

# DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics

## Quarter One: April to June 2023

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## **Key Findings**

- In quarter one of 2023/24, DVA delivered 288,099 vehicle tests (full tests and re-tests). This is 2.1% (5,899) higher than the number of vehicle tests delivered in the same quarter of 2022/23 (282,200), and the highest quarter one Figure on record.
- Over 246,200 full vehicle tests were conducted between April and June 2023. This is an increase of 2.5% (6,064) when compared to the number of full vehicle test delivered in the same quarter of 2022/23 (240,188).
- Private cars accounted for 81.3% (200,128) of all full vehicle tests conducted in this quarter.
- Over 13,600 vehicles failed to attend a booked vehicle test in the quarter. This equates to 4.7% of all vehicle tests conducted in quarter one and is the second highest on record since 2008/09.
- The percentage of vehicle tests booked online continues to increase, reaching a maximum recorded of 94.9% this quarter. Of the 318,531 vehicle test applications this quarter, 5.1% were made via the DVA call centre.
- Over 23,300 theory tests were conducted in quarter one of 2023/24, the highest in a single quarter since the start of this series in 2012/13.
- DVA delivered 16,346 driving tests in this quarter, of which 81% (13,279) were for private cars.
- At the end of March 2023, there were there were 1.26 million licensed vehicles registered to Northern Ireland, the highest on record.
- Performance for driver licensing paper applications this quarter at 97.5% was 7.5 percentage points above the 90% target level, and the highest quarterly performance on record to date.
- At the end of the first quarter of 2023/24 driver licensing online applications performance at 97.6% was above the 95% target level.
- At the end of June 2023, there were 1,153,567 full and eligible driver licence holders with private car/light van entitlement, the highest on record.
- In this quarter to the end of June 2023, the DVA issued 2,485 transport licences in respect of taxi vehicles (1,742), taxi drivers (590) and taxi operators' (153).
- In the first quarter of 2023/24, DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities having checked 622 vehicles, issued 63 fixed penalty notices totalling £6,000 in fines, with 5 joint operations with PSNI, 4 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, and 5 spot checks on school buses.

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## **Introduction**

This is the thirty-fifth 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 April 2023 to 31 June 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 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).

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<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.

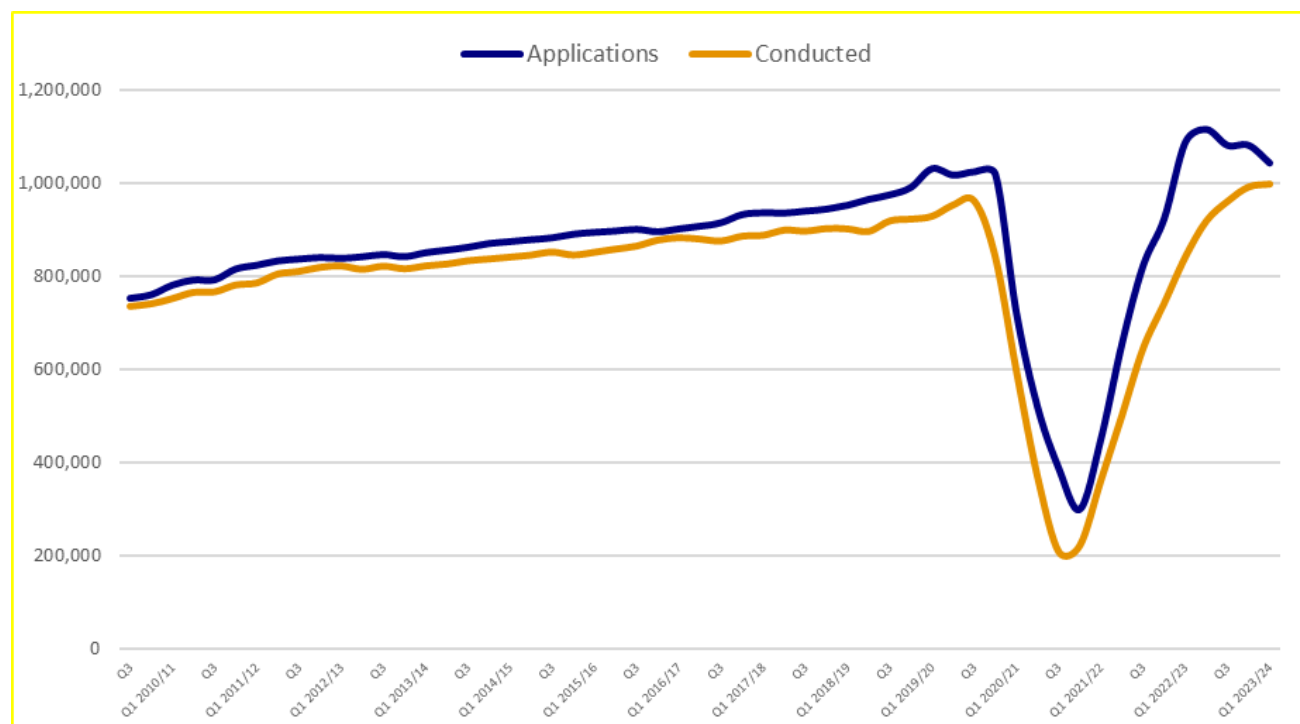
Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24 March 2020, and began issuing temporary exemption certificates (TECs) to all customers. The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1 June 2020, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20 July 2020. Priority vehicle 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 that 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. There are no restrictions on vehicle testing related to the pandemic. For the latest news and updates, please visit the Motoring page on the NIDirect website<sup>2</sup>.

### Vehicle Test Applications

From April to June 2023, the DVA received 318,531 applications for a vehicle test, 6.5% (22,095) lower than the previous quarter (340,626) (Table 1.3).

The majority (86.6%; 275,900) of vehicle test applications were full tests. The most common vehicle test category was private cars, accounting for 81.0% (223,558) of all full test applications. Figure 1.1 details the rolling four quarterly count for full vehicle test applications and full vehicle tests conducted.

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



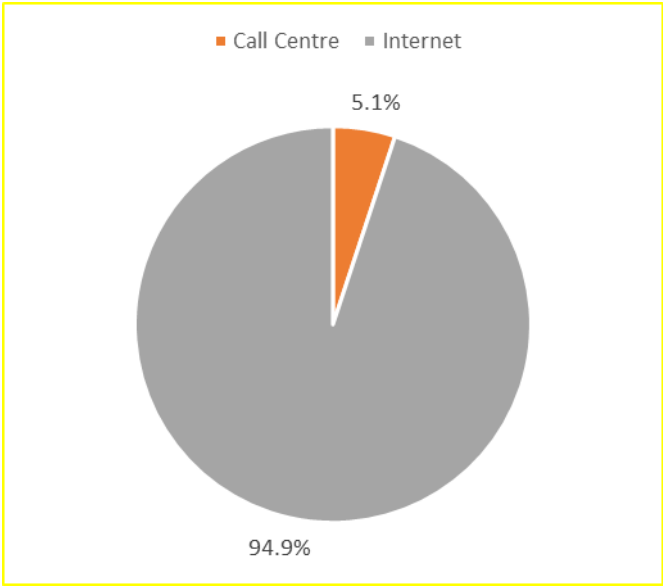
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-and-motoring>

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

**Booking Method**

During quarter one of 2023/24, 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 94.9% (302,345) of all vehicle test applications (Figure 1.2 and Table 1.4). The remaining 5.1% (16,186) of vehicle test applications were made via DVA call centres. This is the seventh consecutive quarter in which online vehicle test bookings have exceeded 90% of all vehicle test bookings (Table 1.4).

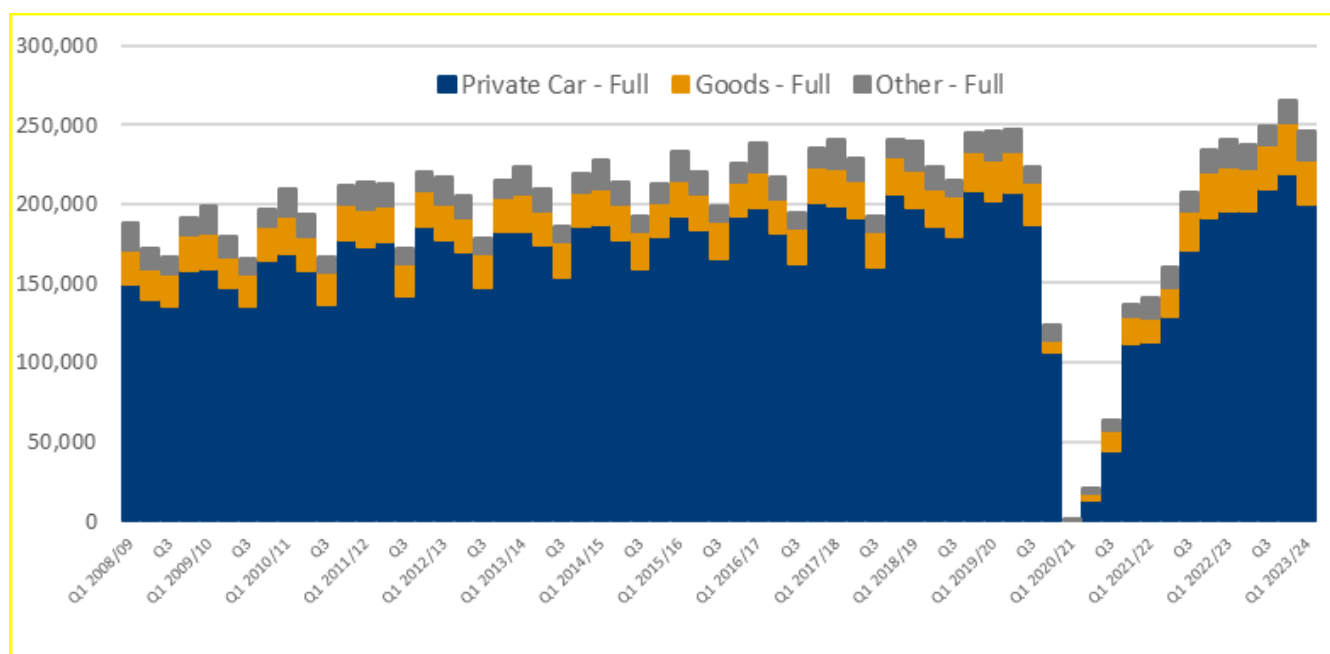
Figure 1.2: Vehicle Test Applications by Booking Method.



