

DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics

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Key Findings

Please note that DVA services were impacted by industrial strike action on 22 September 2023, so statistics for quarter two are lower than would have been the case had this been a routine working day.

- During quarter three of 2023/24, DVA delivered 283,792 vehicle tests (full and retest), the second highest quarter three volume on record. During the current financial year to date, DVA has delivered 846,034 vehicle tests to the end of December 2023.
- Over 11,900 vehicles failed to attend a booked vehicle test in quarter three, equating to 4.2% of all conducted tests during this period; there were 37,357 missed vehicle tests in this year to date, relative to 35,271 for the same period last year, an increase of over 2,000 (5.9%) vehicles that failed to attend for a booked test.
- From October to December 2023, 20,695 theory tests were delivered, with over 66,800 tests completed in this financial year to date.
- During this quarter, 3,047 customers failed to attend (FTA) a booked theory test, which equates to 14.7% of all theory tests conducted in this period.
- The DVA conducted 16,147 driving tests this quarter and a total of 47,865 tests this financial year to date.
- There were 551 candidates who failed to attend a booked driving test this quarter, equivalent to 3.4% of all driving tests conducted in this period, with over 1,780 candidates failing to attend a booked driving test so far this year to date.
- At the end of September 2023, there were almost 1.28 million licensed vehicles, the highest on record.
- Performance for driver licensing paper applications in quarter three was 7.3 percentage points above the 90% target level, at 97.3%.
- Driver licensing online applications performance was also above the target level this quarter, at 99.6% against a target of 95%.
- At the end of December 2023, there were over 1.167 million full and eligible driver licence holders (excluding provisional licence holders) with private car/light van entitlement, the highest on record.
- In quarter three of 2023/24, the DVA issued 2,636 transport licences related to taxi vehicles (2,108), taxi drivers (461) and taxi operators (67).
- DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities this quarter, having checked 519 vehicles and issued 145 fixed penalty notices totalling £22,350 in fines.
- DVA undertook 10 joint operations with the PSNI, 2 cross border operations with the Road Safety Authority, PSNI and An Garda Síochána and 28 spot checks on school buses.

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Introduction

This is the thirty-seventh 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 three of 2023/24. This covers the period from 1 October 2023 to 31 December 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).

Please note that the HGV Random Survey 2023/24 results are not designated National Statistics, but Official Statistics and are reported within this issue of the quarterly report for convenience. DVA are not planning to conduct these types of survey on a quarterly basis going forward.

¹ <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.

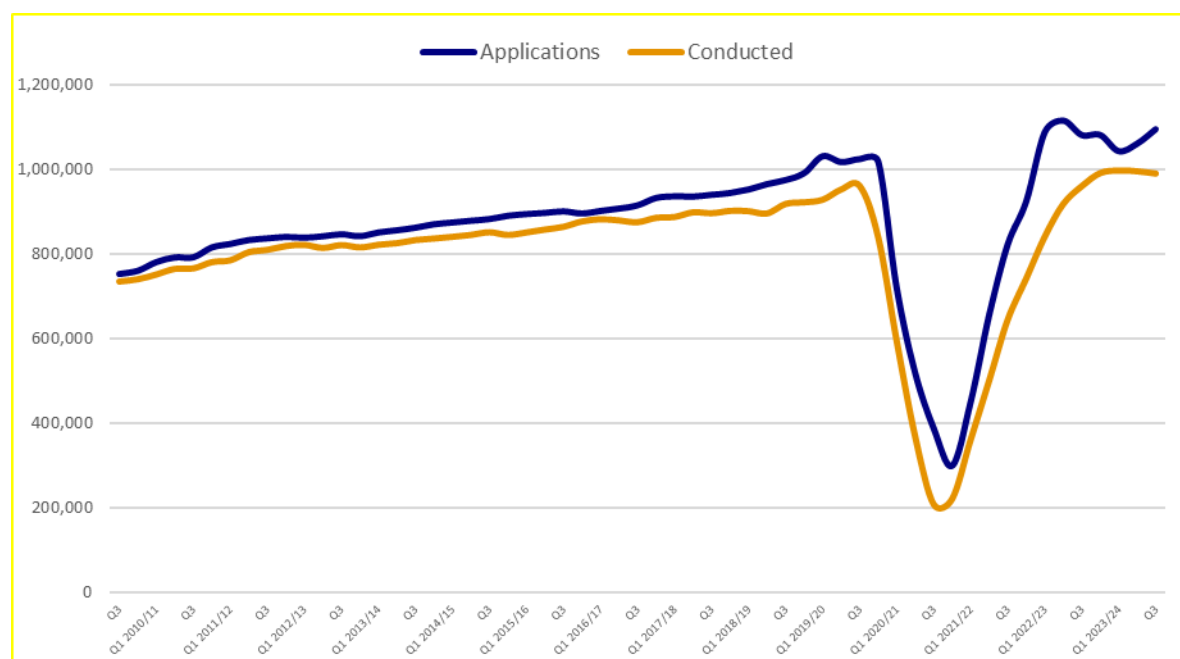
Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24 March 2020, and began issuing temporary exemption certificates (TECs) to all customers. The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1 June 2020, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20 July 2020. Priority vehicle 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 currently no restrictions on vehicle testing related to the pandemic. For the latest news and updates, please visit the Motoring page on the NIDirect website².

Vehicle Test Applications

From October to December 2023, DVA received 289,280 applications for a vehicle test, 8.9% (28,106) lower than the previous quarter (317,386), but 12.5% (32,100) higher than quarter 3 of 2022/23 (257,180) (Table 1.3).

The majority (85.7%; 247,979) of vehicle test applications were full tests (Table 1.1). The most common vehicle test category was private cars, accounting for 82.5% (204,556) of all full test applications (Table 1.1). 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)



Please note that figures for vehicle test applications include taximeter tests but those for vehicle tests conducted do not.

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

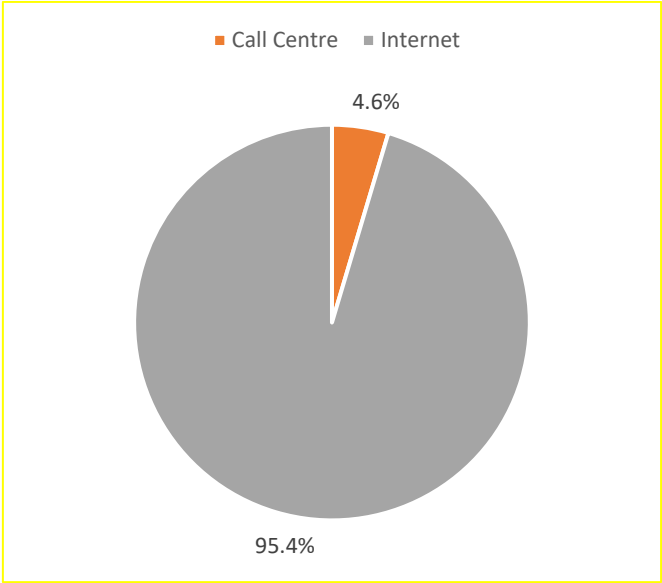
Booking Method

During quarter two 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 95.4% (275,948) of all vehicle test applications (Figure 1.2 and Table 1.4). The remaining 4.6% (13,332) of vehicle test applications were made via DVA call centres.

This is the ninth consecutive quarter in which online bookings have exceeded 90% of all vehicle test applications bookings (Table 1.4).

Figure 1.2: Vehicle Test Applications by Booking Method.



Vehicle Tests Conducted

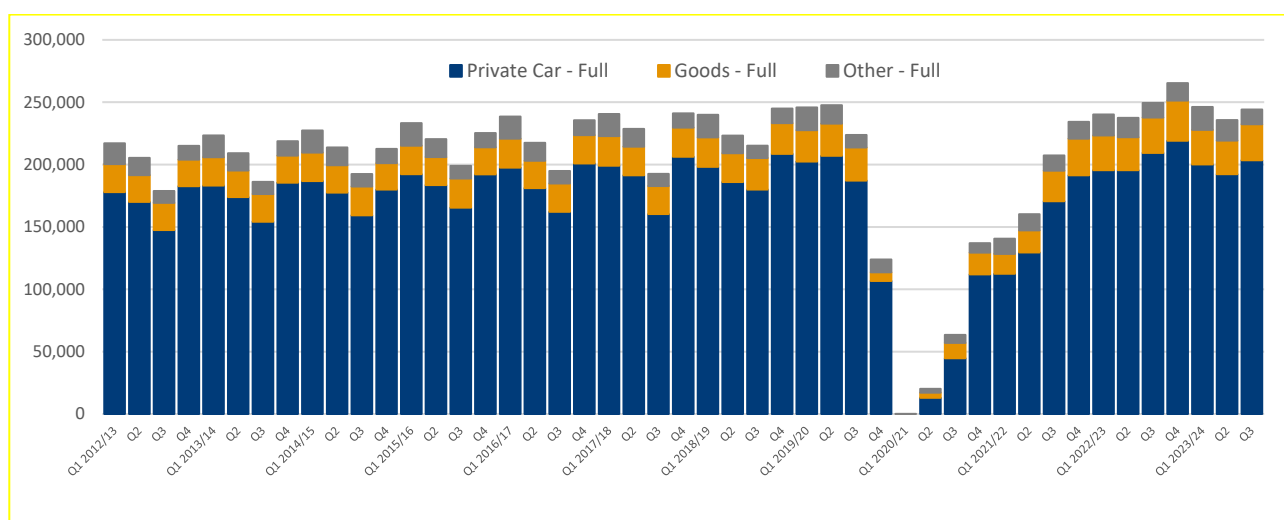
During quarter three, DVA delivered 283,792 vehicle tests (full and retest) (Table 1.7). This is 3.5% (9,649) higher than the previous quarter (274,143) and the second highest quarter three volume on record.

