

DfI Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics

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Key Findings

- In 2023/24 DVA delivered over 1.138 million vehicle tests, the second highest in our series back to 2008/09.
- Just over 49,100 vehicles failed to attend a booked vehicle test in 2023/24, the second highest on record, and equating to approximately 869 missed vehicle tests per working week.
- Full vehicle tests conducted this year at over 978,480 is the second highest test volume recorded for a single year.
- Private cars accounted for 82.1% (803,831) of all full vehicle tests delivered in 2023/24.
- For all vehicle test applications made this year, 95 in every 100 (95%) were booked using the online booking system, the remaining 5% via the DVA call centre.
- The DVA delivered just over 62,870 driver tests in 2023/24, 82.0% (51,562) of which were for private cars.
- In total 2,340 candidates failed to attend for a booked driving test in 2023/24, the second highest on record and just over 3.7% of all tests conducted this year.
- This year DVA delivered just over 89,350 theory tests, the second highest annual volume on record back to 2009/10.
- Over 12,270 customers failed to attend a booked theory test in 2023/24, the highest on record and 13.7% of all theory tests conducted this year (89,355).
- Online driver licensing application performance in 2023/24 at 98.7% was above the 95% target level for this year, and for each quarter within the year.
- Paper driver licensing applications performance at 96.5% was above the 90% yearly target level, and above 90% for each quarter within the year.
- At the end of March 2024, there were 1,170,481 full and eligible licence holders with private car/light vans entitlement, the highest on record.
- DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities this year having checked 2,761 vehicles, issued 579 fixed penalties notices totalling £81,230 in fines, completed 39 joint operations with the PSNI and 17 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, with 50 spot checks on school buses. In addition, they completed 66,470 tachograph checks, 53,022 at the roadside and 13,448 in premises.

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Introduction

This is the thirty-eighth 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 2023/24. This covers the period from 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2024.

Please note that DVA services were impacted by industrial strike action on 22 September 2023 and 18 January 2024, and so testing volumes for these months are lower than would have been the case had these been routine working days.

This release presents statistical information for the volumes of activities under the following business areas:

- Vehicle testing;
- Vehicle licensing and registration;
- Driver theory testing;
- Driver practical testing;
- Driver licensing;
- Road transport licensing (i.e. buses, heavy goods vehicles and taxis);
- Enforcement and compliance;
- DVA target monitoring, and
- Driving and Motorcycle Instructors

DVA systems provide the majority of data, although we also source some from within the wider Department for Infrastructure and from DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency). In addition, while the DVA is no longer responsible for vehicle registration and licensing with the transfer of those functions to DVLA in Swansea in July 2014, statistics relating to this area are presented in section two.

For further information and guidance on this publication, please see the User Guidance document, available on our website¹.

Background

The *Driver and Vehicle Agency* (DVA) is an executive agency within the *Department for Infrastructure* (DfI). The DVA was formed on 1 April 2007 as part of the Review of Public Administration, through a merger of two existing Agencies, namely the *Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency* (DVTA) and *Driver and Vehicle Licensing Northern Ireland* (DVLNI).

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

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

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the DVA suspended all vehicle testing from 24 March 2020, and began issuing temporary exemption certificates (TECs) to all customers. The DVA resumed IVA testing on 1 June 2020, whilst the testing of priority vehicle groups commenced on 20 July 2020. Priority vehicle groups include taxis and buses due a first-time test, vehicles not previously registered in Northern Ireland, vehicles with an MOT expired by more than 12 months (that includes vehicles previously declared SORN), and those sold by car dealerships. Testing of further vehicle categories began on 1 September 2020, including four-year-old private cars and motorcycles, three-year-old light goods vehicles, all heavy goods vehicles, and trailers. The restrictions during 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.

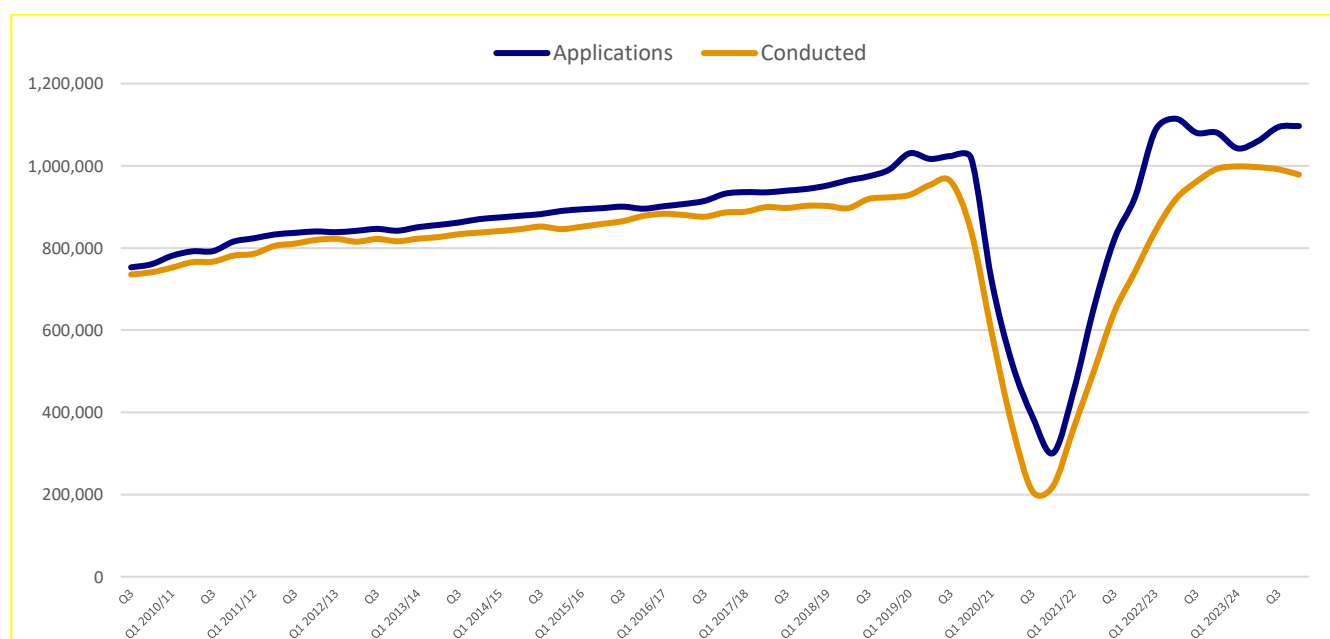
Vehicle Test Applications

From January to March 2024, the DVA received 338,613 applications for a vehicle test (full and retest), 17.1% (49,333) higher than the previous quarter (289,280) but 0.6% (2,013) lower than the same quarter the previous year (340,626) (Table 1.3).

For financial year 2023/24, 1.26 million vehicle test applications were made to DVA, relative to 1.25 million in the previous year, an increase of 1.0% (12,780) for this period (Table 1.3).

In 2023/24 most vehicle test applications were for full tests, which accounted for 86.8% (1.097 million) of all vehicle test applications, the remaining 13.2% (167,080) being for vehicle retest applications (Table 1.1). Figure 1.1 below 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)