## Vehicle Tests Conducted

During quarter one, DVA delivered 288,099 vehicle tests (full tests and retest) (Table 1.7). This is 6.9% (21,320) lower than the previous quarter, but 2.1% (5,899) higher than the number of tests conducted in the same quarter of 2022/23 and is the highest quarter one Figure in the series. Most of the tests conducted were full tests, which accounted for 85% of all vehicle tests conducted (Table 1.5). Of the 246,252 full tests conducted, 81% (200,128) were for private cars (Table 1.5 and Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Full Vehicle Tests Conducted



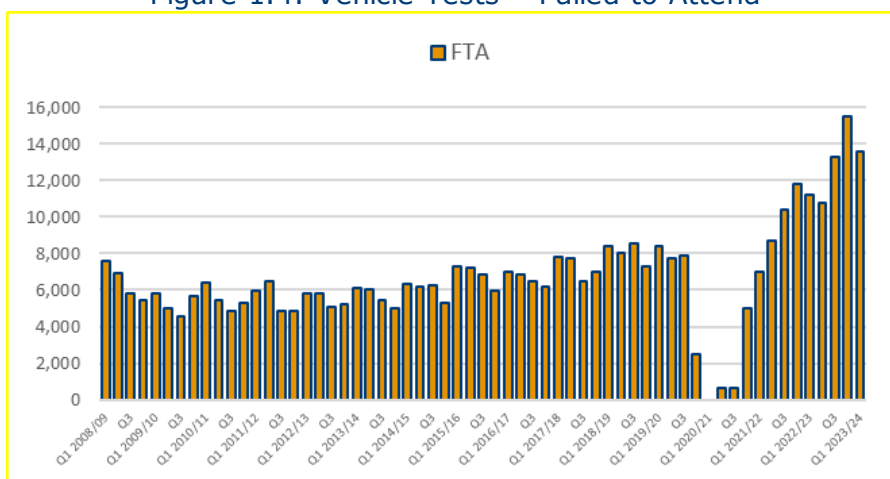
The steady increase in vehicle test applications seen in the trend series prior to the COVID-19 pandemic can, in the main, be explained by the increasing number of licensed cars in Northern Ireland, which has risen by 8.7% over the five years to 2020-21 (see Table 2.13). In addition, owners seem to be 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, 13,612 customers failed to attend for a booked vehicle test, (Table 1.10 and Figure 1.4). This equates to 4.7% of all conducted tests during this period (288,099).

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

For the first quarter of 2023/24, the overall pass-rate for full vehicle tests was 82.4%, one percentage point above the 81.4% achieved in quarter four of 2022/23 (Table 1.11). 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.

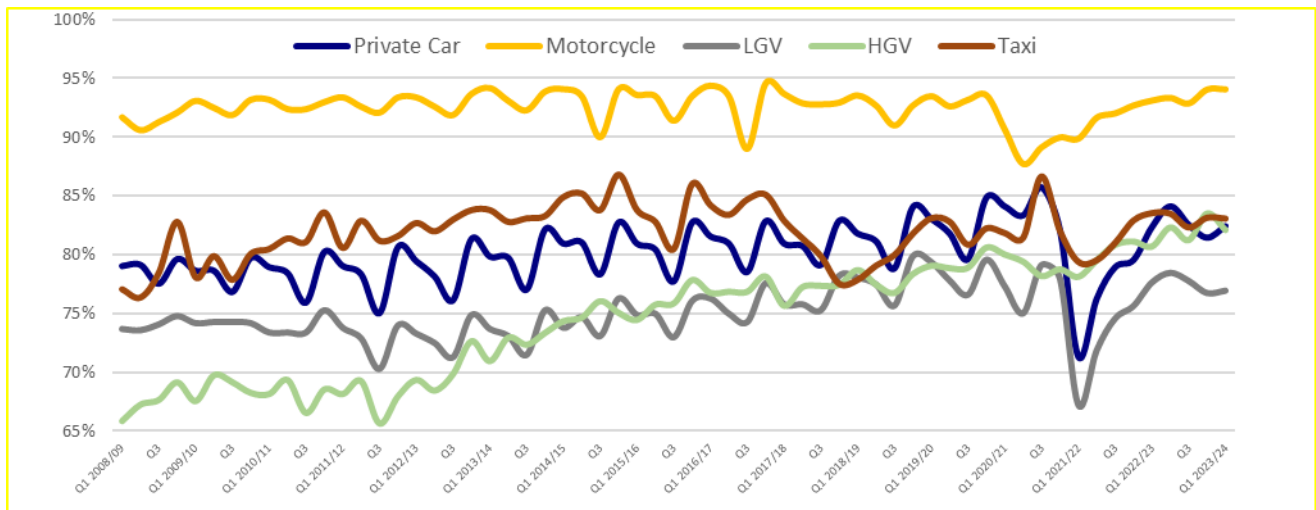
For the financial year 2022/23, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 82.4%, almost five percentage points higher than in 2021/22 (77.6%) (Table 1.11). This 2022-23 Figure is close to the 2019/20 pass-rate of 82.1%. The 2022/23 annual pass-rate for full tests varied by category, from 77.6% for light goods to 93.3% for motorcycles (for categories where there were at least 2,000 tests) (Table 1.11).

The overall pass-rate for vehicle re-tests this quarter was 94.4%, similar to the 2022/23 quarter four pass-rate (94.3%) (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% 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).



Figure 1.5: Full Vehicle Test Pass-Rates



### Vehicle Tests by Test Centre

The busiest test centre for vehicle testing during quarter one was Newtownards, having conducted 32,157 full tests (Table 1.14). Of these, 28,347 were for private cars, a decrease of 8.1% (2,502) relative to the 30,849 conducted in 2022/23 quarter four. Omagh, which is a smaller centre, conducted 7,549 full private car tests this quarter (Table 1.14), compared with 8,344 in 2022/23 quarter four, a decrease of 9.5%.

The overall full test pass rate for private cars rose slightly between quarters, from 81.4% in quarter four of 2022/23 to 82.4% in quarter one of 2023/24; pass rates by test centre within this category ranged from a low of 78.0% in Cookstown to a high of 87.5% in Belfast (Balmoral) (Table 1.14). This is the twelfth 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**

Since July 2014, Vehicle Licensing for Northern Ireland has been administered by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea.

### Vehicle Registrations

This section includes the latest available vehicle licensing data for Northern Ireland covering the period from January 2023 to March 2023. Vehicle licensing data for April to June 2023 will be published in our quarter two report scheduled for release in November/December 2023.

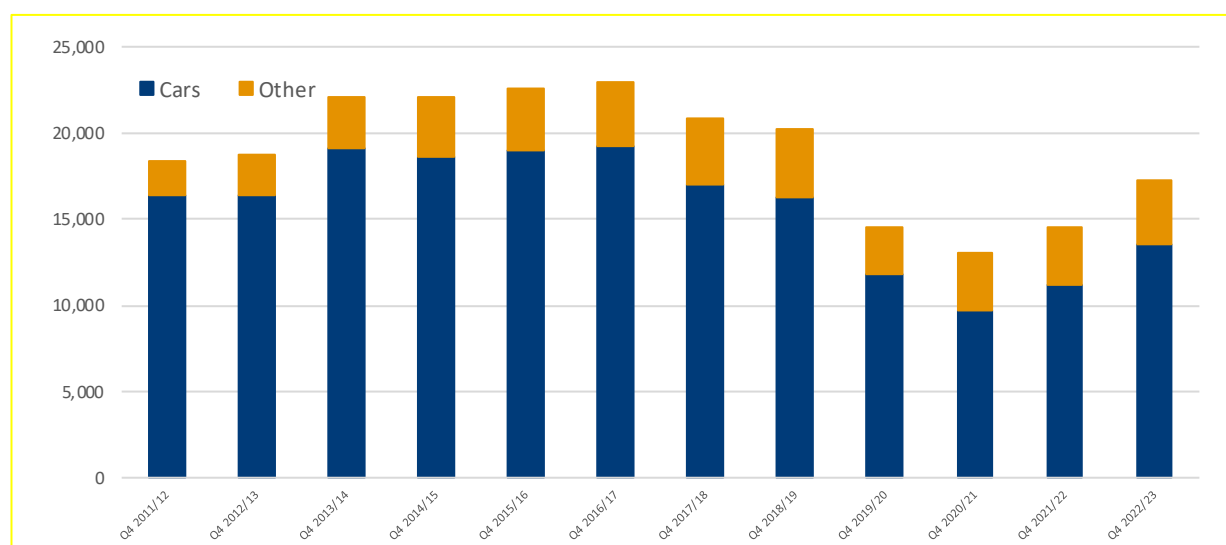
During January to March 2023, the DVLA registered 17,198 new vehicles to Northern Ireland, 75% (7,389) higher than the previous quarter (9,809), and the highest since the same quarter in 2018-19 (20,867) (Table 2.1) (Figure 2.1). Please note that new vehicle registrations exclude vehicles previously 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 this quarter was 17,334, the highest in four years.

