

DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics- Update

Quarter Four: January to March 2023

Issue number: 34

Date of publication: 14 June 2023

Updated: 7 July 2023

Theme: Travel and Transport

Coverage: Northern Ireland

Produced by:

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

Contact: Manny Fitzpatrick

Telephone: 02890 547934

Email: DVA.Statistics@nisra.gov.uk

Website:

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

Key Findings

- In 2022/23 DVA delivered over 1.155 million vehicle tests, the highest in our series back to 2008/09.
- Full vehicle tests conducted this year at over 992,400 is the highest recorded for a single year back to 2008/09.
- Private cars accounted for 82.6% (819,523) of all full vehicle tests delivered in 2022/23, which again is a single year record from when this series started in 2008/09.
- Over 50,770 vehicles failed to attend a booked vehicle test in 2022/23, the highest on record for a single year.
- Just over 93% of all vehicle test applications in 2022/23 were made using the DVA internet booking system, compared with 56% in 2015/16. The remaining 7% of vehicle test applications this year were made via the DVA call centre.
- DVA delivered 68,540 driving tests in 2022/23, the highest on record in thirteen years.
- Almost 82% (56,132) of all driving tests in 2022/23 were private cars, the highest for a single year in twelve years.
- Theory tests conducted in 2022/23 at just over 87,230 is the second highest on record for this series back to 2009/10.
- Online driver licensing application performance in 2022/23 at 98.6% was above the 95% target level for the year. Performance was over 98% for every quarter in 2022/23 and stood at 98.3% for the last quarter of this financial year.
- Paper driver licensing applications performance at 92.6% was above the 90% target level for the year, and significantly better than the 78.3% achieved in 2021/22. Performance was above target for each quarter of 2022/23, ending the year at 90.6% for quarter four of 2022/23.
- Ordinary licensing transactions during 2022/23 at 242,642, is slightly above (0.6%) that for 2019/20 (241,315).
- At the end of March 2023, there were 1,149,045 full and eligible licence holders with private car/light vans entitlement in Northern Ireland, the highest on record.
- DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities this year having checked 2,894 vehicles, issued 283 fixed penalty notices totalling just over £29,000 in fines, completed 36 joint operations with PSNI and 21 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, with 52 spot checks on school buses. In addition, DVA completed 146,768 tachograph checks, 43,431 in premises and 103,337 at the roadside.
- At the end of March 2023, there were 919 Approved Driving Instructors and 54 Approved Motorcycle Instructors registered with DVA.

Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Key Findings	2
Introduction	4
1. Vehicle Testing	5
2. Vehicle Licensing and Registration	10
3. Driver Theory Testing	13
4. Driver Practical Testing	16
5. Driver Licensing	21
6. Road Transport Licensing	23
7. Enforcement & Compliance	25
8. DVA Target Monitoring	27
9. Driving and Motorcycle Instructors	28
Notes	30

Introduction

This is the thirty 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, operators in the area of regulation and enforcement during quarter four of 2022/23. This covers the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023.

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; and
- DVA target monitoring;

DVA systems provide the majority of data, although we also source some from within the wider Department for Infrastructure and from DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency). 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 this area 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 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).

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

Vehicle testing forms the most significant aspect, in terms of volumes, of the work of the Operations Directorate in DVA.

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 2020, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20 July 2020. 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 2020, including four-year-old private cars and motorcycles, three-year-old light goods vehicles, all heavy goods vehicles, and trailers. The restrictions during the winter did not directly curtail vehicle testing, although additional deep-cleaning and social distancing have reduced capacity across the test centres. Further vehicle categories returned to the testing regime in March 2021, along with changes to the length of TECs being issued.

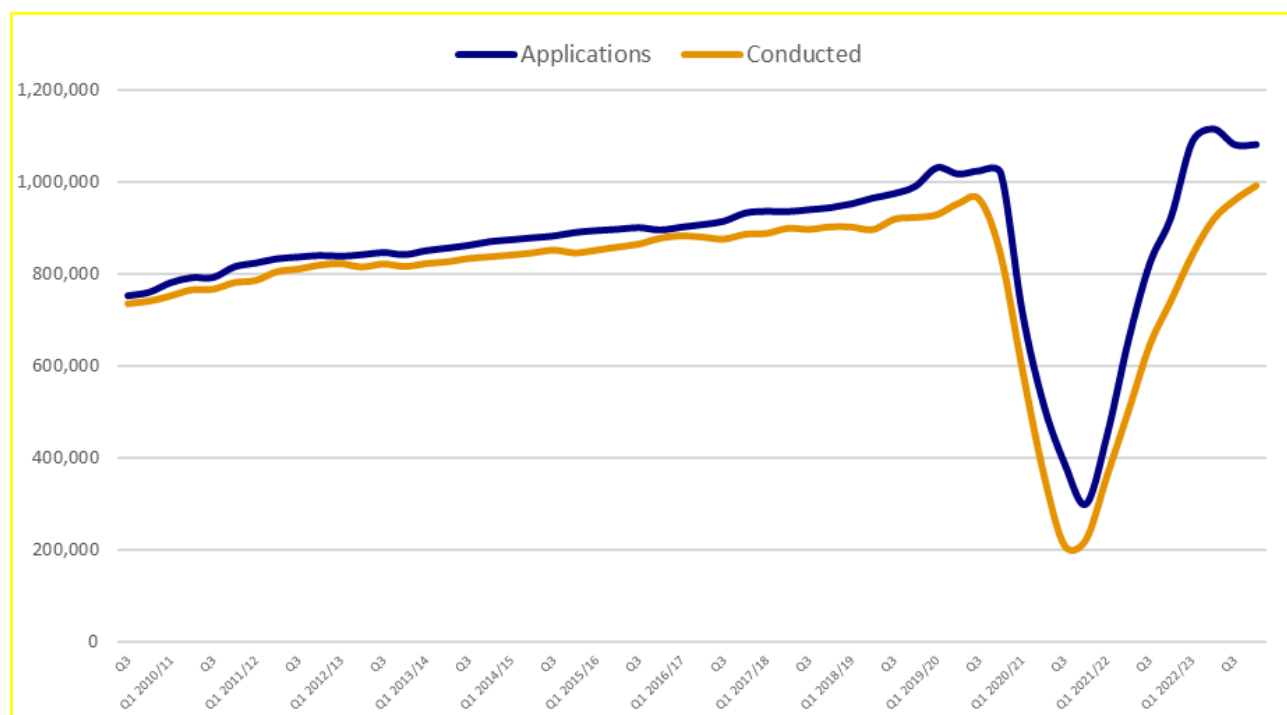
For the latest news and updates, please visit the Motoring page on the NIDirect website².

Vehicle Test Applications

From January to March 2023, the DVA received 340,626 applications for a vehicle test, 32% (83,446) higher than the previous quarter (257,180) (Table 1.3). Figure 1.1 details the rolling four quarterly count for full vehicle test applications and full vehicle tests conducted, full vehicle tests conducted returning to levels being achieved prior to the pandemic.

The majority (86.0%; 292,927) of vehicle test applications were full tests. The most common vehicle test category was private cars, accounting for 82.6% of all full test applications (239,111).

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



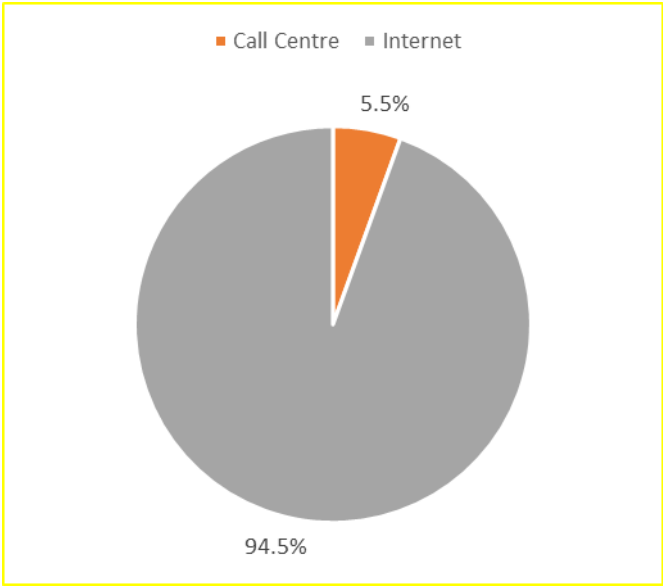
² <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-motoring>

Note that figures for vehicle test applications include taximeter tests and those for vehicle tests conducted do not.

Booking Method

During quarter four of 2022/23, all vehicle test applications were made via the DVA online booking facility or using DVA call centres. The most popular method used was online booking, which received over 94% (321,743) of all vehicle test applications. The remaining 5.5% (18,883) of vehicle test applications were made via DVA call centres. This is the sixth consecutive quarter in which online vehicle test bookings have exceeded 90% of all vehicle test bookings (Figure 1.2 and Table 1.4).

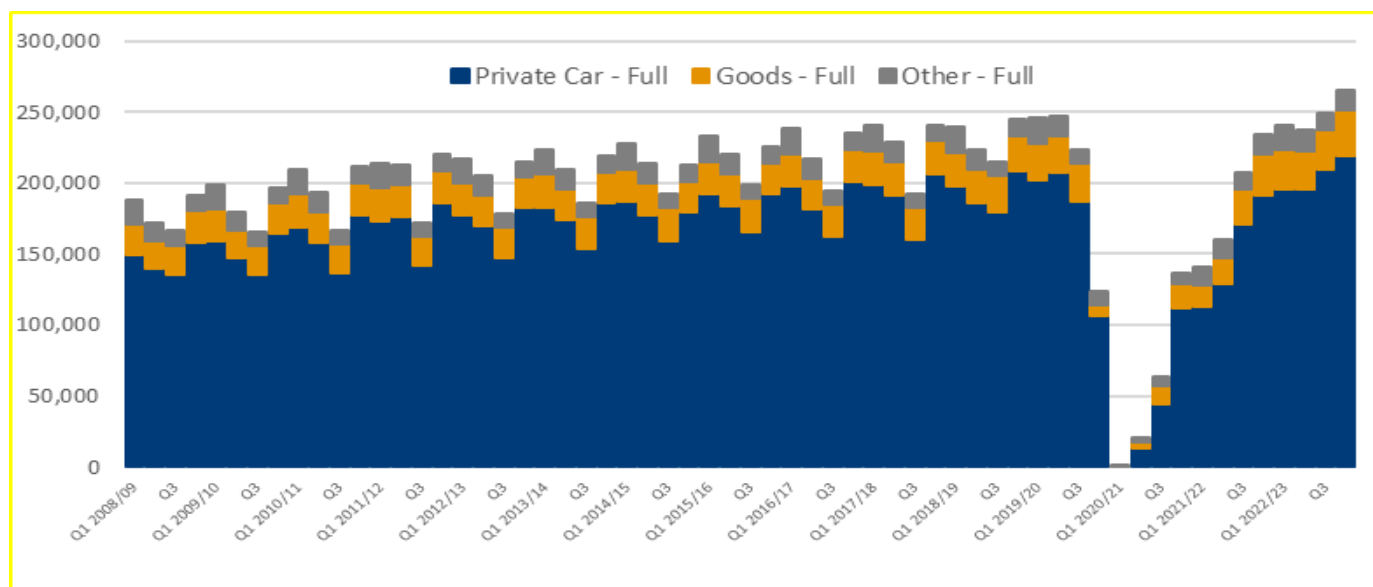
Figure 1.2: Vehicle Test Applications by Booking Method.



