

# DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics

## Quarter Four: January to March 2021

**Issue number:** 26

**Date of publication:** 26 May 2021

**Theme:** Travel and Transport

**Coverage:** Northern Ireland

**Produced by:**

DVA Statistics Branch,  
Driver and Vehicle Agency,  
Annex 4, Belfast Test Centre,  
66 Balmoral Road,  
Belfast,  
BT12 6QL

**Contact:** Richard Ramsden

**Telephone:** 02890 547911

**Email:** [DVA.Statistics@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:DVA.Statistics@nisra.gov.uk)

**Website:**

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

## **Key Findings**

- The DVA conducted almost 157,000 vehicle tests during quarter four, roughly half of the usual volume. For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA conducted approximately 252,000 vehicle tests, approximately a quarter of the volume in the preceding year and the lowest annual total in our time series. The pass-rate for full tests during this period was a series-high of 82.7%, an increase of 0.6 percentage-points on 2019-20.
- DVLA registered just under 9,760 new vehicles in Northern Ireland during October to December 2020. This is 0.2% lower than the figure recorded for the same period in 2019 and the lowest quarter-three total for eight years. The most popular new private-car make was Volkswagen (13%); with grey the most popular colour (23%) and petrol the most popular fuel-type (57%). More significantly, this was the first time that alternative-fuel cars out-sold diesel cars.
- There were 1,219,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 31 December 2020, an increase of 0.9% compared with December 2020. The overwhelming majority (82%) were cars.
- COVID-19 restrictions during the quarter meant theory testing was limited to critical workers only. For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA conducted just over 30,400 theory tests, a decrease of 56% compared to last year and the lowest annual total in our time series. The pass-rate for private-car theory tests was 55.2%, an increase of 9 percentage-points on 2019-20, and the second-highest pass-rate in our time series.
- Similarly, COVID-19 restrictions severely curtailed practical driver testing, and only off-road motorcycle and LGV tests were conducted during the quarter. During the full financial year, the DVA conducted just over 9,500 driver tests, an 83% decrease on 2019-20, and the lowest annual total in our time series. The pass-rate for private-car driver tests for 2020-21 was 65.4%, up by 10.8 percentage points on the preceding year, and the highest pass-rate in our time series.
- The DVA carried out approximately 182,000 licensing transactions during 2020-21. This represents a decrease of 30% when compared to last year (260,000), and 42% when compared to the series-high in 2017-18 (314,000). Just over 5,800 licences were converted from provisional to full during the year, a fifth of the 5-year average, reflecting the decrease in practical driver testing.
- At the 31 March 2021, there were approximately 1,084,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars/ light vans entitlement. This was a decrease of 0.1% compared with the previous quarterly total.
- At the 31 March 2021, there were just over 8,780 licensed taxi drivers, down by 8.4% when compared with the same point of 2020, and the lowest figure in our series. However, the number of licensed taxi vehicles increased by 5.1% to just over 9,000, again when compared to 2020. This is the second time where there have been more taxi vehicles than there are taxi drivers.
- DVA Enforcement activities were extremely constrained by COVID-19 measures during 2020-21. Accordingly, only 1,346 vehicles were spot-checked, approximately a quarter of the usual volume checked.
- For 2020-21, in response to the pandemic, the DVA has developed new performance targets. For driver licensing, for the full financial year, online application performance was 98.1% processed within five days, successfully meeting the target of 95%. For paper applications, the performance was 79.5% processed within ten days, missing the agency target of 80%.

## **Contents**

	<u>Page</u>
Key Findings	2
Introduction	4
1. Vehicle Testing	5
2. Vehicle Licensing and Registration	9
3. Driver Theory Testing	12
4. Driver Practical Testing	14
5. Driver Licensing	18
6. Road Transport Licensing	21
7. Enforcement & Compliance	24
8. DVA Target Monitoring	26
9. Driving and Motorcycle Instructors	27
Notes	28

## **Introduction**

This is the twenty-sixth 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 2020-21. This covers the period from 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021. Due to the transfer of vehicle licensing functions to DVLA, the data in the corresponding section (page 9) is from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 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; and
- Driver and 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 two.

For further information and guidance on this publication, please see the User Guidance document, available on our website<sup>1</sup>.

## **Background**

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

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/driver-vehicle-agency-activity-statistics>

## **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.

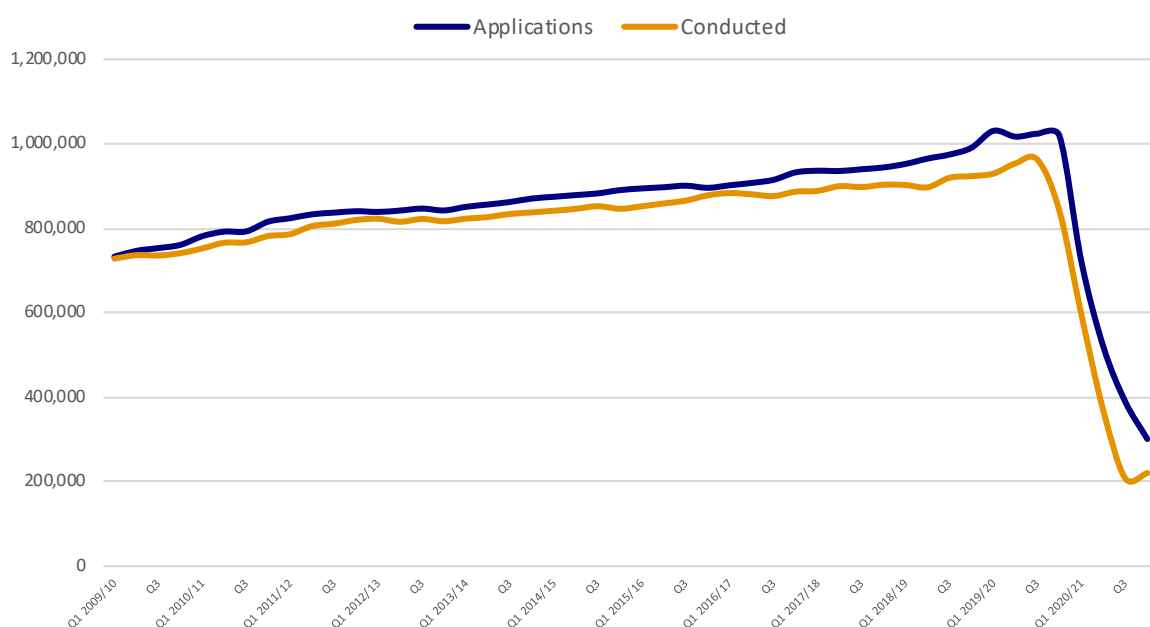
Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24 March 2020, and began issuing temporary exemption certificates (TECs) to all customers. The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1 June, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20 July. Priority vehicle groups 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 1 September, including four-year-old private cars and motorcycles, three-year-old light goods vehicles, all heavy goods vehicles, and trailers. Further vehicle categories returned to the testing regime in March 2021, along with changes to the length of TECs being issued.

For the latest news and updates, please visit the Motoring page on the NIDirect website<sup>2</sup>.

### Vehicle Test Applications

From January to March 2021, the DVA received just over 214,000 applications for vehicle tests, approximately two-thirds of the usual volume received during the same period over the previous five years (table 1.1). Private cars accounted for the majority of this decrease (down 76,000), however proportionally, the biggest decrease was for taxi tests (down 76%). The vast majority (90%) of these were for full tests rather than re-tests, whilst private cars (83%) were the most common test-category.

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



For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA received nearly 336,000 applications for vehicles, a decrease of 71% on the series-high last year, and the lowest figure in our series.

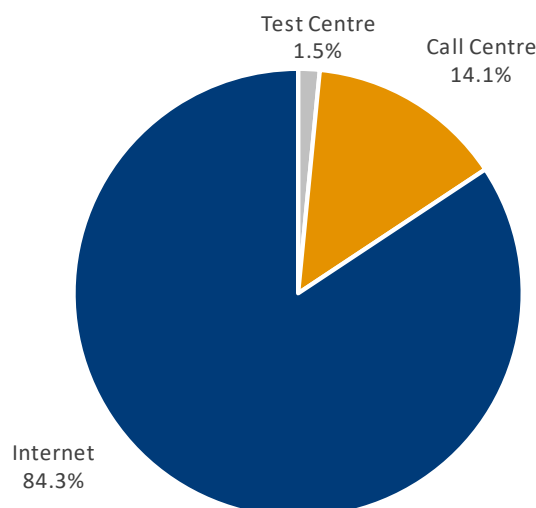
Note that the figures for vehicle test applications include taximeter tests (circa 1,300 tests per quarter, pre-pandemic), in contrast to the figures for vehicle tests conducted, which do not.

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

## Booking Method

The most popular booking method for vehicle test applications was the internet booking system, which received 84.3% of all applications during the quarter (figure 1.2 and table 1.4). This is the largest proportion on record, albeit during a period when many customers are receiving temporary exemption certificates, rather than needing to book a test. 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.

Figure 1.2: Vehicle Test Applications by Booking Method

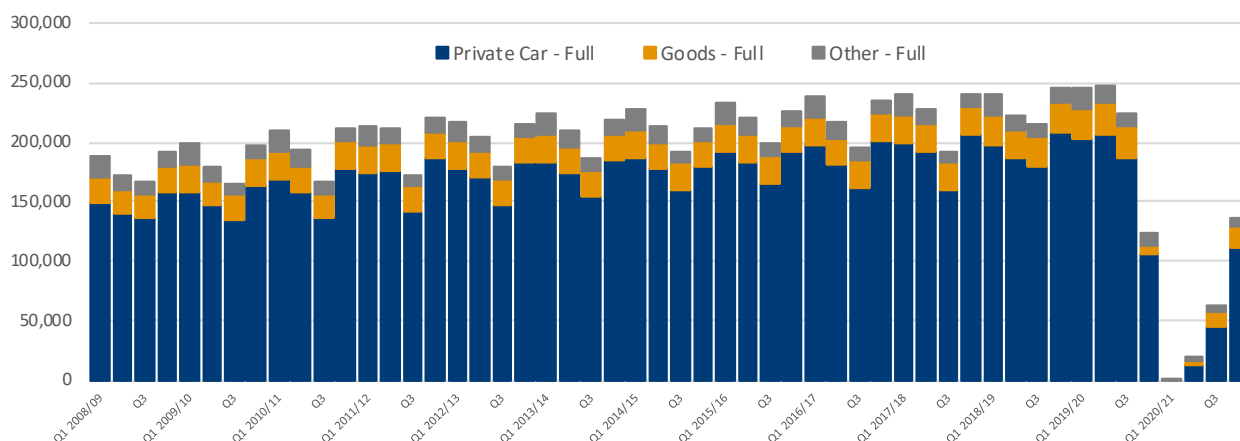


## Vehicle Tests Conducted

During quarter four, the DVA conducted almost 157,000 vehicle tests (both full tests and re-tests), a 1.5% increase on the same period in 2020, although roughly only half the usual volume in the 5 years prior (table 1.7 and figure 1.3). The restrictions during autumn and winter did not directly curtail vehicle testing, although additional cleaning and social distancing have reduced capacity across the test-centre network.

