

DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics

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Key Findings

- Vehicle testing resumed in stages throughout the quarter, beginning with priority vehicle groups in July, and extending to further categories (including four-year-old private cars) in September. The DVA conducted approximately 22,800 vehicle tests during quarter one, roughly 8% of the usual volume. Whilst the pass-rate for full tests increased to 83.6%, this was mainly due to the mix of vehicles tested being substantially different to normal.
- DVLA registered just over 4,600 new vehicles in Northern Ireland during April to June 2020. This is 72.3% lower than the figure recorded for the same period in 2019 and the lowest quarter-one total in our time series. The most popular new private-car was Volkswagen (10%); with grey the most popular colour (21%) and petrol the most popular fuel-type (57%).
- There were 1,200,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 30th June 2020, a decrease of 0.1% compared with March 2020. The overwhelming majority (83%) were cars.
- Theory testing resumed post-lockdown on 6th July. Between July and September 2020, the DVA conducted just under 14,900 theory tests, approximately 80% of the usual volume. The pass-rate for private-car theory tests was 56.0%, an increase of 8.6 percentage points on the pre-pandemic quarter-four pass-rate.
- Driver testing resumed in stages throughout the quarter: motorcycles in July, cars, and large goods vehicles in September. As such, the DVA conducted 3,400 driver tests during the quarter, approximately a quarter of the usual volume. The pass-rate for private-car driver tests was 68.1%, up by 9.2 percentage points on the pre-pandemic quarter-four pass-rate.
- Between July and September 2020, the DVA carried out 57,300 licensing transactions, down 16.7% on the corresponding period in 2019. The number of provisional licenses issued during the quarter was a third higher than 2019, and was the highest quarterly total in our time series.
- At the 30th September 2020, there were approximately 1,096,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement. This was a decrease of 1.4% compared with the previous quarterly total.
- At the 30th September 2020, there were just under 9,050 licensed taxi drivers, down by 9.1% when compared with the same point of 2019, and the lowest figure in our series. However, the number of licensed taxi vehicles increased by 2.7% to 9,000, when compared to the record low reported in March 2020.
- Due to various measures introduced due to COVID-19, DVA Enforcement activities were again extremely constrained during the quarter. Accordingly, only 310 vehicles were spot-checked, approximately a quarter of the usual volume checked.
- For the 12-month period up to the end of September 2020, Agency performance against both the vehicle testing and driver testing performance measures was below the target level of 92%. Vehicle testing was up 8.2 percentage points, to 77.4%. Similarly, driver testing was up by 9.6 percentage points, to 87.0%. For driver licensing, for the 12-months to the end of September 2020, online application performance was 97.8% processed within five days, whilst paper application performance was 84.9% processed within ten days, both against a target of 95%.

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Introduction

This is the twenty-fourth 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 two of 2020-21. This covers the period from 1st July 2020 to 30th September 2020. Due to the transfer of vehicle licensing functions to DVLA, the data in the corresponding section (page 8) is from 1st April 2020 to 30th June 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 website¹.

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

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.

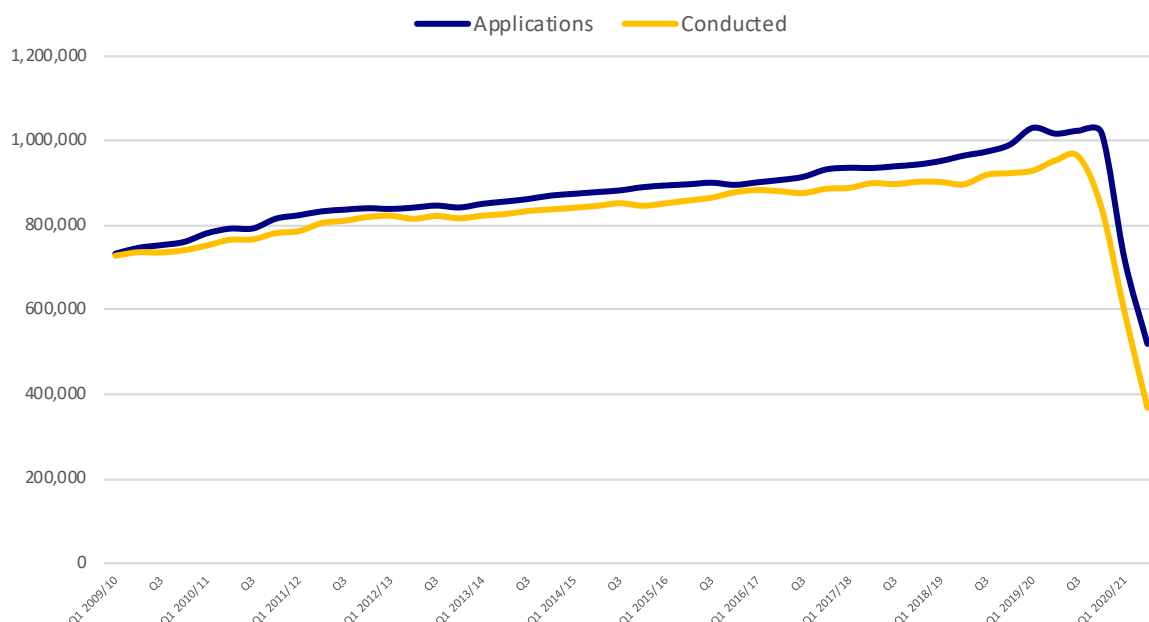
Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24th March 2020, and began issuing temporary exemption certificates (TECs) to all customers. The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1st June, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20th July. Priority vehicle groups 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.

For the latest news and updates, please visit the MOT and Vehicle Testing page on the NIDirect website².

Vehicle Test Applications

From July to September 2020, the DVA received nearly 30,500 applications for vehicle tests, roughly 10% of the usual volume received during the same period over the previous five years (table 1.1). The vast majority (91%) of these were for full tests rather than re-tests, whilst private cars (55.9%) were the most common test-category.

Figure 1.1: Full Vehicle Tests – Applications and Conducted (Rolling 4-Quarter Total)



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.

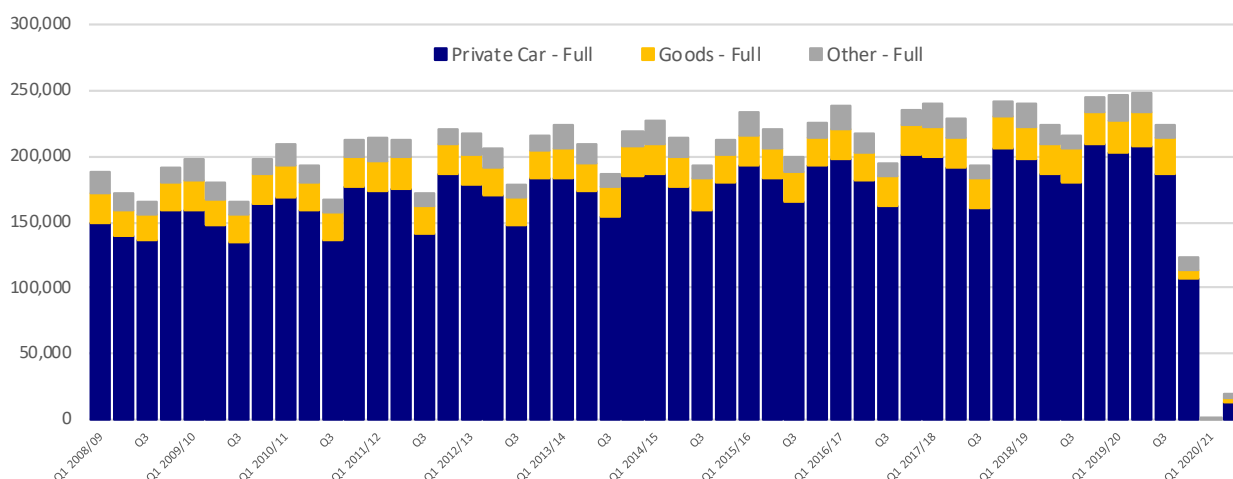
Vehicle Tests Conducted

During quarter two, the DVA conducted approximately 22,800 vehicle tests (full tests and re-tests), roughly 8% of the usual volumes (table 1.7 and figure 1.2). In comparison to the 5-year monthly

² <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-motoring>

averages, July 2020 was 4.0% of the trend figure, August was 6.0%, and September was 16.0% (table 1.14). As usual, the vast majority of these (57%) were full tests for private-cars.