Private cars accounted for 13,510 (78.6%) of all new vehicle registrations (17,198), which is almost the same in percentage terms relative to the previous quarter (78.5%) (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).

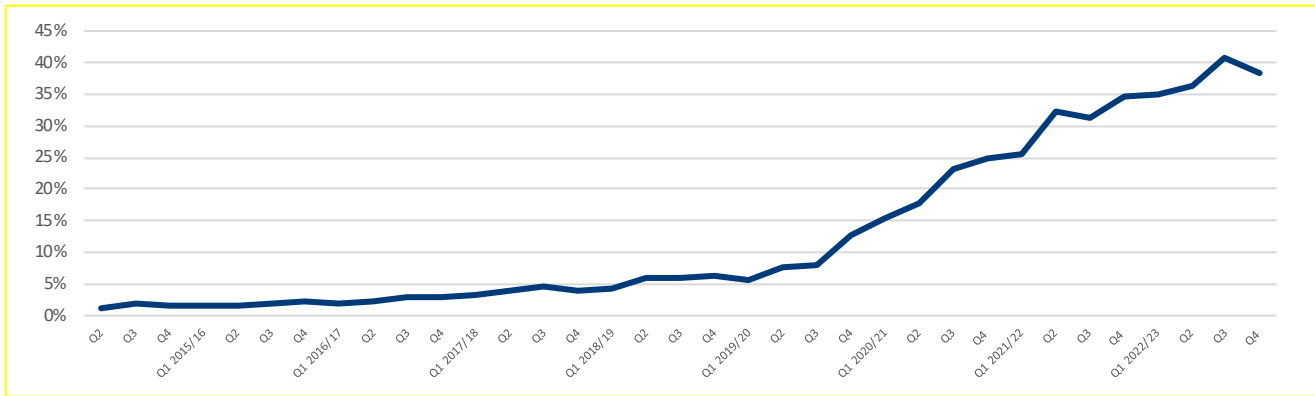
Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations



Top makes for private car first time registrations in quarter four were Ford at 10.0% (1,361), Volkswagen at 8.4% (1,147) followed closely by Toyota at 8.2% (1,108) (Table 2.3).

Grey was again the most popular choice of colour for new private cars this quarter, accounting for 24.2% (3,267) of all new car registrations (13,510); White (18.5%) and Blue (16.9%) 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 fuel<sup>3</sup> has increased substantially over the last number of years, rising from 5.8% in quarter two of 2018/19 to a high of 40.8% for quarter three of 2022/23. Over the same period, the proportion of new diesel cars has declined from 36.5% to 10.3%. This is the tenth quarter in a row that alternative-fuel cars have out-sold diesel cars, in this quarter 5,158 compared with 1,389 respectively.

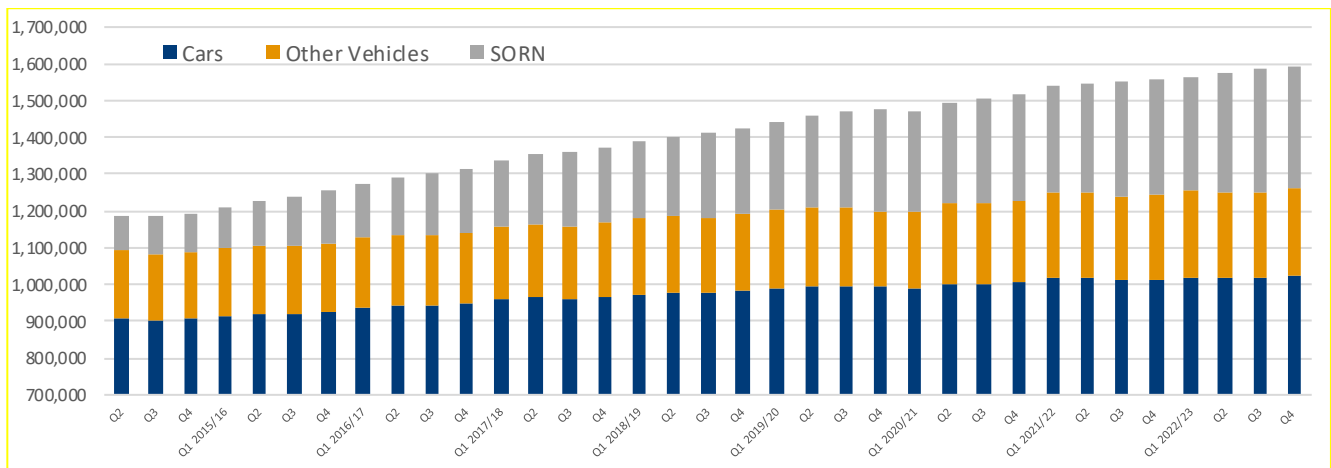
### Licensed Vehicles

At the end of March 2023 there were just over 1,259,560 licensed vehicles in Northern Ireland (excluding vehicles with a SORN – Statutory Off-Road Notification), an increase of 0.7% (8,404) relative to quarter three (1,251,160), and the highest quarterly licensed stock volume on record since quarter two of 2014/15 (1,096,250) (Table 2.13).

At the end of this quarter, just over 8 in every 10 (81.2%) licensed vehicles was a private car (1,022,604). Private car stock is the highest on record and has increased by 12.3% (112,604) since quarter two of 2014/15 (910,270) (Table 2.13).

Just over 333,870 vehicles had a SORN at the end of March 2023, a small drop from the previous quarter (334,220). Sorned vehicles represent 21.0% of all vehicle stock in Northern Ireland (1,593,440) (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



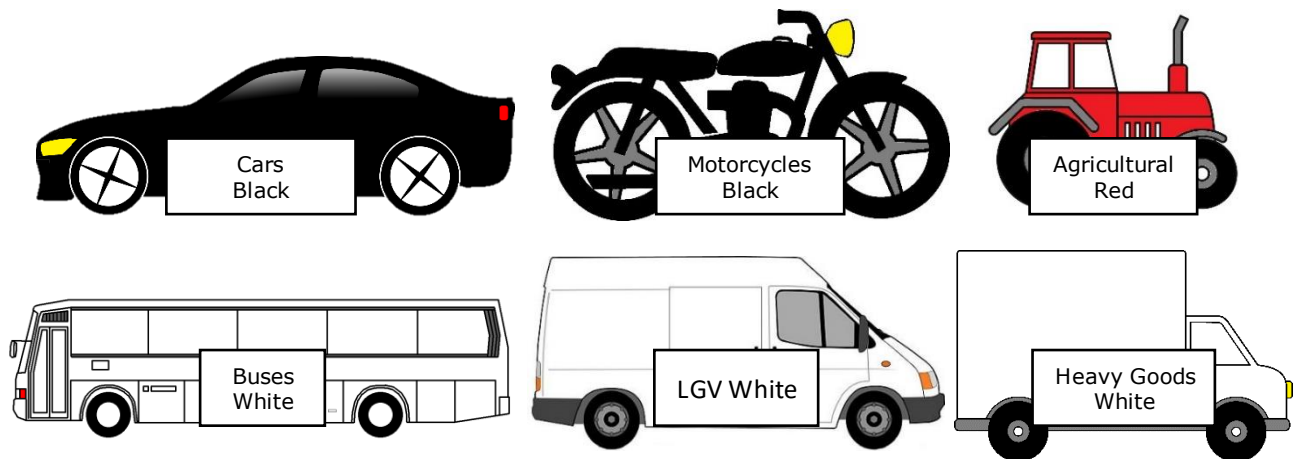
<sup>3</sup> Alternative-fuel vehicles are able to use a range of alternatives to purely petrol or diesel fuel, including gas, electricity, or a combination such as gas bi-fuel and hybrid-electric.

As of 31 March 2023, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 9.60 years a small increase on the 9.55 years in the previous quarter.

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

- Cars – 9.2 years
- Motorcycles – 14.4 years
- Light Goods – 8.9 years
- Heavy Goods – 10.2 years
- Buses – 10.2 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.