In comparison to the 5-year monthly averages, January 2021 was 43.5% of the trend figure, February was 66.9%, and March was 78.0% (table 1.14). As usual, the vast majority of these (71.4%) were full tests for private-cars.

Figure 1.3: Full Vehicle Tests Conducted



For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA conducted just under 252,000 vehicle tests, a quarter of the number conducted in 2019-20, and the lowest annual total in our time series.

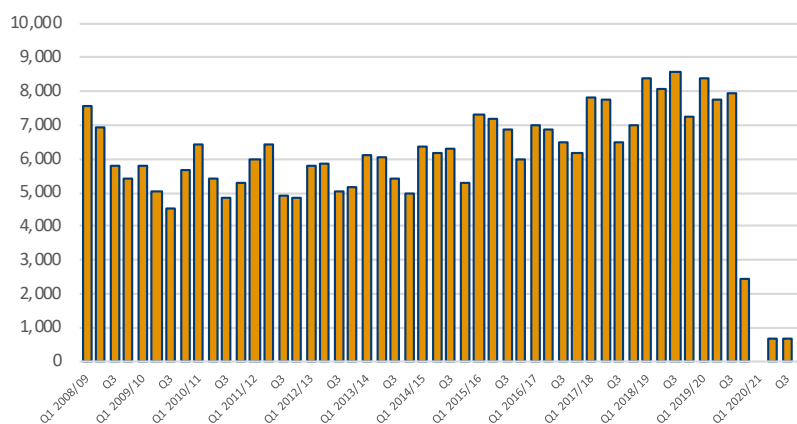
The steady increase in vehicle tests seen in the trend series prior to the COVID-19 pandemic can, in the main, be explained by the increasing number of licensed cars in Northern Ireland, which has risen by 8.7% over the past five years (see table 2.13). In addition, owners seem to be keeping their vehicles for longer, as the proportion of cars of MOT-age has risen by nearly 6 percentage-points 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 99,000 (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's lifestyles and car-usage will inevitably change.

### Failed to Attend

Just under 5,000 vehicles failed to attend for a booked test during the quarter (table 1.10 and figure 1.4). This equates to 3.1% of the conducted tests during this period, the second-highest proportion in the last decade.

For the full financial year, over 6,300 vehicles failed to attend, a 76% decrease compared to 2019-20, and the lowest figure in our time series. These missed tests equate to over 2,000 working-hours of time lost.

Figure 1.4: Vehicle Tests – Failed to Attend



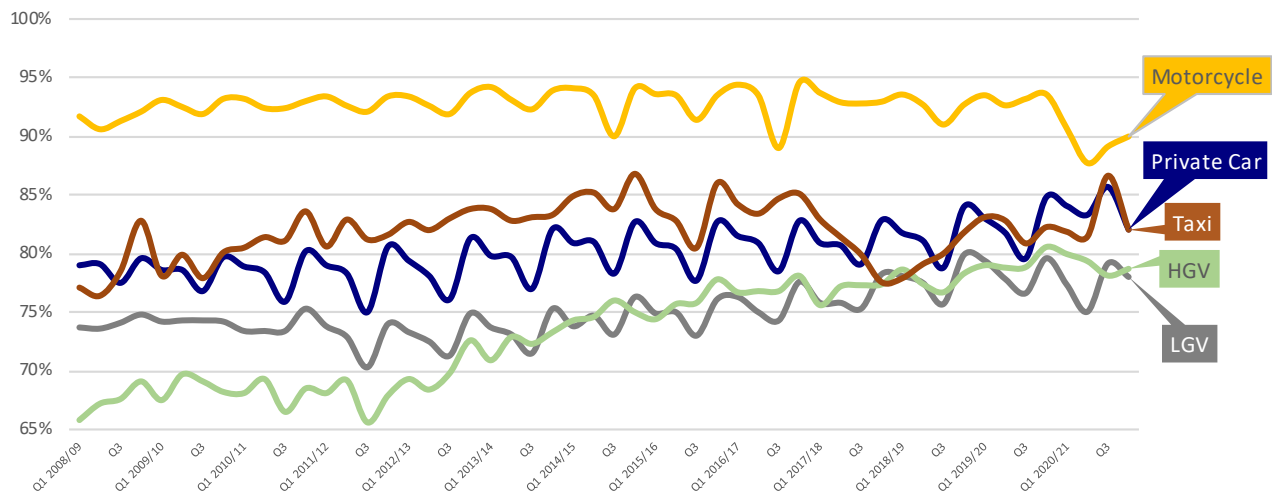
### Vehicle Test Pass-Rates

In quarter four, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 81.8%, a decrease on the series-high pass-rate of 84.5% recorded in the same period last year (table 1.11 and figure 1.5). This is the lowest quarter four pass-rate since 2014. However, we need to be careful with this comparison, as due to the TECs issued during 2020 and 2021, 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 82.7%, the highest annual pass-rate on record, albeit with the same caveat on the mix of vehicles as above. This annual pass-rate for full tests varied by category, from 78.1% for light goods to 89.1% (for categories where there were at least 2,000 tests) (table 1.11).

The pass-rate for re-tests during quarter four was 94.0%, an increase when compared with last year (table 1.12). For the 2020-21 financial year, the re-test pass-rate was 93.5%, a small decrease on the 93.8% recorded in 2019-20. Similar to full tests, the re-test pass-rate varied by category, from 91.2% for light goods to 94.2% for private cars (for categories where there were at least 1,000 tests).

Figure 1.5: Full Vehicle Test Pass-Rates

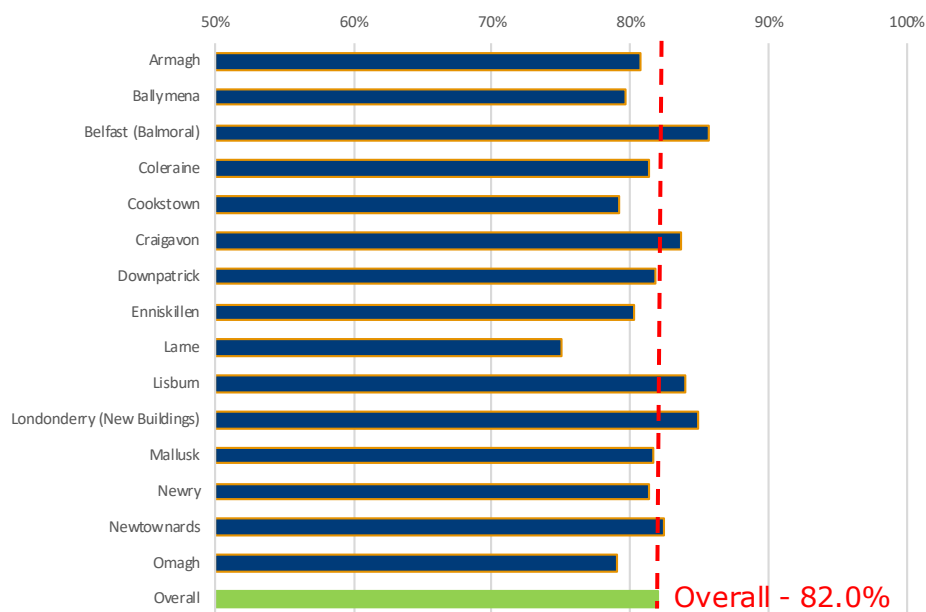


## Vehicle Tests by Test Centre

The busiest test centre was Newtownards, which conducted over 19,500 tests during the quarter. The quietest centre was Downpatrick, having conducted just under 6,300 tests during the January to March period (table 1.14).

Whilst the overall pass-rate for private-car full tests during quarter four was 82.0%, of those test centres that conducted at least 500 tests, this ranged from a high of 85.6% in Belfast (Balmoral) to a low of 75.0% in Larne (table 1.14 and figure 1.6). This is the second consecutive quarter that Belfast (Balmoral) had the highest pass-rate, a description that has applied for the majority of the last seven years. 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.

Figure 1.6: Private-Car Full Vehicle Test Pass-Rates by Test Centre





## **Vehicle Licensing and Registration**

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

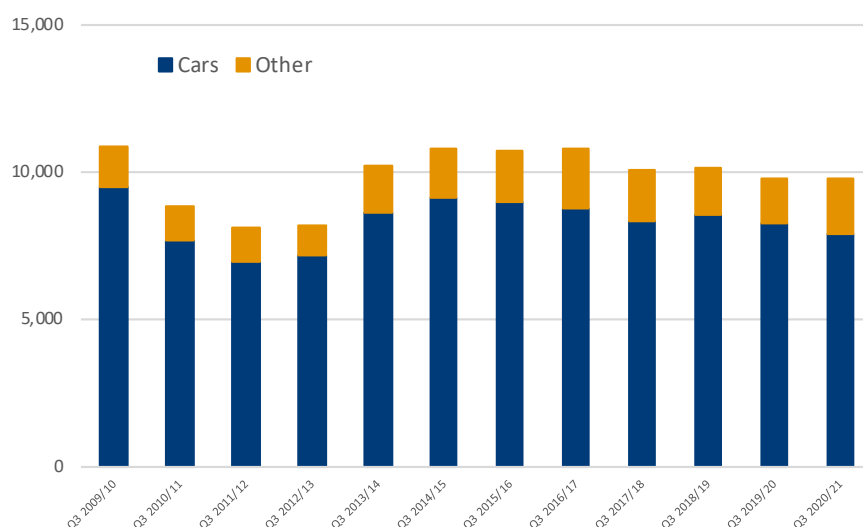
### Vehicle Registrations

During October to December 2020, the DVLA registered just under 9,760 new vehicles for the first time in Northern Ireland. The number of new vehicle first registrations showed a small decrease of 0.2% from the same period in 2019 and is the lowest quarter three total for eight years. Private car first registrations accounted for the majority of this decrease, down by 4.8% when compared to 2019 (table 2.1).