Vehicle Tests Conducted

During quarter four, DVA delivered 309,419 vehicle tests (full and retest), the highest quarterly count on record since this series began in 2008/09 (Table 1.7). Most of these were full tests which accounted for 86% of all vehicle tests conducted; of the 265,290 full tests conducted, 83% (219,084) were for private cars. The number of private car full tests conducted this quarter is also at an all-time high (Table 1.5 and Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Full Vehicle Tests Conducted



The 2022-23 figures for test applications and tests conducted both reached an annual maximum (Figure 1.1), with over 992,000 full tests conducted (Table 1.5 and Table 1.15) and over 1,080,500 full vehicle test applications (Table 1.1).

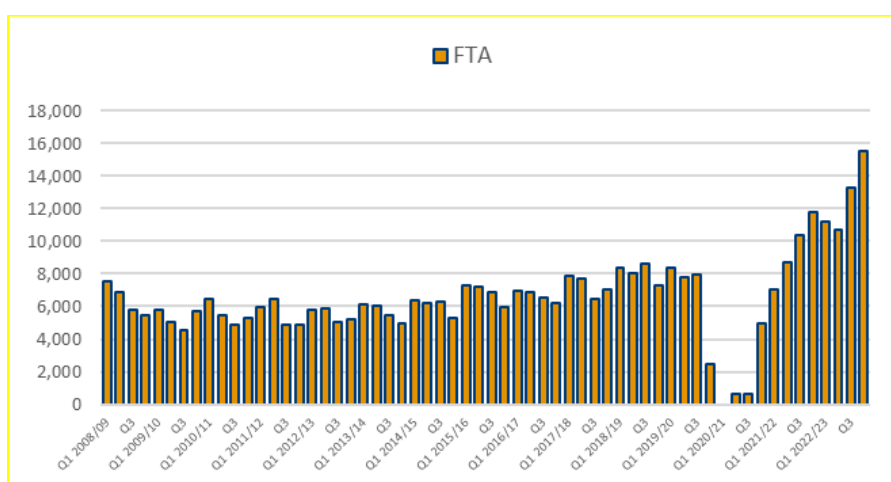
The steady increase in vehicle test applications seen in the trend series prior to the COVID-19 pandemic can, in the main, be explained by the increasing number of licensed cars in Northern Ireland, which has risen by 8.7% over the five years to 2020-21 (see Table 2.13). In addition, owners seem to be keeping their vehicles for longer, as the proportion of cars of MOT-age has risen by nearly 6 percentage-points over the same 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 and other relevant changes will have on these trends long term, as people's lifestyles, work pattern and car-usage will inevitably change.

Failed to Attend

This quarter, 15,501 customers failed to attend for a booked vehicle test, the highest figure in our series (Table 1.10 and Figure 1.4). This equates to 5.0% of all conducted tests during this period (309,419).

For the full financial year 2022-23, over 50,700 vehicles failed to attend for testing, the highest in our series and 34.0% (12,887) higher than 2021-22.

Figure 1.4: Vehicle Tests – Failed to Attend



Vehicle Test Pass-Rates

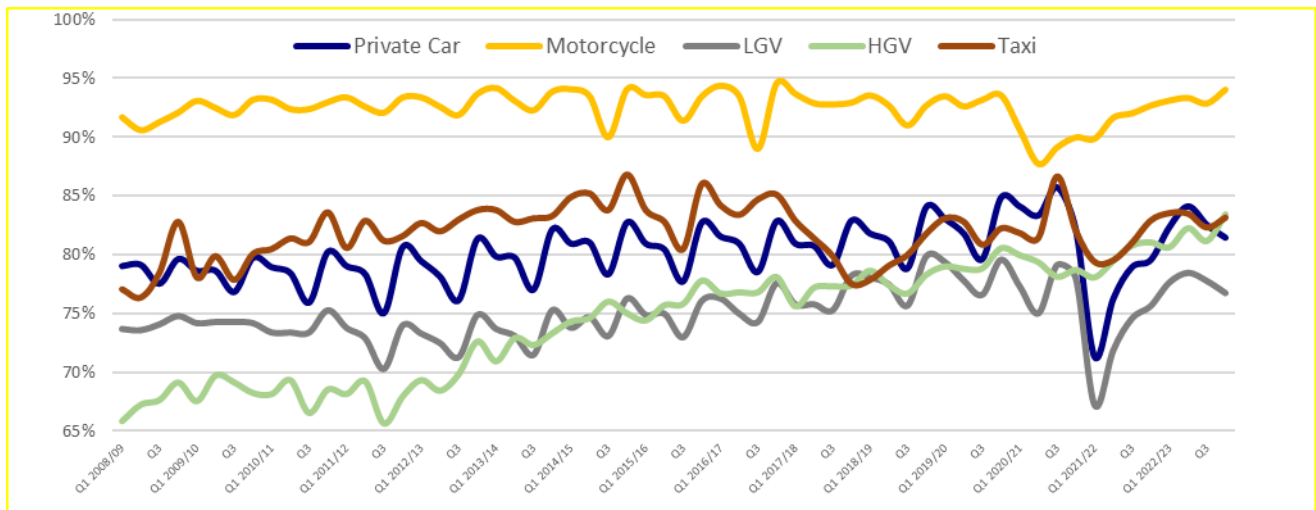
In terms of annual trend, for 2022-23, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 82.4%, almost five percentage points higher than in 2021-22 (77.6%) (Table 1.11). This 2022-23 figure is close to the 2020-21 pass-rate of 82.7%, which remains the highest annual pass-rate on record. The 2022-23 annual pass-rate for full tests varied by category, from 77.6% for light goods to 93.3% for motorcycles (for categories where there were at least 2,000 tests) (Table 1.11 and Table 1.15).

For the fourth quarter of 2022/23, the overall pass-rate for full vehicle tests was 81.4%, almost one percentage point below the 82.3% achieved in quarter three. This pass-rate is on a par with quarterly pass-rates in 2019-20 (Table 1.11 and Figure 1.5). The pandemic era drop in pass-rates would suggest that vehicle owners did not maintain their vehicles during periods of test exemption, though vehicle test pass rates seem to have trended back to pre-pandemic levels.

The pass-rate for vehicle re-tests this quarter was 94.3%, similar to the quarter three pass-rate (94.5%) (Table 1.12). This is also on a par with historical quarterly re-test pass rates which maintained very stable levels of circa 93%-94% over a long period of time prior to the pandemic (Table 1.12).

For the 2022/23 financial year, the overall re-test pass-rate of 94.4% (Table 1.15) is the highest annual pass rate recorded (Table 1.12). The 2022-23 figure is one percentage point higher than the 2021/22 overall re-test pass-rate (93.4%). As with full tests, the annual re-test pass-rate varied by category, from 89.8% for LPCV to 94.7% for private cars and motorcycles, for vehicle test categories where there were at least 1,000 tests (Table 1.12 and Table 1.15).

Figure 1.5: Full Vehicle Test Pass-Rates



Vehicle Tests by Test Centre

The busiest test centre for vehicle testing during quarter four was Newtownards, having conducted 34,393 full tests. Of these, 30,849 were for private cars, an increase of 9.0% (2,535) relative to the 28,314 conducted in quarter three. Omagh, which is a smaller centre, conducted 8,344 full private car tests this quarter, compared with 7,966 in quarter three, an increase of 4.7% (Table 1.14).

The overall full test pass rate for private cars fell slightly between quarters from 82.5% to 81.4% in quarter four; pass rates by test centre within this category ranged from a low of 76.1% in Cookstown to a high of 87.4% in Belfast (Balmoral) (Table 1.14). This is the eleventh consecutive quarter that Belfast (Balmoral) has had the highest full test private car pass-rate. Differences in pass rates may arise due to several factors including, for example, the mix of vehicles tested within and between test centres.

Vehicle Licensing and Registration

Vehicle Licensing for Northern Ireland since July 2014 has been administered by the DVLA in Swansea.

Vehicle Registrations

Please note this section has been updated post publication on 23 May 2023 with data for October to December 2022, and a final quarter four report was released on 7 July 2023. As of this updated release, section two now includes the latest available vehicle licensing data for Northern Ireland.

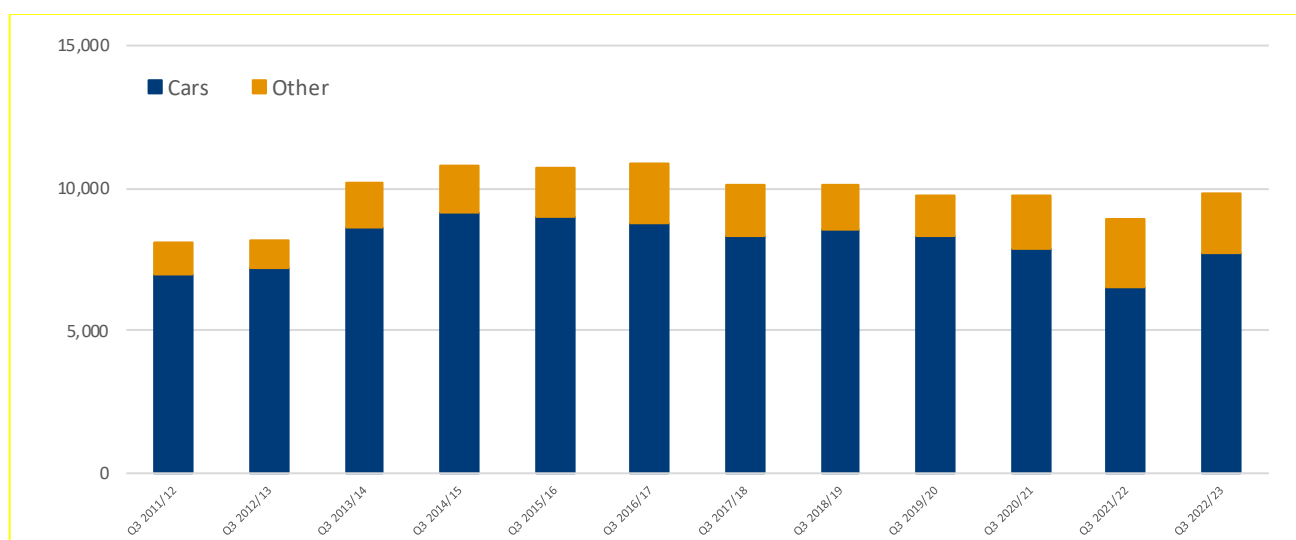
During October to December 2022, the DVLA registered 9,809 new vehicles to Northern Ireland, 21% (2,635) fewer than the previous quarter (12,444) but 9% (879) higher than the 8,930 registered in quarter three 2021/22 (table 2.1) (figure 2.1). Please note that new vehicle registrations exclude vehicles previously registered with the DVLA but whose ownership transferred to Northern Ireland during the latest quarter. Taking new and "used" vehicles into account, the total number of first-time registrations to Northern Ireland in quarter three was 9,915 compared with 12,544 in quarter two and 9,039 in quarter three of 2021/22.