### 3 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 website<sup>4</sup>.

#### Theory Test Applications and Tests Conducted

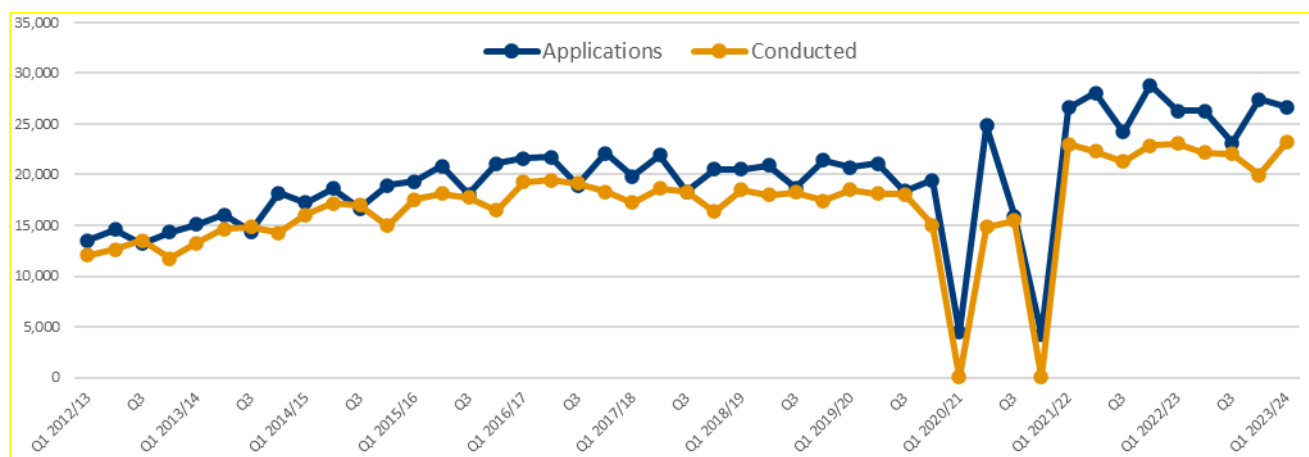
From April to June 2023, the DVA delivered 23,325 theory tests, the highest quarterly level achieved since the start of this series in 2012/13 (Table 3.2) (Figure 3.1).

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 26,713 theory test applications in quarter one, 2.7% (729) lower than the previous quarter (27,442) (Table 3.1).

Private cars accounted for over eight in every ten theory test applications (85.7%, 22,884) and theory tests conducted (86.0%, 20,062) in quarter one (Tables 3.1 and 3.2; Figure 3.1).

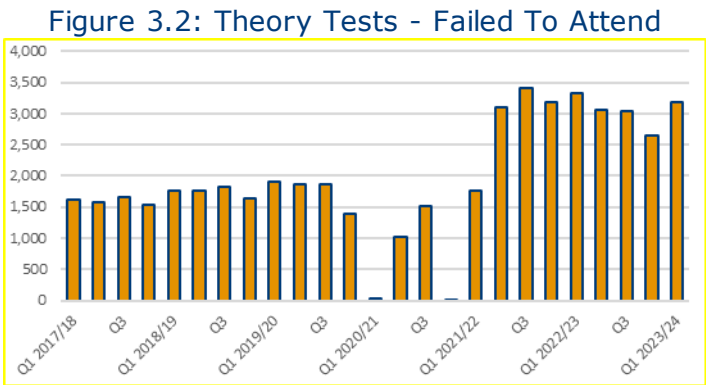
Figure 3.1: Theory Test Applications and Conducted



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

Failed To Attend

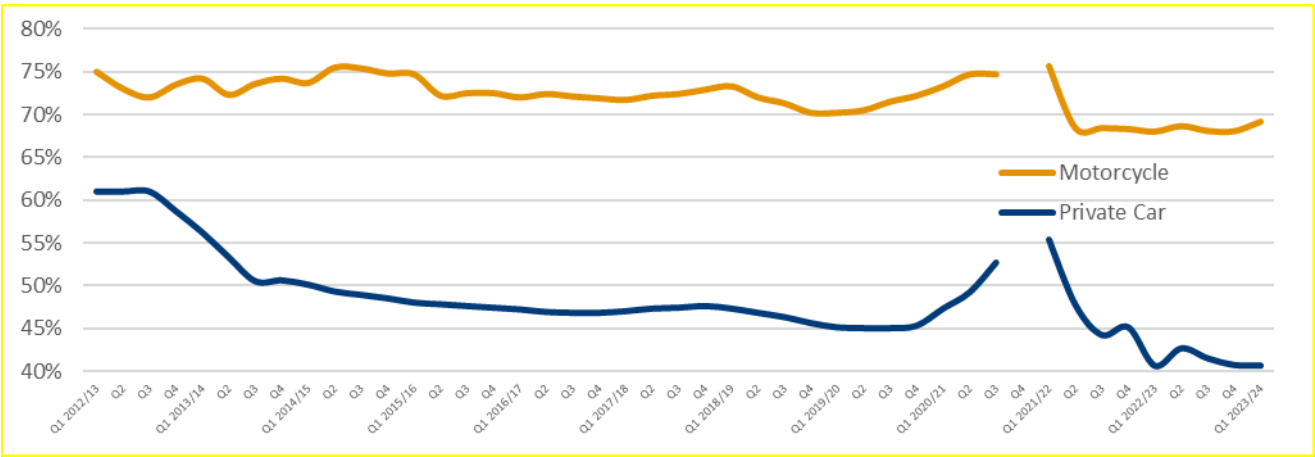
During this quarter, 3,184 customers failed to attend (FTA) a booked theory test (Table 3.3 and Figure 3.2). This represents 13.7% of all theory tests conducted during this quarter (23,325).



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.

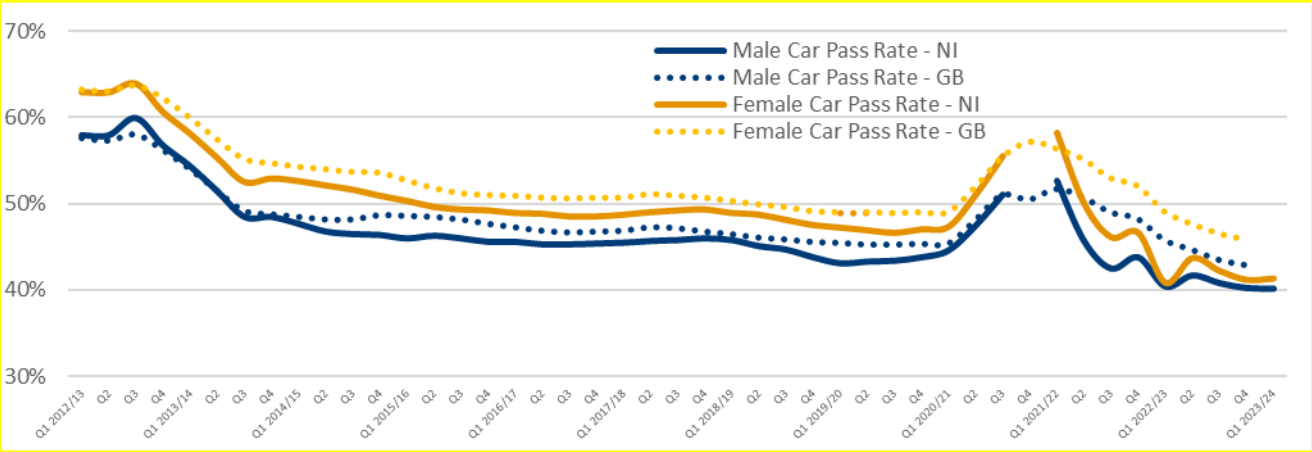
Figure 3.3: Theory Test Pass-Rates (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



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 one rolling four-quarter average Figures suggests that pass-rate trend for males and females is similar to the previous quarter, with Figures of 40.2% and 41.4% for quarter one compared to 40.2% and 41.2% 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 trends are similar to those in Great Britain for the period for which 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 until 20 November, again for a third time between 27 November and 10 December. The most recent suspension began on 23 December 2020, reopening on 23 April 2021. During quarter four, only off-road motorcycle and certain LGV tests were able to continue. DVA are currently testing across all driver test categories.

For the latest news and updates, please visit the Practical Driving Test page on the NIDirect website<sup>5</sup>.

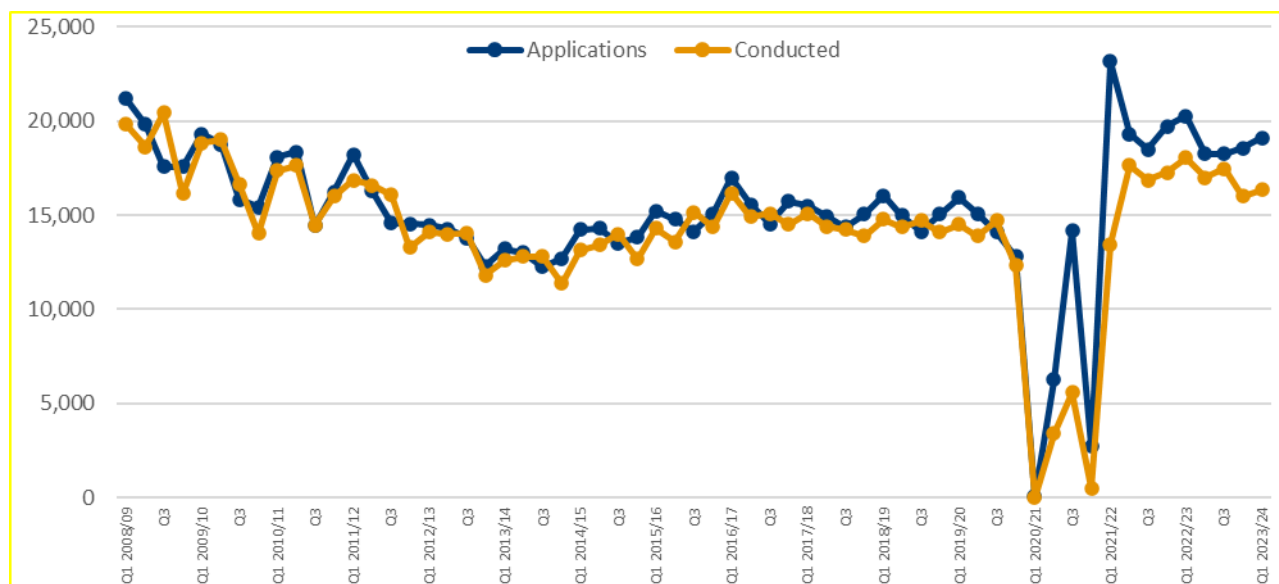
### Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

The DVA conducted 16,346 driving tests this quarter, 2.0% higher than the previous quarter (Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1). Just over 8 in every 10 driving tests conducted were private cars (81.2%; 13,279) (Table 4.3).