This decrease was caused by the second COVID-19 lockdown in autumn/winter 2020, as most dealerships were either closed or operating at reduced capacity to ensure social distancing.

For the 2020 calendar year, there were approximately 36,200 new private car registrations in Northern Ireland. This was 28.1% lower than in 2019, and the lowest annual total in our time series.

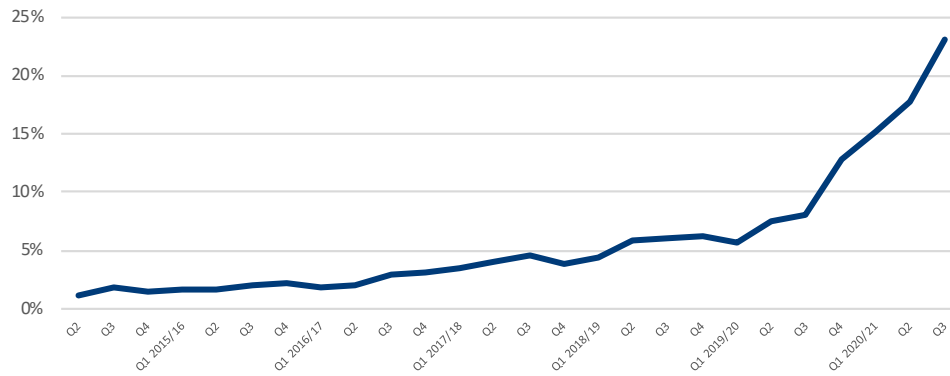
Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations



The top make for cars registered for the first time during October to December 2020 was Volkswagen, accounting for just over 800 registrations. This marks a return to the top for Volkswagen, and was followed by Ford, Audi, Toyota, and Peugeot (table 2.3). For the full calendar year, the most popular make was Ford, followed by Volkswagen, Toyota, Hyundai, and Audi. More than one out of every ten new cars was a Ford.

Grey was again the most popular colour for new cars, accounting for 23.1% of all new registrations. Blue (19.8%), white (18.5%), black (16.6%), and red (10.7%) are the next most popular.

Figure 2.2: Proportion of New Car Registrations using Alternative Fuels



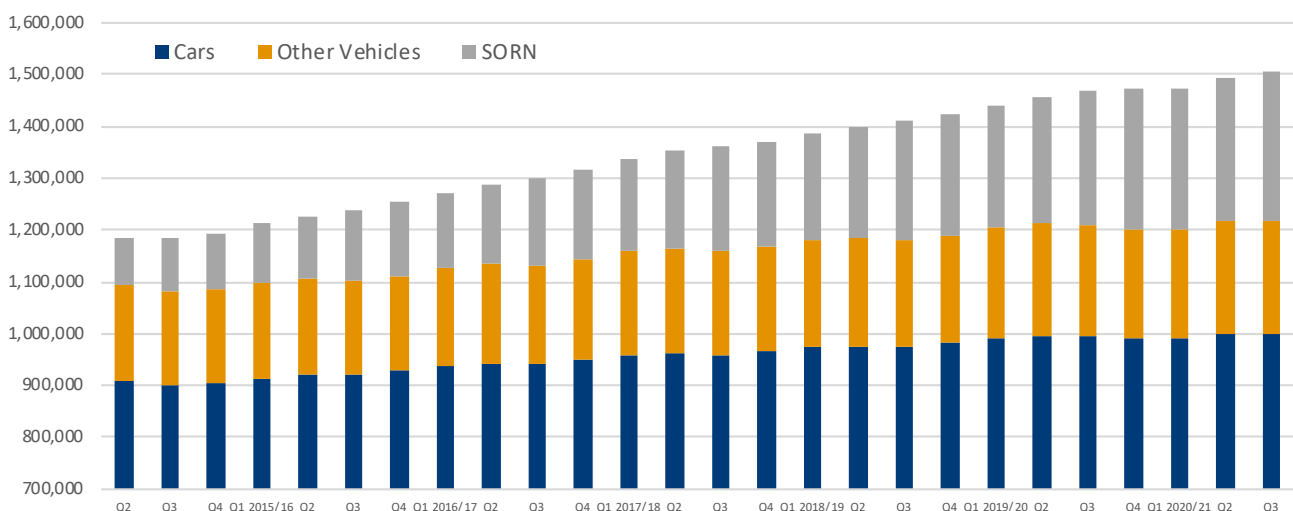
The proportion of newly registered alternative-fuel<sup>3</sup> cars has increased substantially over the last two years, increasing from 6.0% during quarter three 2018, to 23.1% in the equivalent period in 2020. Over this same period, the proportion of diesel cars has continued to decline, from 37.4% in autumn 2018 to 20.3% in 2020 and from a peak of 58.1% in autumn 2015. This is the first time that alternative-fuel cars have out-sold diesel cars.

### Licensed Vehicles

There were approximately 1,220,000 vehicles licensed in Northern Ireland at 31 December 2020, broadly unchanged compared with the previous quarter, reversing the decreasing trend seen in late-2019 and early-2020. This is the largest figure in our time series. This comparison varied by body-type, with Private-Cars (+0.1%), Light Goods (+0.7%), Heavy Goods (+1.2%), and Agricultural (+1.3%) all seeing small increases, whereas Motorcycles (-8.7%), and Buses (-0.4%) saw decreases.

Approximately 287,000 vehicles had a SORN at the 31 December 2020, representing 19.0% of the total vehicle stock (table 2.13). The number of SORN vehicles in Northern Ireland increased by over a tenth (10.2%) from the same date in 2019; in comparison to a 14.0% 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



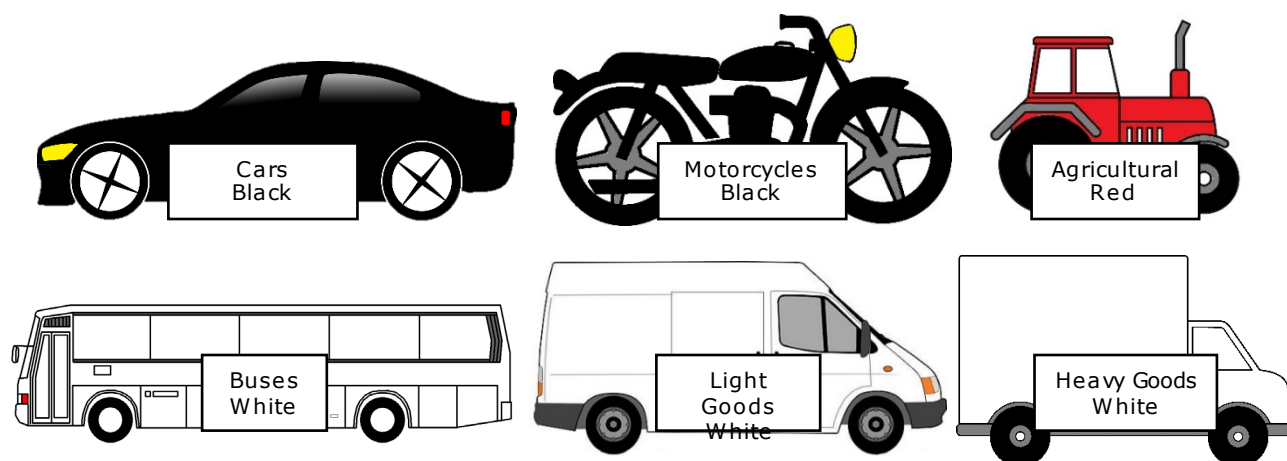
<sup>3</sup> Alternative-fuel vehicles are those able to use a range of alternatives to purely petrol or diesel fuel, including gas, electricity, or a combination such as gas bi-fuel and hybrid-electric.

As of 31 December 2020, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 8.9 years, unchanged from last quarter. However, there is some variance in average age for different body-types:

- Cars – 8.5 years (+0.1 on Q2)
- Motorcycles – 13.9 years (+0.3)
- Light Goods – 8.5 years (-)
- Heavy Goods – 9.9 years (-)
- Buses – 10.5 years (+0.1)
- Agricultural – 21.5 years (+0.1)
- Other – 10.4 years (-)

(Figures in brackets refer to the change in age, in years, compared to the previous quarter).

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.

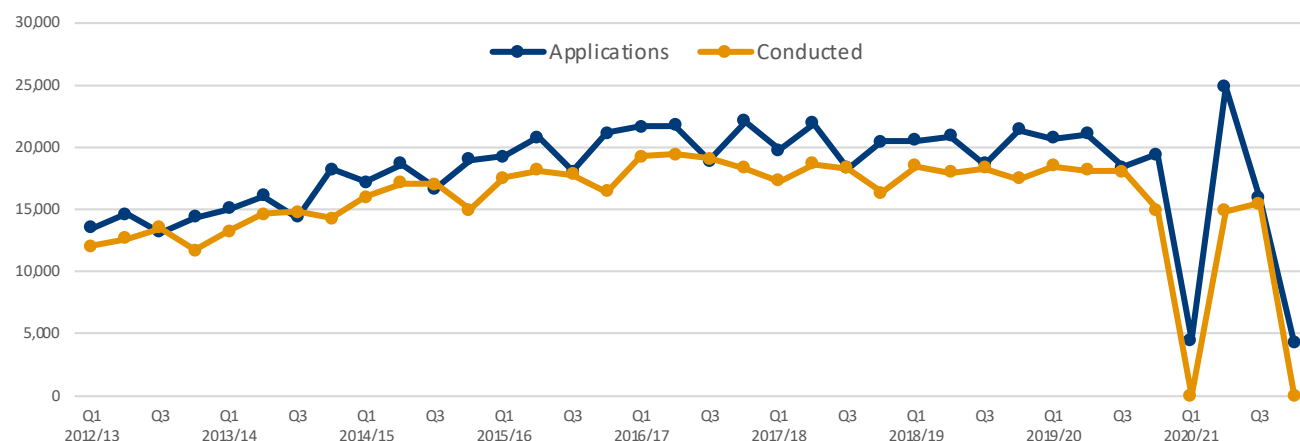
Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all driver theory testing between 20 March 2020 and 6 July, and again from 26 December until 22 April 2021. For the latest news and updates, please visit the Driver Theory Testing page on the NIDirect website<sup>4</sup>.