Private cars accounted for 7,703 (78.5%) of all new vehicle registrations (9,809) this quarter with no change in this proportion relative to the previous quarter (table 2.1).

The noticeable drop in new vehicle registrations in quarter one of 2020/21 (figure 2.1) is directly related to the pandemic and is not reflective of changes in customer buying behaviour prior to or post the pandemic when many vehicle dealerships were either closed or operating at reduced capacity to ensure social distancing.

For financial year 2021/22, there were 38,464 new private car registrations in Northern Ireland, 24.2% lower than 2018/19 (50,799) and the lowest financial year total in our series (table 2.1).

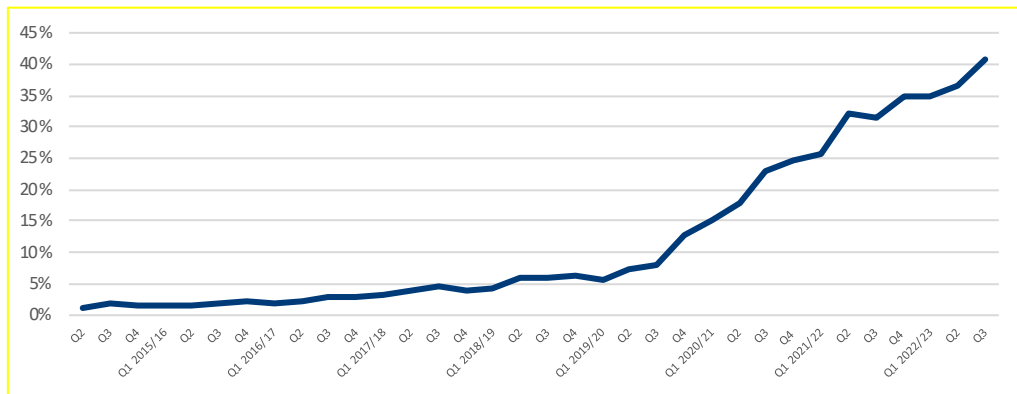
Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations



Top makes for private car first time registrations in quarter three (7,737) were Ford at 10.4% (804), Volkswagen at 9.1% (707) followed closely by Toyota at 8.2% (631) (table 2.3).

Grey was again the most popular choice of colour for new private cars this quarter, accounting for 24.0% (1,847) of all new car registrations (7,703); Black (17.8%), White (17.6%), Blue (17.2%) and Red (11.1%) respectively were the next most popular colours.

Figure 2.2: Proportion of New Car Registrations using Alternative Fuels



The proportion of new cars registered in Northern Ireland using alternative-fuel³ cars has increased substantially over the last number of years, rising from 5.8% in quarter two of 2018/19 to its current high of 40.8% for the latest quarter of 2022/23. Over the same period, the proportion of new diesel cars has declined from 36.5% to 10.6%. This is the ninth quarter in a row that alternative-fuel cars have out-sold diesel cars.

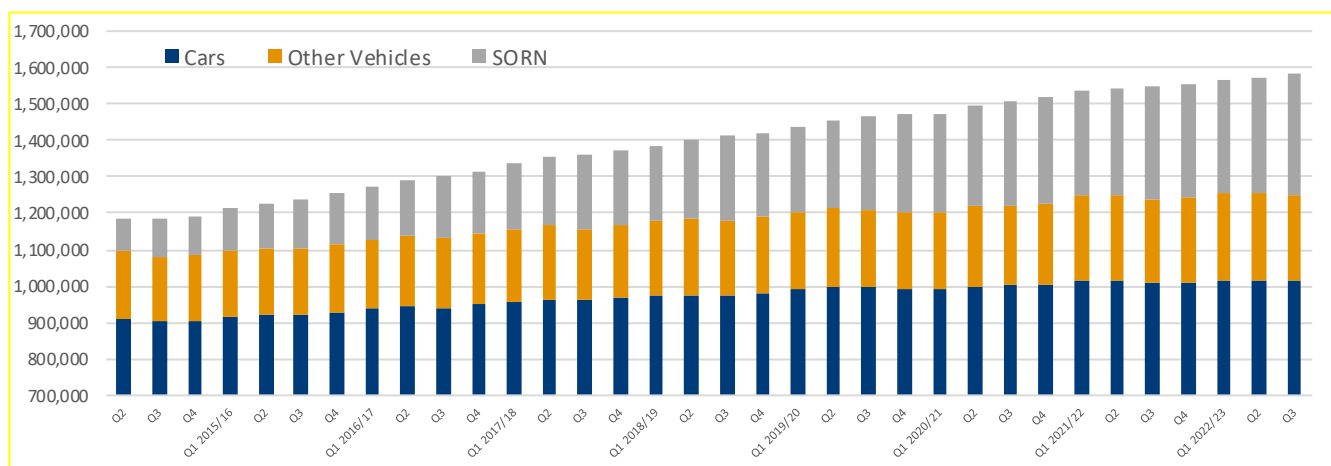
Licensed Vehicles

At the end of December 2022, there were just over 1,251,160 licensed vehicles (excluding vehicles with a SORN – Statutory Off-Road Notification), a fall of 0.1% (1,603) relative to quarter two (1,252,764) and continuing the recent downturn in licensed vehicle stock. This is the second drop in quarterly licensed vehicle stock since the third quarter of 2019/20, and the third highest quarterly licensed stock volume on record since 2014/15 (1,096,250) (table 2.13).

At the end of this quarter, just over 8 in every 10 (81.3%) licensed vehicles was a private car (1,017,376). Private car stock has increased by 11.8% (107,104) since quarter two of 2014/15 (910,270) (table 2.13).

Over 334,220 vehicles had a SORN at the end of December 2022, representing 21% of all vehicle stock in Northern Ireland (table 2.13). 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 year-on-year increases in SORN from quarter four of 2013/14 onwards, both in Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

Figure 2.3: Northern Ireland Vehicle Stock



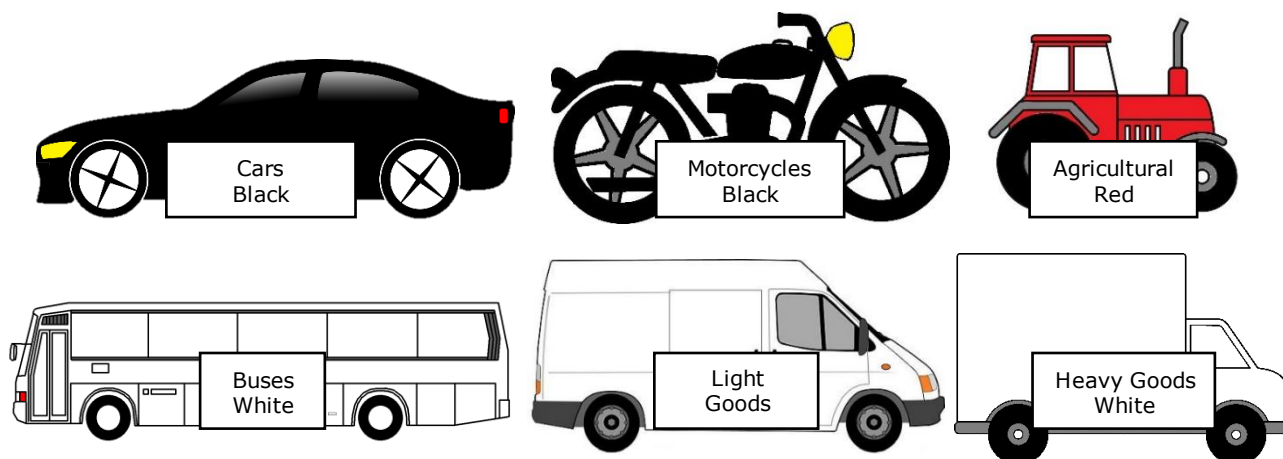
³ Alternative-fuel vehicles are able to use a range of alternatives to purely petrol or diesel fuel, including gas, electricity, or a combination such as gas bi-fuel and hybrid-electric.

As of 31 December 2022, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 9.55 years, a small increase from the previous quarter (9.48 years).

However, there is some variance in average age for different vehicle body-types:

- Cars – 9.1 years
- Motorcycles – 14.3 years
- Light Goods – 8.8 years
- Heavy Goods – 10.2 years
- Buses – 10.1 years
- Agricultural – 21.5 years
- Other – 10.9 years

As with new registrations for licensed vehicles the most popular colours for each body-type are notably monochrome, with as always only the stereo-typical 'big red tractor' bucking this trend.



Driver Theory Testing

Please note that some theory-testing data from 2021-22 onwards is provisional and pass rates are only partially complete for this period.

The DVA has responsibility for the theory test element of the overall driving test process. DVSA 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 website⁴.

Theory Test Applications and Tests Conducted

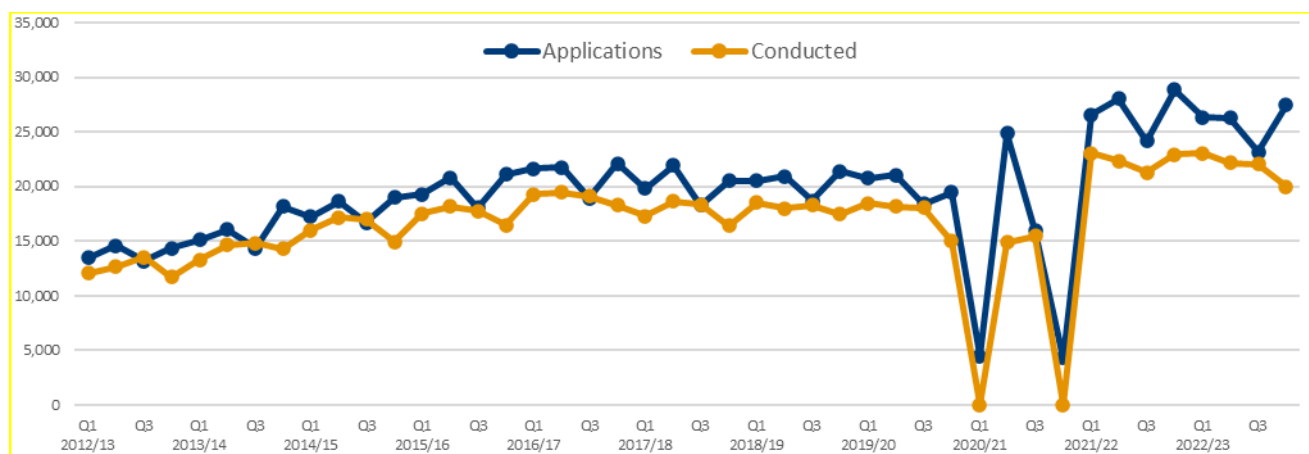
From January to March 2023, the DVA delivered 19,980 theory tests, the second highest quarter four level achieved since the start of this series in 2012/13 (Table 3.2) (Figure 3.1).