Figure 1.2: Full Vehicle Tests Conducted

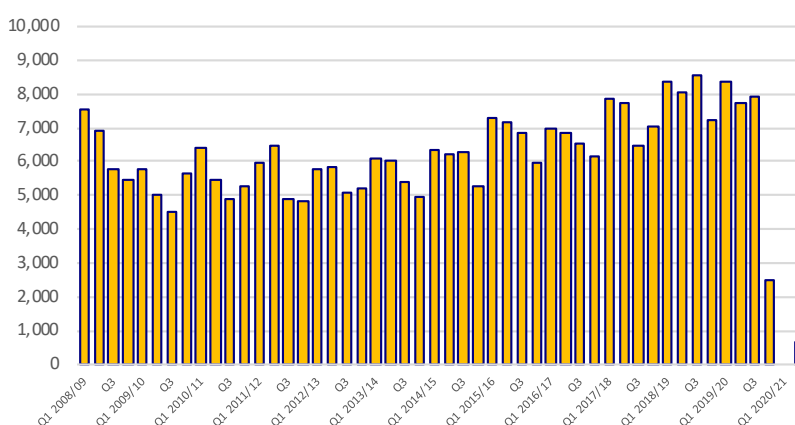


The increased level of vehicle test applications seen in the trend series prior to the COVID-19 pandemic can, in the main, be explained by the increasing number of licensed cars in Northern Ireland, which has risen by 8.2% over the past five years (see table 2.13). In addition, owners seem to be keeping their vehicles for longer, as the proportion of cars of MOT-age has risen by nearly 4% over the past five years, whilst the average age of a licensed car has risen from 7.7 to 8.4 years over the same period. Together, this resulted in approximately 96,000 (14%) additional private cars requiring a test in 2020 compared to 2015. It is too early to say what impact the pandemic will have on these trends, as people lifestyles and car-usage will inevitably change.

Failed to Attend

660 vehicles failed to attend for a booked test during the quarter (table 1.10 and figure 1.3). This equates to 2.8% of the conducted tests during this period, a proportion that is broadly unchanged over the past five years.

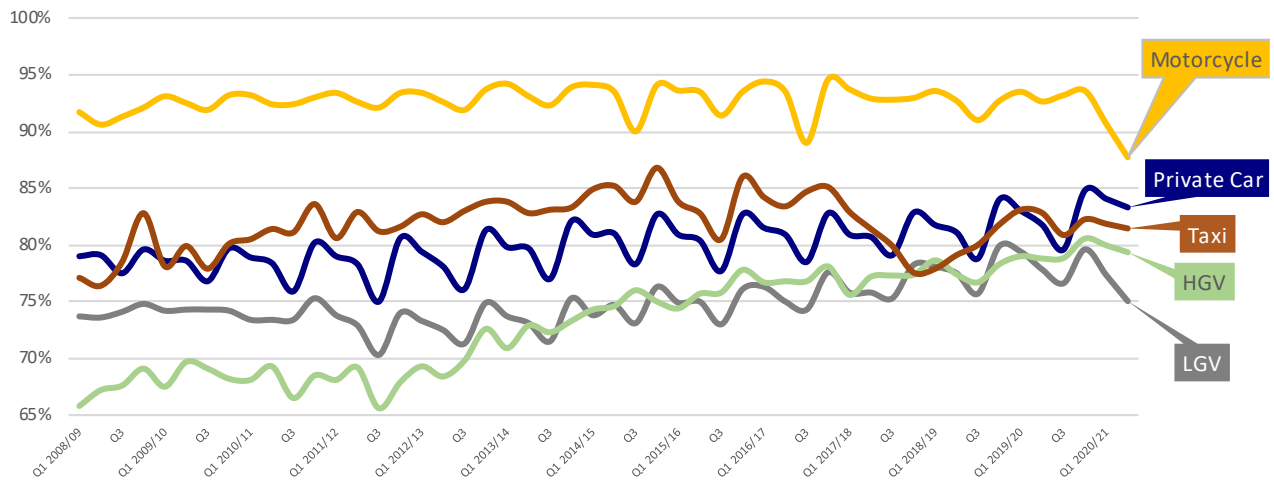
Figure 1.3: Vehicle Tests – Failed to Attend



Vehicle Test Pass-Rates

In quarter two, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 83.6%, an increase on the pass-rate of 81.8% recorded in the same period last year, and the highest quarter-two pass-rate since the time series began in 2008 (table 1.11 and figure 1.4). 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). The pass-rate for re-tests during quarter four was 92.2%, a decrease when compared with last year (table 1.12).

Figure 1.4: Full Vehicle Test Pass-Rates



Vehicle Tests by Test Centre

The busiest test centre was Mallusk, which conducted almost 2,870 tests during the quarter. Excluding the centres in use as drive-through COVID-19 testing centres (Belfast (Balmoral), Craigavon, and Newtownards), the quietest centre was Omagh, having conducted just over 900 tests during the July to September period (table 1.14).

Whilst the overall pass-rate for private-car full tests during quarter four was 83.3%, of those test centres that conducted at least 500 tests, this ranged from a high of 89.2% in Newtownards to a low of 79.4% in Cookstown (table 1.14). This was the first time in over seven years that Belfast (Balmoral) did not have the highest pass-rate, albeit that the centre was closed for vehicle testing for the majority of this quarter. 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 Licensing and Registration

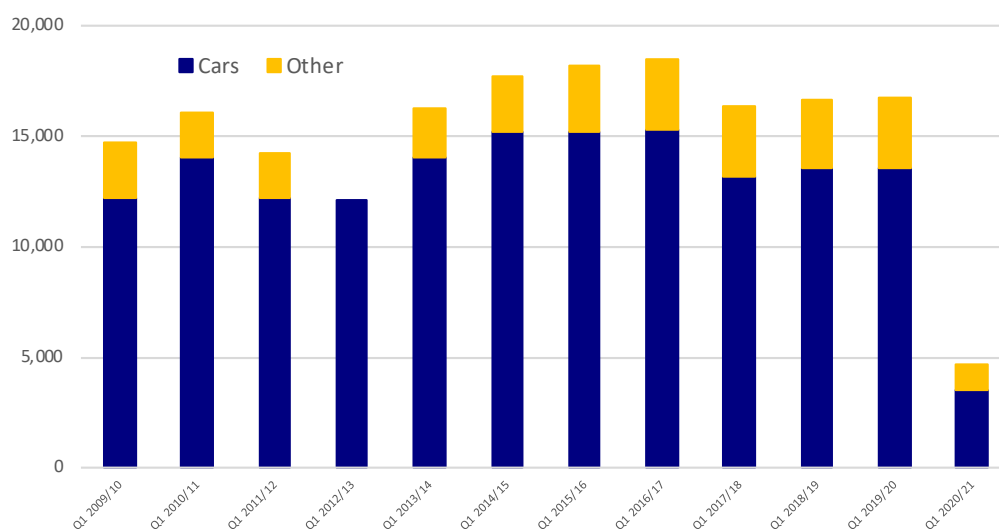
Vehicle Licensing is the responsibility of DVLA in Swansea, following the transfer of this work from DVA in July 2014.

Vehicle Registrations

During April to June 2020, the DVLA registered just over 4,600 new vehicles for the first time in Northern Ireland. The number of new vehicle first registrations showed a decrease of 72.3% from the same period in 2019 and is the lowest quarterly total in our time series. Private car first registrations accounted for the majority of this decrease, down by 74.4% 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 and only reopening in June. The lockdown meant that only 600 vehicles were registered in April and May, compared to the 10,000 seen during this period in previous years.

Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations

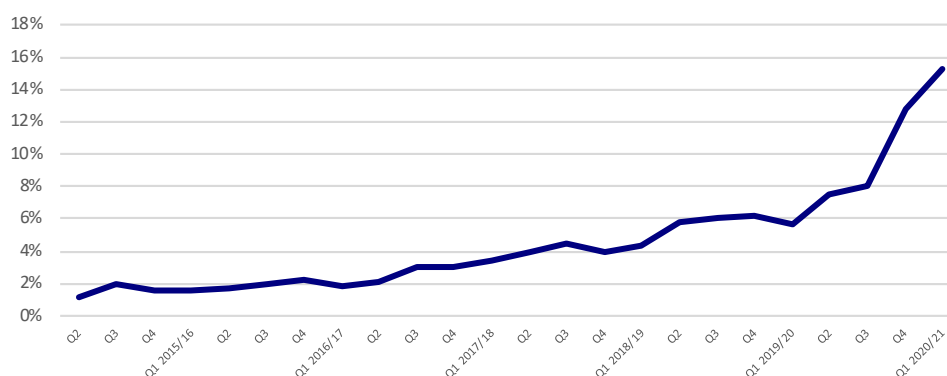


* Other Registrations split into new and used for quarter one 2012-13 are unavailable

The top make for cars registered for the first time during April to June 2020 was Volkswagen, accounting for 350 registrations. This is the second quarter in a row that Volkswagen was the most popular, having dethroned Ford earlier this year (table 2.3).