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

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

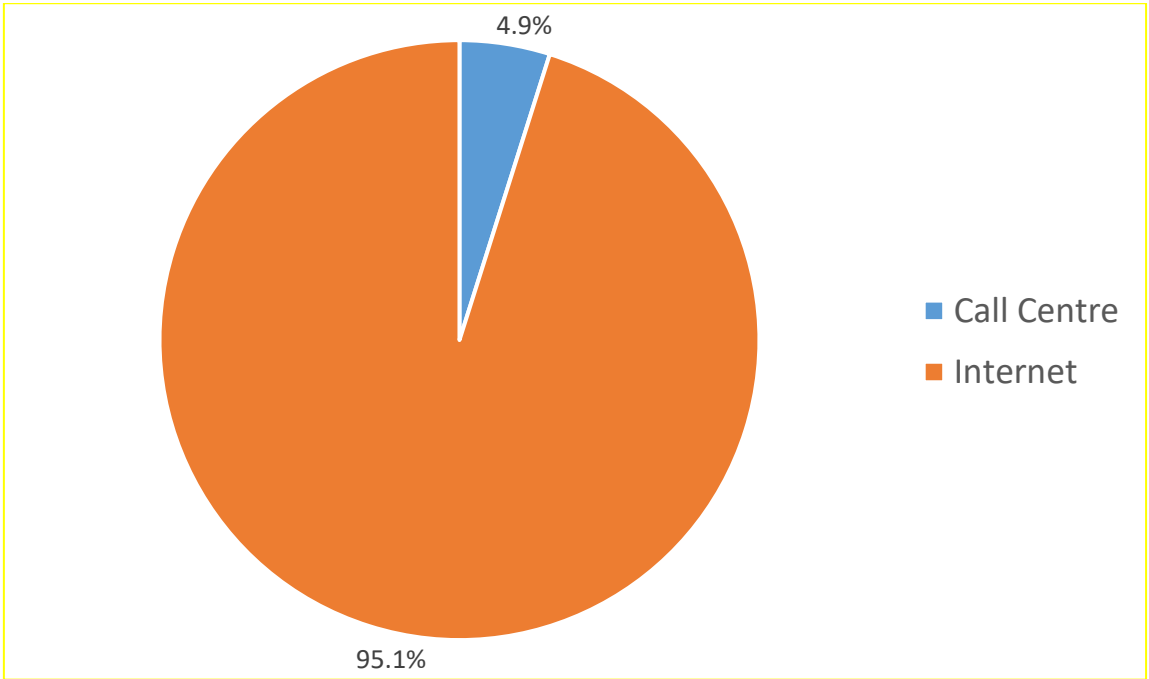
Booking Method

In 2023/24 of the 1.26 million vehicle test applications, 95.0% (1.20 million) were made using the DVA online booking system, compared with 93.0% in the previous year, and 76.3% in 2018/19.

In the last quarter of 2023/24, online vehicle test bookings accounted for 95.1% (322,117) of all test applications during this period (338,613), the remaining 4.9% (16,496) of bookings being made using the DVA call centres (Figure 1.2 and Table 1.4).

This is the tenth 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.

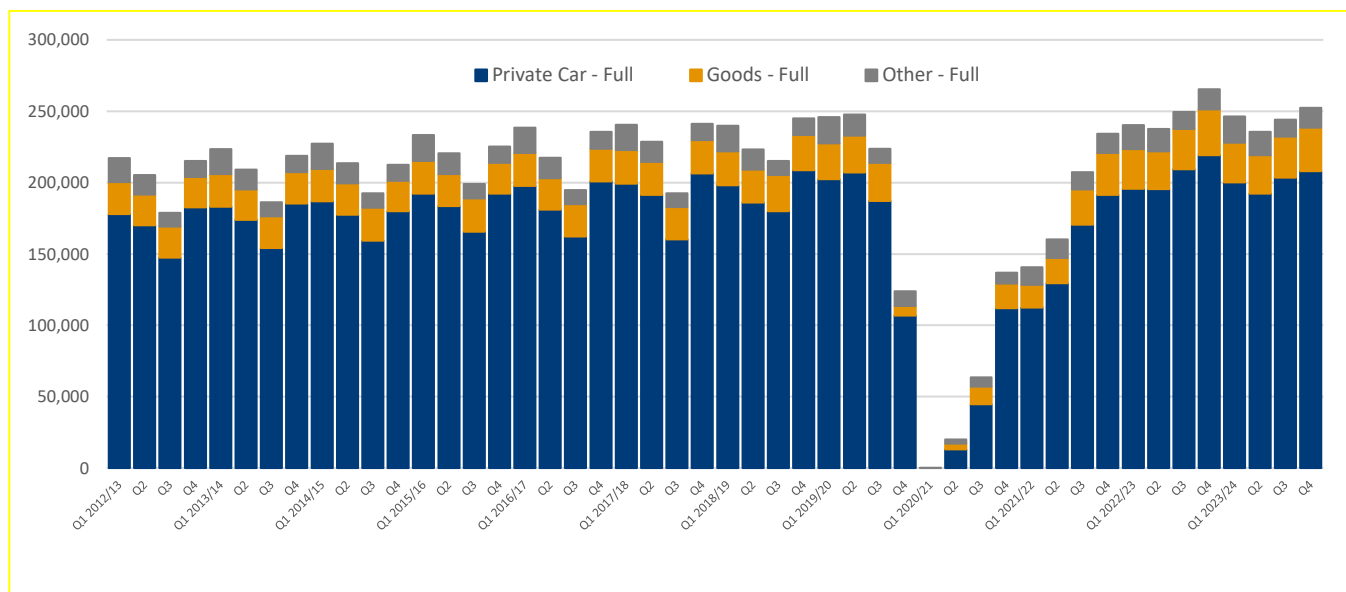


Vehicle Tests Conducted

During the latest quarterly period, DVA delivered 292,954 vehicle tests (full and retests) the highest quarterly total this year, and 3.2% (9,161) above that for quarter three (283,793) (Table 1.7).

Year to date from April 2023 to March 2024, DVA delivered over 1.138 million vehicle tests, the second highest annual total since 2008/09, but below that achieved last year (1.155 million). Most vehicle tests conducted this year were full tests, accounting for 85.9% (978,481) of all tests the remaining 14.1% (160,512) being vehicle retests (Table 1.5). Most full tests were for private cars, accounting for 82.2% (803,831) of all full tests conducted this year (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. This upward trend in vehicle ownership has continued through the post covid era and as at the end of September there were 1.034 million registered vehicles in Northern Ireland, the highest on record. (see Table 2.13).

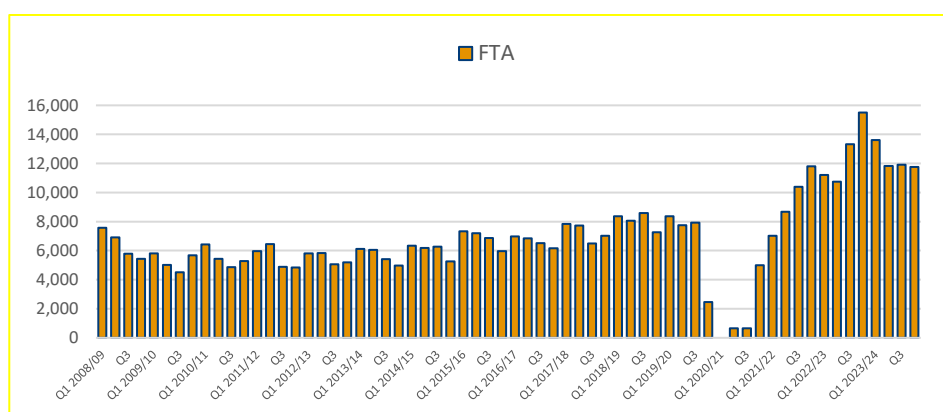
In addition, owners are keeping their cars for longer, as the average age of car stock has continued to increase in recent years to a high of 9.3 years at the end of September 2023, the highest on record. This has resulted in increased numbers of cars and other vehicle types that require DVA vehicle testing services, as detailed in the vehicle tests conducted statistics within this report and tables.

Failed to Attend

This quarter, 11,750 customers failed to attend a booked vehicle test (Table 1.10 and Figure 1.4). This equates to 4.0% of all conducted tests during this period (292,954).

For the full financial year 2023/24, 49,101 vehicles failed to present for vehicle testing, the second highest on record, and representing 4.3% of all vehicle tests conducted this year.

Figure 1.4: Vehicle Tests – Failed to Attend



Vehicle Test Pass-Rates

In the last quarter of 2023/24, the overall pass-rate for full vehicle tests was 82.2%, which is only slightly below what it was for the previous quarter (82.6%) and slightly above that for the same quarter in the previous year (81.4%) (Table 1.11 and Figure 1.5).