### Theory Test Applications and Tests Conducted

From January to March 2021, the DVA received just over 4,300 theory test applications. This marks a decrease of 78% from the 19,400 recorded in the same quarter last year (figure 3.1). This is the lowest quarterly total in our time series. During the same period, theory testing was limited to critical workers only, and so only 38 tests were conducted (table 3.2).

For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA conducted just over 30,400 theory tests, a decrease of 56% compared to last year and the lowest annual total in our time series, as closures and social distancing measures reduced capacity at the testing centres. Prior to the pandemic, volumes had been broadly consistent over the previous five years.

Figure 3.1: Theory Test Applications and Conducted



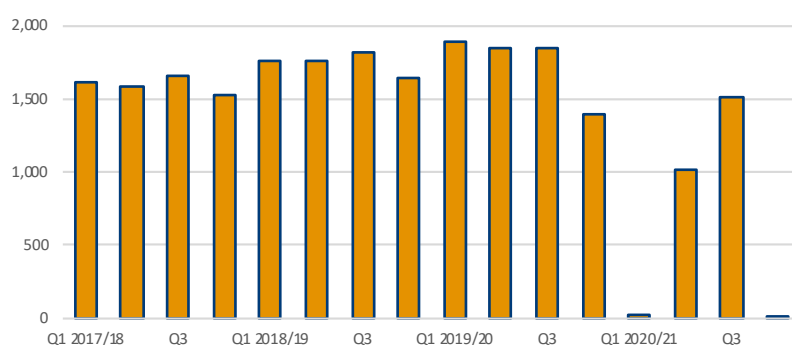
For both theory test applications and conducted, tests for private-cars account for nearly nine out of every ten of all applications or tests conducted.

### Failed To Attend

As testing was limited to critical workers only, just two customers failed to attend a booked test during quarter four (table 3.3 and figure 3.2).

For the 2020-21 financial year, approximately 2,560 customers failed to attend, equating to 7.8% of the conducted tests during the quarter, the lowest annual proportion in our time series.

Figure 3.2: Theory Tests - Failed To Attend



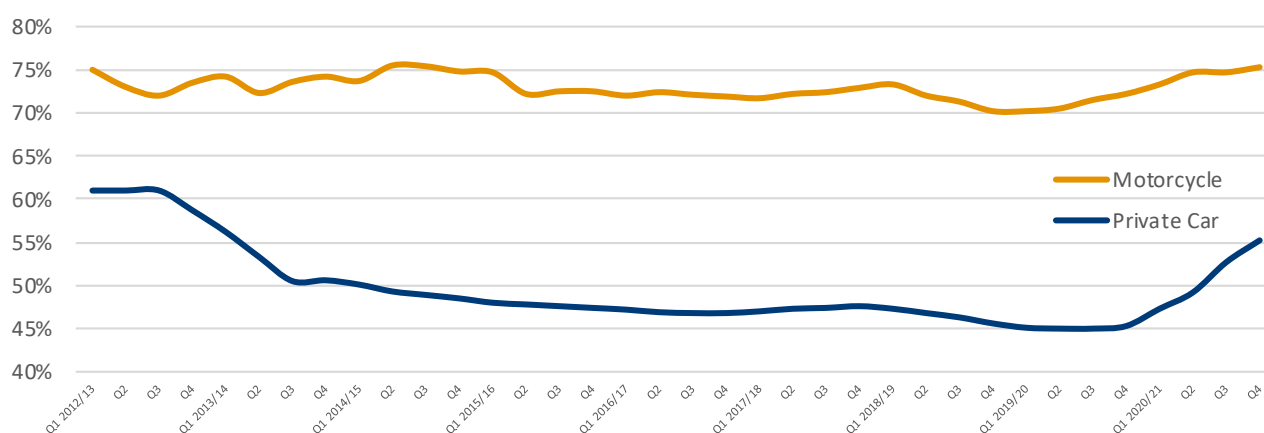
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-theory-test>

## Theory Test Pass-Rates

Due to the low number of tests conducted between January and March 2021, no pass-rate is available for quarter four.

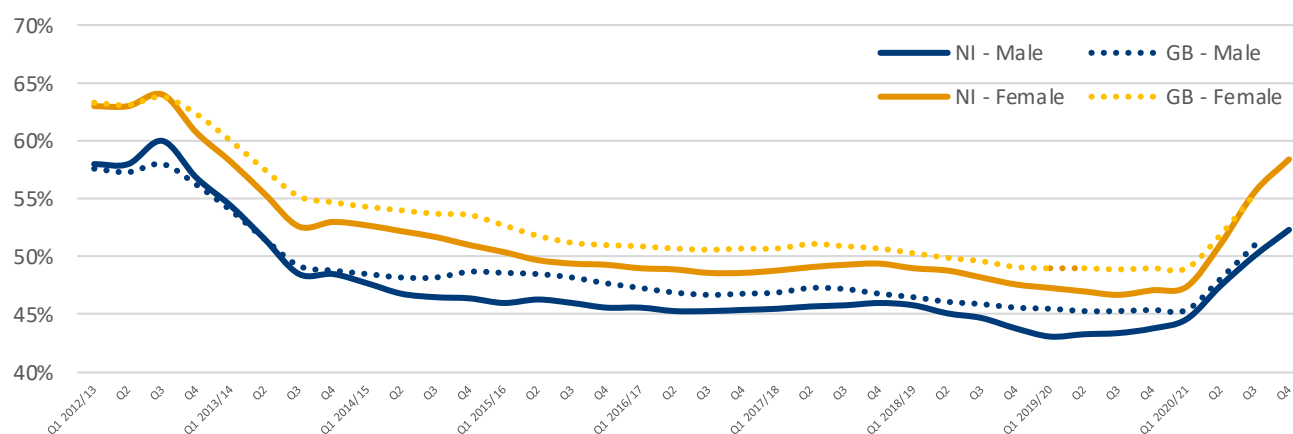
For the full 2020-21 financial year, the theory test pass-rate for private-cars was 55.2%, an increase of 9 percentage-points on the pass-rate last year, and the second highest annual pass-rate in our time series. For the motorcycle test, the pass-rate was 75.2%, reflecting the fact that those taking the motorcycle test will usually have already taken the private-car test. This was an increase of 3 percentage-points compared to 2020-21 and the highest annual motorcycle pass-rate in our time series. Whilst not directly comparable due to the nature and purpose of the tests, the pass-rate for the taxi theory test was 19.8%, a decrease of almost 12 percentage-points compared to last year, and the lowest annual pass-rate for four years.

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



Continuing the trend over the past decade, 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 2020-21 financial year, the pass-rates were 58.4% for females and 52.3% for males. Although the pass-rates had been gradually decreasing from 2012 to 2020, since the resumption of testing in summer 2020, pass-rates for both genders have increased substantially. It is too soon to say whether this is indicative of a change in the under-lying trends or just an effect of the pandemic. Both the 'gender-gap' and post-pandemic trend are similar to those seen in Great Britain (figure 3.4).

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



## 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 March 2020 until 5 October, again from 17 October and 20 November, again for a third time between 27 November and 10 December. The most recent suspension began on 23 December, reopening on 23 April 2021. During quarter four, only off-road motorcycle and certain LGV tests were able to continue. For the latest news and updates, please visit the Practical Driving Test page on the NIDirect website<sup>5</sup>.

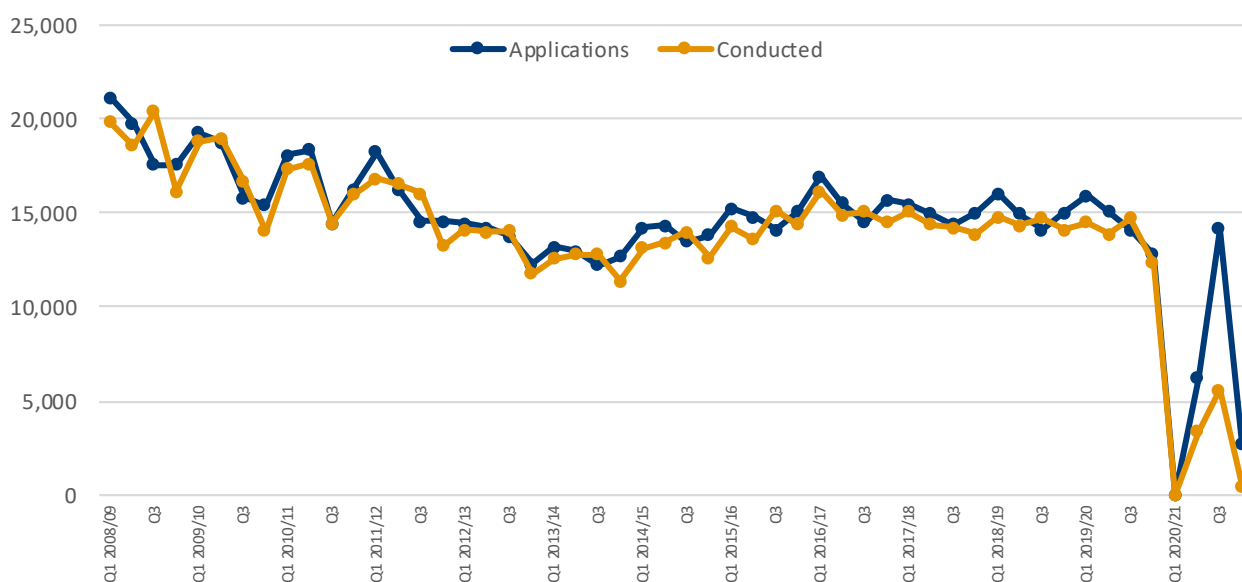
### Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

From January to March 2021, the DVA received just over 2,700 applications for a driving test, just 18% of the five-year-average (table 4.1 and figure 4.1). For the full financial year, the DVA received just under 23,200 applications, a 60% decrease compared to 2019-20, and the lowest annual total in our time series.

As the COVID-19 pandemic meant the suspension of all driver testing, bar off-road motorcycle and certain LGV tests, the DVA conducted only 513 tests during quarter four. During 2020-21, the DVA conducted just over 9,500 driver tests (table 4.3, and figure 4.1), an 83% decrease compared to the total in the preceding year. Of these tests, 71% were for private car tests.