From April to June 2023, the DVA received 19,100 applications for a driving test, 2.8% (525) higher than the previous quarter (18,575), but 5.8% (1,168) lower than quarter one of 2022/23 (20,268) (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



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

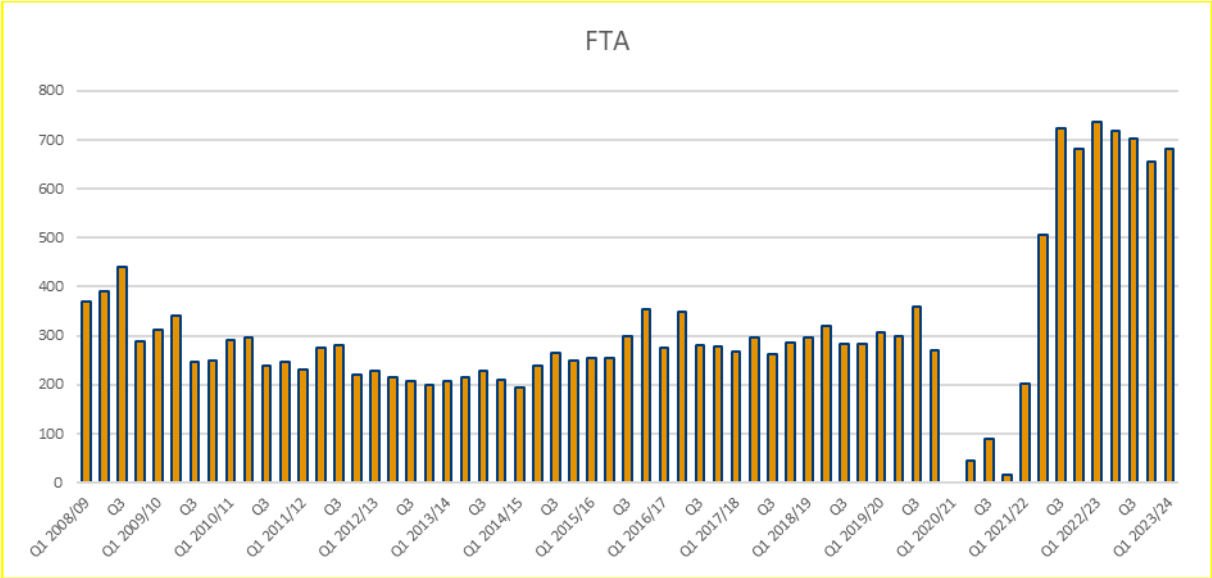


Failed to Attend

In quarter four there were 682 driving test appointments for which customers failed to attend (FTA) a booked practical driving test (Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2), equating to 4.2% of all practical driver testing this quarter (16,346).

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

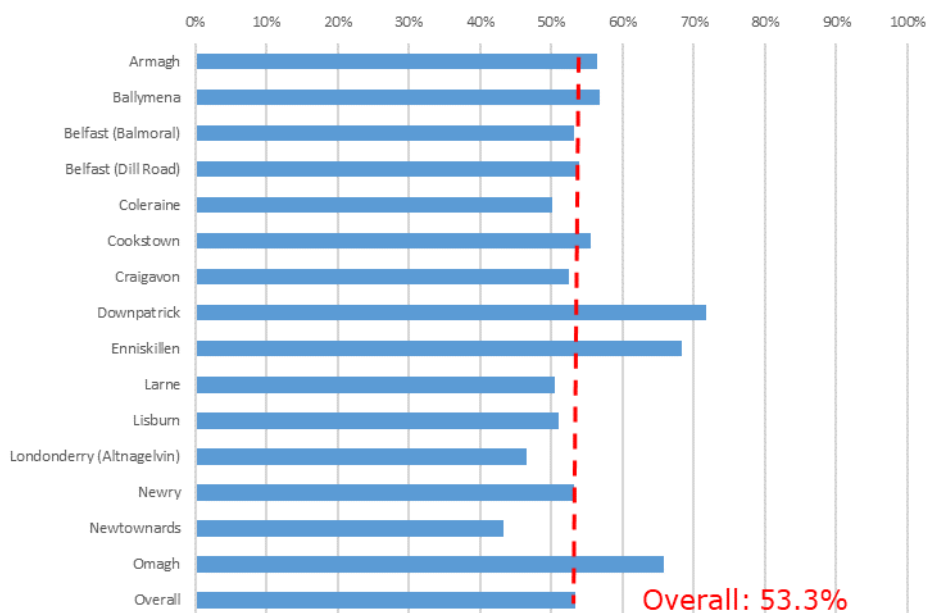
Figure 4.2: Driving Tests – Failed to Attend



## Driving Tests by Test Centre

The number of private car driving tests delivered in quarter one ranged from a maximum of 1,527 at Newtownards to a minimum of 415 at Armagh (Table 4.6). Across test centres and using a rolling 4-quarter average, the pass rates for private cars ranged from 43.3% in Newtownards to 71.8% in Downpatrick (Table 4.7b). 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, Q1 (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



## Driving Test Pass-Rates

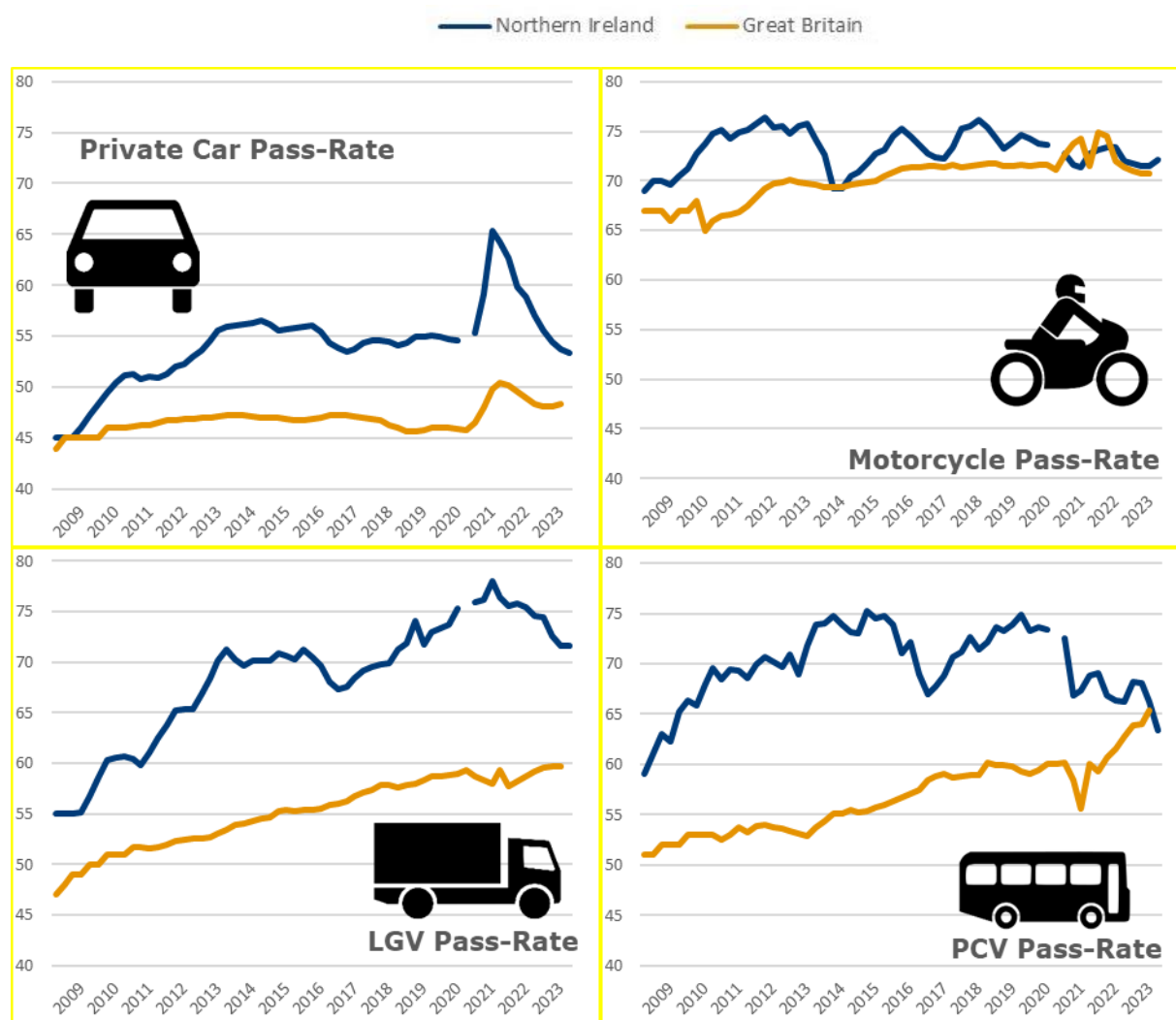
For April to June 2023, the private car overall pass rate was 53.4%, similar to that of the previous quarter (52.8%) (Table 4.5).