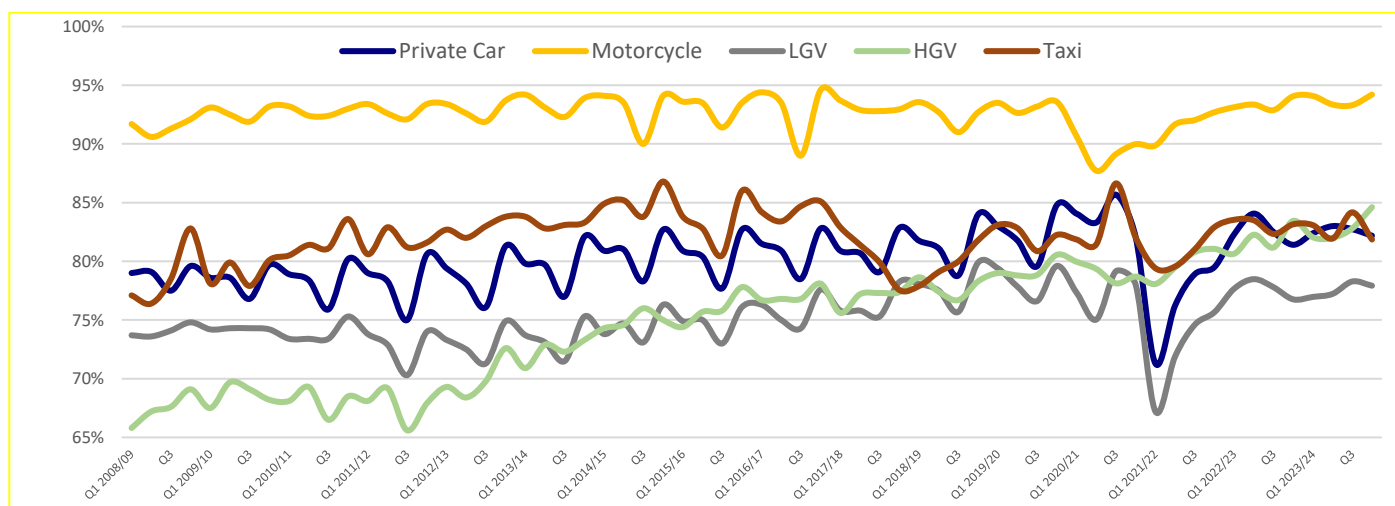
The pandemic era drop in pass-rates would suggest that vehicle owners did not maintain their vehicles during periods of test exemption, although vehicle test pass rates since 2022/23 seem to have trended back to pre-pandemic levels. This is also the case for private car full tests, with pass rates slightly above 82.0% from the first quarter of 2022/23 onwards.

This financial year 2023/24, the overall pass-rate for full tests was 82.5%, relative to 82.4% for the previous year, and this was on a par with pass levels obtained pre-pandemic era. Pass rates for full tests, varied by test category, from 77.6% for light goods vehicles to 93.8% for motorcycles, with 82.9% for heavy goods vehicles and 82.6% for private cars (for categories where there were at least 2,000 tests), all of which were the same as or slightly above those obtained in the previous year, 2022/23 (Table 1.11).

The overall pass-rate for vehicle re-tests this quarter was 94.7%, slightly lower than the quarter three pass-rate of 94.8% (Table 1.12). This current quarterly retest pass rate is comparable to historical 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 2023/24 financial year, the overall re-test pass-rate of 94.5% is the highest annual pass rate on record (Table 1.12). This year's retest pass rate is just over percentage point higher than for 2021/22 (93.4%). As with full tests, the annual re-test pass-rate varied by category, from 91.2% for LPCV to 94.9% for private cars and 95.6% for motorcycles, for vehicle test categories where there were at least 1,000 tests. Retest pass rates for larger volumes of retests were slightly above those for the previous year (Table 1.12).

Figure 1.5: Full Vehicle Test Pass-Rates



Vehicle Tests by Test Centre

The busiest test centre for vehicle testing during 2023/24 was Newtownards which conducted 134,910 full tests during the year, of which 89.3% (120,519) were for private cars (Table 1.15). Omagh test centre conducted the fewest number of full vehicle tests during this period at 33,953.

Pass rates by test centres for private cars this year, ranged from 79.4% in Coleraine to 87.3% in Belfast (Balmoral) (Table 1.15). Differences in pass rates for private cars and other vehicle types within and between test centres may arise due to several interacting factors including, for example, differences in vehicle ages and the behaviour of customers in terms of vehicle maintenance.

Vehicle Licensing and Registration

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

Vehicle Registrations

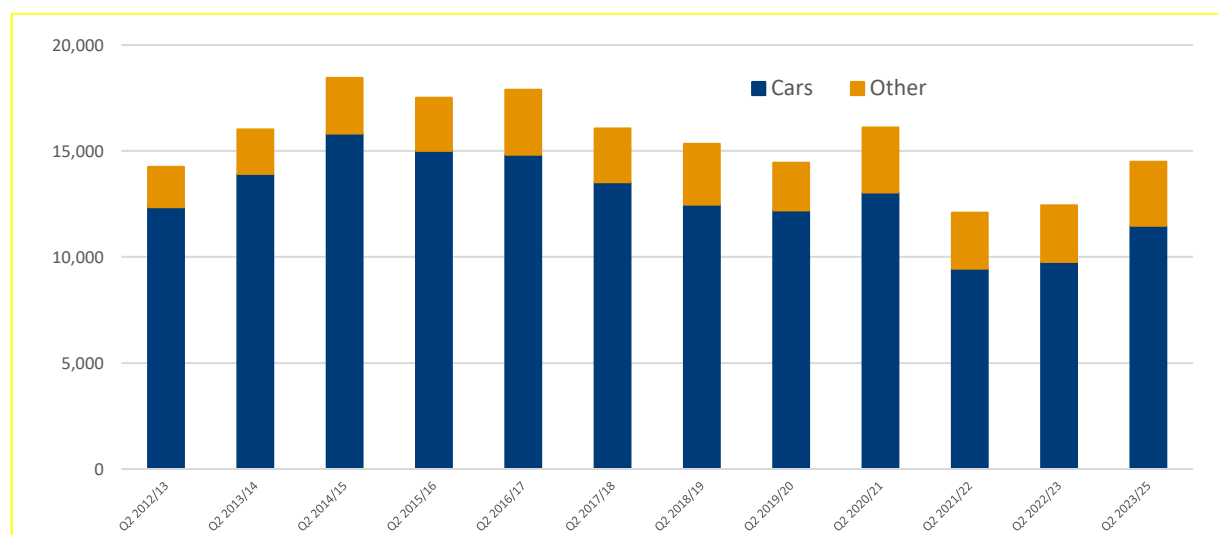
This section includes the latest available vehicle licensing data for Northern Ireland covering the period from July to September 2023. Data for October to December 2023 that would normally be detailed in this report was not available in time to be included herein. It will be included in the quarter one report for 2024/25 scheduled for publication in September/October 2024.

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)