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

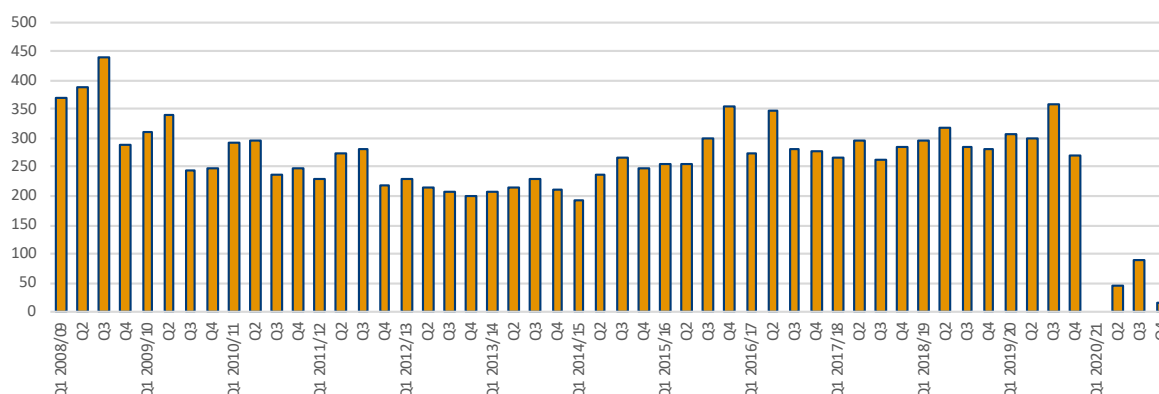


<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/book-your-practical-driving-test-online>

## Failed to Attend

During quarter four, there were 17 appointments where the individual failed to attend (table 4.4). These account for 3.2% of the conducted tests during the quarter. During the full financial year, there were 150 missed appointments, accounting for 1.6% of the tests conducted during the period.

Figure 4.2: Driving Tests – Failed to Attend



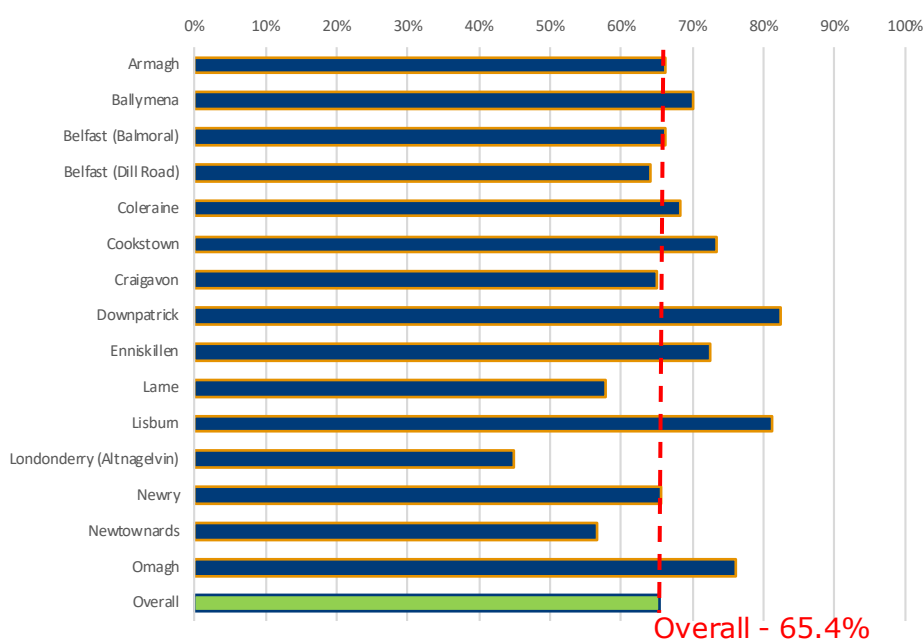
## Driving Tests by Test Centre

For the full financial year, the test centre that conducted the largest number of driving tests was Belfast (Balmoral), whilst Enniskillen conducted the fewest (table 4.7b).

Again for the 2020-21 financial year, the test centre with the highest pass-rate for private-car driving tests was Downpatrick (82.4%), whilst Londonderry (Altnagelvin) recorded the lowest (44.8%). Downpatrick has now recorded the highest pass-rate for private-cars tests in every quarter for more than eight years.

As the DVA did not conduct any private-car driving tests during quarter four, there are no volume or pass-rate comparisons for the period.

Figure 4.3: Private Car Driving Test Pass-Rates by Test Centre, Q4 (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



## Driving Test Pass-Rates

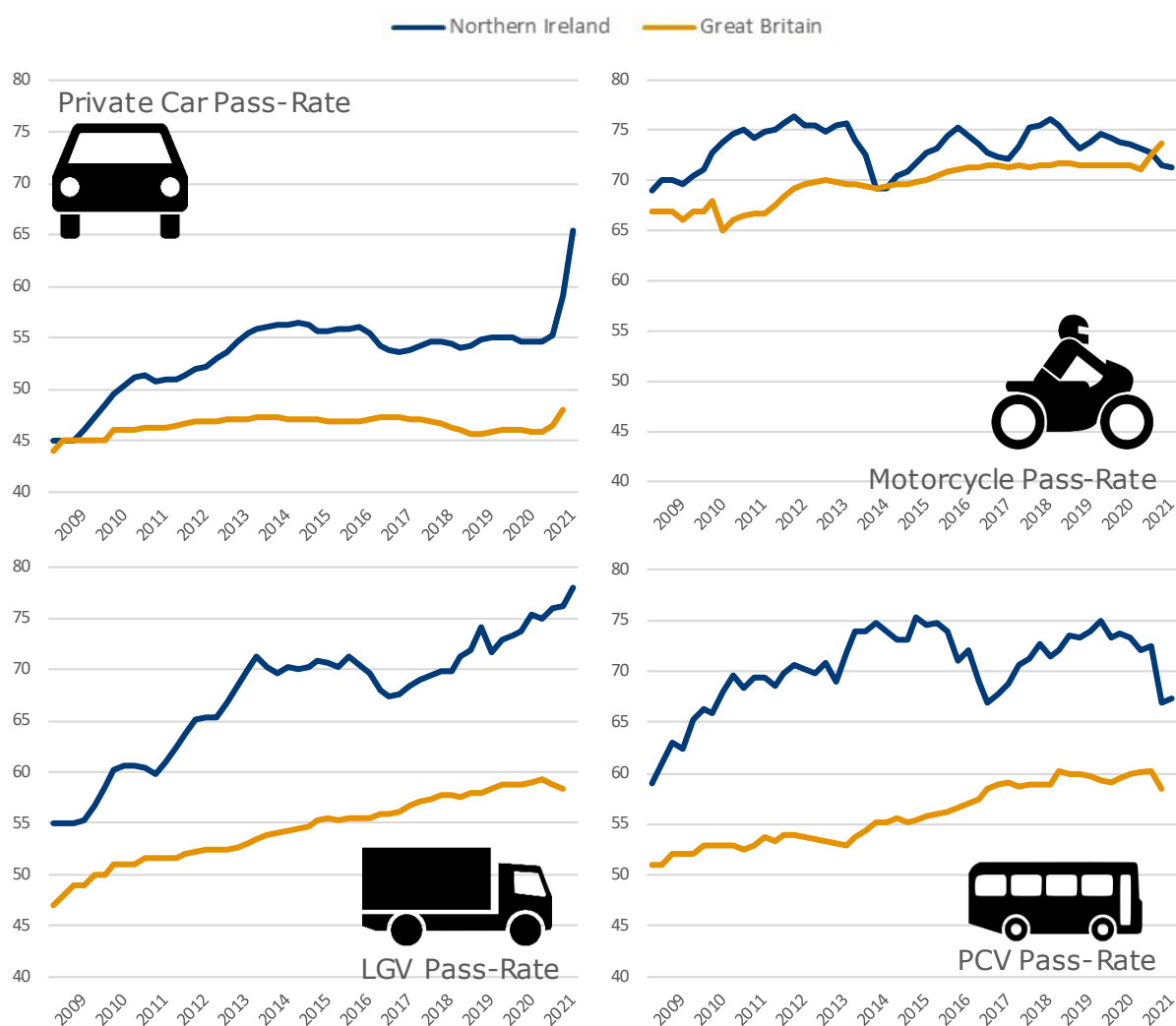
The DVA conducted insufficient driving tests during January to March 2021 to allow the normal analysis of quarterly pass-rates. Instead, we have focused on rolling four-quarter averages in this section.

The pass-rate for private-car driving tests for 2020-21 was 65.4%, an increase of 10.8 percentage-points on the 54.6% recorded in the pre-pandemic 2019-20 (table 4.10 and figure 4.4). This is the highest annual pass-rate in our time series. You can see a similar, albeit smaller, increase in the LGV pass-rate, which increased from 75.3% to 78.0%. Conversely, the pass-rates for both Motorcycles and PCVs both decreased year-on-year.

Prior to this year, pass-rates for all categories of vehicle remained broadly unchanged over the past five years. It is too soon to say whether this is indicative of a change in the under-lying trend or just an effect of the pandemic.