Grey was again the most popular colour for new cars, accounting for 20.8% of all new registrations. Blue (19.1%), white (18.7%), black (17.9%), and red (12.1%) 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 50.7% of cars in 2015-16 quarter one to 27.5% this year. Conversely, the number of alternative-fuel³ cars being registered continues to increase, rising from 240 cars in 2015-16 quarter one (1.6% of new car registrations) to 530 in the same period this year (15.3% of new car registrations).

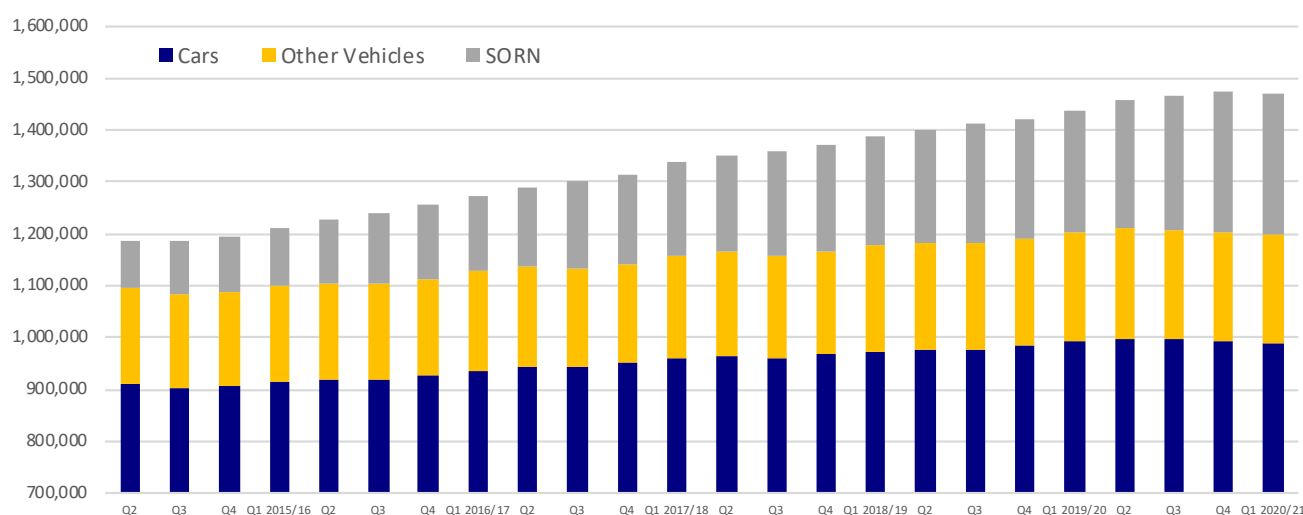
However, it is possible that this relates to how electric vehicles are purchased, rather than a substantial change in the underlying trend. Electric vehicles are more likely to be delivered directly to customers rather than through dealerships and so will have been less affected by the COVID-19 lockdown.

Licensed Vehicles

There were approximately 1,200,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 30th June 2020, a 0.1% decrease compared with the previous quarter, and the third consecutive quarterly decrease since the series-peak of 1,212,000 in September 2019. This decrease was primarily caused by decreases in Private Cars (0.3%) and Buses (10.7%), offset somewhat by the traditional increase in Motorcycles (9.2%). (Many motorcycle owners will SORN their bike during the winter months due to the adverse weather, and will only reregister these in the spring).

Approximately 271,800 vehicles had a SORN at the 30th June 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 (15.7%) 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

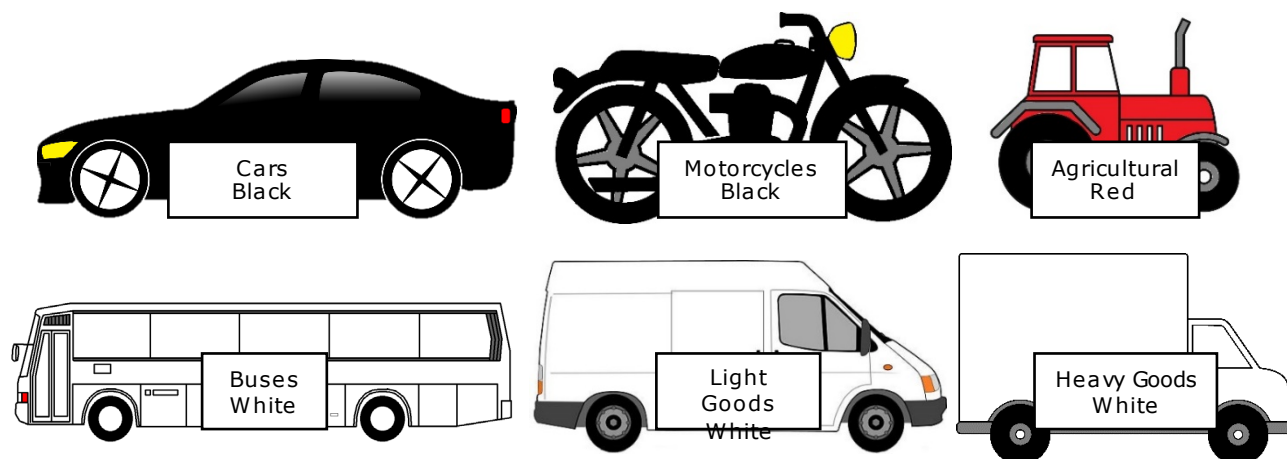


As of 30th June 2020, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 8.9 years, up from the 8.7 years reported last quarter. However, there is some variance in average age for different body-types:

- Cars – 8.4 years;
- Motorcycles – 13.4 years;
- Light Goods – 8.4 years;
- Heavy Goods – 9.8 years;
- Buses – 9.8 years;
- Agricultural – 21.4 years;
- Other – 10.3 years.

³ 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.

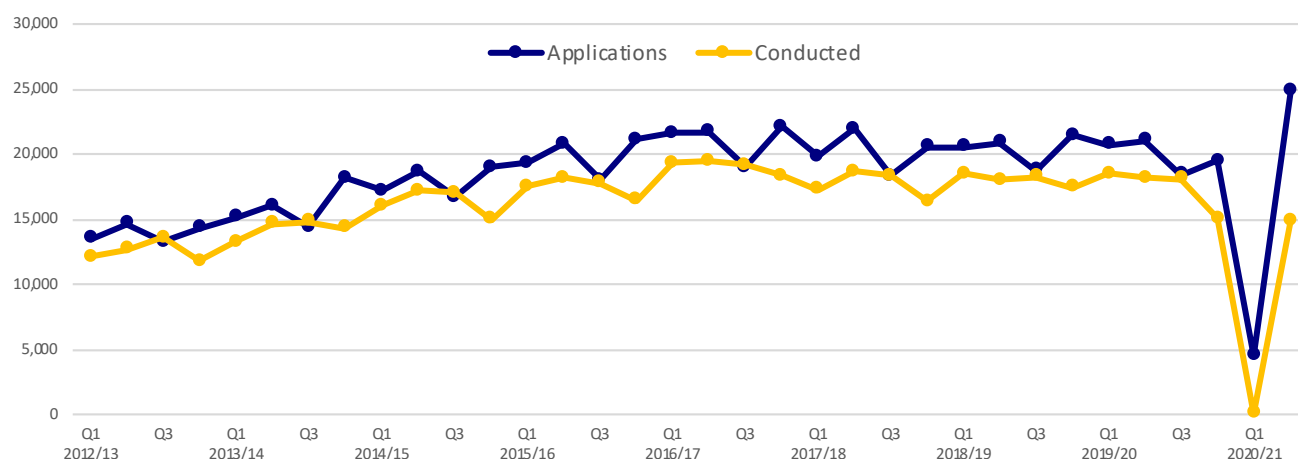
Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all driver theory testing from 20th March 2020, and resumed on 6th July. For the latest news and updates, please visit the Driver Theory Testing page on the NIDirect website⁴.