For the 2022-23 financial year, the DVA conducted over 87,200 theory tests, the second highest on record for a single year. Pre-pandemic, test volumes ranged from 69,950 in 2015-16 to 76,200 in 2016-17.

The DVA received 27,442 theory test applications in quarter four, 18.6% (4,301) higher than the previous quarter (23,141) (Table 3.1).

Private cars accounted for just over eight in every ten theory test applications (83.8%, 23,010) and theory tests conducted (84.4%, 16,861) in quarter four.

Figure 3.1: Theory Test Applications and Conducted

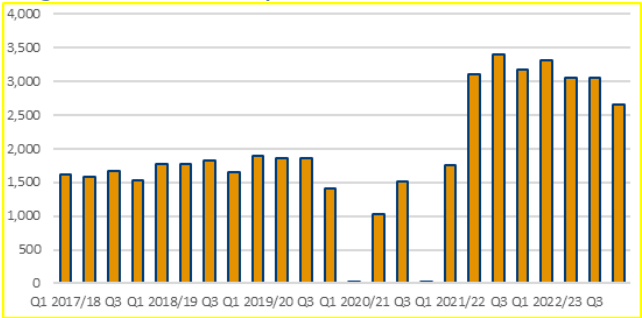


⁴ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-theory-test>

Failed To Attends

During this quarter, 2,652 customers failed to attend (FTA) a booked theory test (Table 3.3 and Figure 3.2). This represents 13.3% of all theory tests conducted during this quarter (19,980).

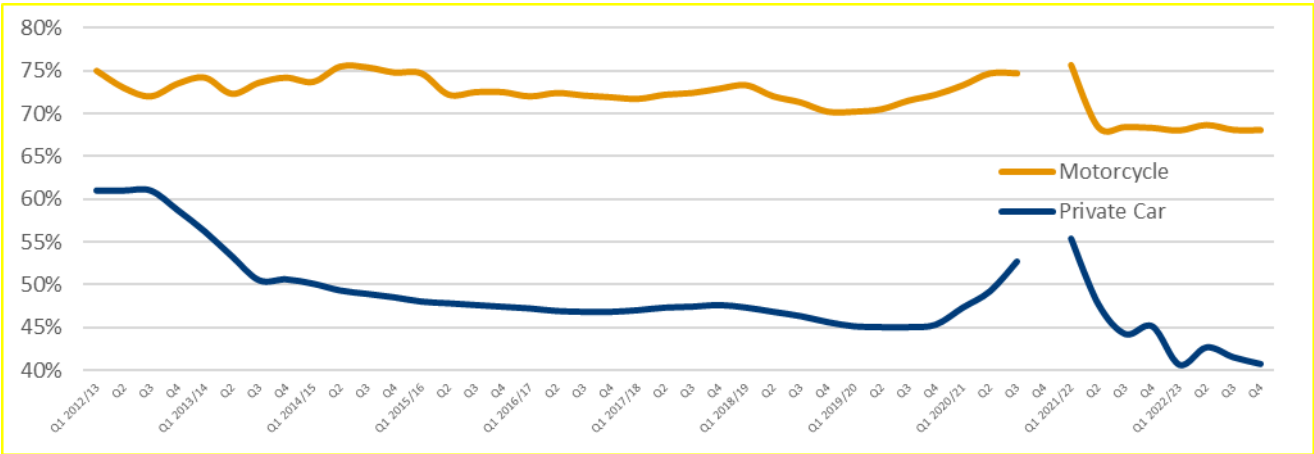
Figure 3.2: Theory Tests - Failed To Attend



Theory Test Pass-Rates

For the full 2022/23 financial year, the theory test pass-rate for private cars was 40.7%, a decrease of 14.5 percentage points from the 2020/21 pass rate (55.2%) (Table 3.4). For the motorcycle test, the pass-rate was 68.0%, reflecting the fact that those taking the motorcycle test will usually have already taken the private-car test. The 2022/23 motorcycle theory test pass-rate represents a decrease of over seven percentage points from the 2020/21 annual figure (75.3%). Whilst not directly comparable due to the nature and purpose of the tests, the pass-rate for the taxi theory test was 25.9%, an increase of over six percentage points compared to 2020/21.

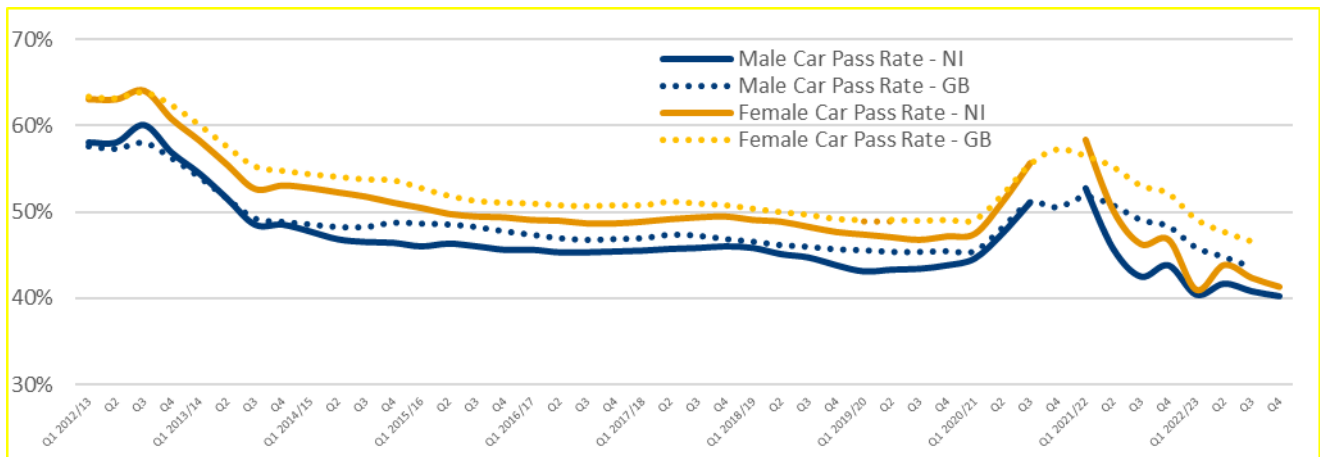
Figure 3.3: Theory Test Pass-Rates (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



Continuing the trend over the past decade, the NI 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 2022-23 financial year, the pass-rates were 41.2% for females and 40.2% for males, a difference of one percentage point (Table 3.7). Although the pass-rates had been gradually decreasing from 2012 to 2020, since the resumption of testing in summer 2020, partial and provisional data suggests that pass-rates for both genders have decreased coming out of the pandemic period.

Provisional quarter four rolling four-quarter average figures suggests that pass-rate trend for males and females has turned slightly downward to 40.2% and 41.2% from 40.8% and 42.3% respectively in the previous quarter (Table 3.7). There is insufficient data to conclude there is a permanent change to the gender gap in theory pass rates by gender. Both 'gender-gap' and post-pandemic pass-rate trend are similar to those in Great Britain to the period we have comparable data (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. DVA are testing across all driver test categories.

For the latest news and updates, please visit the Practical Driving Test page on the NIDirect website⁵.

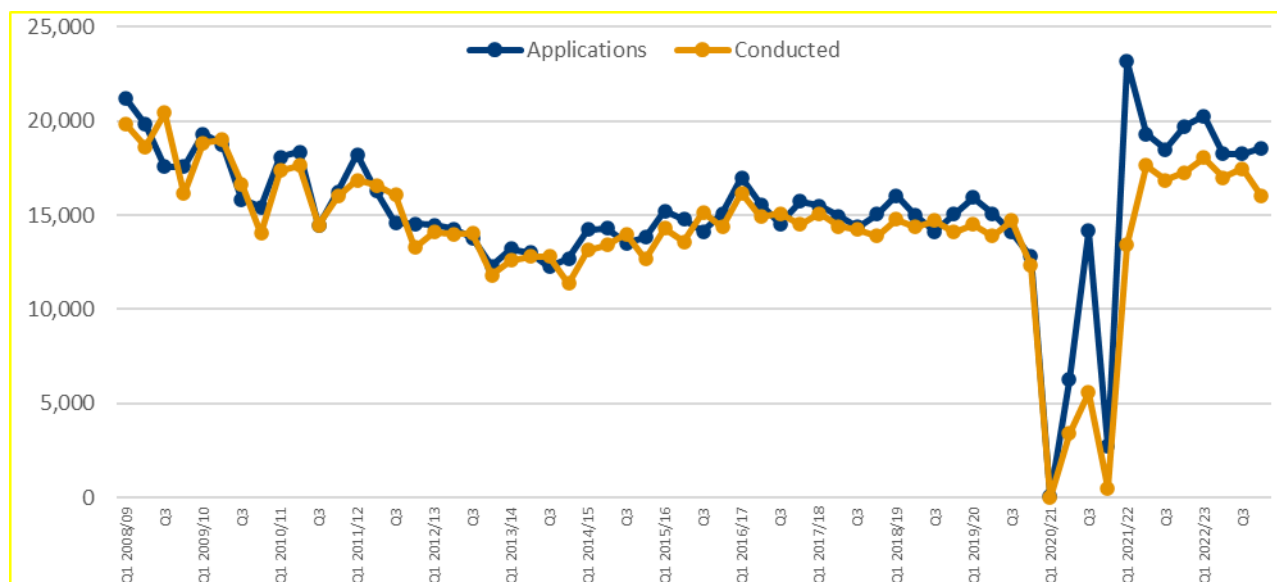
Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

The DVA delivered 16,020 driving tests this quarter, 8.4% fewer than in quarter three (Table 4.3). Just over 8 in every 10 driving tests conducted were private cars (81.9%; 13,118) (Table 4.3).