In the year to date, from April to December 2023, DVA delivered 846,034 vehicle tests. This is very similar to the number of vehicle tests conducted in the same period in 2022/23 (846,144).

Most vehicle tests conducted were full tests, accounting for 86.0% (244,117) of all vehicle tests completed this quarter (Table 1.5). The majority of full tests were for private cars, accounting for 83.3% (203,449).

For the year to date, DVA has delivered 595,864 private car full tests. This is 0.8% lower (4,575) than in the same period in 2022/23 (Table 1.5 and Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Full Vehicle Tests Conducted



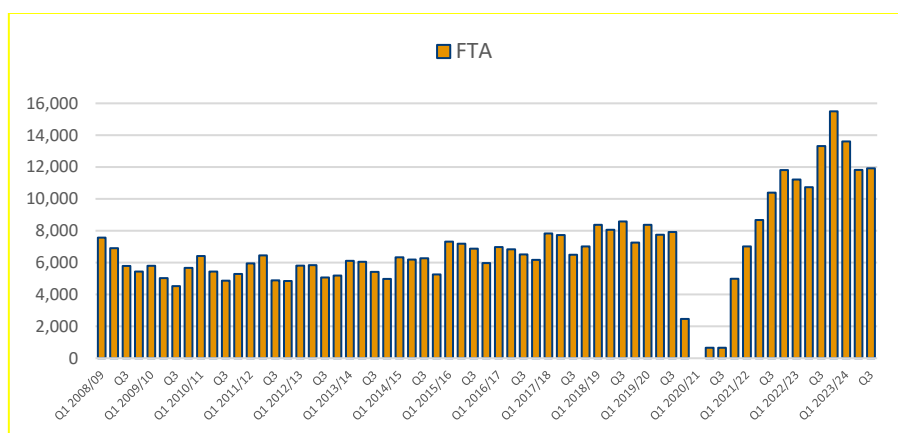
The steady increase in vehicle test applications seen in the trend series prior to the COVID-19 pandemic can, in the main, be explained by the increasing number of licensed cars in Northern Ireland, which has risen by 8.7% over the five years to 2020-21 (see Table 2.13). In addition, owners seem to be 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, 11,925 customers failed to attend a booked vehicle test (Table 1.10 and Figure 1.4). This equates to 4.2% of all conducted tests during this period (283,792).

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 the third quarter of 2023/24 the overall pass-rate for full vehicle tests was 82.6%, which is slightly lower than the previous quarter (82.8%; Table 1.11). This pass-rate is similar to quarterly pass-rates in 2019-20 (Table 1.11 and Figure 1.5).

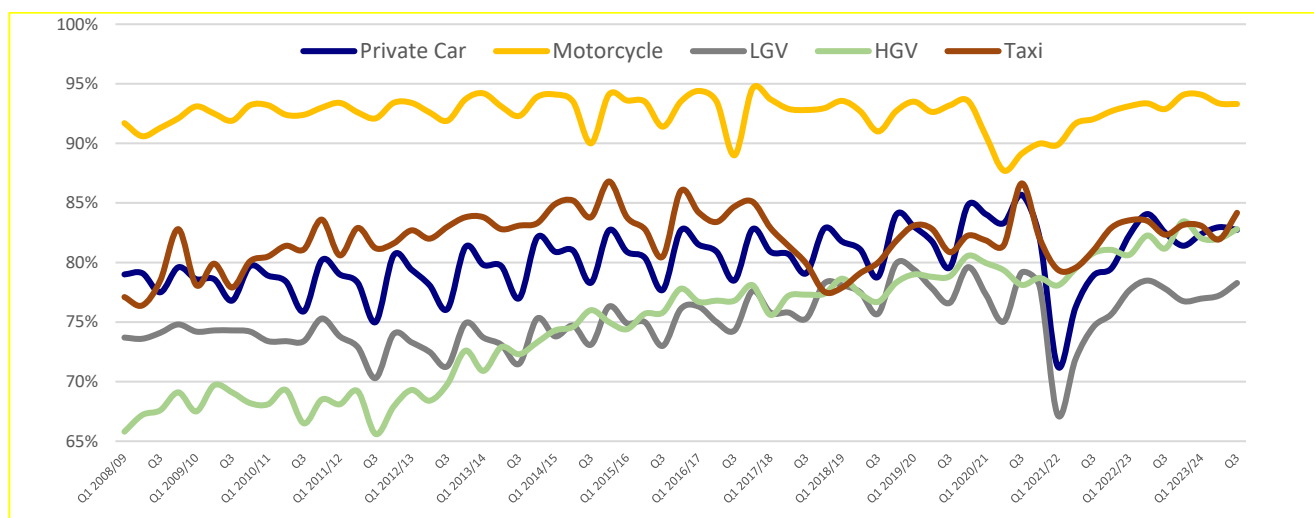
The pandemic era drop in pass-rates would suggest that vehicle owners did not maintain their vehicles during periods of test exemption, although vehicle test pass rates since 2022/23 seem to have trended slightly above pre-pandemic levels. This is also the case for private car full tests, with the current quarter three pass rate of 82.7% being 3 percentage points above the 79.6% for the same quarter in 2019/20.

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). The 2022-23 rate is close to the 82.1% achieved in 2019/20. Pass rates for full tests in 2022/23 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 94.8%, slightly higher than the quarter two pass-rate of 94.2% (Table 1.12). This is also comparable with historical quarterly re-test pass rates, which maintained very stable levels of approximately 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 three was Newtownards having conducted 33,778 full tests (Table 1.14). Of these, 30,630 were private car tests, a decrease of 2.6% (802) relative to the 31,432 private car full tests conducted in Newtownards in quarter two. Enniskillen and Omagh conducted fewest private car full tests this quarter, at 6,539 each. This compared to 7,617 and 5,908 in Enniskillen and Omagh, respectively, in the previous quarter (Table 1.14).

The overall full test pass rate for private cars fell slightly between quarters, from 83.0% in quarter two to 82.7% this quarter. Pass rates by test centre within this category ranged from 78.9% in Coleraine to 86.8% in Belfast (Balmoral) (Table 1.14). This is the fourteenth consecutive quarter that Belfast (Balmoral) has had the highest full test private car pass-rate. Differences in pass rates may arise due to several interacting 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

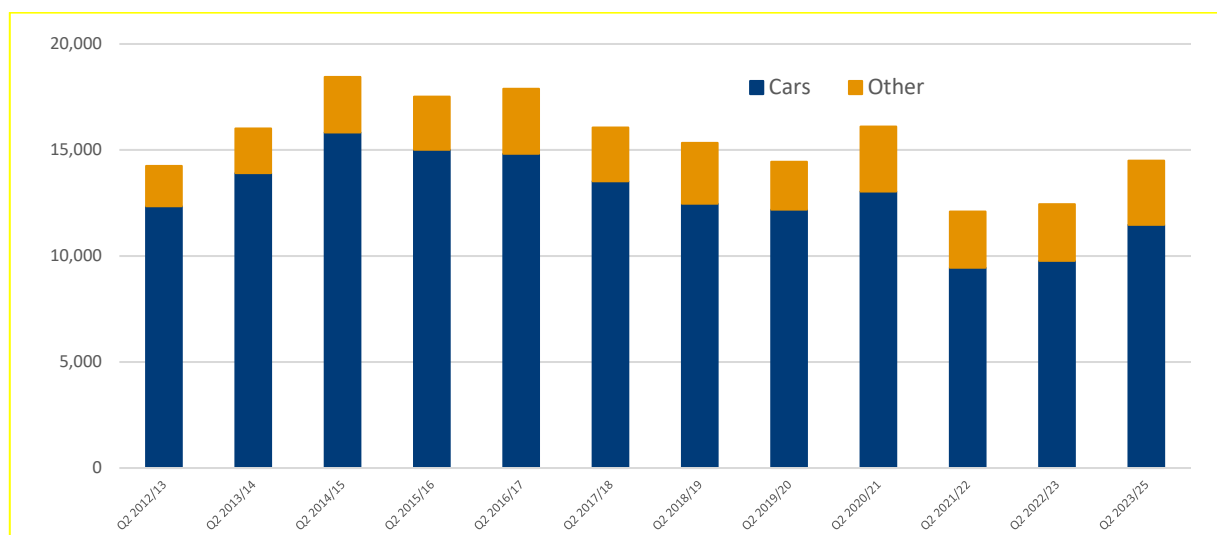
This section includes the latest available vehicle licensing data for Northern Ireland covering the period from July to September 2023.