Theory Test Applications and Tests Conducted

From July to September 2020, the DVA received approximately 24,900 theory test applications. This marks an increase of 17.9% from the 21,100 recorded in the same quarter last year (figure 3.1). Whilst this is the highest quarterly total in our time series, this rise is solely due to the COVID-19 pandemic rather than an underlying increase in trend.

During the same period, the number of theory tests conducted was lower than the previous year, from approximately 18,200 in 2019 to just under 14,900 this year (table 3.2). This is approximately 80% of the 5-year average total for quarter two, as social distancing measures have reduced capacity at the testing centres. Whilst this is the lowest quarter two total for seven years, prior to the pandemic, volumes had been broadly consistent over the previous five years.

Figure 3.1: Theory Test Applications and Conducted

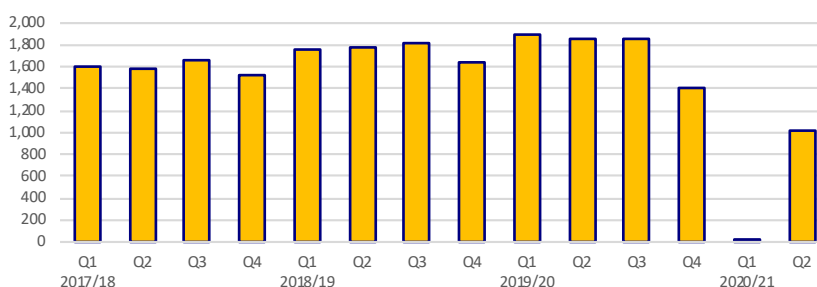


For both theory test applications and conducted, tests for private-cars account for over four fifths of all applications or tests conducted.

Failed To Attend

During quarter two, there were 1,024 tests where the individual failed to attend, a decrease of 45% on the equivalent period in 2019 (table 3.3 and figure 3.2). These account for 6.5% of the conducted tests during the quarter, the lowest quarterly total since our time-series began in 2015.

Figure 3.2: Theory Tests - Failed To Attend

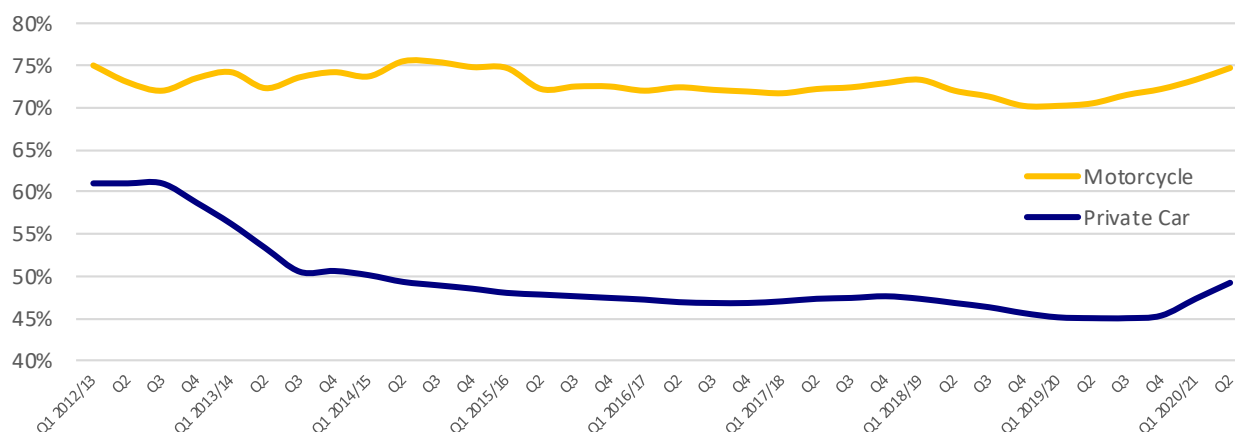


⁴ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-theory-test>

Theory Test Pass-Rates

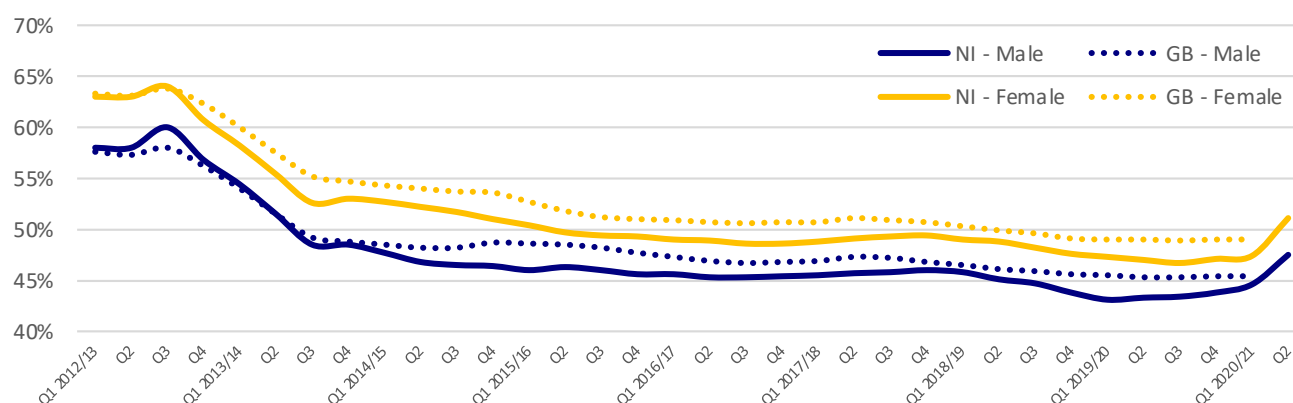
The theory test pass-rate for private-cars in quarter two showed an 8.6 percentage-point increase to 56.0% when compared with the pre-pandemic quarter four pass-rate of 47.4% (table 3.4). This is the highest pass-rate since 2012. The theory test pass-rate for motorcycles remains substantially higher, at 76.0%, reflecting the fact that those taking the motorcycle test will usually have already taken the private-car test (figure 3.3). Whilst not directly comparable due to the nature and purpose of the tests, the pass-rate for the taxi theory test was 11.3%, substantially down on the pre-pandemic trend, and the lowest quarterly pass-rate in our time series.

Figure 3.3: Theory Test Pass-Rates (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



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 51.1% for females and 47.5% 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).

Figure 3.4: Private Car Theory Test Pass-Rates by Gender (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



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.

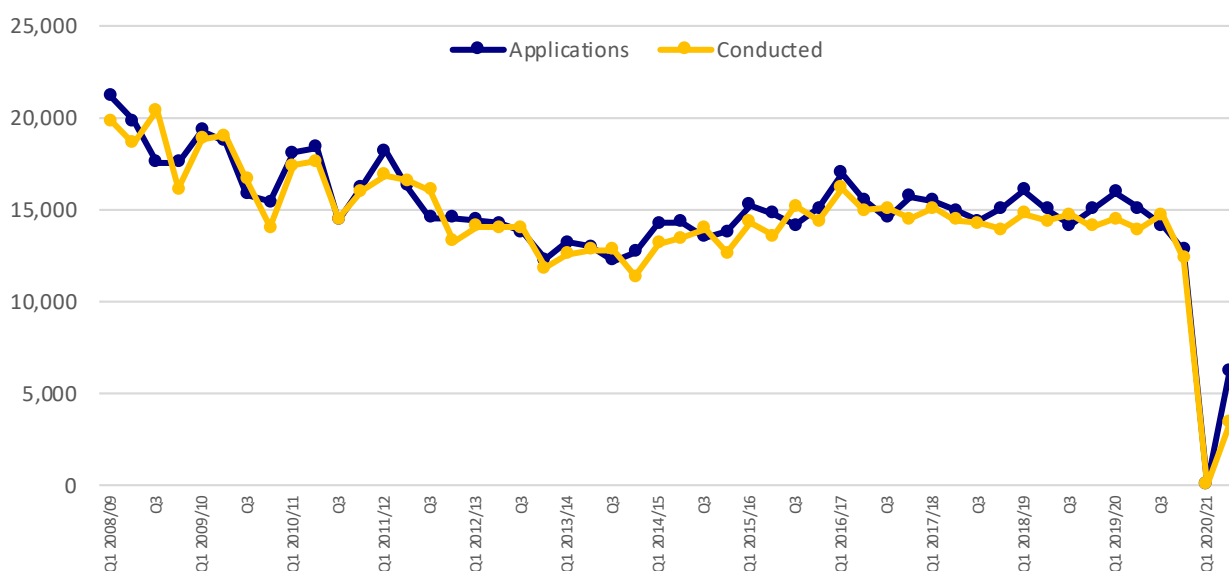
Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all driver testing from 20th March 2020. Motorcycle testing resumed on 6th July, whilst tests for drivers of buses, tractors and module 4 CPC commenced on 20th July. Car and large goods vehicle testing resumed on 1st September, initially for key workers and those with a previously cancelled test, and later extended to all customers in October. As a result of new restrictions in the autumn, all driving tests scheduled between 17th October and 20th November have been cancelled. For the latest news and updates, please visit the Practical Driving Test page on the NIDirect website⁵.

Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

From July to September 2020, the DVA received 6,250 applications and conducted 3,400 tests (table 4.1, table 4.3, and figure 4.1). In both cases, these were the lowest quarterly totals on record, reflecting the substantial impact of COVID-19 on operations.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the trends for both applications and tests conducted over the past five years had remained relatively steady.

Figure 4.1: Driving Test Applications and Conducted



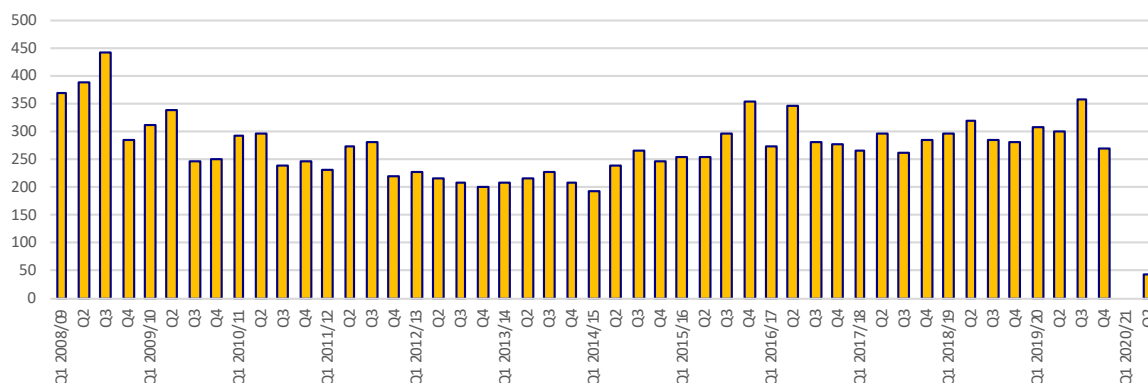
For both driving test applications and driving tests conducted, tests for private-cars account for over four fifths of all applications or tests conducted.

⁵<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/book-your-practical-driving-test-online>

Failed to Attend

During quarter four, there were 44 appointments where the individual failed to attend (table 4.4). These account for almost 1.3% of the conducted tests during the quarter, the lowest proportion on record.

Figure 4.2: Driving Tests – Failed to Attend

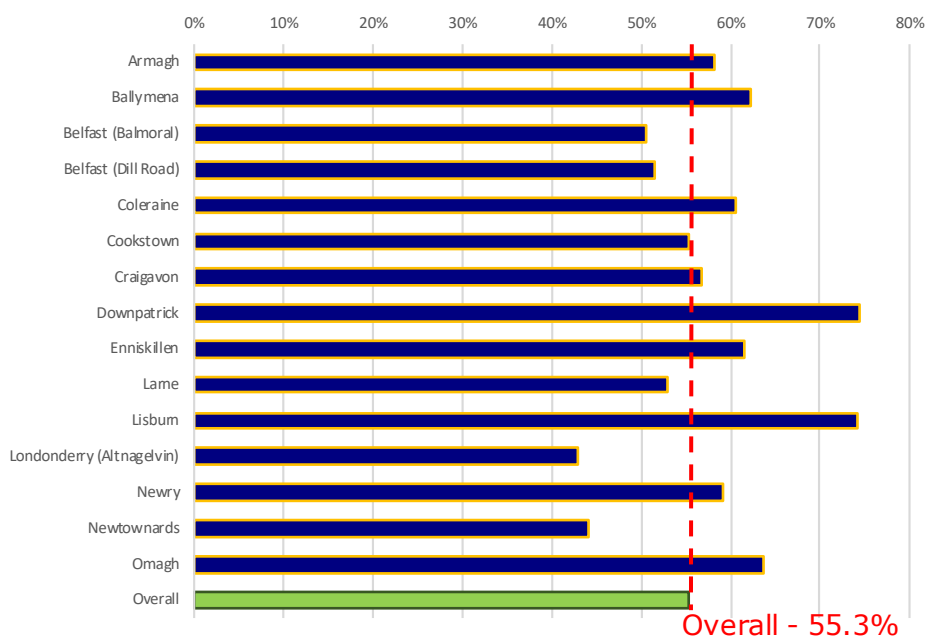


Driving Tests by Test Centre

The test centre that conducted the most private-car driving tests during the July to September 2020 period was, again, Belfast (Balmoral) (268 tests). With the exception of Craigavon (as it was in use as a drive-through COVID-19 testing centre), the Enniskillen centre conducted the fewest, with 73 tests during the quarter.

By test centre, and using a rolling 4-quarter average, the pass-rate for private-car driving tests ranged from 42.8% in Londonderry (Altnagelvin) to 74.3% in Downpatrick (table 4.7b and figure 4.3). Downpatrick has now recorded the highest pass-rate for private car tests every quarter for more than seven years. 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.

Figure 4.3: Private Car Driving Test Pass-Rates by Test Centre, Q2 (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)

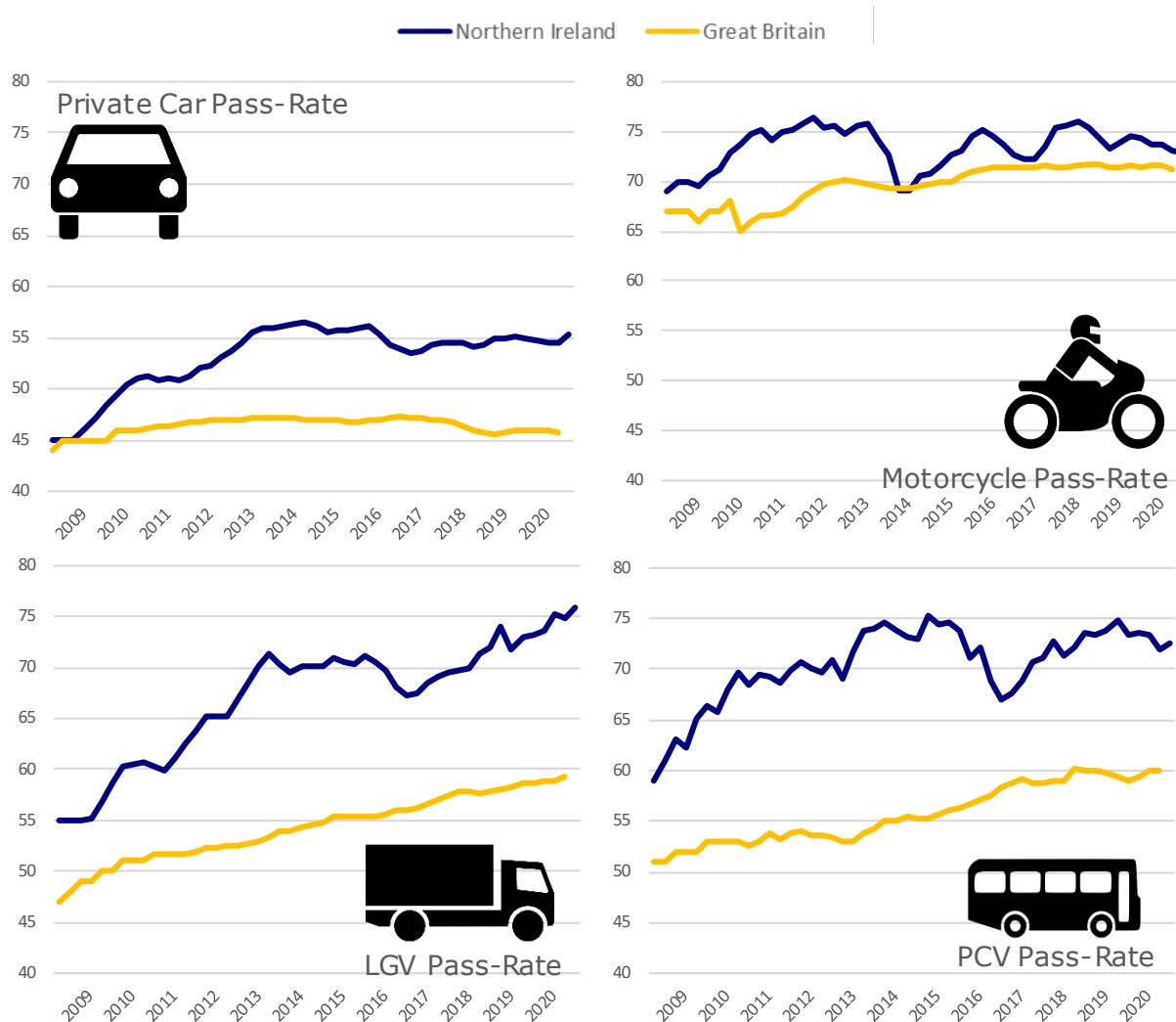


Driving Test Pass-Rates

For July to September 2020, the pass-rate for private-car driving tests was 68.1%, up by 9.1 percentage-points on the 55.0% recorded in quarter four prior to the pandemic (table 4.5). Prior to this quarter, pass-rates for all categories of vehicle remained 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 4.4). 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.