From January to March 2023, the DVA received 18,575 applications for a driving test, slightly higher than the previous quarter (18,257) (Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1).

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, trends for both test applications and tests conducted over the past five years had remained relatively steady, but post pandemic increased applications reflect higher numbers of young people presenting for a driving test.

Figure 4.1: Driving Test Applications and Conducted



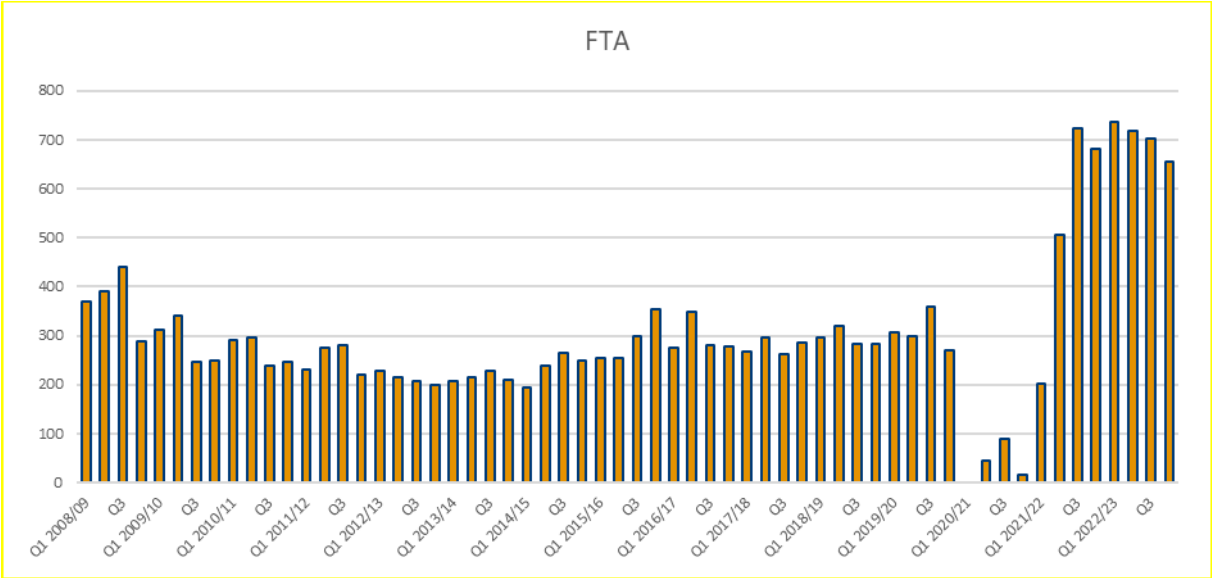
⁵ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/book-your-practical-driving-test-online>

Failed to Attend

In quarter four there were 656 driving test appointments where customers failed to attend (FTA) a paid for driving test (Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2), equating to 4.1% of all practical driver testing this quarter (16,020).

In 2022-23, there were 2,812 FTA practical driving test appointments, the highest on record back to 2008-09.

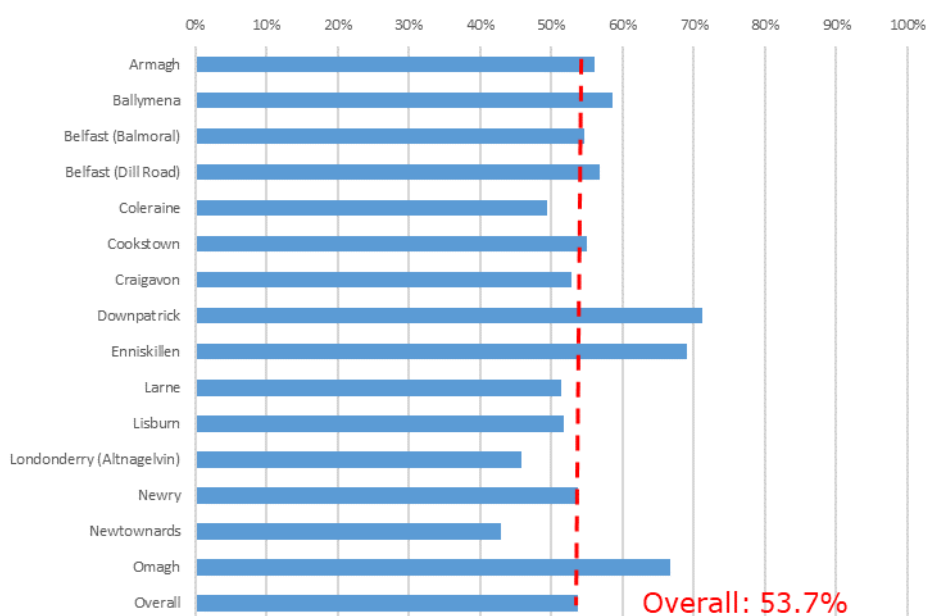
Figure 4.2: Driving Tests – Failed to Attend



Driving Tests by Test Centre

The number of private cars driving tests delivered in quarter four ranged from a maximum of 1,474 at Newtownards to a minimum of 413 at Enniskillen (Table 4.6). Across test centres and using a rolling 4-quarter average, the pass rates for private cars ranged from 43.0% in Newtownards to 71.1% in Downpatrick (Table 4.7c). At least part of the difference in driving test outcomes 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 each test centre such as local driving conditions.

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



Driving Test Pass-Rates

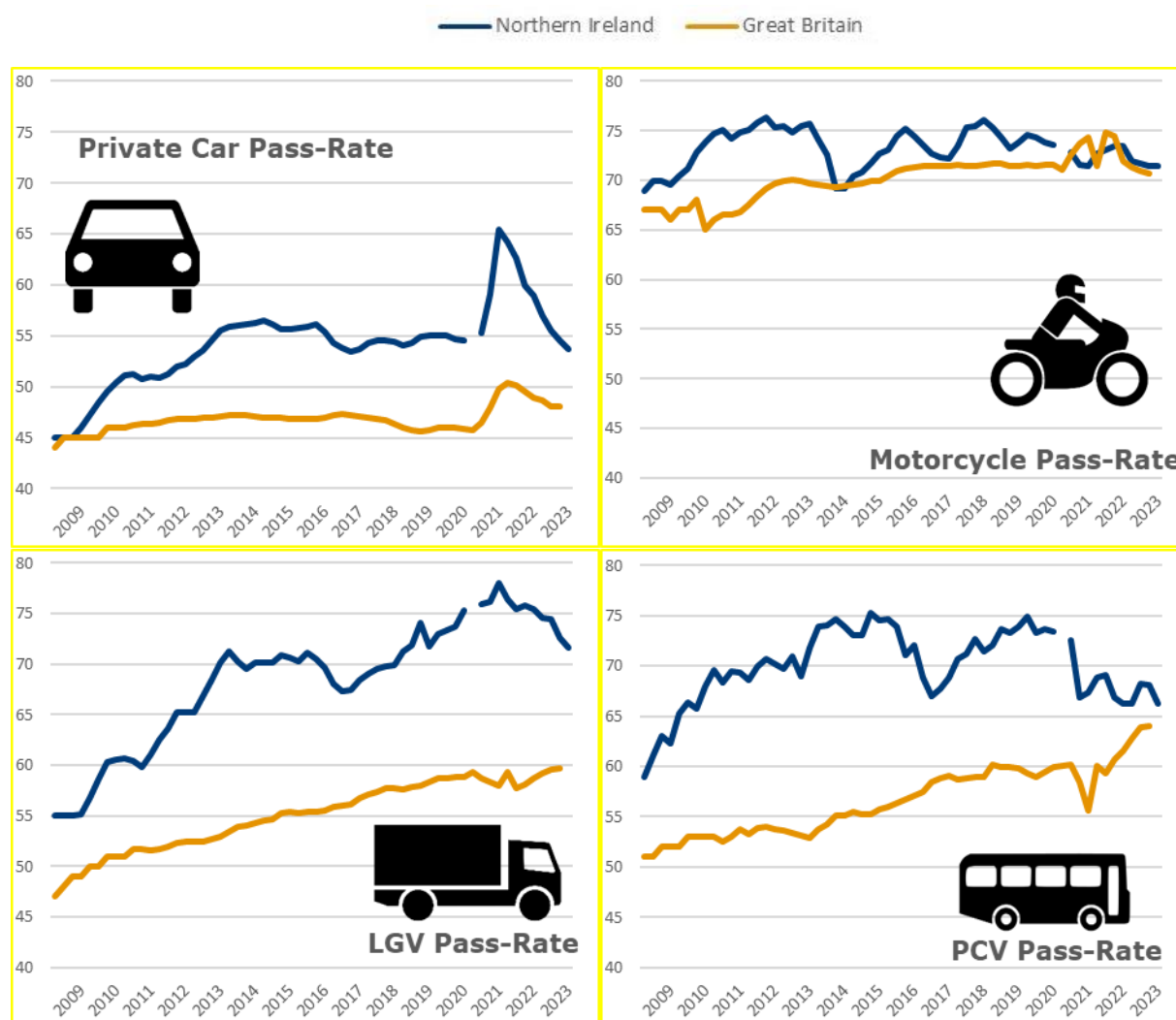
For January to March 2023, the private car overall pass rate was 52.8%, similar to that of the previous quarter (52.4%) (Table 4.5).

Prior to the pandemic, pass-rates for all categories of vehicle remained broadly unchanged over the five years up to the onset of Covid restrictions in 2020. Although pass-rates for private cars reached a high of 66% in quarter three of 2020-21, pass rates for this category have been trending downwards since and seem to have returned to pre-Covid levels (table 4.5).

Using a rolling 4-quarter average, pass-rates for private car driver testing dropped from 65.4% in quarter four of 2020/21 to 53.7% for this quarter (Tables 4.7b and 4.7c). The rate is now comparable to pre-pandemic rolling 4 quarter pass-rates of typically 54%-55% (Table 4.10 and Figure 4.4).

Using the same rolling 4-quarter average, pass-rates across the main four driver test categories are generally higher in Northern Ireland compared with the equivalent rates in Great Britain, although overall rates are broadly similar for motorcycle tests (Table 4.10 & Figure 4.4). Part of the difference between NI and GB pass-rates may be attributable to regional driving conditions including volumes of traffic and the complexity of road networks for driver testing.

Figure 4.4: Driving Test Pass-Rates (rolling 4-quarter average)



Driving Test Pass-Rates by Gender

Historically up to pre-pandemic, a clear 'gender-gap' is apparent in private car driver testing pass-rates, based on a four-quarter rolling average. This gap narrowed considerably during 2020 and remained much lower throughout 2022/23, with a difference of just two percentage points in quarter four (Table 4.10 & Figure 4.5).