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)

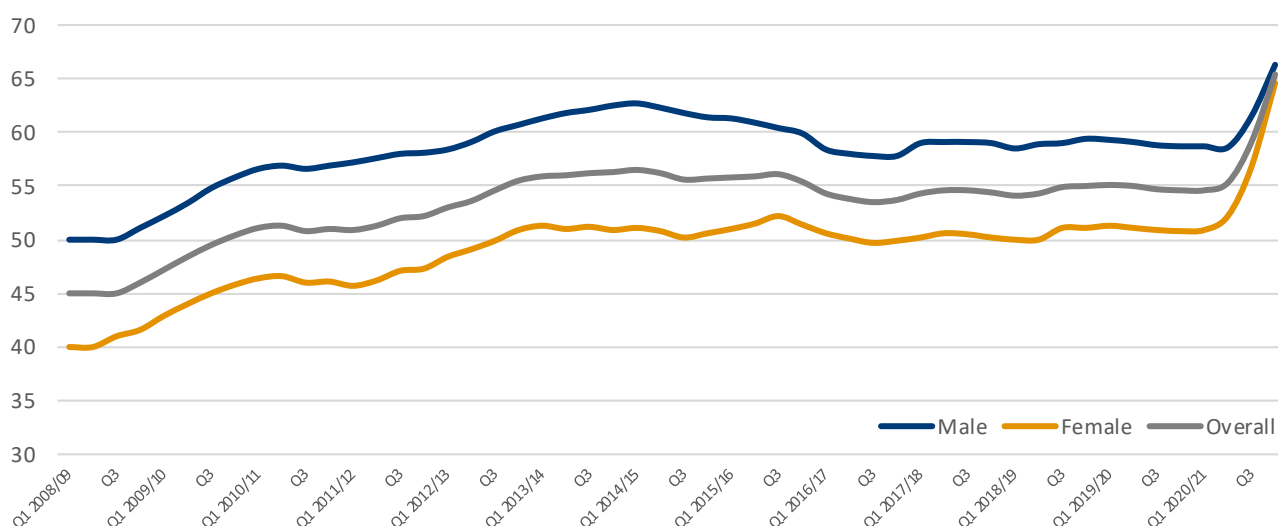




## Driving Test Pass-Rates by Gender

A clear 'gender-gap' is apparent in Northern Irish test pass-rates, using a four-quarter rolling average, albeit one that has narrowed considerably during 2020-21 (table 4.10 & figure 4.5). Over the last twelve months, males had a 1.7 percentage-point higher pass-rate compared to females for the private-car driving test. This gap had remained relatively consistent prior to 2020, in the 7.8 to 8.8 range; however, since testing resumed during summer 2020 the gap has shrunk to the lowest figure in our time series. This gap is also substantially narrower than the 6.2 percentage-point gap present in the Great Britain statistics. As with the overall pass-rate, it is too soon to say whether this is indicative of a change in the under-lying trend or just an effect of the pandemic.

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.

Most test centres offering private-car driving tests also showed this same disparity, to varying degrees, with Lisburn (88.4% v 74.5%) and Newry (68.3% v 63.2%) showing the widest gender-gaps in favour of males. In contrast, Armagh (62.4% v 69.7%) showed a large gender-gap in favour of females (table 4.7c).

## 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.

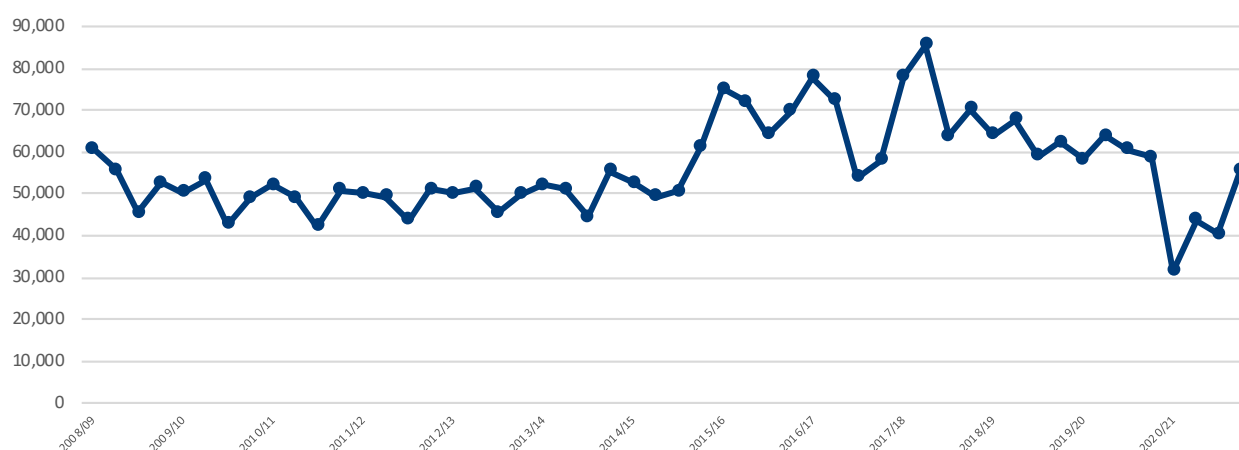
On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and temporarily closed down the driver licensing office. From the end of April, the DVA began processing applications from Group 2 (lorry/bus) applicants and those from front line workers. Only applications received online were processed in this period. From June 2020, the DVA began the process of resuming driver licensing services (bar the counter service, which remains closed) and is now working to process all applications it receives.

### Driver Licensing Transactions

The DVA carried out approximately 55,600 ordinary licensing transactions during January to March 2021 (figure 5.1). This represented an increase of 38% in comparison with quarter three, and a decrease of 5.2% in comparison with the volume carried out in the corresponding quarter of 2020. The automatic extension of driving licences during 2020 meant the DVA received a reduced number of driving licence renewals, which accounted for the majority of this decrease.

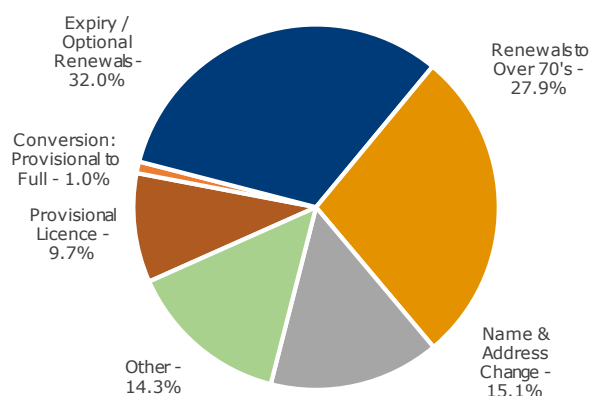
For the financial year, the DVA carried out just under 171,000 ordinary licensing transactions, a 29% decrease compared to last year, and the lowest annual total in our time series as COVID-19 impacted the licensing office in Coleraine.

Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of ordinary first licences (*provisional licences*) issued in quarter four 2020-21 (5,377) was 17.6% lower than the figure for those issued during the same period in the previous year (6,523 licences) (table 5.1), although this trend has been broadly unchanged over the past decade. This was the third-lowest quarter-four total in our time series, as licensing services resumed following in the initial COVID-19 lockdown.

Figure 5.2: Driver License Transactions by Type, 2020-21 Quarter Four



During 2020-21, the DVA issued just over 23,000 provisional licences, 13.5% less than during 2019-20, and the lowest total in our time series.

In quarter four 2020-21, the DVA carried out over 3,539 vocational licensing transactions, an increase of 24% on quarter three, and a decrease of 16.5% on the corresponding period in 2020 when the figure stood at 4,236 (table 5.2). For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA carried out approximately 11,500 vocational licensing transactions, a decrease of 39% compared to the previous year, and the lowest annual total in our time series.

In other licensing activity, the number of letters of entitlement issued during the quarter (5,141) was 12% higher than in quarter four 2019-20 (table 5.3). Conversely, the volume of identity checks (6,692) is 19% lower than last year.

**Driver Licence Stock**

At the 31 March 2021, there were approximately 1,084,000 full and eligible licence holders with private-cars / light vans entitlement, a decrease of 0.1% compared with the previous quarterly total (table 5.9 and figure 5.4). This is the fourth consecutive quarterly decrease since the series peak at 31 March 2020. It is mostly caused by the substantial reduction in the number of practical driving tests conducted during 2020-21 (circa 46,000) 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 (approximately 112,000) increased by 4.1% compared with the previous quarter and by 15.8% on the figure recorded a year ago (just over 96,000). This is the largest number of provisional licences in our time series.

The number of people aged 65 and over holding a full licence decreased by over 7,000 in the past twelve months, with the total now approximately 209,000 individuals. Proportionally, those licence holders aged 65 and over account for 19.3% of the driver licence stock, a figure that is broadly unchanged over the last two years.

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

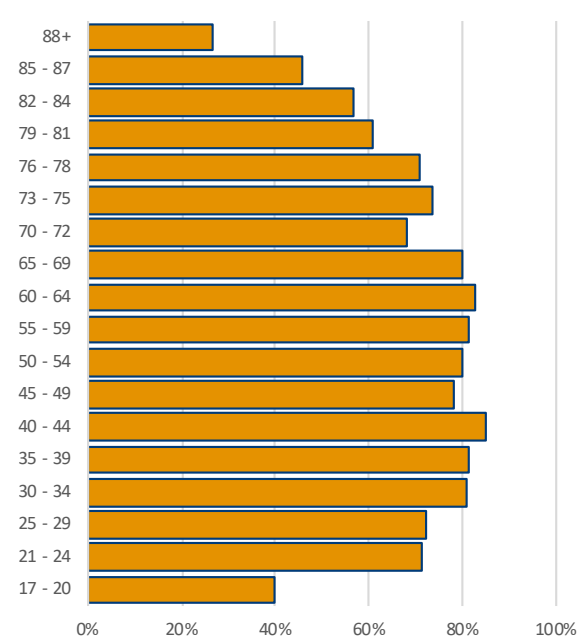


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

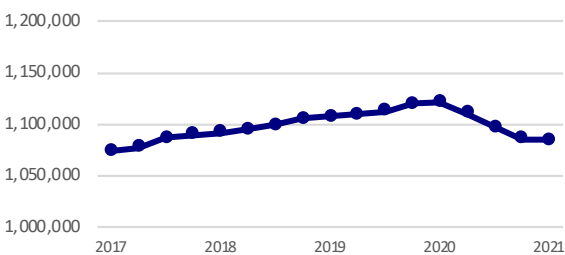
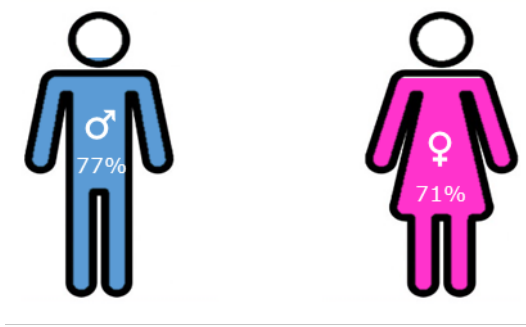


Figure 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Gender



An estimated 73.5% 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 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimates<sup>6</sup> (table 5.8i). This is the lowest proportion in our time series, since it began in 2017. For males, the estimated figure was 76.6%, which is six percentage-points higher than the 70.5% seen for females.