During July to September the DVLA registered 14,494 new vehicles to Northern Ireland, 2.6% (391) lower than the previous quarter (14,885), but over 16% (2,050) higher than the 12,444 registered in the same quarter of 2022/23 (Table 2.1) (Figure 2.1). Please note that new vehicle registrations exclude vehicles previously registered with the DVLA whose ownership transferred to Northern Ireland during the latest quarter. Taking these vehicles into account, the total number of first-time registrations to Northern Ireland this quarter was 14,604 compared with 14,975 for the previous quarter.

Private cars accounted for 11,474 (79.2%) of all new vehicle registrations this quarter, which is slightly above the 78.4% (11,672) relative to the previous quarter (Table 2.1). The noticeable drop in new vehicle registrations in quarter one of 2020/21 is directly related to the pandemic and is not reflective of changes in customer buying behaviour prior to or post this period 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, excluding the pandemic dominated year 2020/21 (Table 2.1). There was a total of 41,189 new private car registrations in the financial year 2022/23, an increase of 7.1% (2725) from 2021/22 (Table 2.1)

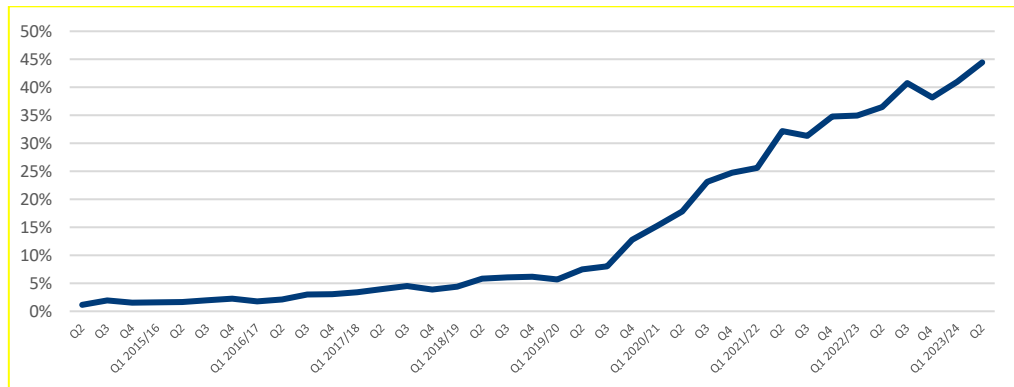
Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations



Top makes for private car first time registrations in quarter two 2023/24 were Ford at 10.6%, just above Volkswagen at 10.1%, followed by Toyota and Hyundai at 8.0% and 7.4% respectively (Table 2.3).

Grey was again the most popular choice of colour for new private cars this quarter, accounting for 25.2% (2,896) of all new car registrations (11,474); Blue (17.4%) and White (17.3%) 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 has increased substantially over the last number of years, rising from 5.8% in quarter two of 2018/19 to a new high of 44.4% in quarter two of 2023/24. Over the same period, the proportion of new diesel cars has declined from 36.5% to 7.8%. This is the twelfth quarter in a row that alternative-fuel cars have out-sold diesel cars, in this quarter 899 compared with 5,099 respectively.

Licensed Vehicles

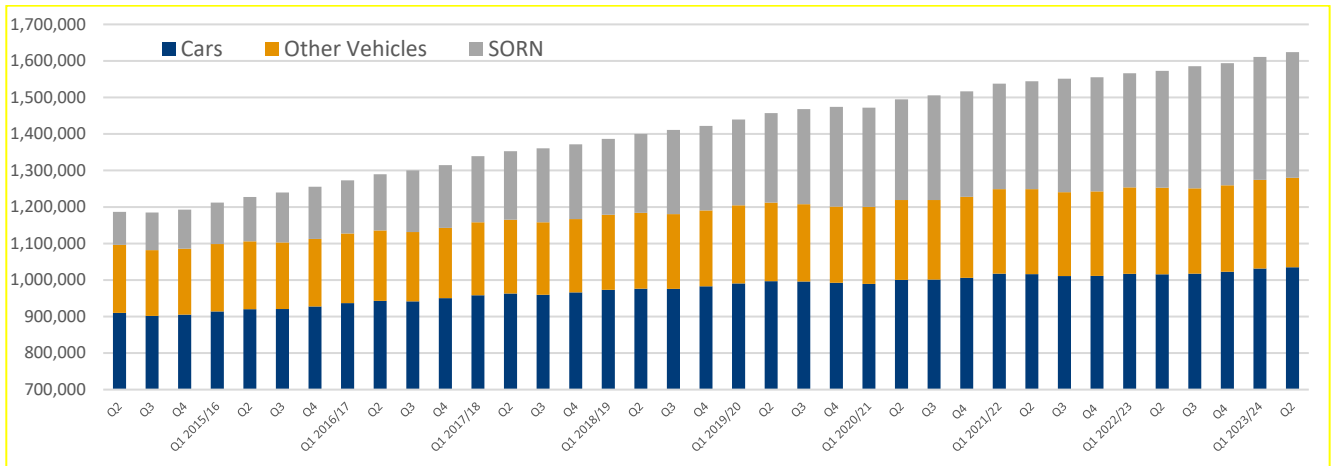
At the end of September 2023 there were 1,279,818 licensed vehicles in Northern Ireland, an increase of 4.2% (5,427) relative to the previous quarter (1,274,391), and the highest licensed stock volume on record (Table 2.13).

At the end of this quarter, just over 8 in every 10 (80.9%) licensed vehicles was a private car (1,034,999). Private car stock is the highest on record and has increased by 13.7% (124,727) since quarter two of 2014/15 (910,270) (Table 2.13).

Just over 344,140 vehicles had a SORN at the end of September 2023, a 2.2% (7,568) increase from the previous quarter (336,577). Sorned vehicles represent 21.2% of all vehicle stock in Northern Ireland (1,623,963) (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.

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.

Figure 2.3: Northern Ireland Vehicle Stock

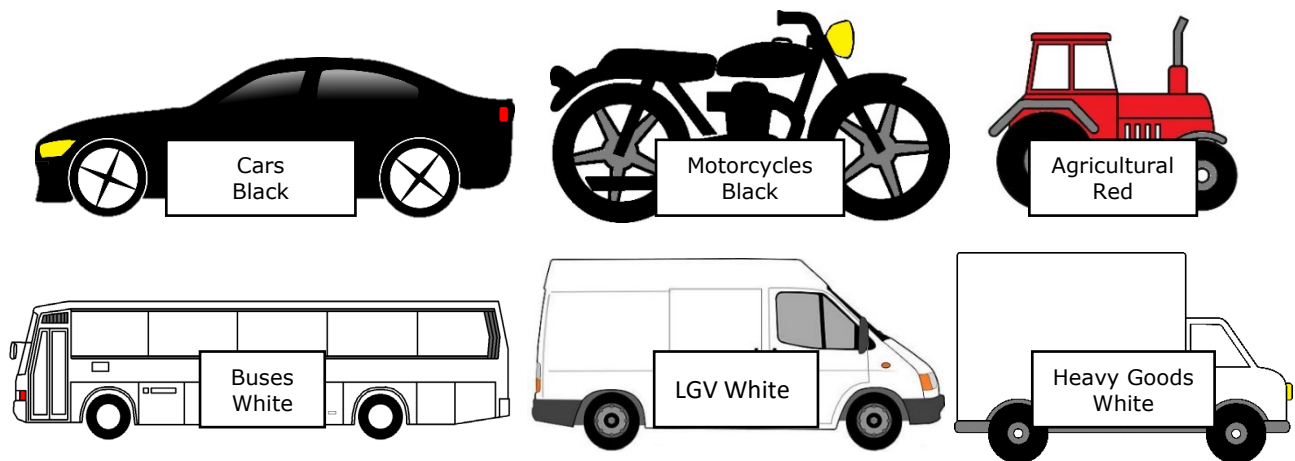


As of 30 September, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 9.80 years, a small increase on the 9.74 years at the end of the previous quarter.