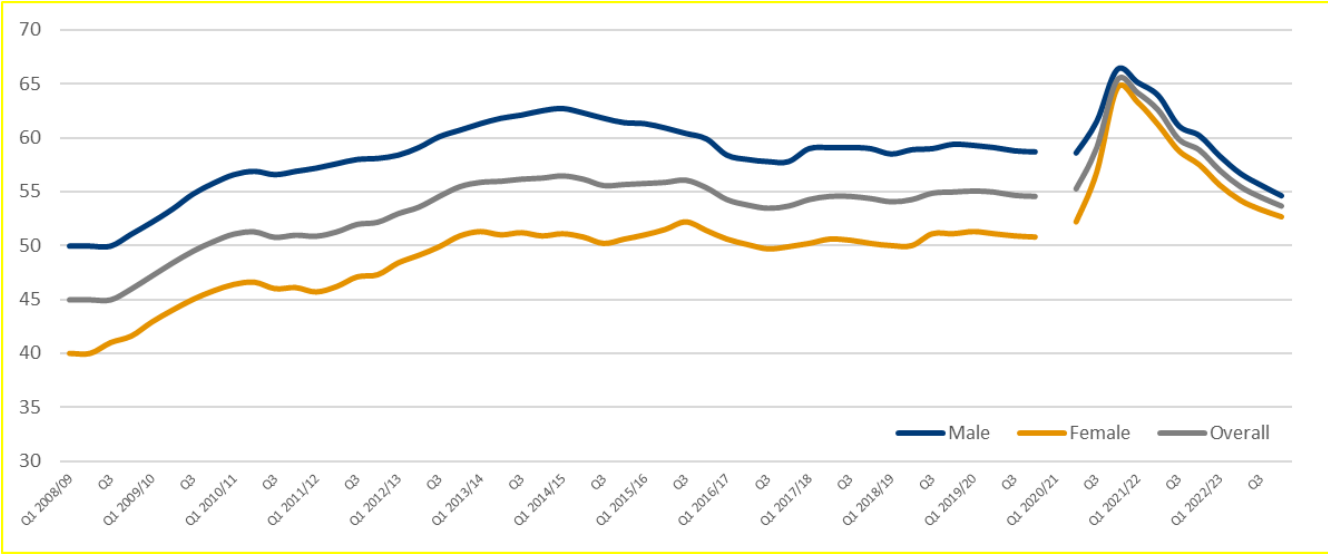
During quarter four of 2022/23, males (54.6%) had a higher pass-rate than females (52.7%) for private car testing, a gap of just 2.0 percentage points (Table 4.10). Prior to 2020, this gap had remained relatively consistent but much higher, in the range of 7.8 to 8.8 percentage points; however, since driver testing resumed in the summer of 2020, this gap has shrunk and remained below half this level.

This gender gap is also now substantially narrower than the 6.2 percentage-point gap present in the Great Britain (GB) statistics pre-pandemic. The gap in GB between males and females has also reduced from over 5 percentage points in quarter one of 2021/22 to 4 percentage points in quarter three of 2022/23 (table 4.10). GB data is not available to allow comparison over 4 quarters to the end of quarter four 2022/23 (Table 4.10).

It remains too soon to conclude if this narrowing of the gender gap is indicative of a permanent reduction or if this gap will revert to pre-pandemic levels. Without a detailed understanding of the profile of candidates presenting for testing, it is difficult to contextualise why differences in pass rates by gender and location persist in the way that they do.

Test centres offering private car driving tests show this gender gap disparity, to varying degrees. However, some test centres show a gender gap in favour of females; for example, based on the same 4 quarter rolling average, pass-rates for private car testing for females were higher than those for males in Newry (55.8% for females and 51.8% for males) and Newtownards (43.2% for females and 42.9% for males) in the four quarters to the end of quarter four 2022/23 (Table 4.7c).

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 private cars, motorcycle pass rates are similar, with a slightly higher pass rate for females (70.9%) than males (70.7%) for GB quarter three 2022/23 (Table 4.10). However, in contrast to Northern Ireland, GB pass-rates for large goods vehicles are consistently higher for females relative to males, typically showing a 4-5 percentage point difference favouring females; the latest figures for GB for quarter three 2022/23 report the pass rates for females at 64.3% compared with 59.3% for males (Table 4.10).

5 Driver Licensing

The DVA is responsible for driver licensing in Northern Ireland. DVA issues and, where appropriate, withdraws driver licences in respect of drivers of private cars, motorcycles, goods vehicles, buses, and other vehicle types.

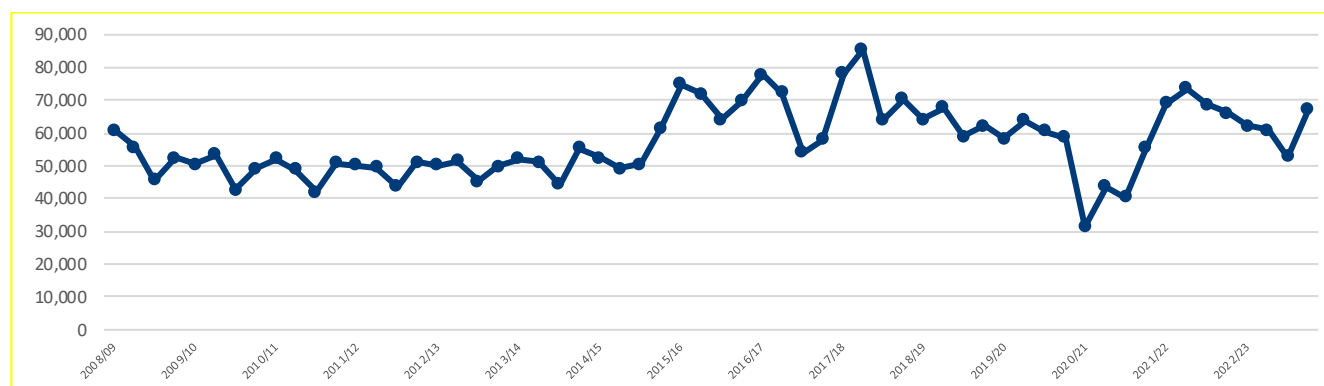
On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and temporarily closed the driver licensing office. From the end of April, the DVA began processing applications from Group 2 (lorry/bus) applicants and those from front line workers. Only applications received online were processed during this period. From June 2020, the DVA began resuming all driver licensing bar counter service at that time, and processes all driver licensing applications it receives.

Driver Licensing Transactions

Ordinary licensing transactions during 2022/23 totalled 242,642 which is slightly above (1,327, 0.6%) that in 2019/20 (241,315), but lower than the 277,510 for 2021/22 which was the highest on record for a single year (figure 5.1).

In the last quarter of 2022/23 DVA completed 67,035 ordinary driver licensing transactions, the highest for a single quarter this financial year and 27% (14,351) above the previous quarter (52,684) (table 5.1).

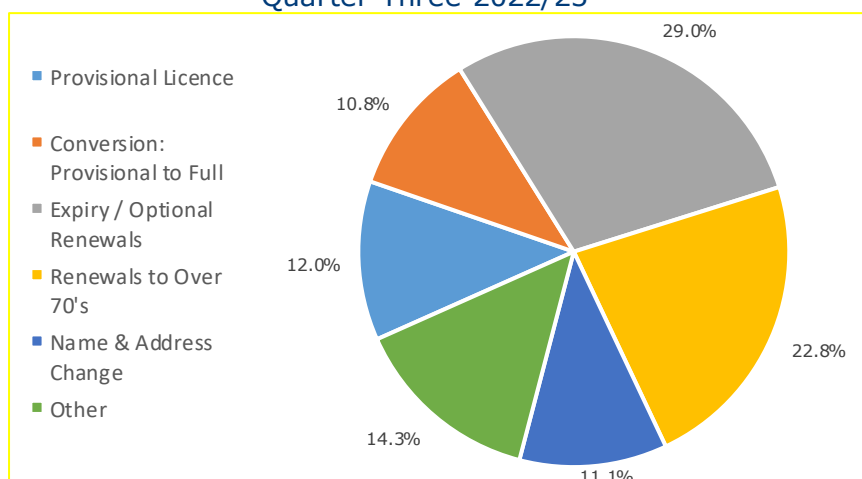
Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of Ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter four was 8,017, the highest this financial year, and 27% (1,729) above that for quarter three (6,288) (table 5.1).

This quarter Expiry/Optional Renewals accounted for 29.0% (19,463) of all ordinary licensing transactions followed by Renewals to over 70's at 22.8% (15,303) of all Ordinary Licences transactions (figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Ordinary Driver License Transactions by Type, Quarter Three 2022/23



In 2022/23 DVA completed just over 19,050 Vocational driver licensing transactions, the second highest on record since 2008/09. In the last quarter of 2022/23, DVA carried out just over 4,900 Vocational driver licensing transactions, 16.6% (698) above that for quarter three (4,200) (table 5.3).

Driver Licence Stock

At the end of March 2023, there were 1,149,045 full and eligible (excluding provisional only licence holders) driver licence holders with private car/light van entitlement in Northern Ireland; this is the highest on record and 0.3% (3,480) above the previous quarter (1,145,565) (table 5.4).

The number of provisional licence holders with private car/light van entitlement increased relative to quarter three from 107,579 to 108,538 at the end of March 2023, a rise of just below 1% (959) between quarters. This is the first quarterly increase in provisional volumes since the last quarter of 2020/21 (113,341).

Driver licence holders with full private car/light van entitlement, aged 65 and above accounted for 235,287, equivalent to just over 20% of all licence holders within this category (1,135,423).

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

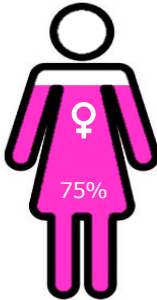
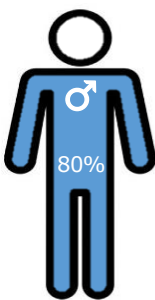
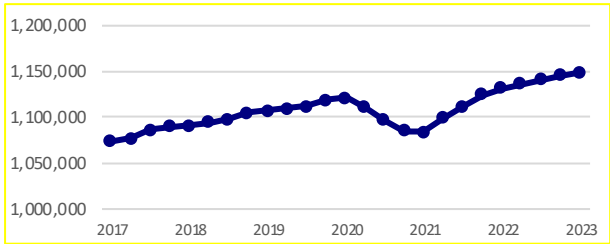
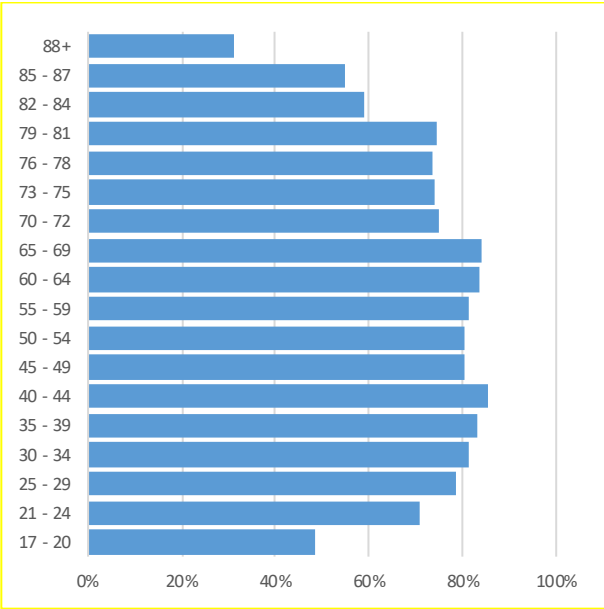


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

At the end of March 2023, and estimated 74.6% of Northern Ireland’s population aged 17 or over, had full and eligible private car/light van drivers licence entitlement. This is based on published NISRA 2021 mid-year population estimates⁶ (table 5.8). For males and females, the equivalent percentages were 80% and 75% respectively (figure 5.5).