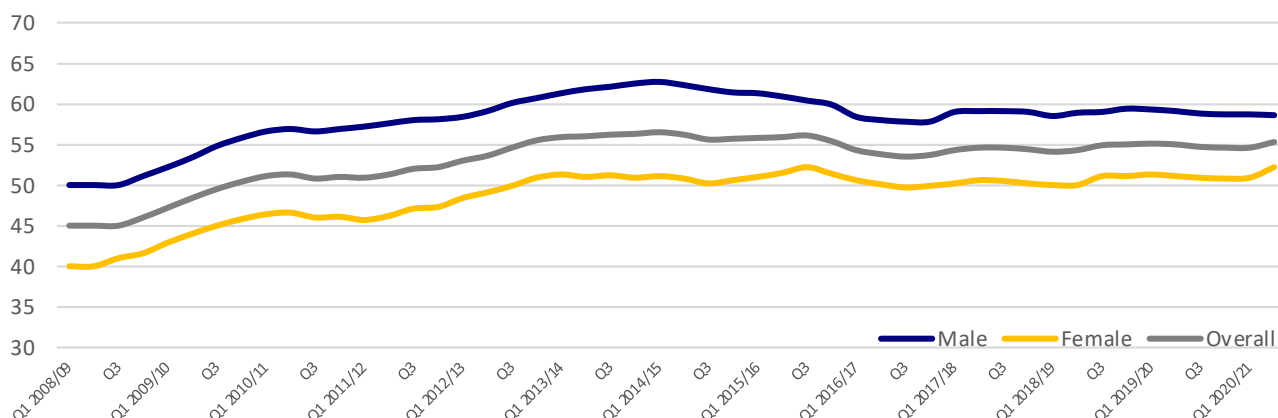
Figure 4.4: Driving Test Pass-Rates (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



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 4.5). In the latest quarter, males had a 6.4 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.

Figure 4.5: Private Car Driving Test Pass-Rate by Gender (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



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.

Every test centre offering private-car driving tests also showed this same disparity, to varying degrees, from 13.2 percentage-points at the Coleraine centre (67.4% v 54.3%) to 1.2 percentage-points at the Newtownards centre (44.6% v 43.5%) (table 4.7b).

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.

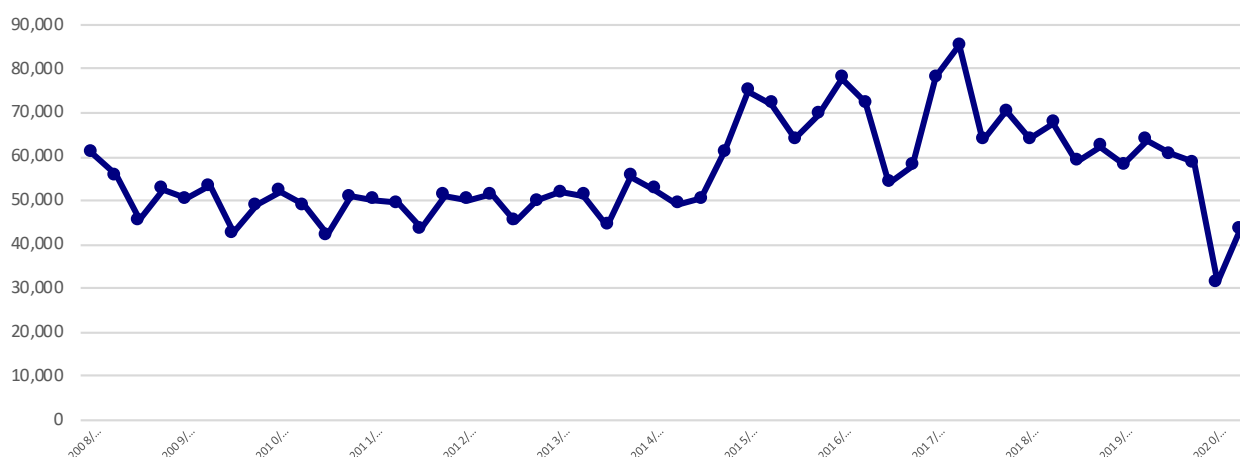
On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and temporarily closed down the driver licensing office. DVA has been gradually resuming driver licensing services (bar the counter service, which remains closed) and is now working to process all applications it receives.

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. This was later extended to include all licenses expiring through the remainder of 2020, and for eleven months rather than seven.

Driver Licensing Transactions

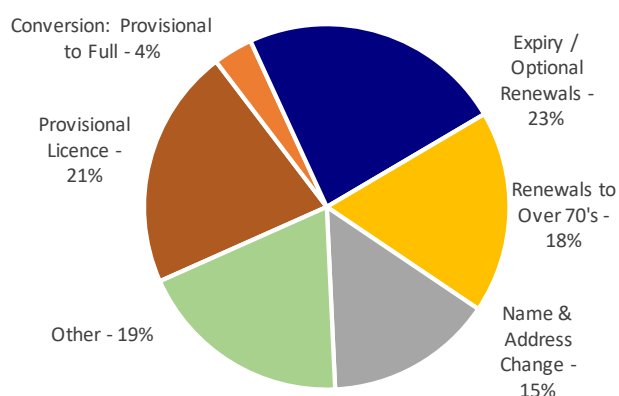
The DVA carried out 43,600 ordinary licensing transactions during July to September 2020 (figure 5.1). This represented an increase of 39% in comparison with quarter one, although a decrease of 32% in comparison with the volume carried out in the corresponding quarter of 2019.

Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter two 2020-21 (9,290) was 33.7% higher than the figure for those issued during the same period in the previous year (6,948 licences) (table 5.1), although this trend has been broadly unchanged over the past decade. This was the highest quarterly total in our time series, as licensing services resumed following in the initial COVID-19 lockdown.

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



During quarter two 2020-21, the DVA carried out 2,744 vocational licensing transactions, an increase of 18.7 on quarter one, and a decrease of 45.0% on the corresponding period in 2019 where the figure stood at 4,991 (table 5.2).

In other licensing activity, the number of letters of entitlement issued during the quarter (5,312) was 11.9% higher than in quarter two 2019-20, and was the highest quarter two total in our time series (table 5.3). Similarly, the volume of identity checks (10,217) is 24.5% higher than last year, and is the highest figure in over a decade.

Driver Licence Stock

At the 30th September 2020, there were approximately 1,096,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement, a decrease of 1.4% compared with the previous quarterly total (table 5.9 and figure 5.4). This is the second quarterly decrease since our time series began in 2017, and the second consecutively. It is primarily caused by the substantial reduction in the number of practical driving tests (circa 20,000 during quarters' one and two) which has 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 104,000) increased by 6.9% compared with the previous quarter, and by 7.8% on the figure recorded a year ago (just over 96,000). The number of people aged 65 and over holding a full licence decreased by over 1,000 in the past twelve months, with the total now approximately 211,000 individuals. However, with the decrease in new, generally younger, drivers, those licence holders aged 65 and over now account for a larger proportion of the driver licence stock: as of September 2020, they made up 19.2% of the total, a rise of 0.2 percentage points compared to twelve months ago.

An estimated 74.3% 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 Estimates⁶ (table 5.8i). For males, the estimated figure was 77.6%, which is six percentage-points higher than the 71.2% seen for females.