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

- Cars – 9.3 years
- Motorcycles – 14.6 years
- Light Goods – 9.0 years
- Heavy Goods – 10.3 years
- Buses – 10.5 years
- Agricultural – 21.6 years
- Other – 11.1 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

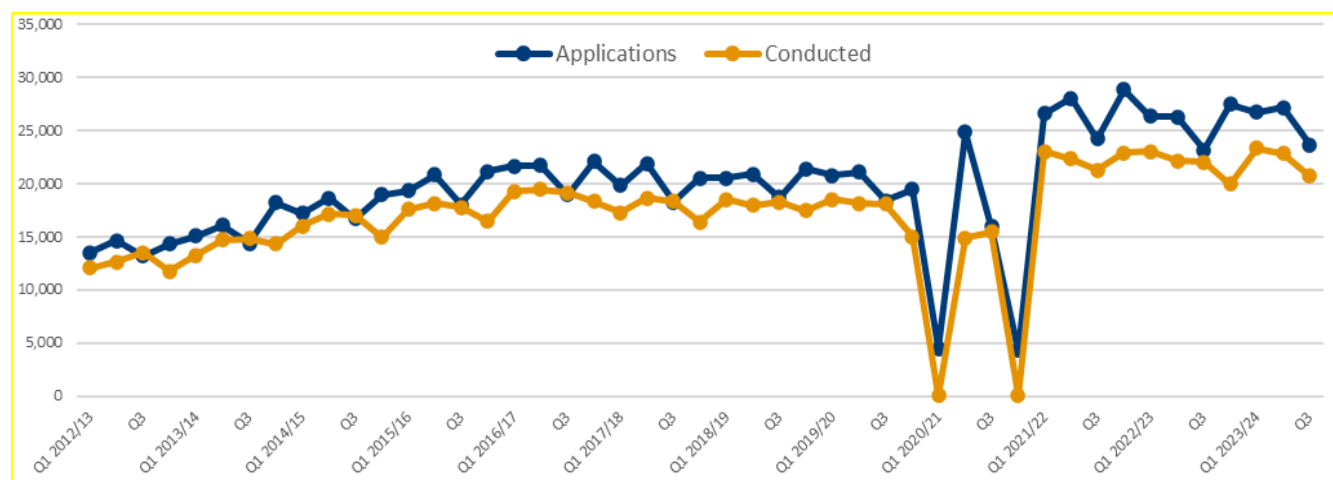
From October to December 2023, the DVA delivered 20,695 theory tests (Table 3.2; Figure 3.1). This figure is 9.5% (2,168) lower than the number of theory tests delivered in quarter two of 2023/24 (22,863; Table 3.2)

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 23,628 theory test applications in quarter three, 13.1% (3,558) lower than the previous quarter (27,186) (Table 3.1).

Private cars accounted for over eight in every ten theory test applications (85.0%, 20,095) and theory tests conducted (86.1%, 17,813) in quarter three of 2023/24 (Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

Figure 3.1: Theory Test Applications and Conducted

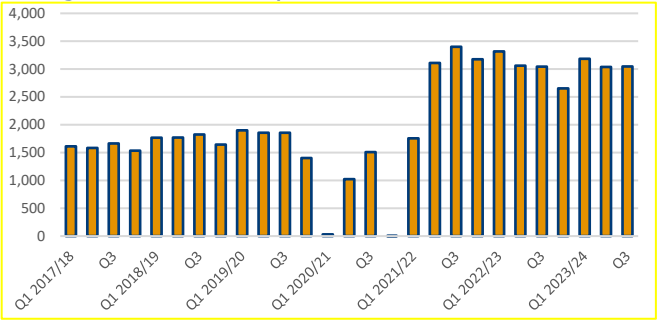


⁴ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/driving-theory-test>

Failed To Attend

During this quarter, 3,047 customers failed to attend (FTA) a booked theory test (Table 3.3 and Figure 3.2). This represents 14.7% of all theory tests conducted during this quarter (20,695).

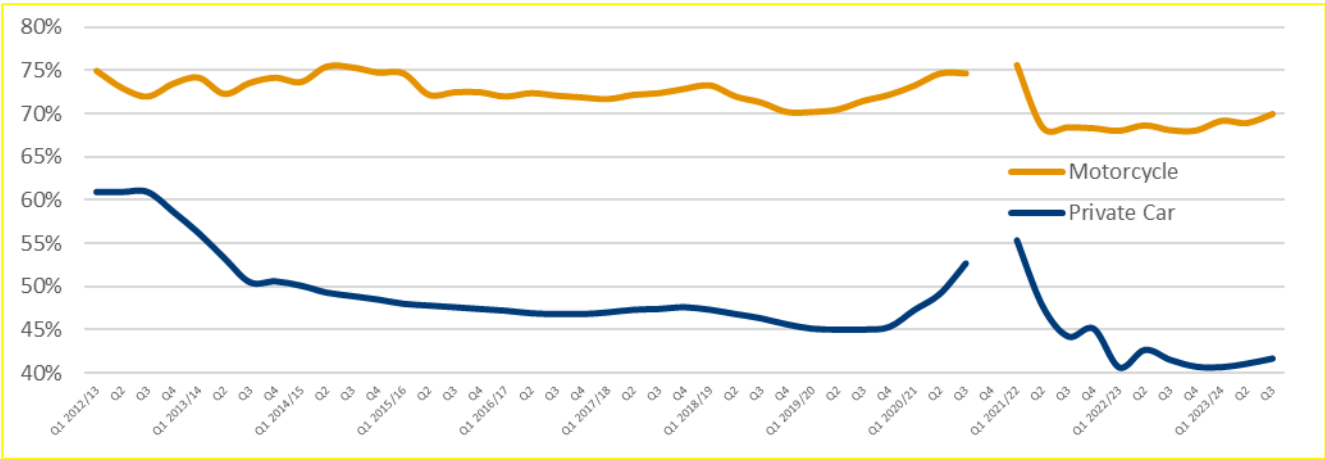
Figure 3.2: Theory Tests - Failed To Attend



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.

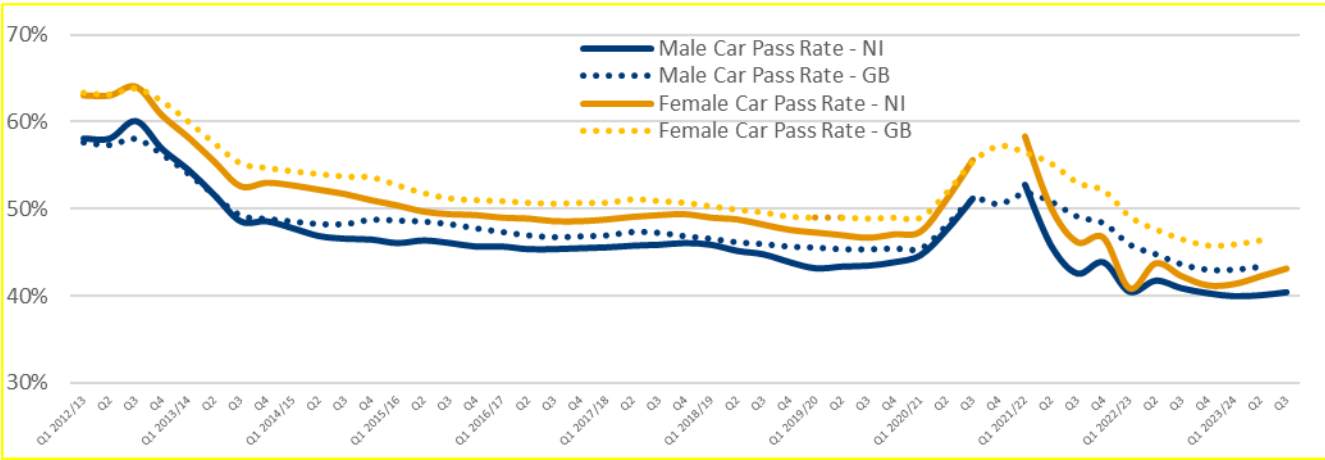
Figure 3.3: Theory Test Pass-Rates (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



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 three rolling four-quarter average figures suggest that the pass-rate trend for males and females is similar to the previous quarter, with figures of 40.4% and 43.2% for quarter two compared to 40.0% 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 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 website⁵.

Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

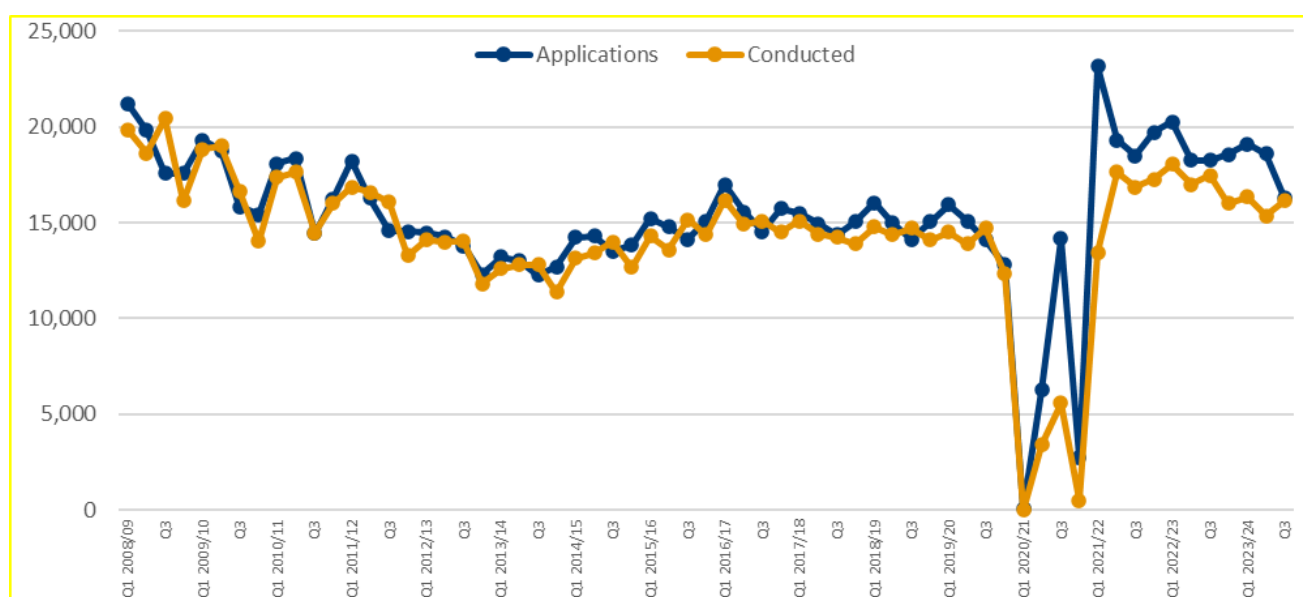
Please note that DVA services were impacted by industrial strike action on 22 September 2023, so testing volumes for September are lower than would have been the case had this been a routine working day.