---

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

## **6** Road Transport Licensing

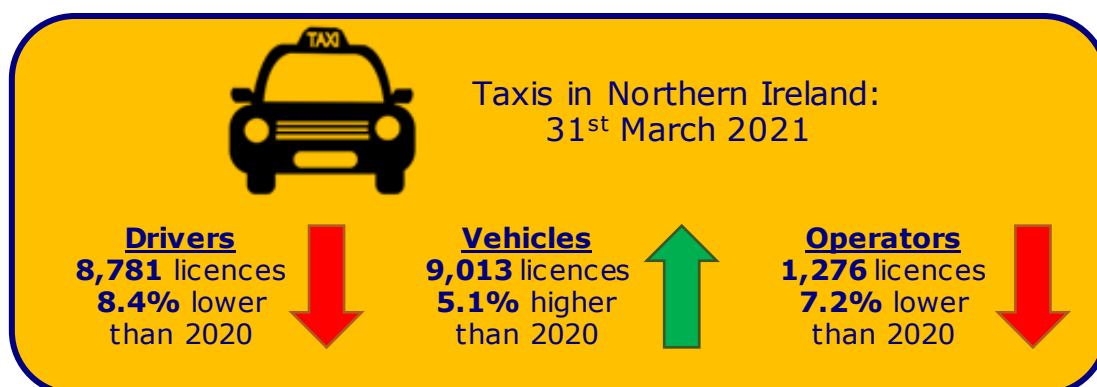
The Passenger Transport Licensing division in DVA is responsible for issuing (and where appropriate, withdrawing) licences in respect of taxi drivers and bus operators. Goods licensing is the responsibility of the Transport Regulation Unit in DfI.

Whilst the majority of the division has continued to operate during the COVID-19 restrictions, the DVA suspended the division's reception and counter services on 27 March 2020. These remain closed.

The NI Assembly designated taxi drivers as key workers, and so taxi driver licensing has continued to operate throughout the pandemic. Similarly, the DVA has maintained bus and taxi operator licensing services throughout. All bus and taxi vehicle licences expiring between 10 March 2020 and 31 May 2021 have been, or will be, automatically renewed for an additional twelve months, at no cost to the owner.

For the latest news and updates, please visit the Motoring page on the NIDirect website<sup>7</sup>.

### **Taxi Licensing**



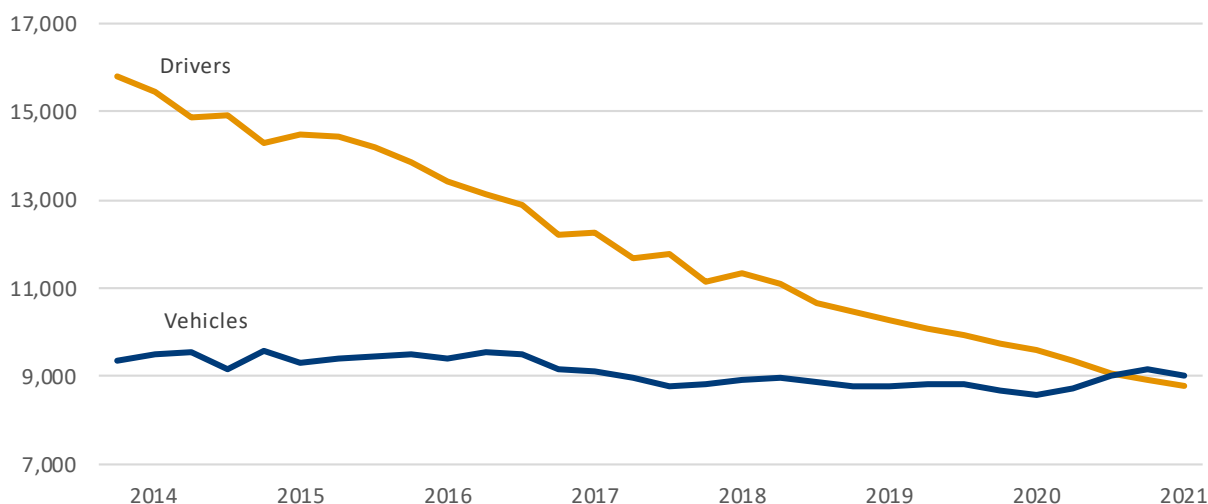
The DVA issued just over 1,200 vehicle licences for taxis during January to March 2021, the lowest quarterly total in our time series, although this was mostly caused by the advance renewal of expiring licences during the prior quarter. The vast majority of these (87%) were 12-month exemption certificates rather than normal licenses (table 6.1). For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA issued over 13,100 vehicle licences, the largest figure in our time series, albeit that 94% of these were automatic rather than 'standard' renewals.

Between January and March 2021, just under 300 taxi driver licences were issued, down 40% compared to the same period in 2020, and the second lowest quarterly total in our time series (table 6.1). The comparison is very similar for the full financial year, where the DVA issued just over 1,200 taxi driver licences. This was 42% lower than in 2020-21, and the lowest annual total recorded.

The number of taxi driver licences in force at the end of March 2021 (8,781) was down by 8.4% compared to the previous year (table 6.2 and figure 6.1), and is the lowest number recorded in our time series. This is the twelfth consecutive "lowest-ever" as the trend continues to decline. The number of taxi drivers has fallen by over a third in just five years. Of these taxi drivers, 96% were male, whilst their average age was 51.9.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-motoring>

Figure 6.1: Licensed Taxi Driver and Vehicle Volumes



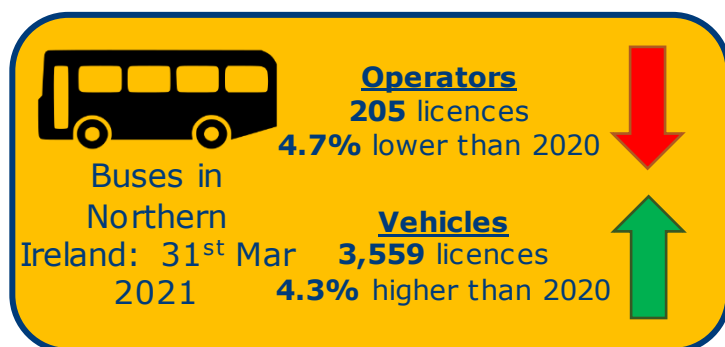
At the 31 March 2021, there were just over 9,000 licensed taxi vehicles in Northern Ireland, an increase of 5.1% when compared to the series-low in 2020, although still 4.0% lower than five years ago (table 6.2 and figure 6.1). For the second time in our series, there were more licensed taxis than there were licensed taxi drivers.

These taxi vehicles were affiliated to 1,276 licensed taxi operators, of which 87% are classified as small operators, i.e. can only list up to two taxis on the licence (table 6.2). This is a 7.2% decrease compared to the same point in 2020, and the lowest figure in our time series.

## Bus Licensing

The number of licensed buses at the 31 March 2021 was almost 3,560, up 4.3% on the figure on the equivalent date in 2020 (table 6.3); although this is down 1.1% on the series high recorded last quarter.

The DVA issued 383 bus vehicle licences during the quarter, 71% of which were 12-month exemption certificates rather than normal licences (table 6.1). During 2020-21, the DVA issued just over 3,700 bus vehicle licences, a 3.4% increase on 2019-20, and the largest figure in our time series. Similar to the taxi vehicle renewals, the automatic renewals processed during the pandemic have inflated this figure (94% of the total).



At the 31 March 2021, there were 205 bus operator licences in force, down 4.7% from the amount recorded last year (215), and the lowest total for nearly three years (table 6.3). During January to March 2021, the DVA processed 36 bus operator licences, the third-lowest quarterly total in our time series. In 2020-21, the DVA processed 190 bus operator licences, a 12.4% decrease compared to 2019-20.

## Goods Licensing

The number of goods vehicle operator licences in force as at the 31 December 2020 was 5,456, an increase of 1.9% on last year, although down 17.0% on eight 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 1,878 accounting for a series high 34.4% of all goods vehicle operators.



Associated to these operators, again as at 31 March 2021, were 21,972 heavy goods vehicles. This is an increase of 1.1% when compared with the same point in 2020, although a decrease of 3.2% when compared with 2017.

## 7 Enforcement & Compliance

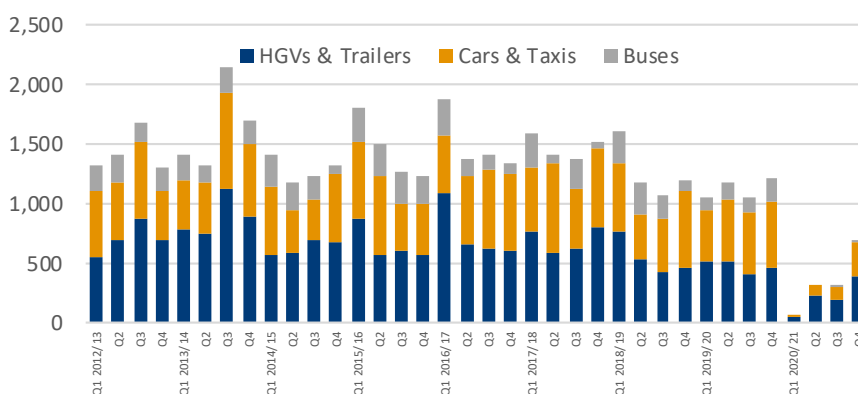
DVA Enforcement falls within the Agency's Compliance and Enforcement directorate. Roadside Enforcement is responsible for the enforcement of legislation pertaining to roadworthiness standards and licensing requirements at the roadside.

COVID-19 continues to present a number of challenges for enforcement activity. The directorate has successfully applied a range of solutions, including the creation of a segregated sterile interview facility within a liveried van to enable staff to conduct an enforcement service, whilst protecting officers, drivers, and operators from the risk of infection.

### Enforcement Activities

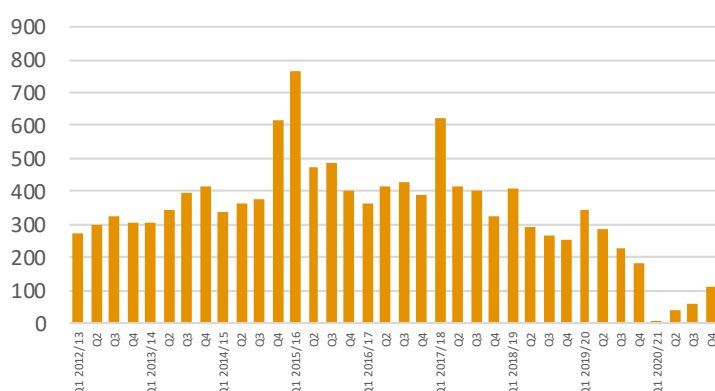
During January to March 2021, DVA enforcement staff checked 682 vehicles. Of these, the largest volume was for heavy goods vehicles, accounting for over two fifths of all vehicles checked (table 7.1 and figure 7.1). Whilst this was the lowest quarter-four total in our time series, it was the largest quarterly total since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Figure 7.1: Enforcement Spot-Checks



For the 2020-21 financial year, the DVA inspected approximately 1,350 vehicles, a decrease of 70% on 2019-20, and the second consecutive lowest annual total in our time series.