⁶ 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

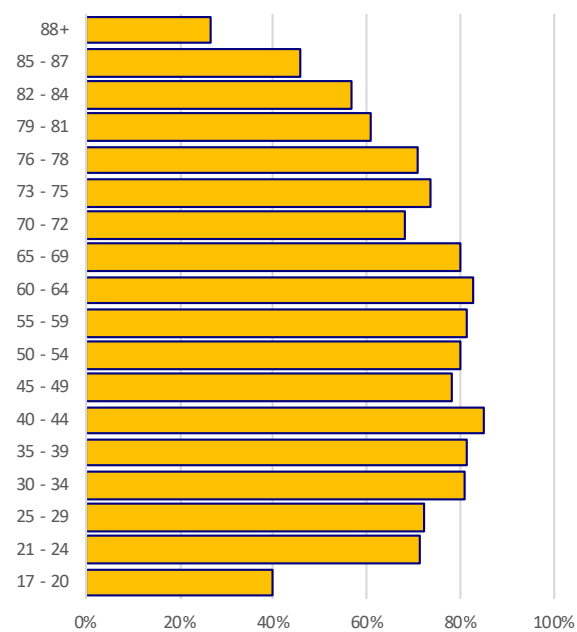


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

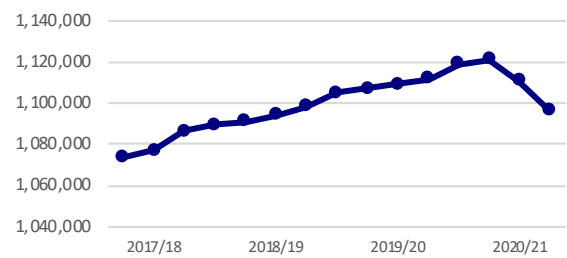
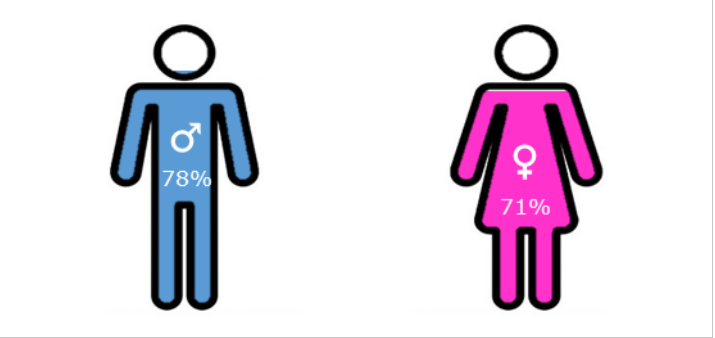


Figure 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Gender



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.

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. This was later extended to include all licenses expiring through to 31 May 2021, and for twelve months rather than six.

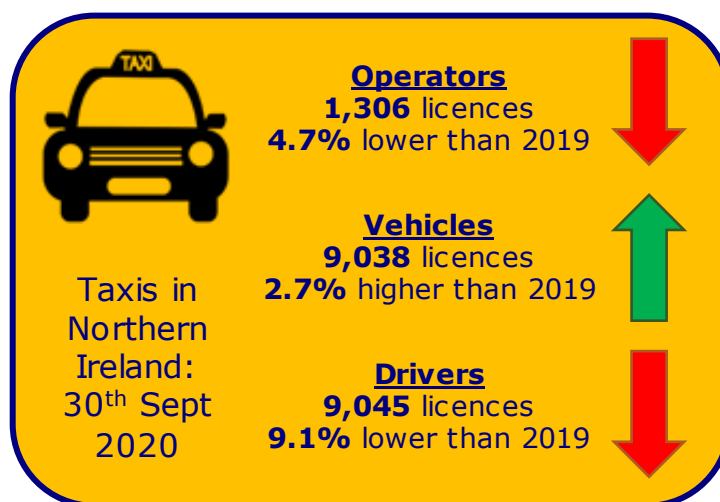
Taxi driver licensing continued to operate during this period, as the government designated taxi drivers as key workers. Renewal-applications with no medical conditions were able to renew without a medical report (on condition that the DVA may ask them to provide a medical report in the future).

The Department also made a determination to renew existing bus vehicle licences, and issued twelve-month licences automatically to affected vehicles with licenses expiring between 10 March 2020 and 31 May 2021.

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 September 2020 (9,045) was down by 9.1% on the previous year (table 6.2), and is the lowest number recorded in our time series. This is the tenth 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, although numbers were already in decline prior to this. Of these taxi drivers, 96% were Male, whilst their average age was 51.5.

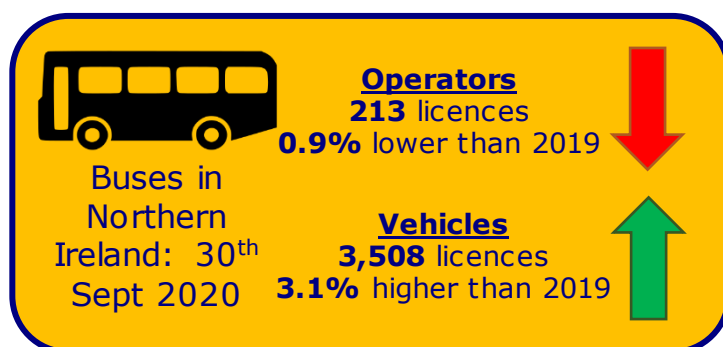


Almost 1,600 vehicle licences for taxis were issued during July to September 2020, the lowest quarterly total in our time series, although this was caused by the advance renewal of expiring licenses earlier in 2020. The vast majority of these (79%) were 6-month exemption certificates rather than normal licenses (table 6.1). At the 30th September 2020, there were approximately 9,000 licensed taxi vehicles in Northern Ireland, an increase of 2.7% when compared to the record low in March 2020, although still 4.4% lower than five years ago.

These taxi vehicles were affiliated to 1,306 licensed taxi operators, of which 88% 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

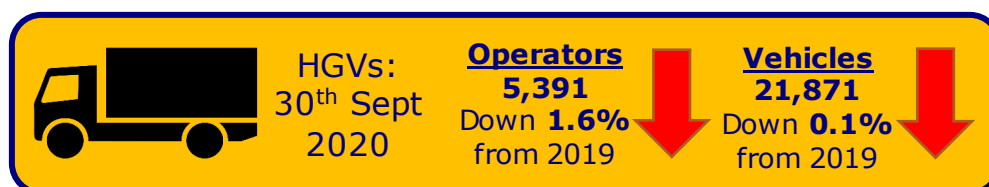
The number of licensed buses at the 30th September 2020 was just over 3,500, up 3.1% on the figure on the equivalent date in 2019 (table 6.3) and the highest figure recorded in our time series. The DVA issued 1,093 bus vehicle licences during the quarter, all of which were 12-month exemption certificates rather than normal licenses (table 6.1).



At the 30th September 2020, there were 213 bus operator licences in force, broadly unchanged from the amount as recorded one year ago (217). During July to September 2020, the DVA processed 90 bus operator licences, the largest quarterly total in our time series.

Goods Licensing

The number of goods vehicle operator licences in force as at the 30th September 2020 was 5,391, a decrease of 1.6% on last year, and a drop of almost a fifth (18.7%) 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 1,852 accounting for a series high 34% of all goods vehicle operators.



Associated to these operators, again as at 30th September 2020, were 21,871 heavy goods vehicles. This is a decrease of 0.1% when compared with the same point in 2019, and a decrease of 4.6% when compared with 2017.



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.