The DVA conducted 16,147 driving tests in quarter three, which is 5.0% (776) more than in quarter two (15,371; Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1). The DVA has conducted 47,865 tests this financial year to date (Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1). Over 8 in every 10 driving tests conducted this quarter were private cars (83.2%; 13,438) (Table 4.3).

From October to December 2023, the DVA received 16,304 applications for a driving test, 12.3% (2,296) lower than for quarter two (18,600) and 10.7% (1,953) lower than the same quarter of 2023/23 (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, though recent trend suggests that driver tests conducted may be returning to pre-pandemic levels of testing.

Figure 4.1: Driving Test Applications and Conducted



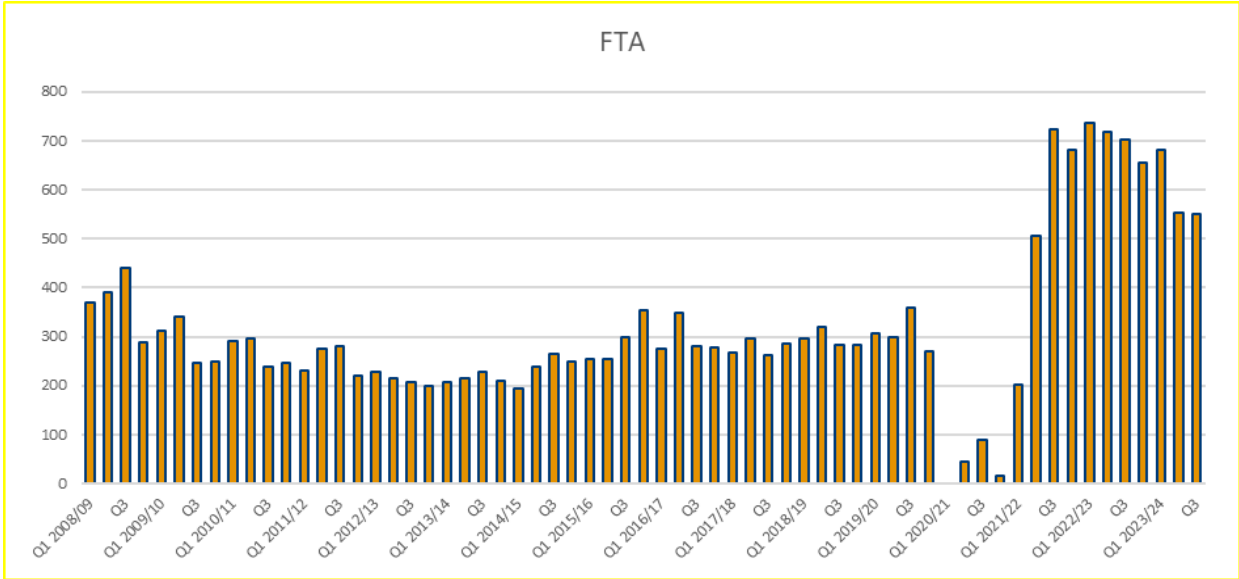
⁵ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/book-your-practical-driving-test-online>

Failed to Attend

In quarter three, there were 551 driving test appointments for which customers failed to attend (FTA) a paid for practical driving test, just one lower than the 552 of quarter two. There have been 1,785 FTA tests this financial year to date, equating to 3.7% of all driving tests conducted from April to December 2023 (Table 4.3 and Table 4.4).

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

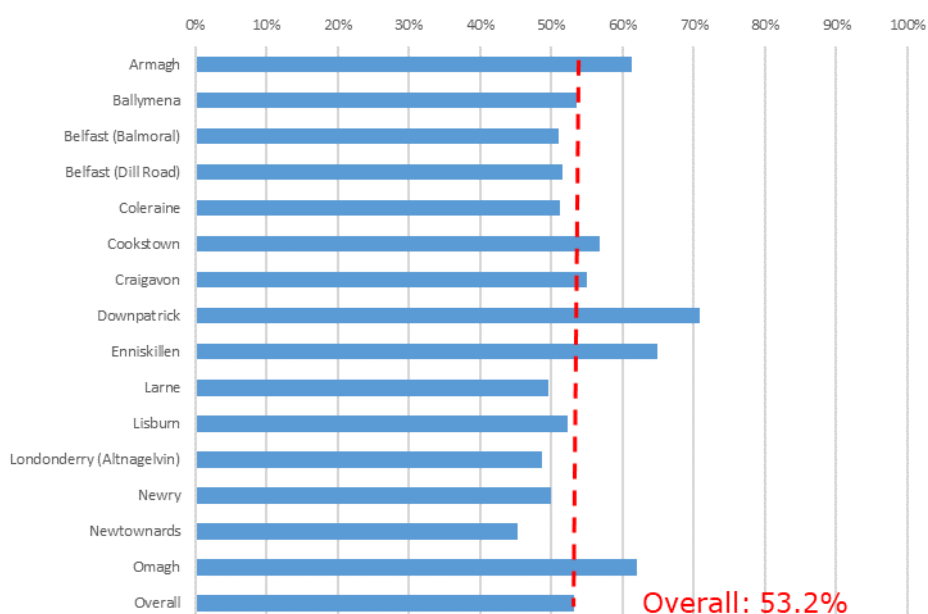
Figure 4.2: Driving Tests – Failed to Attend



Driving Tests by Test Centre

The number of private car driving tests delivered in quarter two ranged from 464 at Enniskillen to 1,592 at Newtownards (Table 4.6). Across all driving test centres and using a rolling four-quarter average, the pass-rates for private car driving tests ranged from 45.3% in Newtownards to 70.8% in Downpatrick (Table 4.7b). At least part of the difference in driving test outcomes between test centres will be due to differential driving ability and the learning 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, Q2 (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



Driving Test Pass-Rates

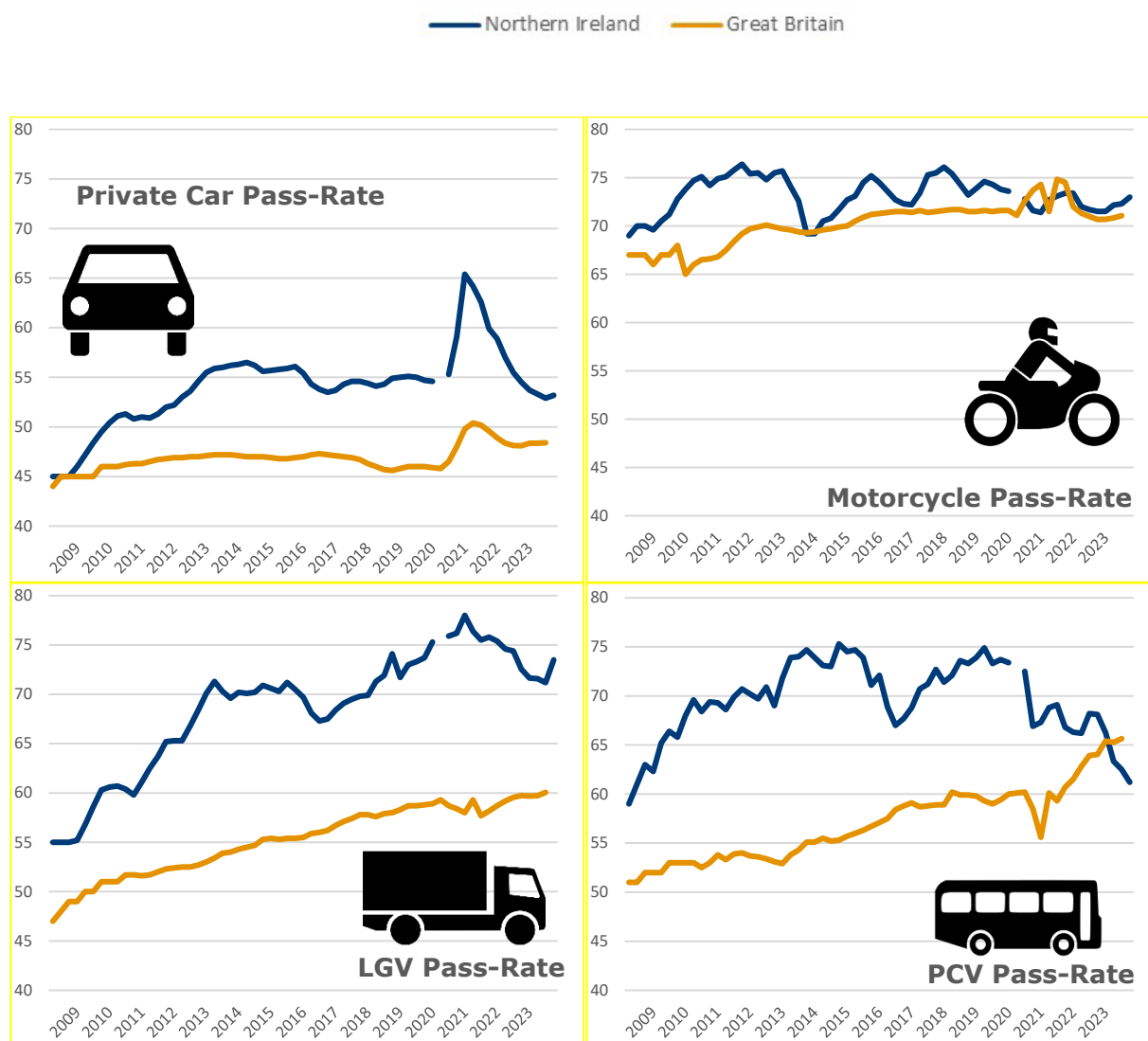
For October to December 2023, the private car driving test pass-rate was 53.6%, slightly above that for the previous quarter (53.0%) and closer to the quarter one rate (53.4%) (Table 4.5).