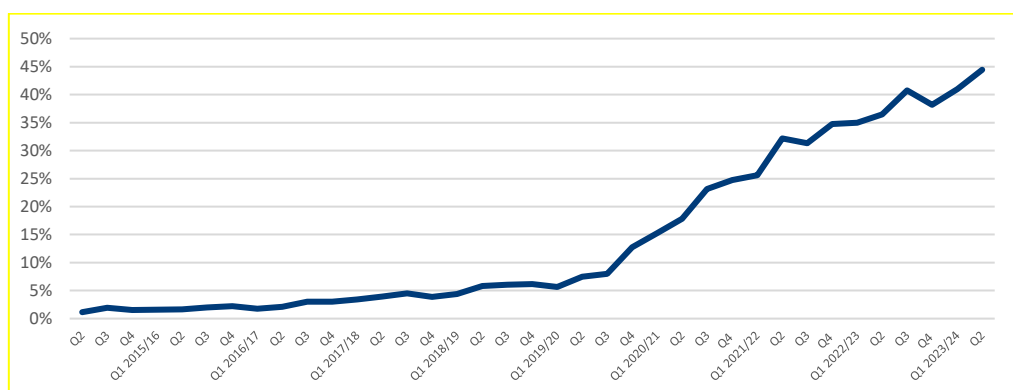
Figure 2.1: New Vehicle Registrations



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

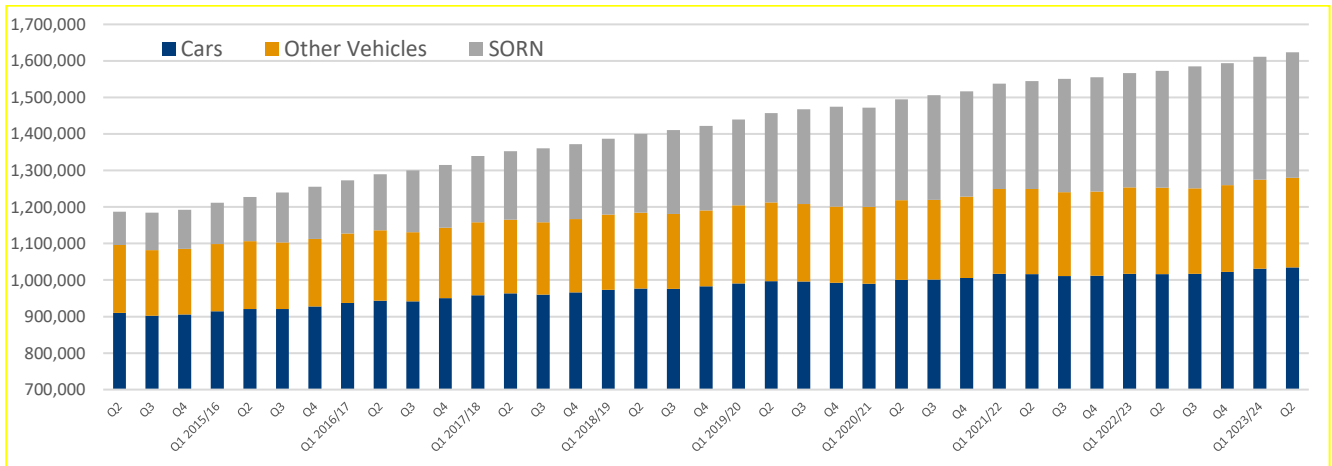
At the end of September 2023 there were 1,279,818 licensed vehicles in Northern Ireland, an increase of 4.2% (5,427) relative to the previous quarter (1,274,391), and the highest licensed stock volume on record (Table 2.13).

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

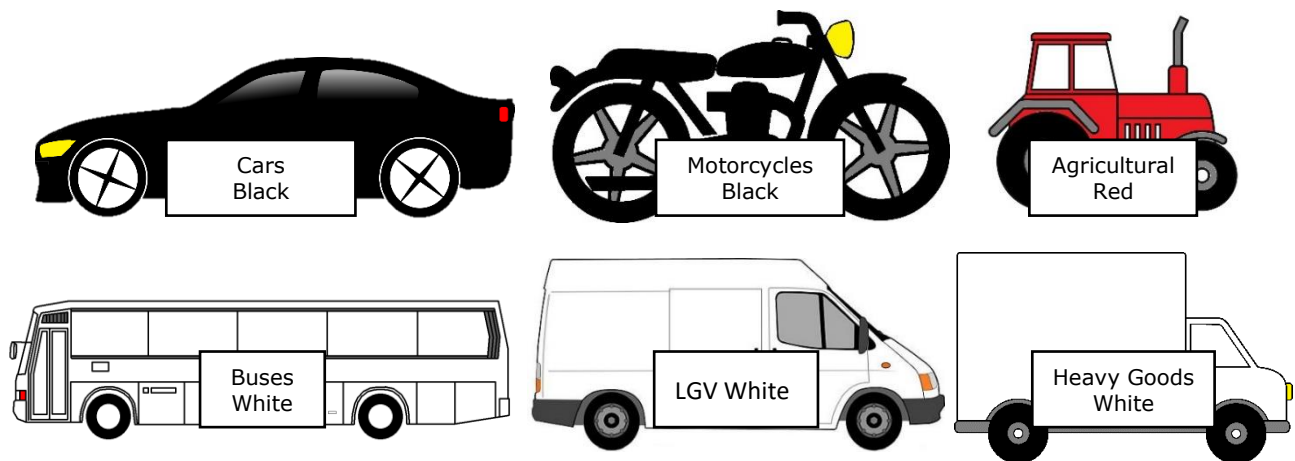


As of 30 September, the average age of a licensed vehicle in Northern Ireland was 9.80 years, a small increase on the 9.74 years at the end of the previous quarter.

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.



3 Driver Theory Testing

The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) administers driver theory testing under contract with the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) within the Department for Infrastructure DfI).

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 relating to driver theory testing, please visit the Driver Theory Testing pages on the NIDirect website⁴.

Theory Test Applications and Tests Conducted

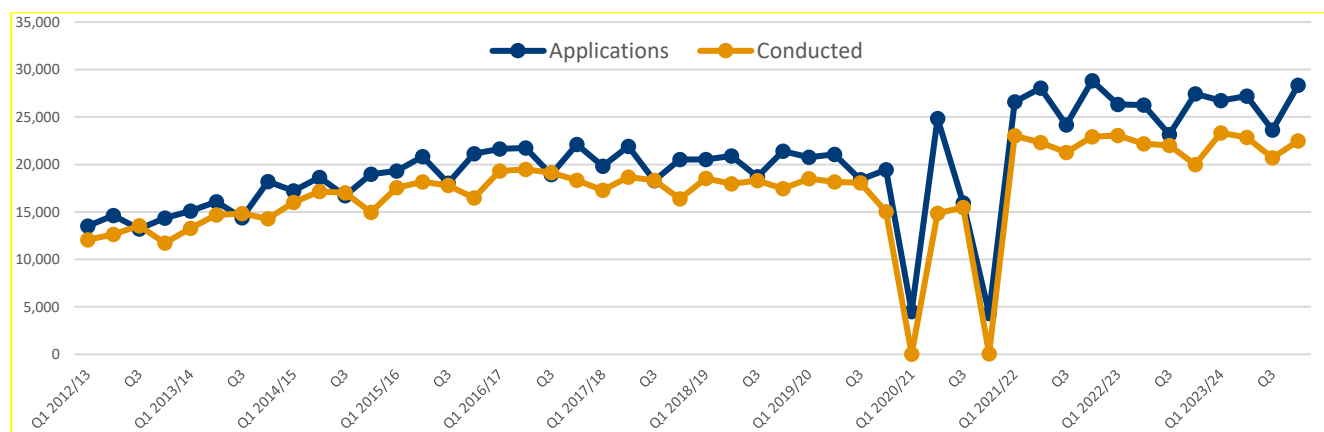
From January to March 2024, the DVA delivered 22,471 theory tests, 8.5% (1,776) higher than the previous quarter (20,895) and 12.5% (2,491) more than for the same quarter last year (19,980) (Table 3.2; Figure 3.1).

In the 2023/24 financial year DVA conducted just over 89,350 theory tests which is 2.4% (2,121) more than in 2022/23 (87,230) and the second highest annual total on record from 2009/10. Pre-pandemic annual theory test volumes ranged from 69,950 in 2015-16 to 76,200 in 2016-17.

The DVA received 28,335 theory test applications this quarter, the highest for a single quarter this financial year, the next highest being 27,212 in quarter two (Table 3.1). Year end for 2023/24 there were just over 105,890 theory test applications, which is 2.6% (2,744) higher than in 2022/23 (103,155), and the second highest annual total on record since 2009/10 (Table 3.1, Figure 3.1)

Private cars accounted for over eight in every ten (85.3%, 90,307) theory test applications and the same for theory tests conducted (86.2%, 76,989) during 2023/24 (Table 3.1 and 3.2).

Figure 3.1: Theory Test Applications and Conducted



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

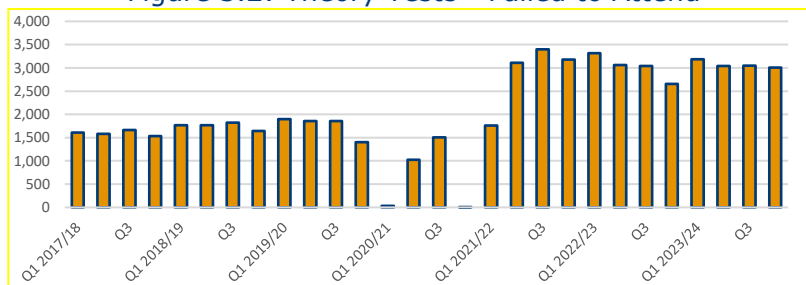
Failed to Attend

During this quarter, 3,006 customers failed to attend a booked theory test, the lowest quarterly total this financial year but higher than the same quarter for the previous year in 2022/23 (2,652) (Table 3.3 and Figure 3.2).