Figure 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued



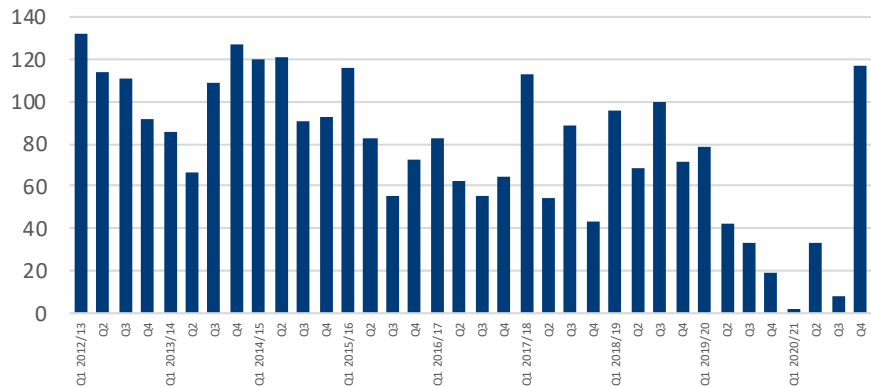
DVA enforcement officers issued 113 fixed penalty notices during quarter four (table 7.2 and figure 7.2). Whilst this was the lowest quarter-four total since our time series began in 2012, it marks the largest quarterly total during the pandemic. The total value of these fixed penalties issued was £12,170.

The DVA issued 211 fixed penalties during the financial year, the lowest annual total in our time series. These penalties totalled £22,670.



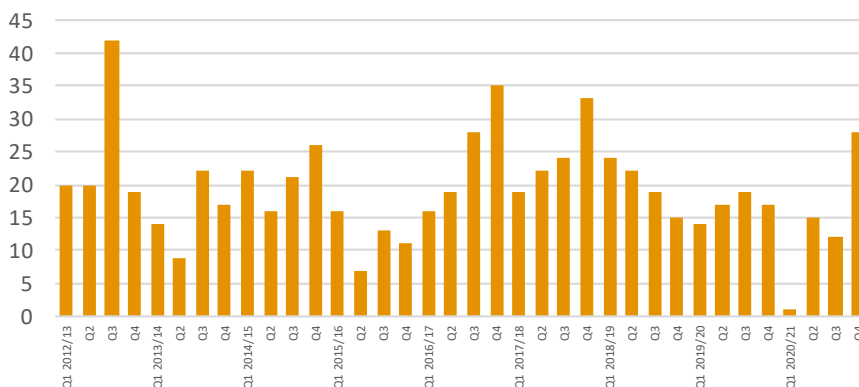
There were 117 successful convictions during the quarter, accounting for 372 offences. This was the largest quarterly total for over six years. From these cases, the DVA received £61,455 of court fines & costs, the largest quarterly total since our time series began in 2021 (table 7.2 and figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: Convictions



For the full financial year, there were 160 convictions covering 487 offences, and £79,460 of fines. Despite the successful final quarter, these were all the lowest annual figures in our time series.

Figure 7.4: Joint or Cross-Border Operations

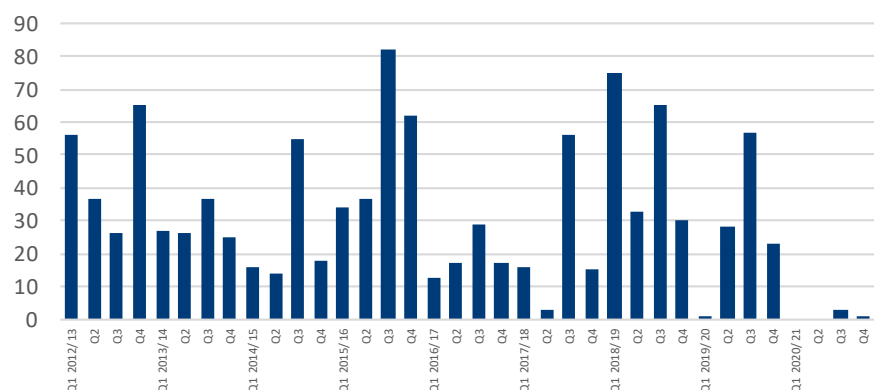


During January to March 2021, enforcement teams carried out 21 joint operations with the PSNI (table 7.3 and figure 7.4). They also carried out 7 cross border operations in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority in Ireland, along with PSNI and An Garda Síochána.

For 2020-21, there were 38 joint operations, the lowest annual total since 2015-16. For cross border operations, the annual figure of 38 was an increase of 8.6% on 2019-20, albeit the second lowest annual total in our time series.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions on schools and group-transportation, the DVA was only able to conduct a single school bus check during quarter four (table 7.4 and figure 7.5). Because of the pandemic, only 4 school bus checks were completed during 2020-21.

Figure 7.5: School Bus Checks



## **DVA Target Monitoring**

For 2020-21, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DVA has developed new targets through which it monitors performance. The previous reported targets for Driver and Vehicle Testing are no longer applicable, and there has been an adjustment to the target for Paper Driver Licensing. The previously reported statistics for the old targets are included in table 8.1. The revised targets are as follows:

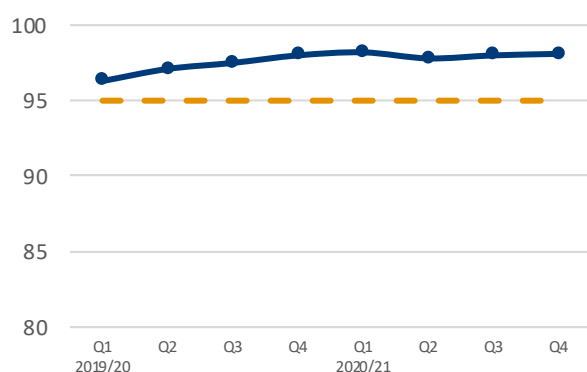
1. *Online Driver Licensing* - Process 95% of complete online driver licensing applications within 5 working days;
2. *Paper Driver Licensing* - Process 80% of complete paper driver licensing applications within 10 working days.

### Driver Licensing

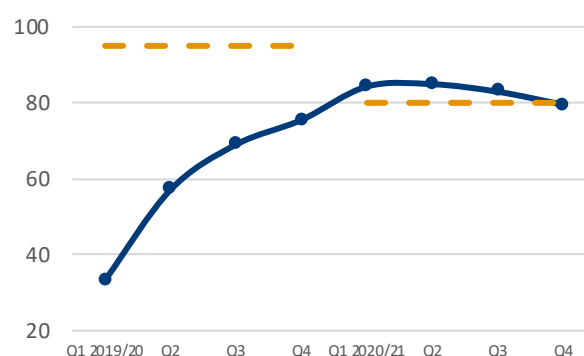
Online application performance for the 2020-21 financial year was 98.1%, exceeding the Agency target of 95%, and a slight increase on the 98.0% reported in 2019-20. Paper application performance was 79.5% for the same period, an increase of 4 percentage-points on the 75.5% reported in 2019-20. However, this just missing the revised Agency target 80%.

Please refer to section five of this report for more commentary regarding driver licensing during the quarter.

**Figure 8.1: Online Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance**



**Figure 8.2: Paper Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance**



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



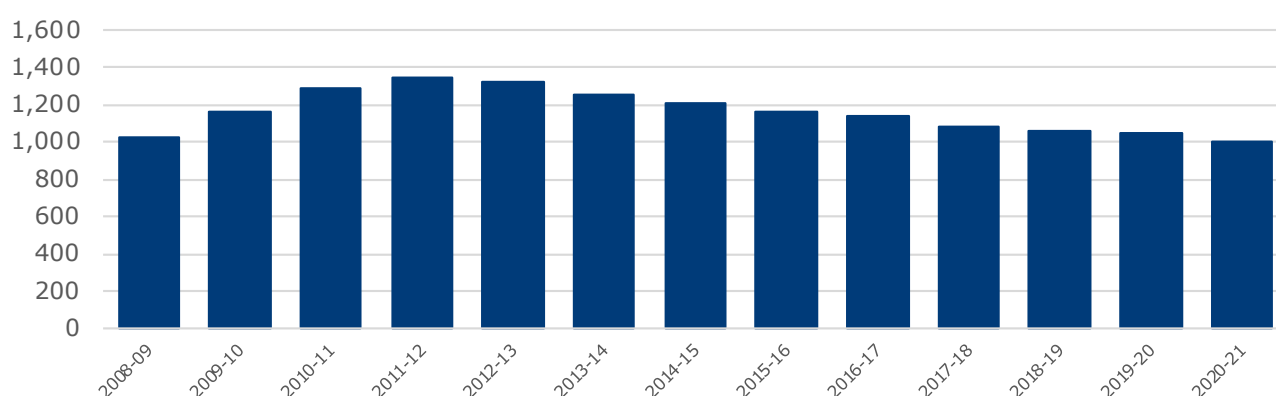
## **Driving and Motorcycle Instructors**

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

### **Volumes**

As of 31 March 2021, there were 1,001 Approved Driving Instructors registered in Northern Ireland, representing a 4.0% reduction on the number registered a year ago. This is the ninth successive fall in numbers, from the peak of 1,344 registered in 2011-12. Of these Driving Instructors, 84% were male: a proportion that is broadly unchanged over the past ten years. There were 8 new registrants this year, a fall of 56% 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.

Figure 9.1: Approved Driving Instructors in Northern Ireland



The number of Approved Motorcycle Instructors remains substantially lower, with 48 registered as of 31 March 2021, 19% reduced from the peak in 2012-13.

### **Test Volumes & Pass-Rates**

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions throughout the financial year, only 10 candidates were able to undertake the Theory & Hazard Perception test with none able to take either the Driving Ability or Instructional Ability test.

## **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 the section on target monitoring. We discussed these with the Office for Statistical Regulation (OSR), and it was agreed that both the old Vehicle Testing and Driver Testing Waiting Time targets fully complied 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 we have highlighted this in the relevant section of the report.

### **Copyright statement**



© Crown copyright 2021

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v.3. To view this licence visit:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

Alternatively, email:

[psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

Where we have identified any third party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.