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 66.1% in quarter three of 2020-21, pass rates for this category have been trending downwards 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 53.2% for quarter three of 2023/24, slightly higher than the 52.9% of the previous quarter (Table 4.10). The pass 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 for private cars and LGV are generally higher in Northern Ireland compared with the equivalent rates in Great Britain where we have comparable data, and overall rates are broadly similar for motorcycle tests (Table 4.10 & Figure 4.4). Pass rates for PCV are slightly lower for NI than GB for quarters one and two, reflecting the downward trend in PCV pass rates seen in NI in recent years. 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 and into the first three quarters of 2023/24. During quarter three of 2023/24, the rolling four-quarter average private car test pass-rate for males was just 1.1 percentage points higher than that for females, at 53.7% and 52.6% respectively, a decrease from the 1.3 percentage point difference of quarter two (Table 4.10 and Figure 4.5).

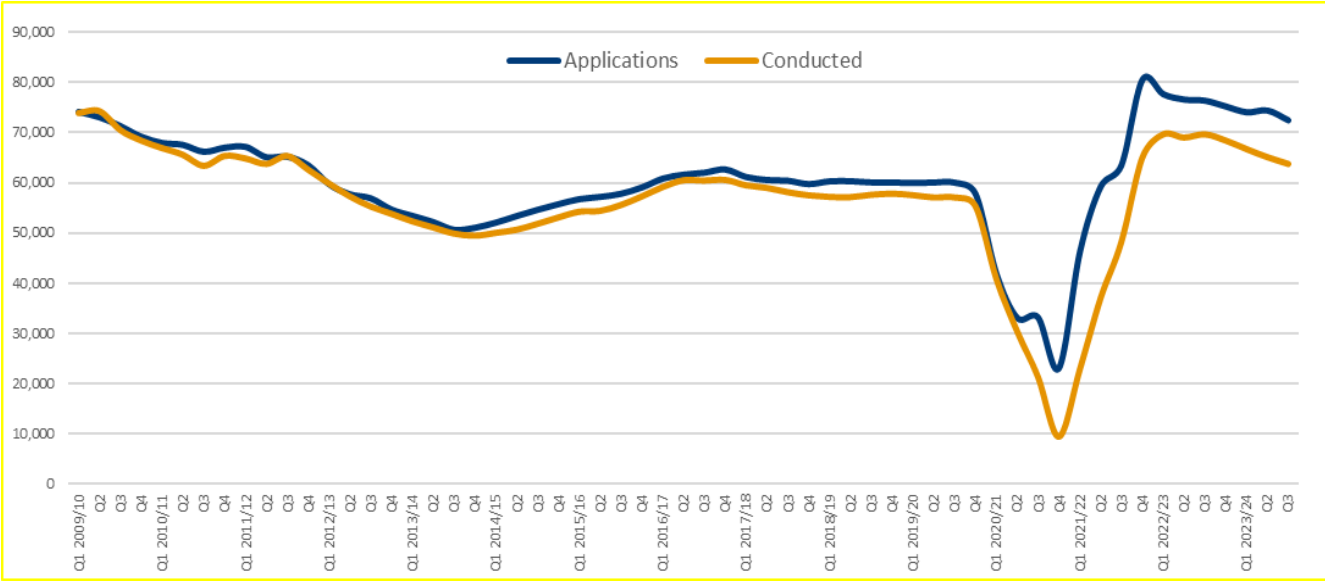
This gender gap is also now substantially narrower than the 6.2 percentage-point gap present in the Great Britain (GB) statistics pre-pandemic. The gap in GB between males and females has also reduced from over 5 percentage points in quarter one of 2021/22 to 3.2 percentage points in quarter two of 2023/24 (Table 4.10). GB data is not available to allow comparison over four quarters to the end of quarter three 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, based on the same four-quarter rolling average, pass-rates for private car

testing for females were higher than those for males in seven testing centres, with the highest percentage point differences in Newry (52.1% against 48.2%), Omagh (63.6% against 60.7%) and Cookstown (57.6% against 56.2%) (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 rolling four-quarter average pass rates for females and males 71.2% and 71.1% respectively for quarter two 2023/24 (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 two report the rolling four-quarter average pass rates for females at 66.0% compared with 59.4% for males, a difference of 6.6 percentage points (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.

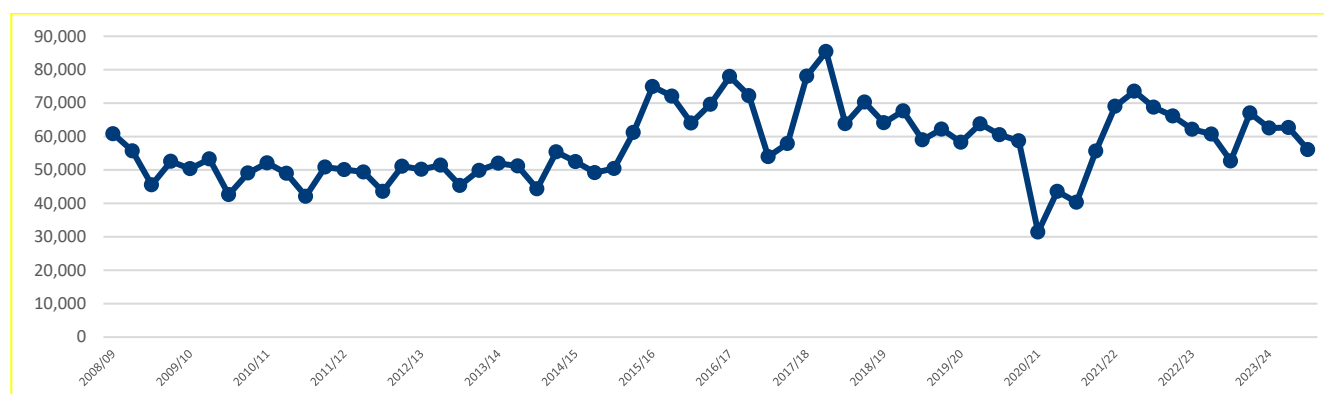
On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and temporarily closed the driver licensing office. From the end of April that year they began processing applications from Group 2 (lorry/bus) applicants and those from front line workers. Only applications received 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, 0.5%) that in 2019/20 (241,315), but lower than the 277,510 for 2021/22 (Figure 5.1).

In the third quarter of 2023/24 DVA completed 56,088 ordinary driver licensing transactions, which is just over 10% (6,622) lower than the previous quarter (62,710) but 6.5% (3,404) above the total for the same quarter in the previous year in 2022/23 (Table 5.1).

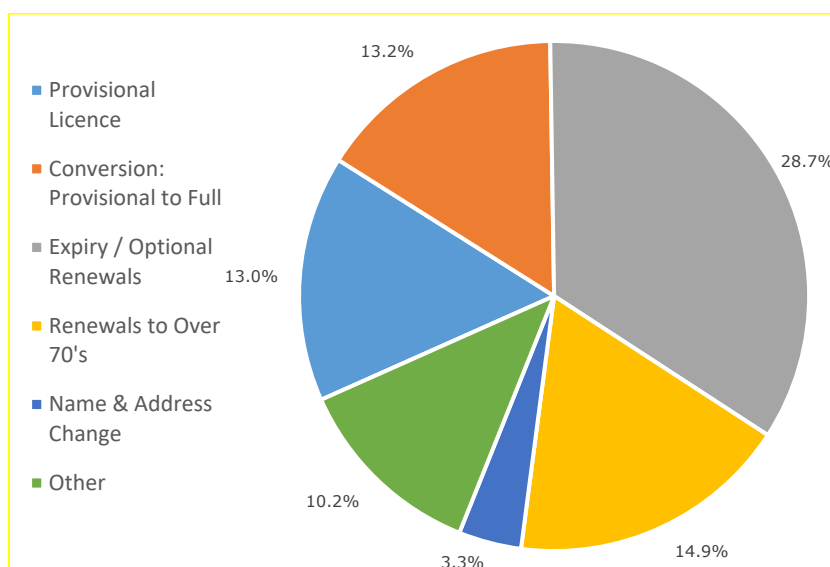
Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of Ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter three was 7,305, 16.2% (1,017) higher than that for the same quarter the previous year (6,288) (Table 5.1).