⁶ 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 Department for Infrastructure.

Whilst most of the division continued to operate during COVID-19 restrictions, the DVA suspended for a limited period the division's reception and counter services on 27 March 2020.

The NI Assembly designated taxi drivers as key workers, and so taxi driver licensing continued to operate throughout the pandemic. Similarly, the DVA maintained bus and taxi operator licensing services throughout. All bus and taxi vehicle licences expiring between 10 March 2020 and 31 May 2021 were renewed automatically 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](#)⁷.

Taxi Licensing

Taxi Vehicles

During financial year 2022/23 DVA issued 7,218 taxi vehicle licenses, the lowest on record and just under 2% (128) fewer than the equivalent figure for 2021/22 (7,409). This compares with 8,625 in 2019/20 the last 'normal' year of operation prior to the pandemic.

In the last quarter of 2022/23, January to March 2023, 1,883 taxi vehicle licenses were issued, slightly above the 1,822 issued in quarter three (table 6.1).

At the end of March 2023, licensed taxi vehicle stock stood at 6,901, an increase of 0.7% (50) relative the end of December 2022 (6,851) (figure 6.1).

Taxi Drivers

During 2022/23 DVA issued 1,535 taxi driver licenses, compared with 1,679 in 2021/22, a fall of just over 8% (144) annually and the lowest on record since 2009/10.

In the last quarter of 2022/23 DVA issued 381 taxi driver licenses, a fall of 28 from the previous quarter (409) (table 6.1).

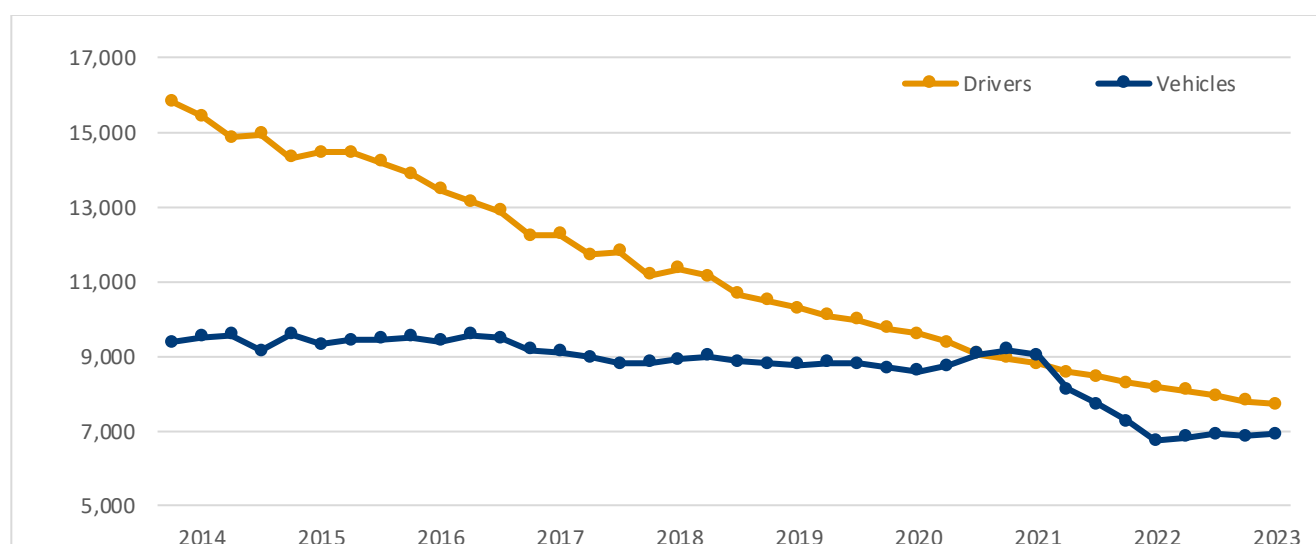
At the end of March 2023, there were 7,716 licensed taxi drivers, continuing the prolonged downward trend in this series and the lowest on record since 2013/14 (table 6.2 and figure 6.1 below).

Taxi Operators

As with taxi drivers, the numbers of taxi operators have been trending downwards in recent years, and at the end of March 2023, there were 1,127 licensed taxi operators; this is the lowest on record since 2013/14 (1,808), and a drop of just under 38% (681) during this period. Relative to the end of 2021/22, the numbers of taxi operators fell by 11% (140), from 1,267 to 1,127 in 2022/23 (table 6.2).

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

Figure 6.1: Licensed Taxi Driver and Taxi Vehicle Volumes



Bus Licensing

Bus Vehicles

During 2022/23 DVA issued 3,472 PSV vehicle licences a small increase of 2.4% (81) relative to 2021/22 (3,391). In the last quarter of 2022/23, January to March 2023, DVA issued 892 bus vehicle licences, compared with 796 the previous quarter, up by just over 12% (96) between these two quarters (table 6.1).

The number of licensed bus vehicles at the end of March 2023 was 3,303, down by 1% (35) from quarter three (3,338), but higher than at year end 2021/22 (3,288) (table 6.3).

Bus Operators

In 2022/23 the DVA issued 3,134 and 154 bus vehicle licences and bus operating licences respectively. Relative to 2021/22, bus vehicle licences and operating licences issued fell by just over 18% (705) and 11% (19) respectively (table 6.1).

At the end of March 2023, there were 194 licensed bus operators, compared with 199 at the end of March 2022, and 3 more than December 2022 (191) (table 6.3).

Goods Licensing

The number of goods vehicles operator licences in place at the end of March 2023, was 5,492, 1.7% (94) fewer than at the end of December 2022 (5,586), and a similar level of reduction relative to the same quarter at the end of 2021/22 (5,587). Associated to these 5,492 operators were 22,204 goods vehicles, 1.2% (262) fewer vehicles compared with the previous quarter (22,466) (table 6.4).

The number of standard international operator licences has fallen for the fourth consecutive quarter from 1,953 at the end of March 2022 to 1,894 at the end of March 2023, a reduction of 1.2% (23) operators licensed to transport goods.

At the end of 2022/23 there were 3,263 operators with restricted licenses, 1.9% (63) lower than the 3,326 at the end of December 2022 (table 6.4).

7 Enforcement & Compliance

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

COVID-19 presented several challenges for enforcement activity. The directorate 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.

During 2022/23, DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities having checked 2,894 vehicles, issued 283 fixed penalty notices totalling just over £29,000 in fines, completed 36 joint operations with PSNI and 21 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, with 52 spot checks on school buses. In addition DVA completed 146,768 tachograph checks, 43,431 in premises and 103,337 at the roadside (table 7.1 to table 7.4).

Enforcement Activities

Enforcement checks during 2022/23 (2,894) were just over 6% above those in 2021/22 (2,714) but remained well below levels achieved prior to the pandemic at circa 5000 checks per annum. There were 663 checks in the last quarter of 2022/23, compared with 828 for the previous quarter (figure 7.1) (table 7.1).

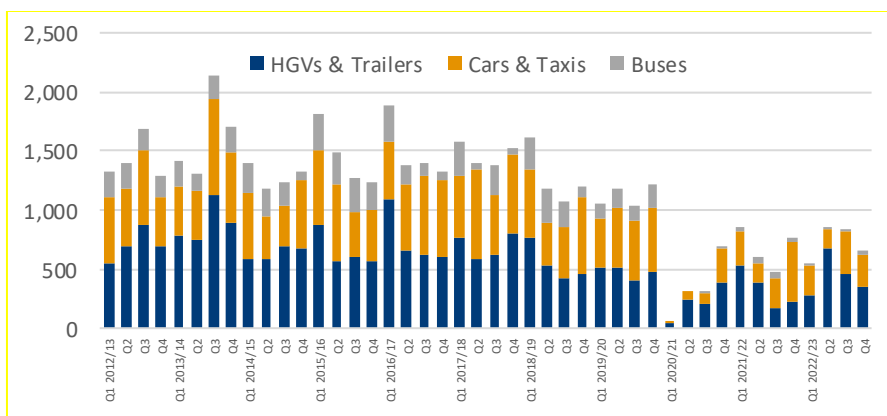
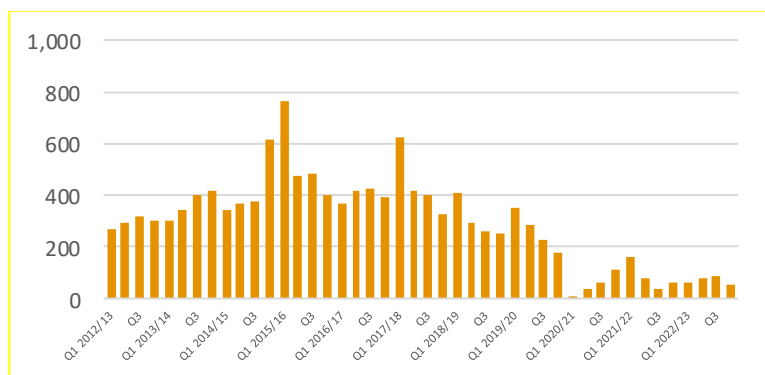


Figure 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued



DVA enforcement officers in 2022/23 issued 283 fixed penalty notices compared with 337 in 2021/22, and 1,041 in 2019/20. The total value of fixed penalties issued in 2022/23 amounted to just over £29,000, £5,120 of this in the last quarter of 2022/23 (figure 7.2 and table 7.2).

Figure 7.3: Convictions

There were 73 successful convictions in 2022/23, compared with 429 the previous year for 2021/22. There were 8 convictions in the last quarter of 2022/3 (table 7.2 and figure 7.3).