This financial year 2023/24 just over 12,270 candidates did not attend a booked theory test, the

highest on record, and representing 13.7% of all theory tests conducted in the same period (89,355).

Figure 3.2: Theory Tests - Failed to Attend



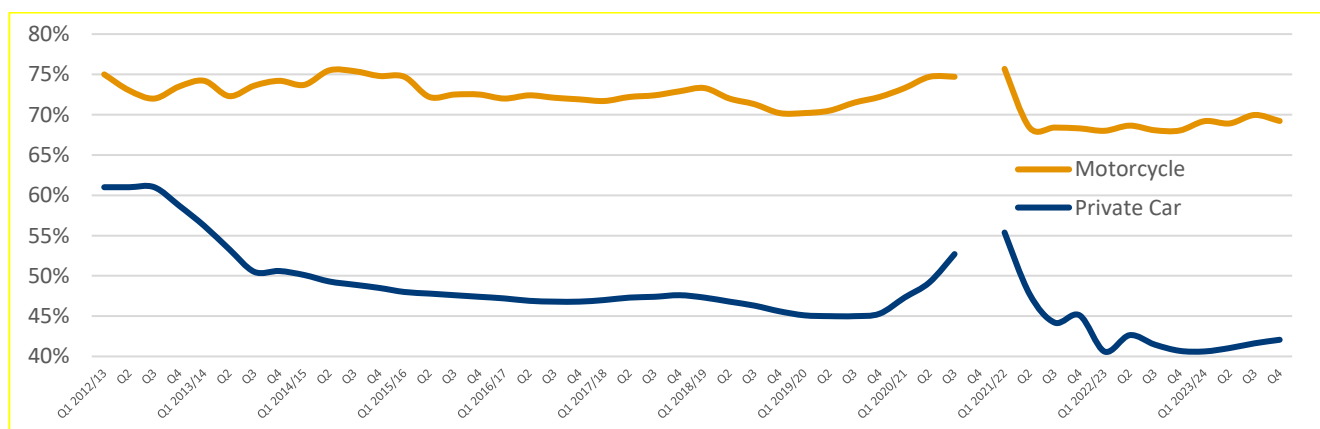
Theory Test Pass-Rates

In 2023/24 financial year, the theory test pass-rate for private cars was 42.1% an increase of 1.4 percentage points relative to the pass rate in 2022/23 of 40.7%, but lower than annual pre-pandemic pass rates which were at the mid 40 percents (Table 3.4, Figure 3.3).

The annual motorcycle theory test pass-rate in 2023/24 was 69.2% up by 1.2 percentage points from 2022/23 (68.0%) which suggests pass-rates may be trending back to pre-pandemic levels in 2019/20 when the pass-rate was 72.2%. Higher pass-rates for motor-cycles relative to cars, may in part be due to candidates having already taken a private-car theory and driving tests.

Whilst not directly comparable due to the nature and purpose of the tests, the pass-rate for the taxi theory test in 2023/24 was 29.2%, an increase of 3.3 percentage points from 2022/23 (25.9%) and similar to the level of 31.5% obtained in 2019/20 (Table 3.4)-taxi pass-rates are not shown in Figure 3.3.

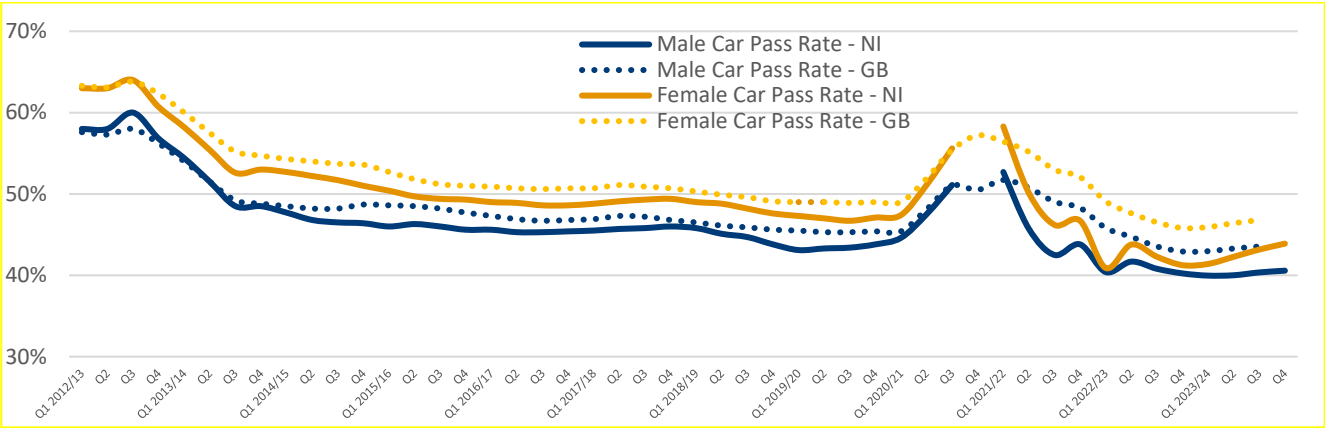
Figure 3.3: Theory Test Pass-Rates (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



Continuing the trend over the past decade, the theory test pass-rate by gender for private-cars has showed females with higher test pass-rates than males (Table 3.7).

For 2023/24 financial year the pass-rates were 43.9% for females and 40.6% for males, a difference of 3.3 percentage points, which is higher than the 1.0 percentage point difference in 2022/23. Although pass-rates had been gradually decreasing from 2012 to 2020, since the resumption of theory testing in 2020, data would suggest that pass-rates for both genders have decreased coming out of the pandemic period but that the gender gap between females and males remains and may be trending back to pre-pandemic levels. There is insufficient data to conclude conclusively that there is a permanent reduction in the gender gap level in private car theory pass rates. Both 'gender-gap' and post-pandemic pass-rate trends are like 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.

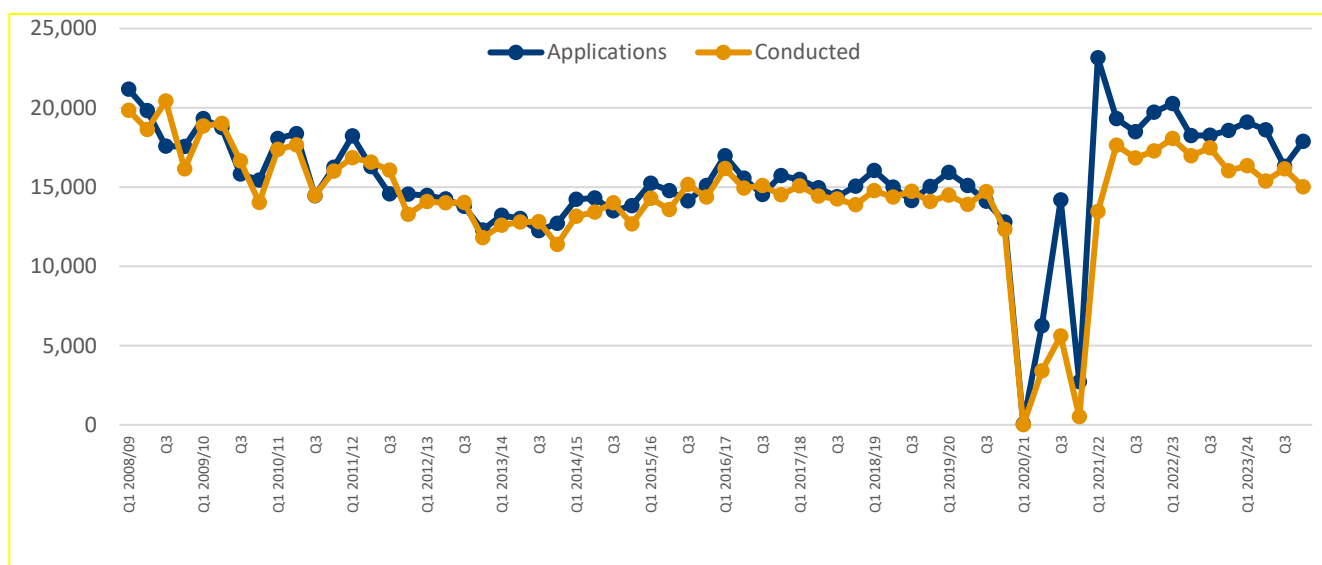
Driving Test Applications and Tests Conducted

Please note that DVA services were impacted by industrial strike action on 22nd September 2023 and 18th January 2024 so testing volumes for these months are lower than would have been the case had these been routine working days. The DVA conducted 15,009 driving tests in the last quarter of this year, 7.0% (1,138) fewer than the previous quarter (16,147), and 6.3% (1,011) less than for the same quarter the previous year in 2022/23 (16,020) (Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1).