This quarter, Expiry/Optional Renewals accounted for 28.7% (16,097) of all ordinary licensing transactions followed by Renewals to over 70's at 14.9% (8,363) of all Ordinary Licences transactions (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Ordinary Driver License Transactions by Type, Quarter Three 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 third quarter of 2023/24, 5,741 vocational driver licensing transactions were completed, which is over 36% (1,535) above that in the same quarter the previous year in 2022/23 (4,206) (Table 5.2).

Driver Licence Stock

At the end of December 2023, there were 1,167,259 full and eligible driver licence holders (excluding provisional licence holders) with private car/light van entitlement in Northern Ireland, 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 slightly relative to the previous quarter (110,358) to 110,385 at the end of December 2023. This is the fourth 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 21.3% (245,490) of all licence holders with this entitlement (1,152,534) (Table 5.4).

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

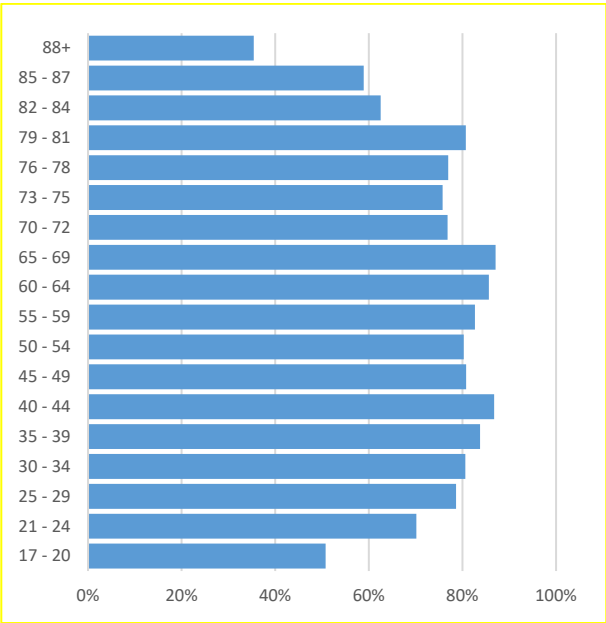


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

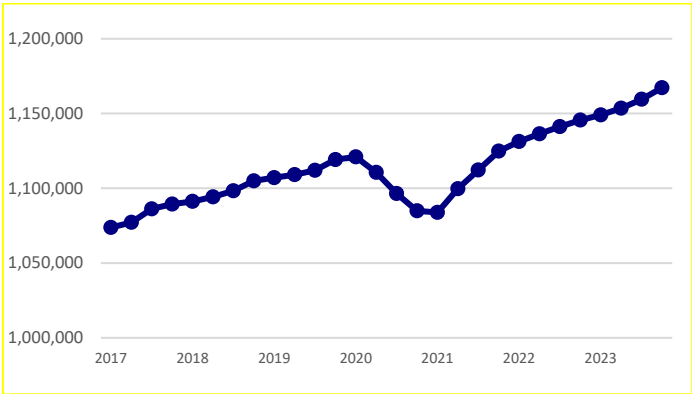
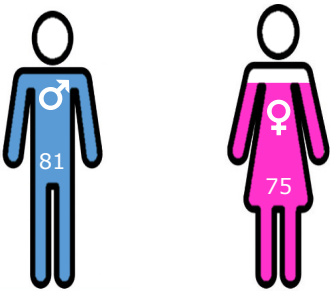


Figure 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Gender



At the end of December 2023, an estimated 75.8% 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 estimates⁶ (Table 5.8). For males and females, the equivalent percentages were 80.9% and 75.2% 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 withdrawing licences in respect of taxi drivers and bus operators. The Transport Regulation Unit within DfI is responsible for goods vehicle licensing in Northern Ireland, and not the DVA.

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 website⁷.

Please note that due to changes in the DVA Transport Licensing System, licenses issued for this quarter and going forward are counted with respect to when relevant licences are created. This change was made for operational reasons to improve customer services and the collation of these statistical series. There has been no significant impact or need to alter historical figures arising from these changes.

Taxi Licensing

Taxi Vehicles

During financial year 2022/23 DVA issued 7,281 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 (Table 6.1). At the end of December 2023, licensed taxi vehicle stock stood at 7,106, the highest on record since quarter 4 of 2021/22 (6,733) (Table 6.2 and 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 8.6% (144) annually, and the lowest on record since 2009/10.

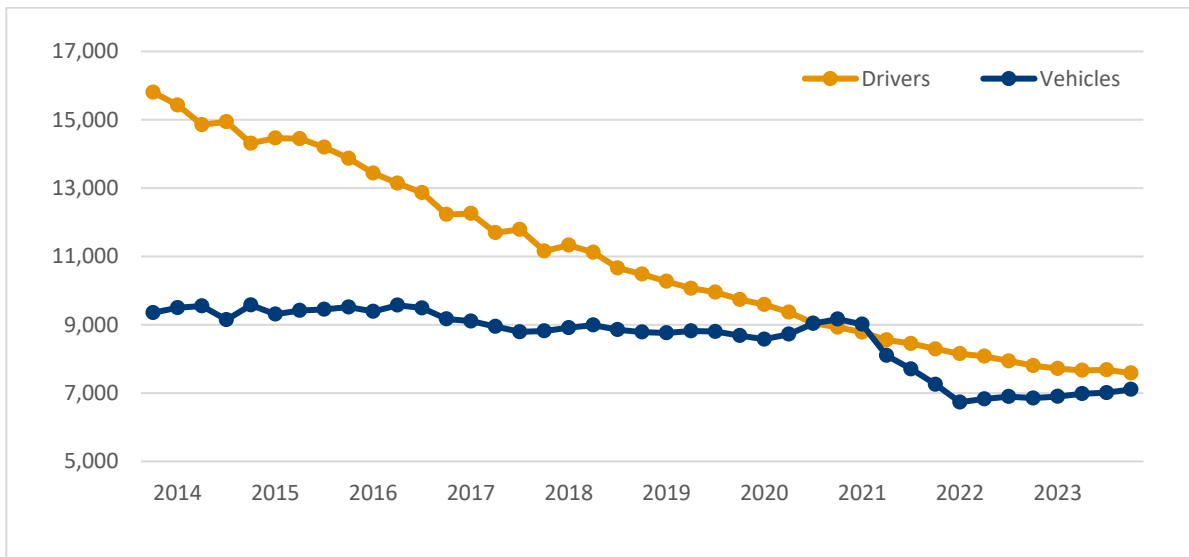
In the third quarter of 2023/24 DVA issued 461 taxi driver licences, compared to 456 in quarter two and 409 in the same quarter of 2022/23 (Table 6.1). At the end of this quarter, there were 7,585 licensed taxi drivers, relative to 7,679 for quarter two (Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1).

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 December 2023 there were 1,123 taxi operators, 15 fewer than the previous quarter (1,137) and 120 lower than the same quarter in 2022/23 (1,243) (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 Public Service Vehicle licences, a small increase of 2.4% (81) relative to 2021/22 (3,391) (Table 6.1).

In the third quarter of 2023/24, DVA issued 803 bus licences, almost 50 higher than the 754 issued in the previous quarter, and slightly higher than the same quarter in 2022/23 (796) (Table 6.1). The number of licensed bus vehicles at the end of this quarter was 3,348, which is 17 lower than the previous quarter (3,365) but 10 higher relative to the same quarter in 2022/23 (3,338) (Table 6.3).

Bus Operators

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

At the end of September 2023 there were 191 licensed bus operators, the same as in the previous quarter, and for the same period in 2022/23 (Table 6.3).

Goods Licensing

There were 5,338 licensed goods operators at the end of this quarter, 51 fewer than in quarter two and 4.4% (248) less than the same quarter in 2022/23 (5,586). Associated with these 5,338 operators were 22,118 goods vehicles, 15 vehicles less than that for quarter two (22,133) and 1.5% (348) lower relative to the same quarter in 2022/23 (22,466) (Table 6.4).

There were 1,856 standard international operators at the end of this quarter, down by five since the end of the last quarter, and the seventh consecutive drop in the numbers of operators since quarter four of 2021/22 (1,953), a fall of 5.0% (97) during this period (Table 6.4).

There were 3,164 operators with restricted licenses at the end of this quarter, 40 less than at the end of September 2023 (3,204) (Table 6.4).