Enforcement Activities

During July to September 2020, DVA enforcement staff checked 310 vehicles; of these, the largest volume was for heavy goods vehicles, accounting for over nearly half of all vehicles checked (table 7.1 and figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Enforcement Spot-Checks

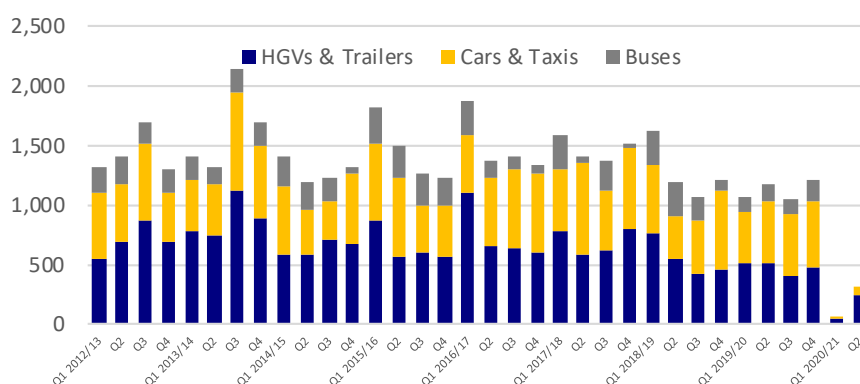
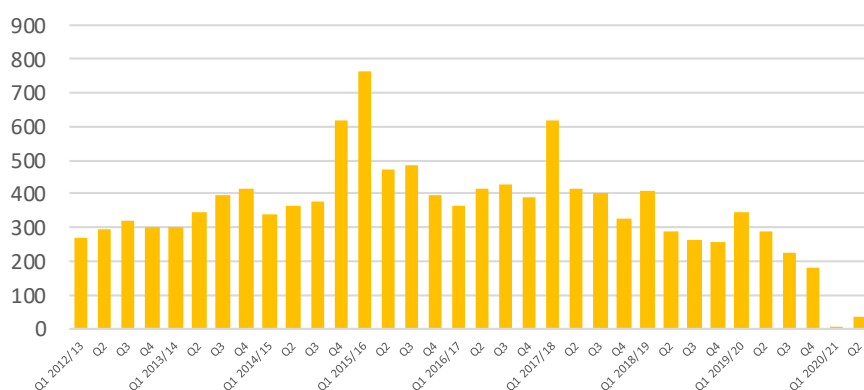


Figure 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued



DVA enforcement officers issued 180 fixed penalty notices during quarter three (table 7.2 and 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.

There were 33 successful convictions during the quarter, accounting for 86 offences. From these cases, the DVA received £13,100 of Court fines & costs (table 7.2 and figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: Convictions

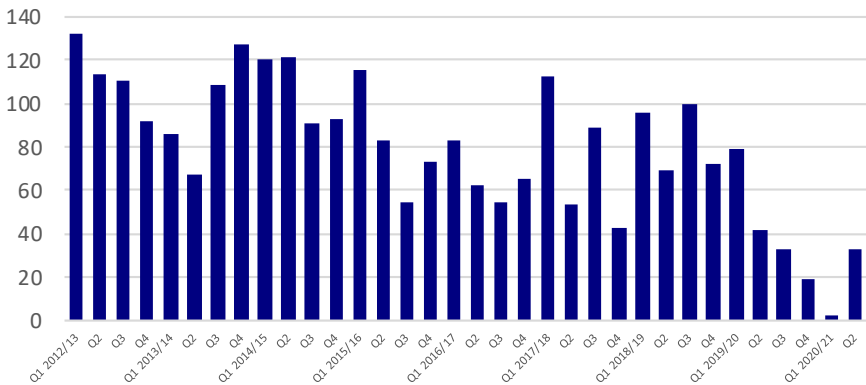
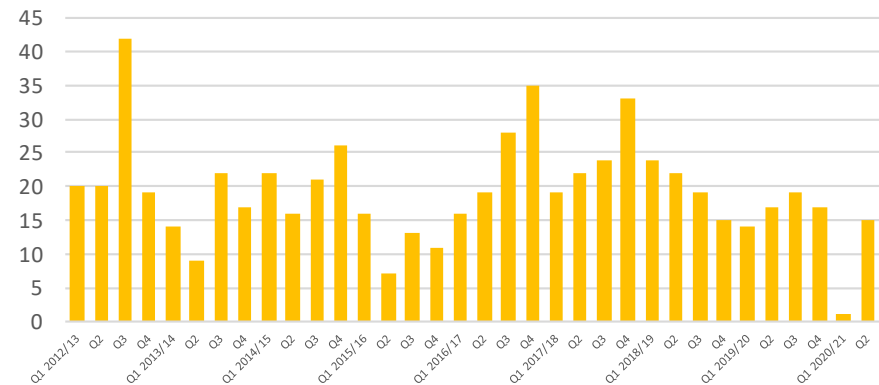


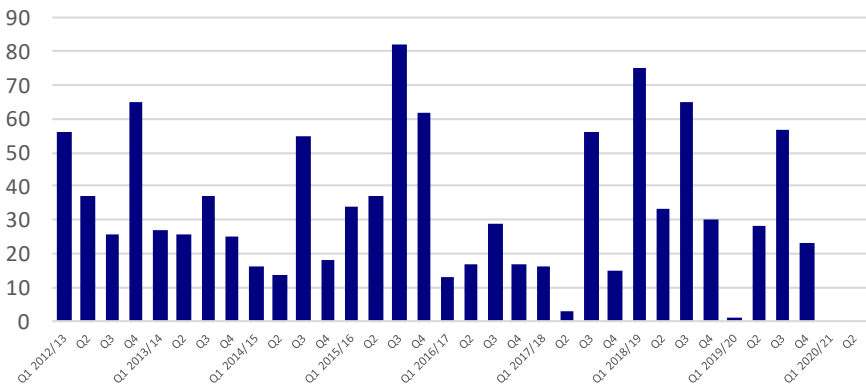
Figure 7.4: Joint or Cross-Border Operations



During January to March 2020, enforcement teams carried out 8 joint operations with the PSNI (table 7.3 and figure 7.4). They also carried out 7 cross border operations in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority in Ireland, along with PSNI and An Garda Síochána.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the DVA has been unable to conduct any school bus checks (table 7.4 and figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5: School Bus Checks



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 12 months up to end-September 2020 was 77.4%. This was up 8.2 percentage-points on the position at March 2020 (no update was provided by quarter one, due to limited testing taking place) although 14.6 percentage-points below the current Agency target of 92% (table 8.1 and figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1: Vehicle Test Waiting Time Performance

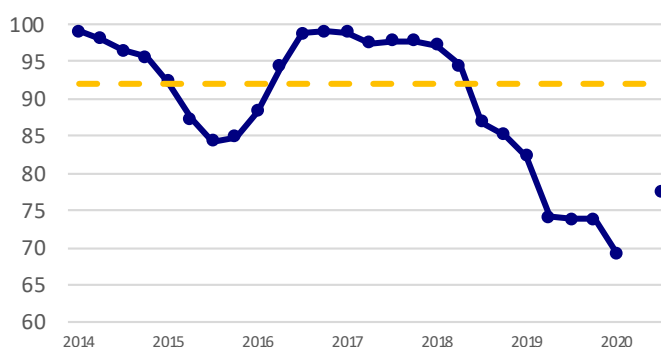
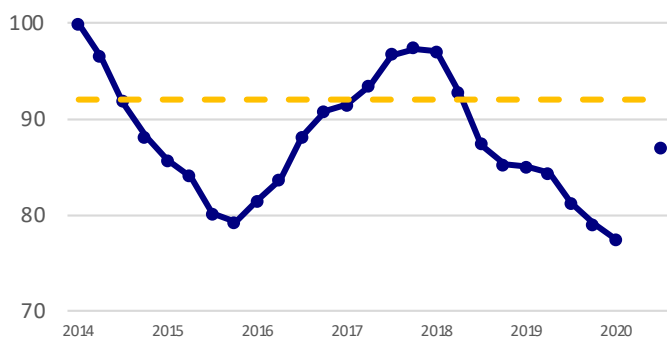


Figure 8.2: Driver Test Waiting Time Performance



Driver testing waiting time performance for the 12 months up to end-September 2020 was 87.0%. This was 9.6 percentage points higher than the position reported in March 2020 (no update was provided in quarter one, as no testing took place) and 5 percentage-points below the current Agency target of 92% (table 8.1 and figure 8.2). This is the highest figure for two years.

From 2019-20, the DVA split the target 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 September 2020 was 97.8%, exceeding the Agency target of 95%. Paper application performance was 84.9% for the same period, 10.1 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 Licence Application
Waiting Time Performance

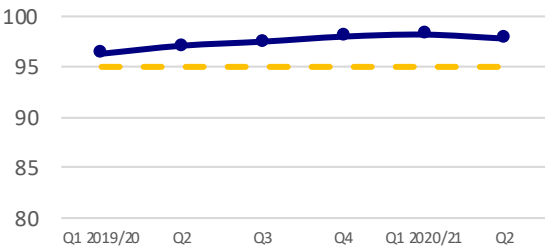
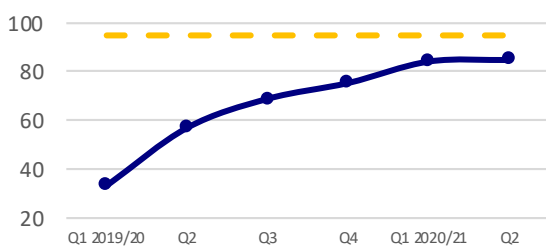


Figure 8.4: Paper Driver Licence Application
Waiting Time Performance



(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 24 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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