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 to 2022/23 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 53.3% for quarter one of 2023/24, slightly lower than the 53.7% of the previous quarter (Table 4.10). 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 years, a clear 'gender-gap' was apparent in private car driver testing pass-rates, based on a four-quarter rolling average. Since driving testing resumed in the summer of 2020, this gap has narrowed considerably and remained much lower throughout 2022/23. During quarter one of 2023/24, the rolling four-quarter average pass-rate for males was just 1.7 percentage points higher than that for females for private car testing (54.1% and 52.4% respectively) (Table 4.10 and Figure 4.5).

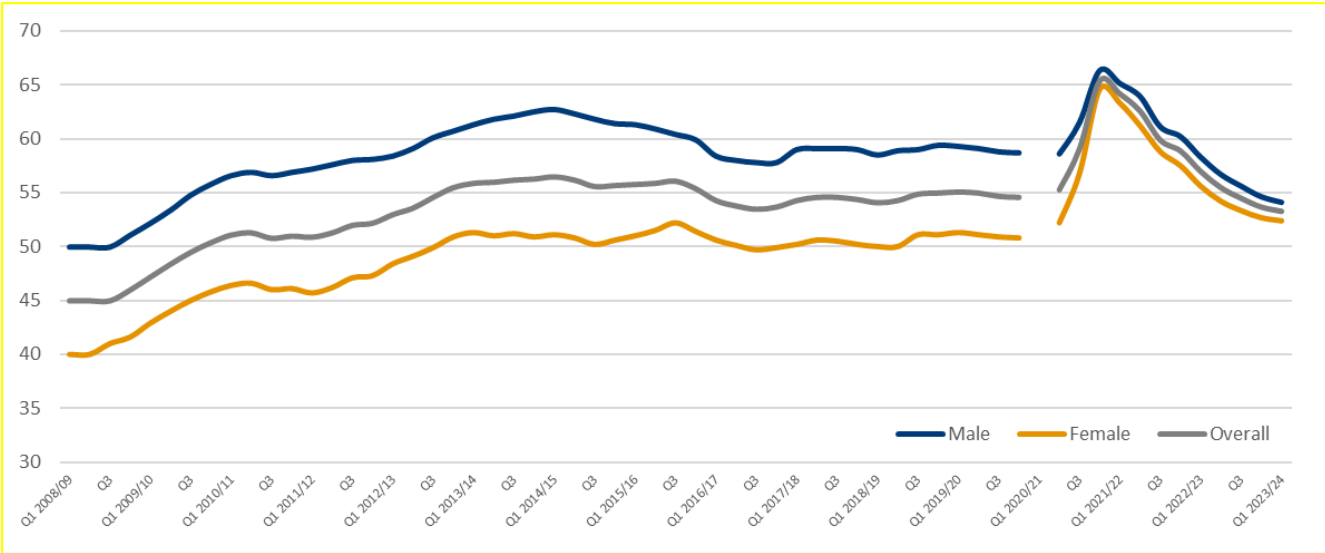
This gender gap is also now substantially narrower than the 6.2 percentage-point gap present in the Great Britain (GB) statistics pre-pandemic. The gap in GB between males and females has also reduced from over 5 percentage points in quarter one of 2021/22 to 3.8 percentage points in quarter four of 2022/23 (Table 4.10). GB data is not available to allow comparison over four quarters to the end of quarter one 2023/24 (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.

Most 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 four-quarter rolling average, pass-rates for private car testing for females were higher than those for males in Craigavon (53.0% for females and 52.1% for males), Newry

(54.1% for females and 52.4% for males) and Newtownards (43.7% for females and 42.9% for males) in the four quarters to the end of quarter one 2023/24 (Table 4.7b).

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 rolling four-quarter average pass rate for females (71.0%) than males (70.7%) for GB quarter four 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; the latest Figures for GB for quarter four 2022/23 report the rolling four-quarter average pass rates for females at 64.6% compared with 59.2% 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.

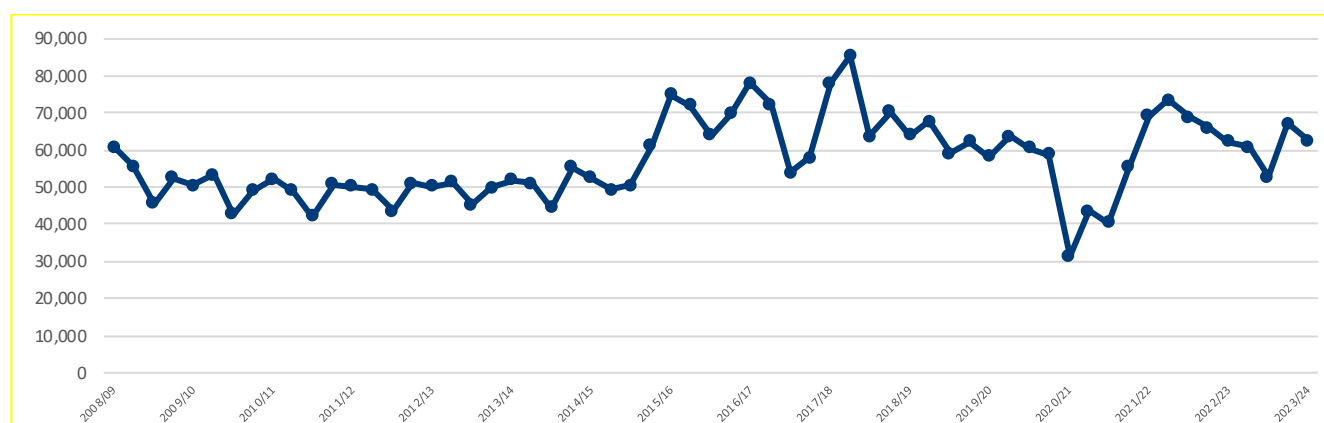
On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and temporarily closed the driver licensing office. From the end of April that year they began processing applications from Group 2 (lorry/bus) applicants and those from front line workers. Only applications received online were processed during this period. From June 2020, the DVA began resuming all driver licensing bar counter service at that time and now 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 first quarter of 2023/24 DVA completed 62,540 ordinary driver licensing transactions, which is lower than the previous quarter (67,035) but 356 (0.6%) higher than the same quarter in 2022/23 (62,175) (Table 5.1).

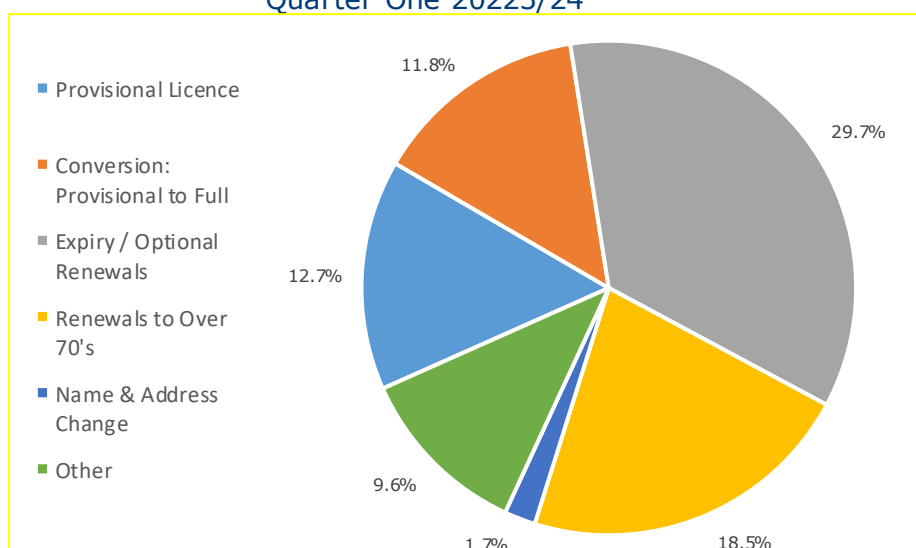
Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of Ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter one was 7,916, 372 (4.9%) higher than that for the same quarter the previous year (7,544) (Table 5.1).

This quarter, Expiry/Optional Renewals accounted for 29.7% (18,552) of all ordinary licensing transactions followed by Renewals to over 70's at 18.5% (11,555) of all Ordinary Licences transactions (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Ordinary Driver License Transactions by Type, Quarter One 2023/24



In 2022/23 DVA completed just over 19,050 vocational driver licensing transactions, the second highest on record since 2008/09. In the first quarter of 2023/24, 4,773 vocational driver licensing transactions were completed, which is just over 8% (447) fewer relative to the same quarter in 2022/23 (5,220) (Table 5.2).

**Driver Licence Stock**

At the end of June 2023 there were 1,153,567 full and eligible driver licence holders (excluding provisional licence holders) with private car/light van entitlement in Northern Ireland, almost 0.4% (4,522) higher than the previous quarter (1,149,045) and the highest on record since quarter two of 2012/13 (1,046,811) (Table 5.4).