In 2023/24 financial year, the DVA delivered 62,874 driving tests, 8.2% (5,666) lower than the number of tests delivered in 2022/23 (68,540), but 13% (7,431) higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2019/20 (55,443). Just over 8 in every 10 driving tests conducted in 2023/24 were for private cars (51,562) (Table 4.3).

This year, DVA received 71,882 applications for a driving test, which is 4.6% (3,468) lower than the previous year 2022/23 (75,350), but 24.1% (13,963) higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2019/20 (57,919). Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, trends for both test applications and tests conducted over the previous five years had remained relatively steady, but post pandemic increased applications reflected higher numbers of young people presenting for a driving test, though recent trend suggests that driver tests conducted may be returning to levels above those in pre-pandemic years, reflecting a sustained increase in underlying demand.

Figure 4.1: Driving Test Applications and Conducted



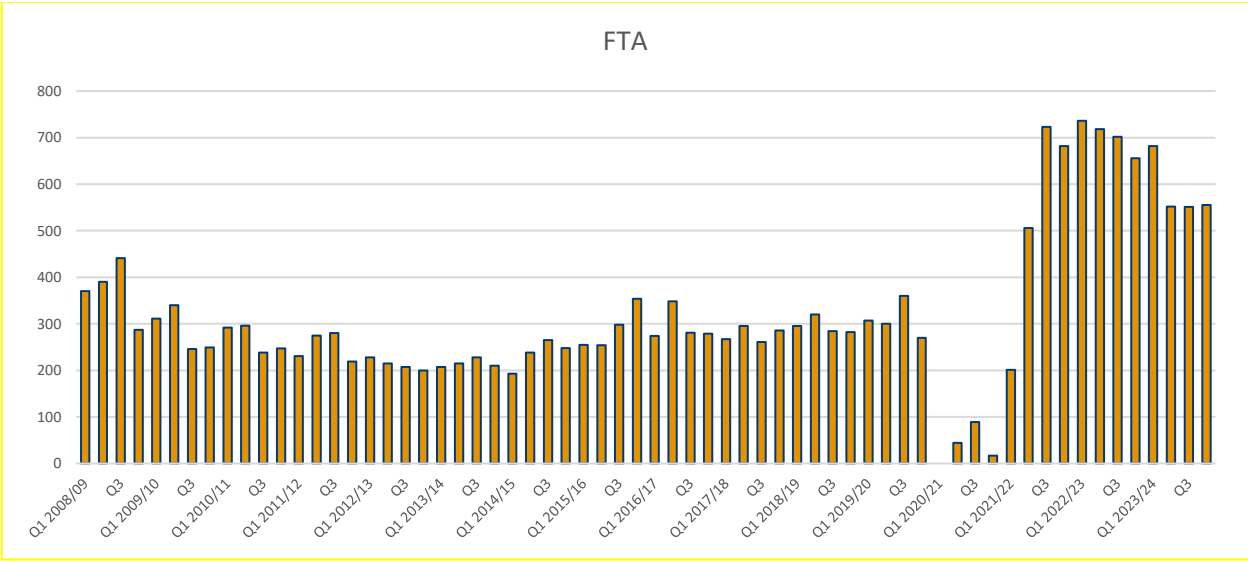
⁵ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/book-your-practical-driving-test-online>

Failed to Attend

In the last quarter of this year 2023/24, there were 555 driving test appointments for which customers failed to attend (FTA) a paid for driving test, 4 above the previous quarter (551), but 15.3% (101) lower than the same quarter the previous year 2022/23 (656) (Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2)

This financial year 2023/24, a total of 2,340 candidates failed to present for their driving test, the second highest on record, and representing 3.7% of all driving tests conducted in this period (62,874) (Table 4.4).

Figure 4.2: Driving Tests – Failed to Attend

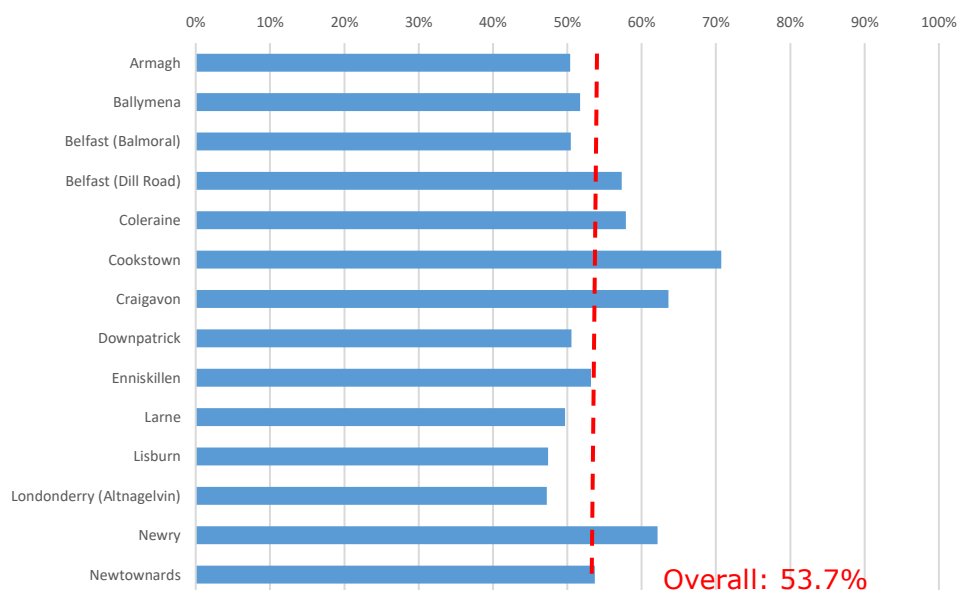


Driving Tests by Test Centre

The number of private car driving tests delivered in the last quarter of this year ranged from 288 at Armagh to 1,226 at Newtownards (Table 4.6). Across all driving test centres and using a rolling four-quarter average, the pass-rate for private car driving tests ranged from 47.3% at Newtownards to 70.7% at Downpatrick, relative to an overall pass-rate of 53.7% (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, Q4 (Rolling 4-quarter Averages)



