019-20, the DVA 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 the twelve months to June 2020 was 98.2%, exceeding the Agency target of 95%. Paper application performance was 84.3% for the same period, 10.7 percentage-points below the Agency target of 95%. Please refer to section five of this report for more commentary regarding driver licensing during the quarter.

Figure 8.3: Online Driver License Application Waiting Time Performance

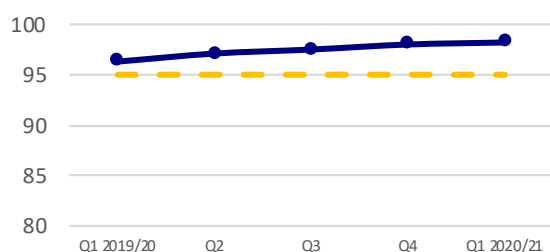
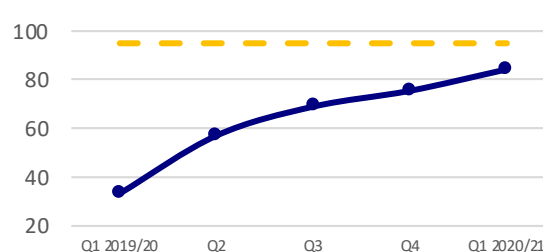


Figure 8.4: Paper Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance



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

Notes

National Statistics

On the 24th 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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