The number of provisional licence holders with private car/light van entitlement increased relative to the previous quarter from 108,538 to 109,037 at the end of June 2023, a rise of just below 0.5% (499) between quarters. This is the second quarterly increase in provisional licence volumes in 2023 (Table 5.4).

Driver licence holders aged 65 years and above with full private car/light van entitlement accounted for almost 21% (237,981) of all licence holders with this entitlement (1,139,689) (Table 5.4).

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

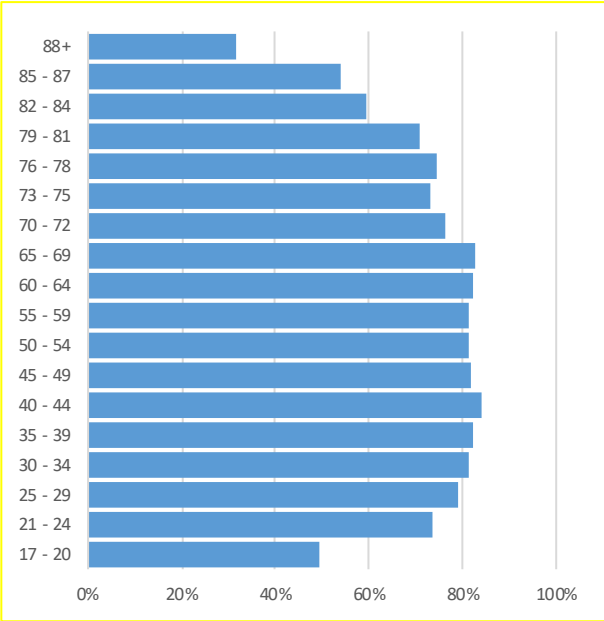


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

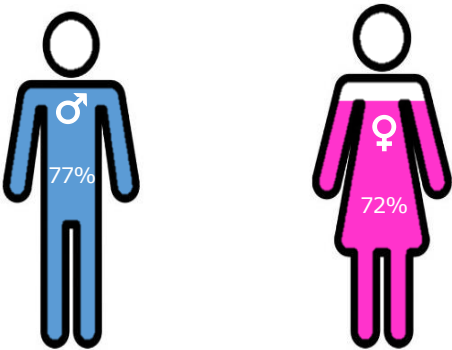
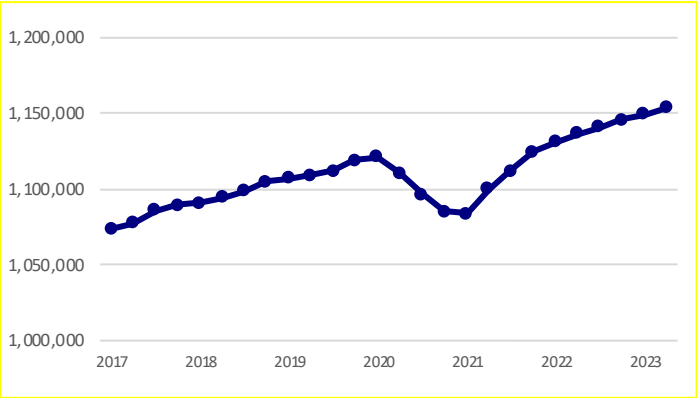


Figure 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Gender

At the end of June 2023, an 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 the latest published NISRA 2022 mid-year population estimates<sup>6</sup> (Table 5.8). For males and females, the equivalent percentages were 77% and 72% respectively (Figure 5.5).

<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 the 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<sup>7</sup>.

### **Taxi Licensing**

#### Taxi Vehicles

During financial year 2022/23 DVA issued 7,218 taxi vehicle licences, 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 first quarter of 2023/24 1,742 taxi vehicle licences were issued, 141 (7.5%) below the 1,883 issued the previous quarter, but 115 (7.1%) above the 1,627 issued in quarter one of 2022/23 (Table 6.1).

At the end of June 2023, licensed taxi vehicle stock stood at 6,981, an increase of 1.2% (80) relative to the end of March 2023 (6,901) (Figure 6.1).

#### Taxi Drivers

During 2022/23 DVA issued 1,535 taxi driver licences, 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 first quarter of 2023/34 DVA issued 590 taxi driver licences compared with 381 the quarter before and 376 in the first quarter of 2022/23 (Table 6.1).

At the end of June 2023 there were 7,665 licensed taxi drivers a fall of 51 (0.7%) relative to the previous quarter (7,716), and the lowest on record since 2013/14 (Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1).

#### Taxi Operators

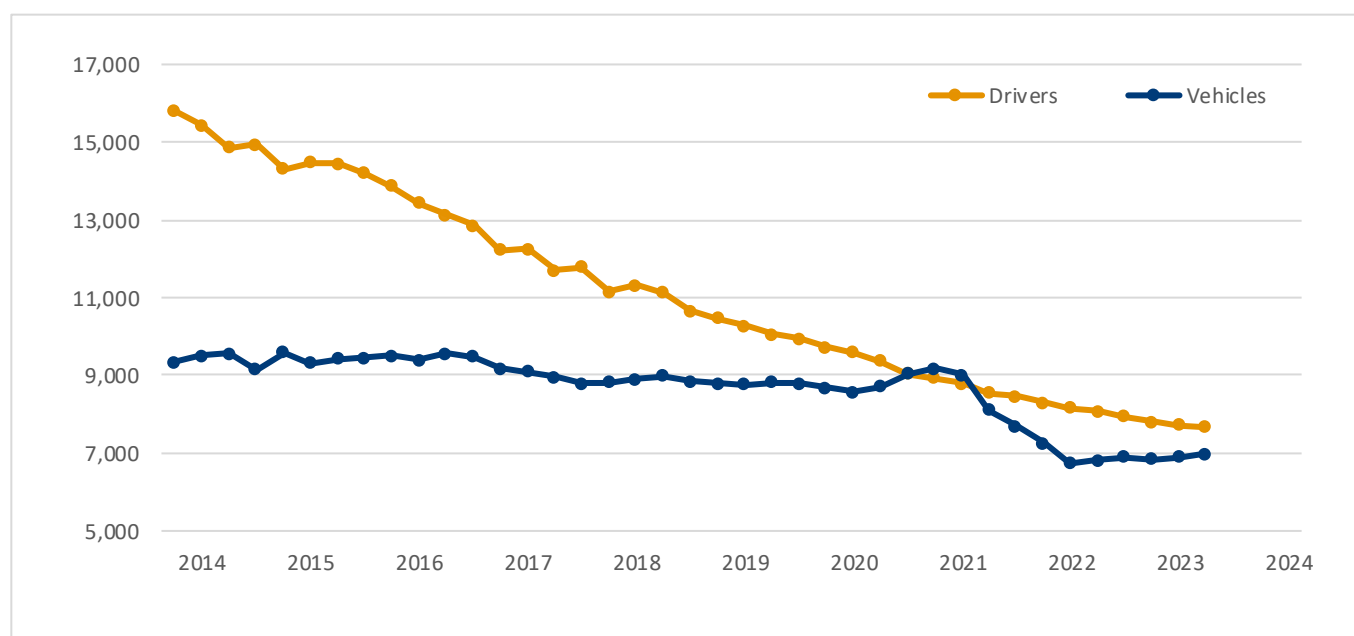
As with taxi drivers, the number of taxi operators has been trending downwards in recent years, falling by 11% (140), from 1,267 at the end of 2021/22 to 1,127 in 2022/23.

At the end of June 2023 there were 1,135 licensed taxi operators, a small increase (8) relative to the previous quarter (1,127), and the first quarterly increase in over a year (Table 6.2).

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<sup>7</sup> <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).

In the first quarter of 2023/24 DVA issued 1,050 bus licences, slightly lower (2) than the same quarter the previous year 2022/23 (1,052), but 17.7% (158) higher than the last quarter of 2022/23 (892) (Table 6.1). The number of licensed bus vehicles at the end of June 2023 was 3,332, 29 more relative to the previous quarter (3,303) (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 June 2023 there were 192 licensed bus operators, compared with 196 at the end of the same quarter in 2022/23 (Table 6.3).

## Goods Licensing

The number of licensed goods vehicles operators at the end of June 2023 was 5,433, the lowest on record since 2021/13, and 1.1% (59) fewer than the previous quarter (5,492). Associated with these 5,433 operators were 22,133 goods vehicles a fall of 71 licensed vehicles relative the end of March 2023 (22,204) (Table 6.4).

The number of standard international operator licences in place fell for the fifth consecutive quarter from 1,894 to 1,865 at the end of June 2023, a reduction of 1.5% (29) between quarters.

There were 3,239 operators working under restricted licenses at the end of this quarter, 24 less than at the end of March 2023 (3,263) (Table 6.4).



Enforcement falls within the 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 enforcement services, whilst protecting officers, drivers, and operators from risks of infection.