7 **Enforcement & Compliance**

Enforcement falls within the Compliance and Enforcement directorate, which is 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 third quarter of 2023/24, DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities, having checked 519 vehicles, issued 145 fixed penalty notices to the amount of £22,350 in fines, carried out 10 joint operations with PSNI, 2 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, and 28 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 519 checks this quarter, down by over 200 compared to the previous quarter (721) (Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Vehicle Checks

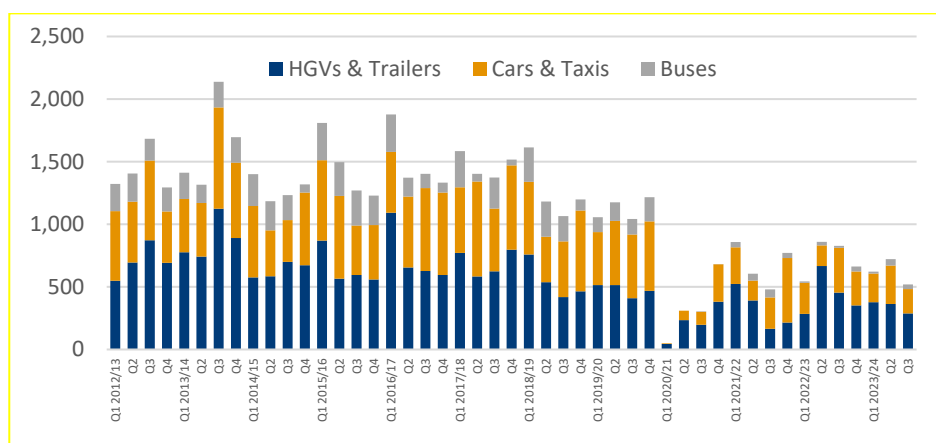
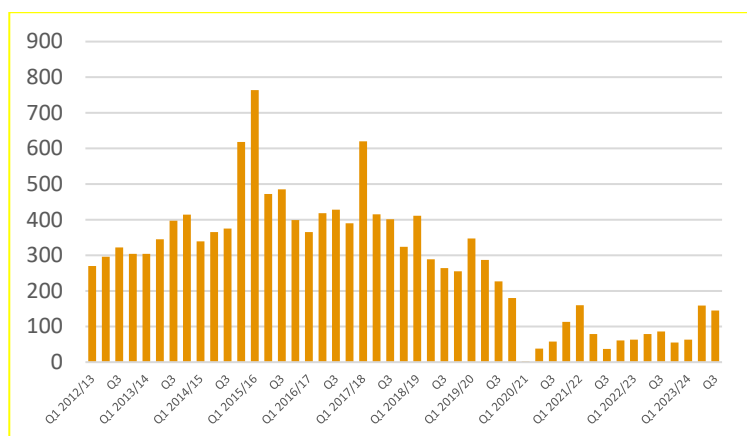


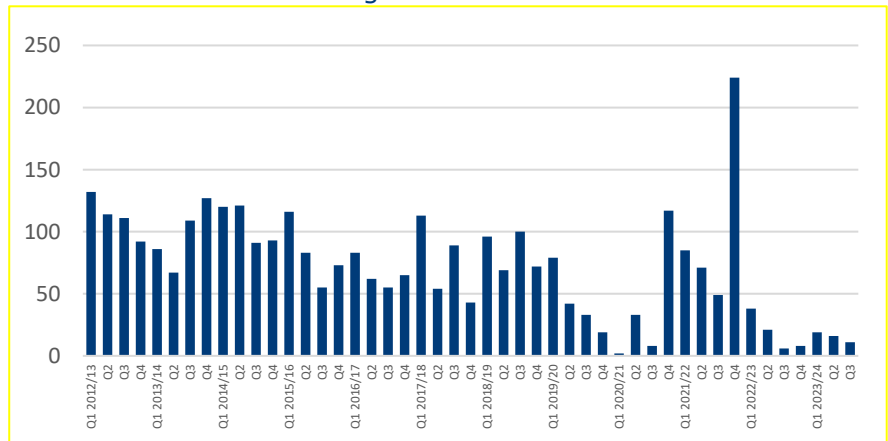
Figure 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued



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 third quarter of 2023/24, DVA issued 145 fixed penalty notices amounting to £22,350 in fines, relative to 159 and £22,090 respectively for the previous quarter (Figure 7.2 and Table 7.2).

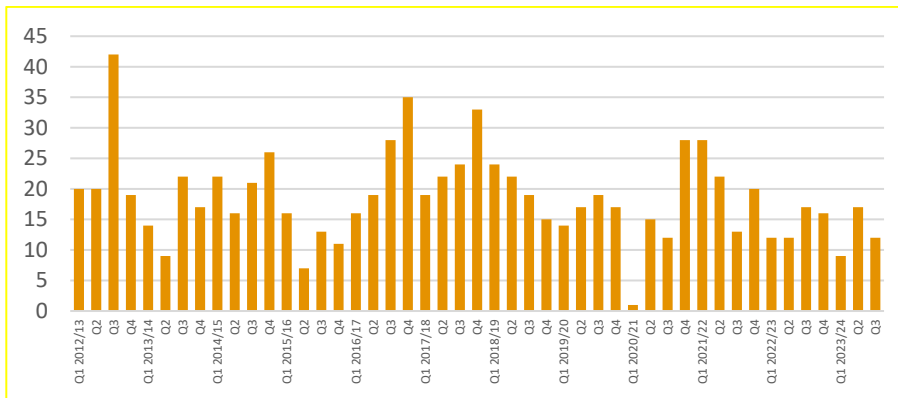
Figure 7.3: Convictions



There were 73 successful convictions in 2022/23, compared with 429 in the previous year, 2021/22.

This quarter of 2023/24 saw 11 convictions in respect of 102 offences (Table 7.2 and Figure 7.3).

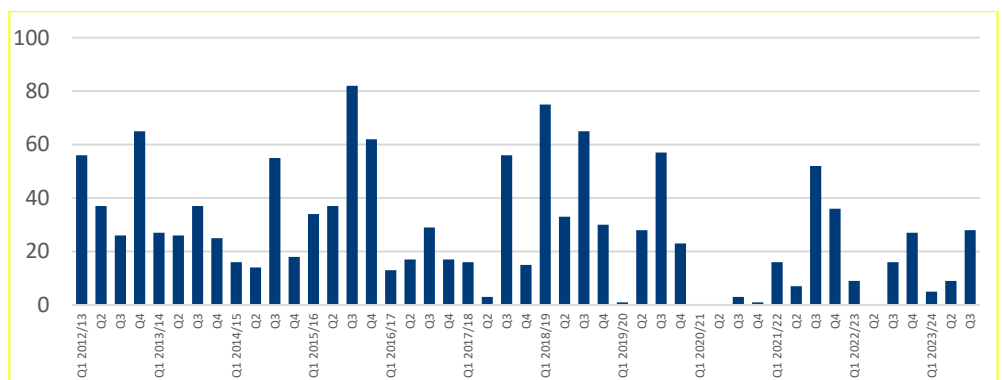
Figure 7.4: Joint and Cross-Border Operations



During 2022/23 there were 36 joint operations with PSNI compared with 62 in 2021/22.

During this quarter, DVA conducted 10 joint operations with the PSNI, and 2 cross border operations with the Road Safety Authority, 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 28 spot checks on School Buses this quarter, and 42 in this financial year to date (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 or reported, 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 third quarter of 2023/24 at 97.3% was 7.3 percentage points above the 90% target level, which is the eight consecutive quarter that paper applications processing has been above target (Table 8.1).

At the end of this quarter, driver licensing online applications processing performance at 99.6% was 4.6 percentage points above the 95% target level (Table 8.1).

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

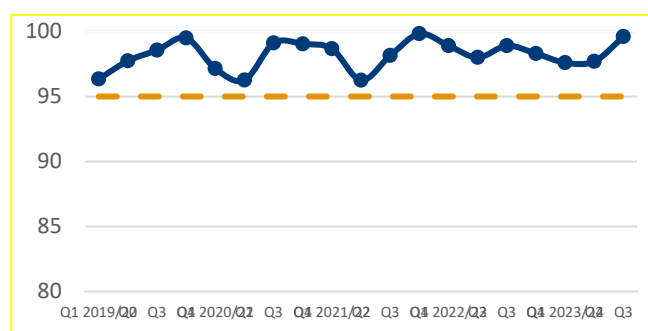
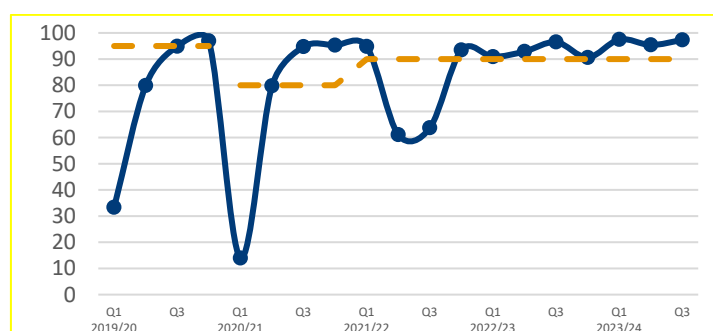


Figure 8.2: Paper Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance



(Note the indicators in this section do not have National Statistics accreditation but continues to have Official Statistics status).

Notes

National Statistics

On the 24 March 2015, the UK Statistics Authority accredited this series as National Statistics. National Statistics are accredited official statistics. These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in March 2015. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics'. The OSR website contains further details at: [Accredited official statistics – Office for Statistics Regulation \(statisticsauthority.gov.uk\)](http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk). 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..> DVA statisticians produce them free from any political interference and undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR).

OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards, at: DVA.Statistics@nisra.gov.uk.

Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

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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