Driving Test Pass-Rates

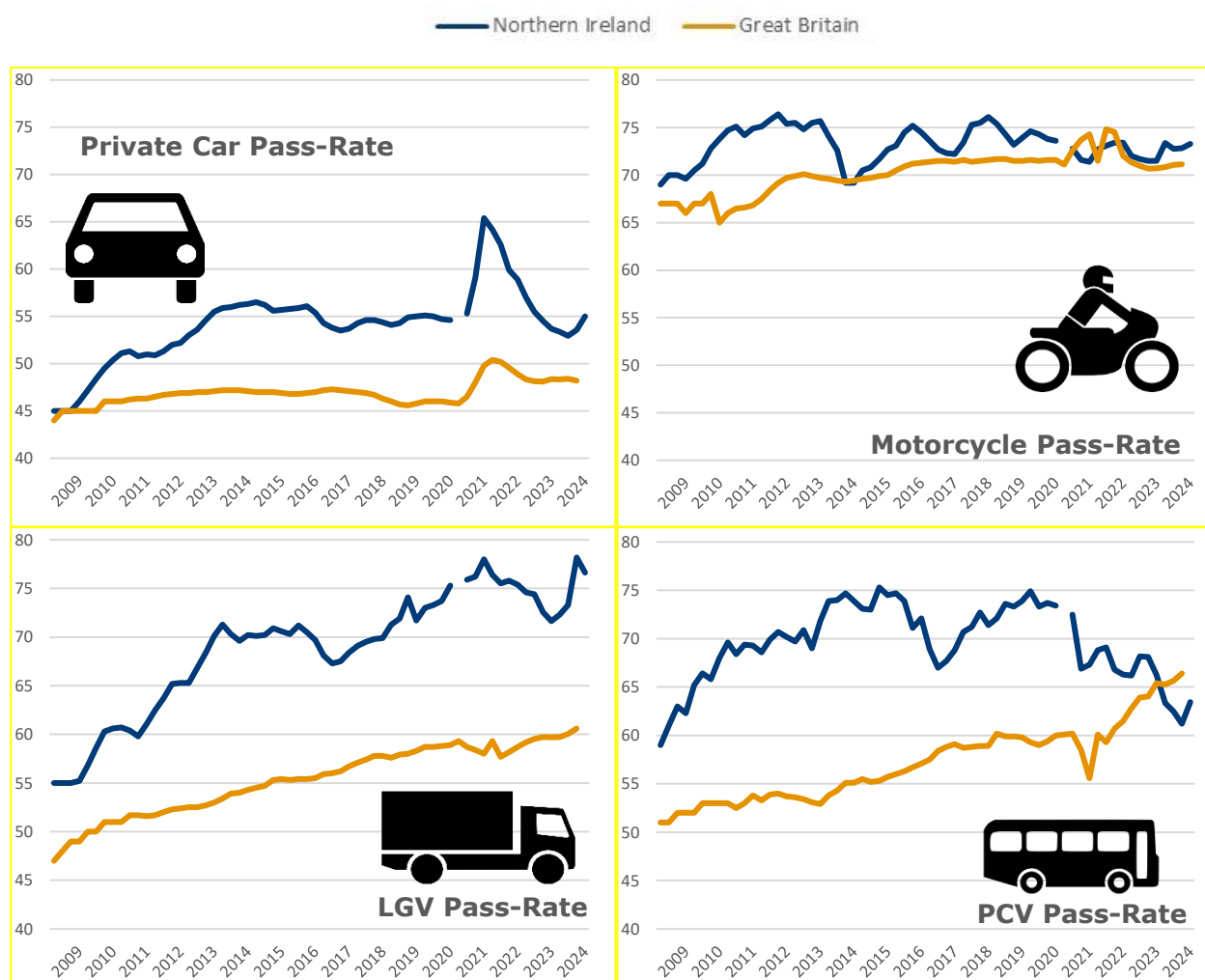
For January to March 2024, the private car driving test pass-rate was 55.0%, relative to 53.6% for the previous quarter and above the 52.8% for the same quarter in 2022/23 (Table 4.5).

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 53.7% for the last quarter of 2023/24, which is slightly above that for the equivalent figure at the end of quarter three in 2023/24 (53.2%). The rolling four quarter average pass rate is now comparable to pre-pandemic pass-rates of typically 54%-55% (Table 4.10 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, 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 (Table 4.10).

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 to the end of 2023/24.

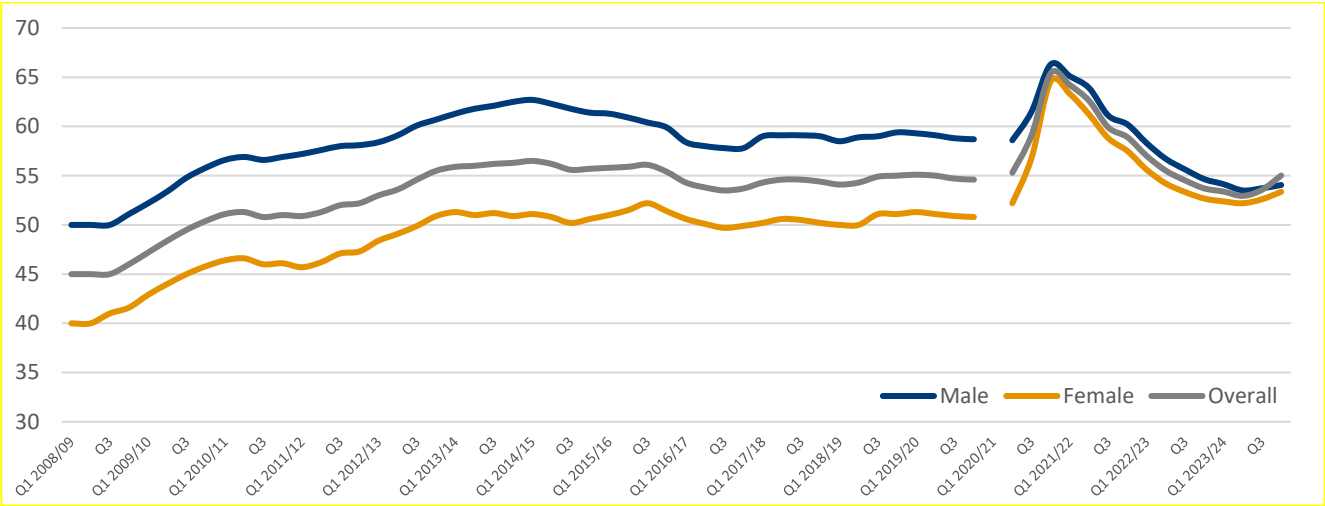
To the end of the last quarter of 2023/24, the rolling four-quarter average private car test pass-rate for males was less than 1 percentage point higher than that for females, at 54.1% and 53.4% respectively, a decrease from the end of the previous quarter when the difference was 1.1 percentage point at 53.7% and 52.6% 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 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 2.8 percentage points in quarter three of 2023/24 (Table 4.10). GB data is not available to allow comparison over four quarters to the end of quarter four in 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 Armagh (67.0% against 62.4%) and Omagh (64.3% against 60.4%). Other centres where female pass rates were higher than those for males were Cookstown, Craigavon, Downpatrick, Newry and Newtownards (Table 4.7b).

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



Whilst a gender gap in favour of males is also apparent in Great Britain for private cars, motorcycle pass rates are in fact similar with rolling four-quarter average pass rates for females and males at 71.4% and 71.1% respectively to the end of quarter three 2023/24 (Table 4.10). This is in marked contrast to Northern Ireland where motorcycle pass-rates differences between males and females are relatively large and have remained so pre and post pandemic, with pass-rates of 74.3% and 61.7% respectively at the end of this quarter for 2023/24, representing almost 12 percentage points of a difference between the two.

However, in contrast to Northern Ireland, GB pass-rates for large goods vehicles are consistently higher for females relative to males, typically showing a 5 to 6 percentage point difference, though this gap seems to be increasing in recent years. The latest figures for GB to the end of quarter three of 2023/24 the rolling four-quarter average pass rates for females at 66.4% compared with 59.9% for males, a difference of 6.5 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.

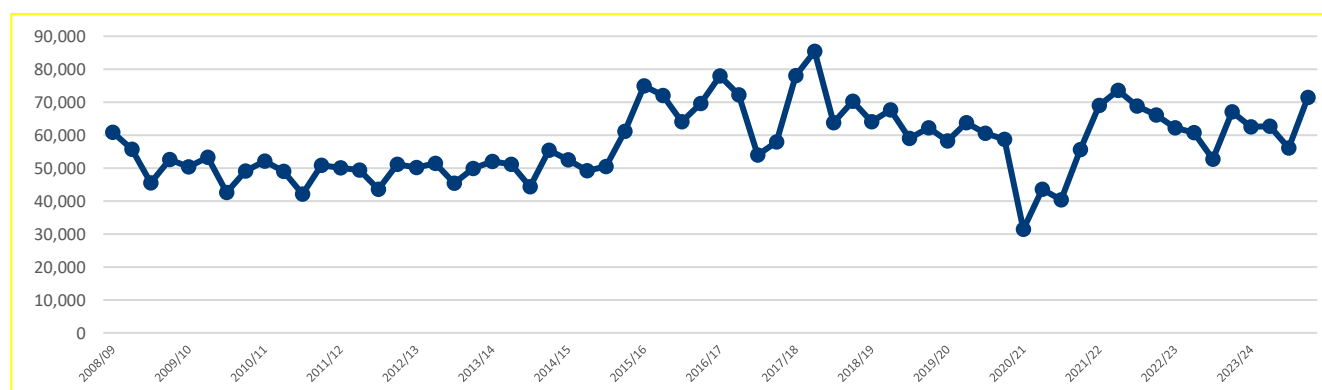
On 27 March 2020, the DVA suspended the processing of all paper renewal applications and temporarily closed the driver licensing office. From the end of April that year they began processing applications from Group 2 (lorry/bus) applicants and those from front line workers. Only applications received 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 driver licensing transactions during 2023/24 totalled 252,820, over 4% (10,178) above that for 2022/23 (242,642) (Figure 5.1).