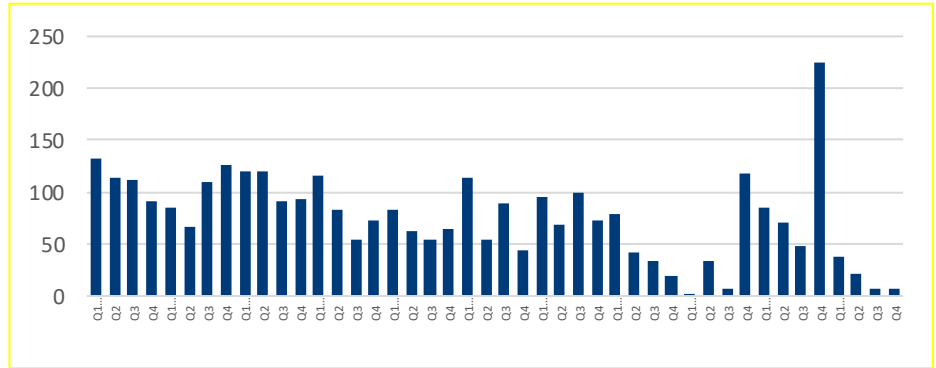
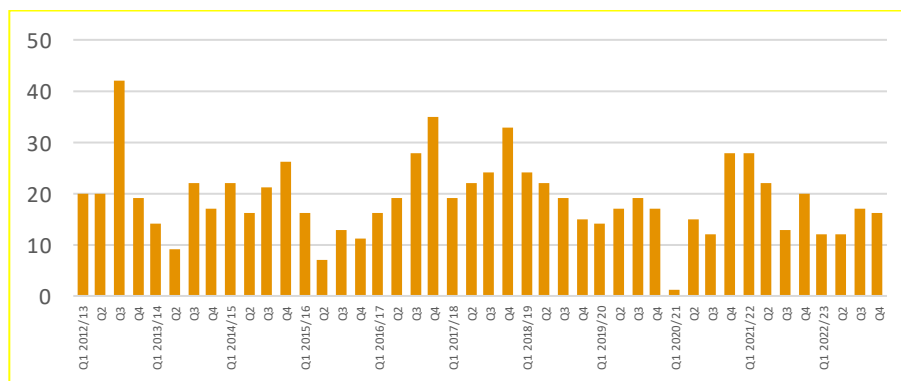


Figure 7.4: Joint or Cross-Border Operations



During the last quarter of 2022/23 there were 11 joint operations with the PSNI, and 36 annually compared with 62 in 2021/22 (table 7.3 and figure 7.4).

There were 5 cross border operations this quarter in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority in Ireland, along with PSNI and An Garda Síochána, 21 in total for 2022/23, same as for 2021/22.

There were 27 spot checks on School Buses this quarter, and 52 for 2022/23, below half that in 2021/22 (table 7.4 and figure 7.5).

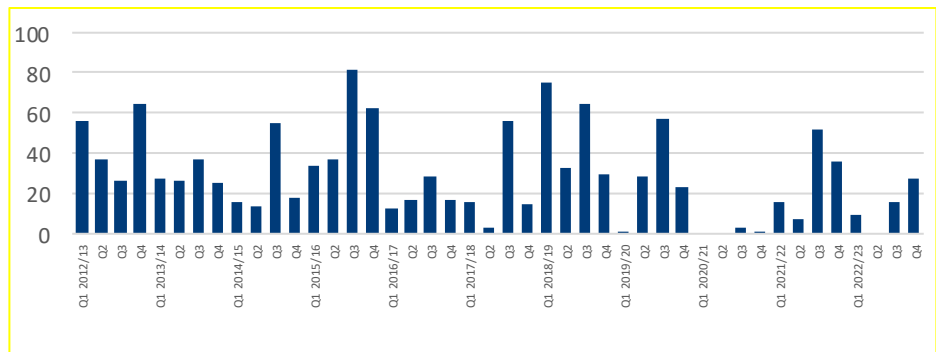


Figure 7.5: School Bus Checks

DVA Target Monitoring

For 2020/21, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DVA 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. For information, 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 90% of complete paper driver licensing applications within 10 working days.

Driver Licensing

Online application performance in 2022/23 at 98.6% was above the 95% target level for the year. Performance was over 98% for every quarter in 2022/23 and stood at 98.3% for the last quarter of this financial year (figure 8.2) (table 8.1). Online applications performance for financial year 2021/22, was 98.1%.

Paper applications performance at 92.6% was above the 90% target level for the year, and significantly better than the 78.3% achieved for paper applications in 2021/22. Quarterly performance was above target for each quarter of 2022/23, ending the year at 90.6% for quarter four of 2022/23.

Please note that for paper applications the reported annual and quarterly performance levels include a small number of records outside the scope of the target, meaning that actual paper applications performance is being slightly under-reported and is likely to be above 92.6% for 2022/23. Work remains ongoing to identify and remove these records for future reporting.

Figure 8.1: Online Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance

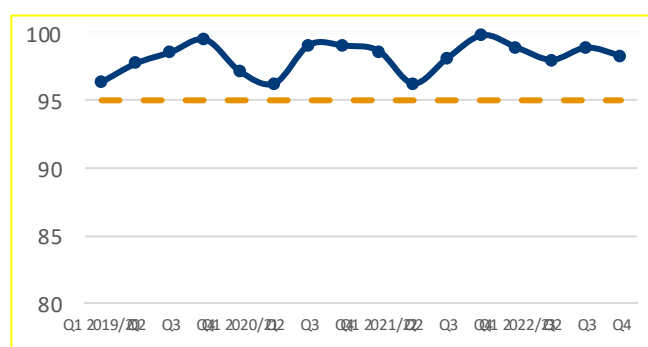
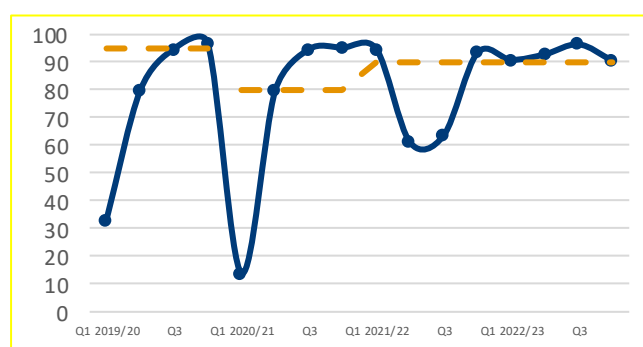


Figure 8.2: Paper Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance



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

The DVA is responsible for the maintenance of Approved Driving Instructors (ADI) and Approved Motorcycle Instructors (AMI) registers.

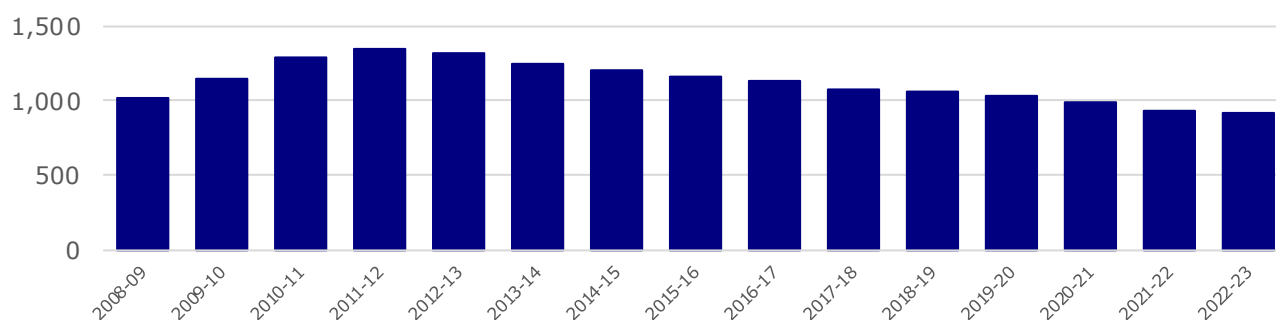
Volumes

As of 31st March 2023, 919 ADI were registered with DVA, slightly below the 940 at the end of 2022, and over 100 lower than the 1034 registered at the end of 2019/20 (figure 9.1) (table 9.1). This is the eleventh successive fall in numbers, from the peak of 1,344 in 2011/12.

Of the 919 ADI registered at the end of 2022/23, 86% (789) were male and 14% (130) were female: a proportion that is broadly unchanged over the past ten years.

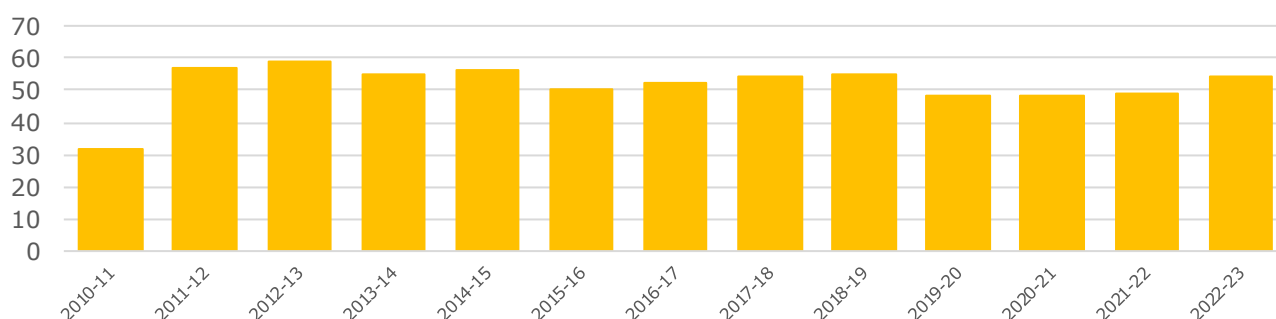
There were 10 new ADI registrants this year, up by 3 on 2021/22 and the third smallest number recorded in our time series, with 31 leaving the register during this period. Given recent increased levels of demand for driver testing (table 4.3) it is difficult to explain the downward trend in ADI over several years to date.

Fig 9.1: Approved Driving Instructors in Northern Ireland



Registered AMI at the end of 2022/23 at 54, was slightly above the 49 in 2021/22 and similar to AMI registered in previous years. There has been no downward trend in AMI over the last several years (figure 9.2).

Fig 9.2: Approved Motor Cycle Instructors in Northern Ireland



Test Volumes & Pass-Rates

The numbers undertaking each exam-element of the ADI assessment process during 2022/23, are relatively small compared to test volumes in 2010/11 (table 9.3). In 2022/23, 150 candidates attempted the Theory & Hazard Perception test, 108 attempted the Driving Ability test and 48 attempted the Instructional Ability test.

The pass-rate for the Theory & Hazard Perception test in 2022/23 was 47%, and 56% and 38% for the Driving Ability and Instructional Ability tests respectively. Note that changes in pass-rates from year to year may be due to the small numbers sitting each of the individual tests (table 9.3 and table 9.4).

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 2023

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

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