In the first quarter of 2023/24, DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities having checked 622 vehicles, issued 63 fixed penalty notices totalling £6,000 in fines, with 5 joint operations with PSNI, 4 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, and 5 spot checks on school buses (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 5,000 checks per annum; there were 622 checks in this quarter relative to 544 in the same quarter of 2022/23 (Figure 7.1) (Table 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Vehicle Checks

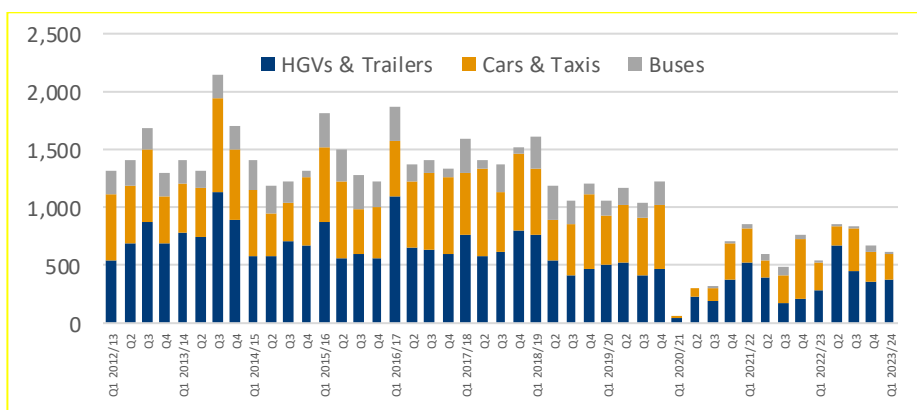
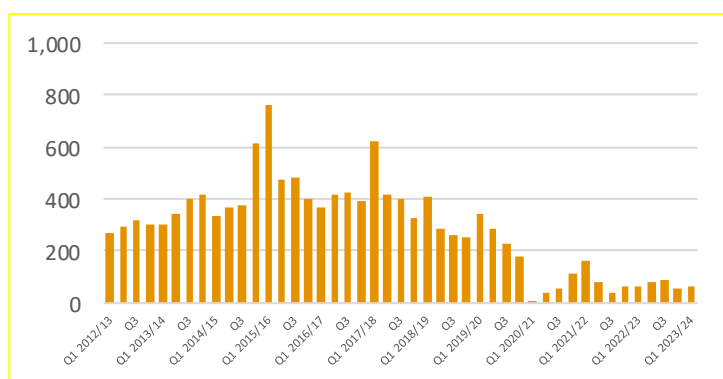


Figure 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued



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. In this, the first quarter of 2023/24, DVA issued 63 fixed penalties, to the value of £6,000 (Figure 7.2 and Table 7.2).

Figure 7.3: Convictions

There were 73 successful convictions in 2022/23, compared with 429 in the previous year, 2021/22. This first quarter of 2023/24 saw 19 convictions relating to 58 offences (Table 7.2 and Figure 7.3).

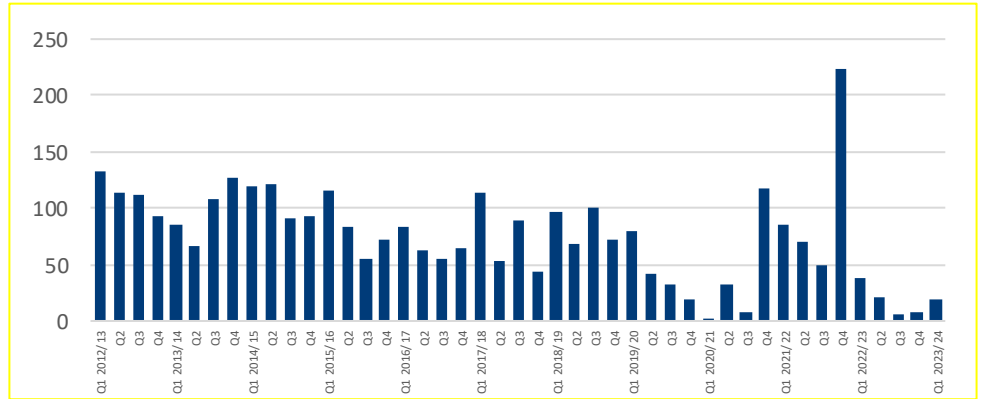


Figure 7.4: Joint and Cross-Border Operations

During 2022/23 there were 36 joint operations with PSNI compared with 62 in 2021/22. There were 5 joint operations with PSNI in the first quarter of 2023/24, and 4 cross border operations with the Road Safety Authority in Ireland, the PSNI and An Garda Síochána (Table 7.3 and Figure 7.4).

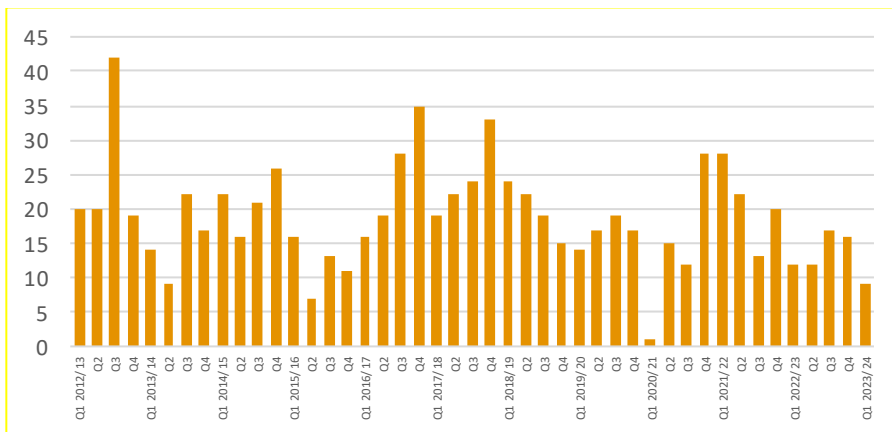
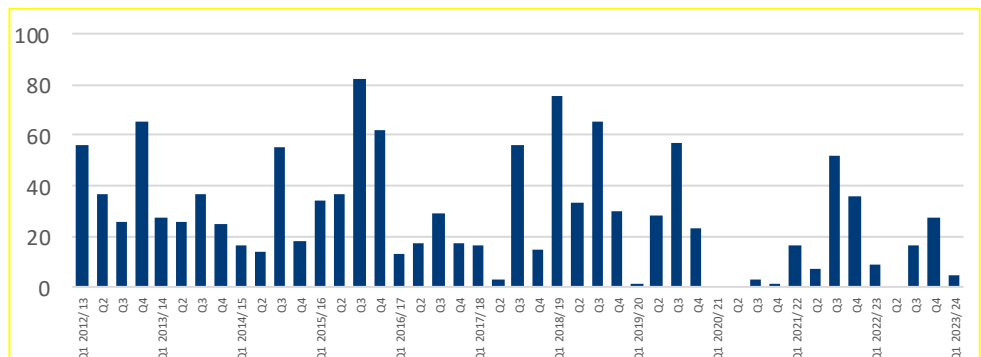


Figure 7.5: School Bus Checks

In 2022/23 there were 52, School Bus Checks, below half that in 2021/22 (111).

There were 5 spot checks made on School Buses in the first quarter of 2023/24 (Table 7.4 and Figure 7.5).



## **DVA Target Monitoring**

For 2020/21, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the DVA developed new targets through which it monitors driver licensing processing times and 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 above 98% for every quarter in 2022/23 and stood at 98.3% for the last quarter of 2022/23 (Figure 8.2) (Table 8.1). Online applications performance for financial year 2021/22, was 98.1%.

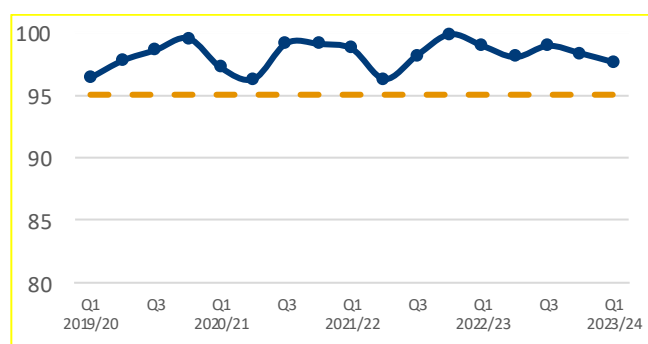
Paper applications performance at 92.6% was above the 90% target level for the last financial year 2022/23, and significantly better than the 78.3% achieved for paper applications in 2021/22. Quarterly performance was above target for each quarter of 2022/23, ending the year at 90.6% for quarter four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

Performance for driver licensing paper applications for the first quarter of 2023/24 at 97.5% was 7.5 percentage points above the 90% target level, and the highest quarterly performance on record to date.

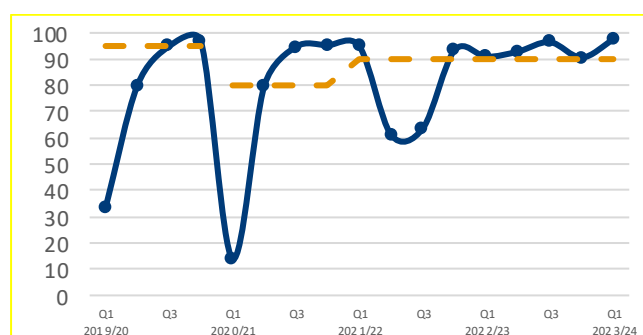
At the end of the first quarter of 2023/24 driver licensing online applications performance at 97.6% was over 2.6 percentage points above the 95% target level.

Please note that reported performance levels include a small number of records potentially outside the scope of the target, meaning that actual performance against target is being slightly under-reported. Work remains ongoing to identify and account for these records in 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 have National Statistics accreditation but continue to have Official Statistics status).

## **Notes**

### **National Statistics**

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

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

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

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

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

Note that since the report achieved National Statistics accreditation, we have added 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.

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