In the last quarter of 2023/24 DVA completed almost 71,500 ordinary driver licensing transactions, which is over 27% (15,411) above that for the previous quarter and the highest quarterly total since quarter two of 2021/22 (Table 5.1).

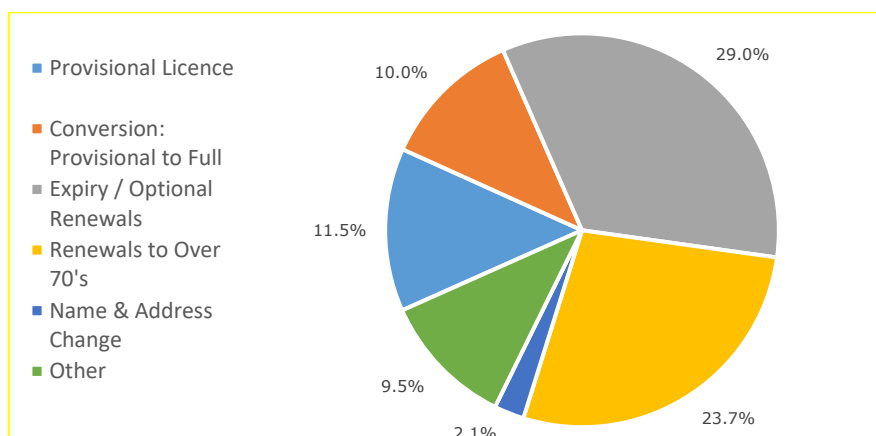
Figure 5.1: Driver Licensing Transactions



The number of Ordinary first licences ('provisional licences') issued in quarter four was 8,226, the highest quarterly total this year and almost 3% (209) above that for the same quarter in 2002/23 (8,017) (Table 5.1).

This quarter, Expiry/Optional Renewals accounted for 29.2% (20,715) of all ordinary licensing transactions followed by Renewals to over 70's at 23.7% (16,924) of all Ordinary Licences transactions (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2).

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



In 2023/24 DVA completed 20,130 vocational driver licensing transactions, the second highest on record since 2008/09. In the last quarter of this fiscal year 5,024 vocational drivers licensing transactions were completed, over 2% (120) higher than the same quarter last year (Table 5.2).

Driver Licence Stock

At the end of March 2024, there were over 1.17 million full and eligible driver licence holders (excluding provisional licence holders) with private car/light van entitlement, which is the highest on record (Table 5.4). This represents 76% of the population aged 15 and over.

The number of provisional licence holders with private car/light van entitlement increased again relative to the previous quarter, from 110,385 to 111,460 at the end of March 2024, an increase of almost 1% (1,075). This is the fifth quarterly increase in provisional licence volumes to date.

Driver licence holders aged 65 years and above with full private car/light van entitlement accounted for 21.3% (247,069) of all licence holders with this entitlement (1,155,445) (Table 5.4).

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

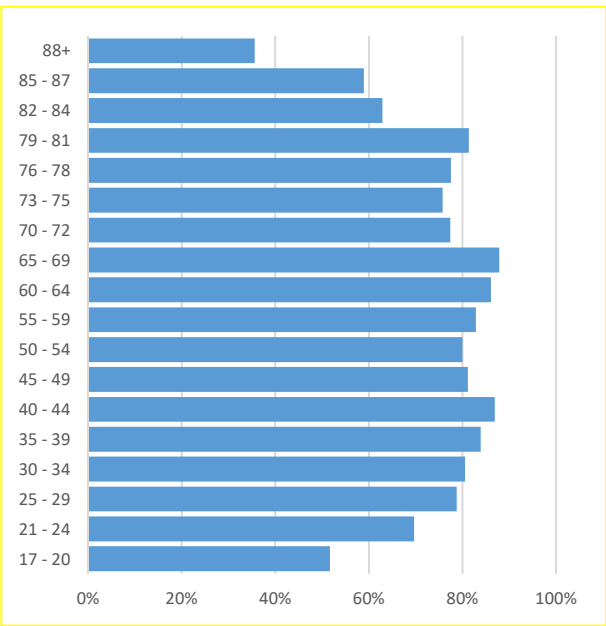


Figure 5.4: Full Car Licence Holders in Northern Ireland

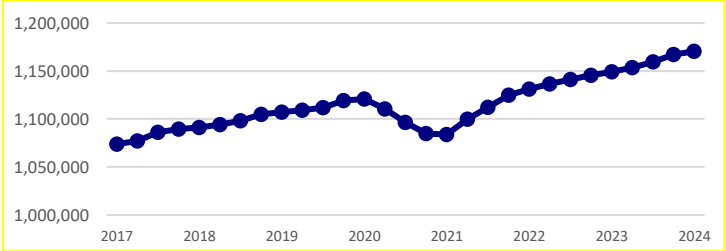
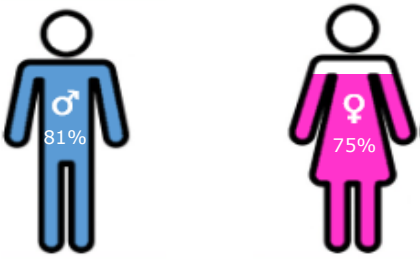


Figure 5.5: Proportion of Population with a Full Car Licence – by Gender



At the end of March 2023, an estimated 78.2% 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 mid-year population estimates for 2022⁶ (Table 5.8). For males and females, the equivalent percentages were 81.1% and 75.4% 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 2023/24 the DVA Public Transport Licensing Division issued 7,858 taxi vehicle licences, 7.9% (577) above the equivalent number in 2022/23 (7,281) (Table 6.1). At the end of March 2024, licensed taxi vehicle stock stood at 7,123 compared to 6,901 for the same quarter in the previous year an increase of 3.2% (222) during this period (Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1).

Taxi Drivers

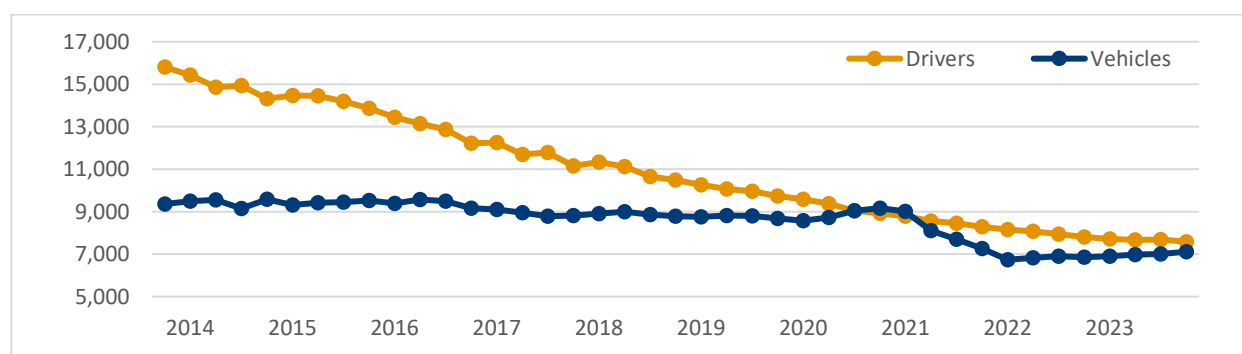
In 2023/24 DVA issued 1,976 taxi driver licences, compared to 1,535 at the end of 2022/23, up by 28.7% (441) during this period (Table 6.1). In the last quarter of the current financial year, DVA issued 469 taxi driver licences relative to 381 for the same quarter the previous year, and up slightly from the previous quarter of this year (461) (Table 6.1).

At the end of this quarter there were 7,585 licensed taxi drivers a drop of 1.7% (130) compared to 7,716 for the same quarter in 2022/23 (Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1).

Taxi Operators

As with taxi drivers, the numbers of taxi operators have been trending downwards in recent years, falling slightly from 1,123 at the end of 2022/23 to 1,117 at the end of this year, a drop of 10 taxi operators during this period (Table 6.2).

Figure 6.1: Licensed Taxi Driver and Taxi Vehicle Volumes



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

Bus Licensing

Bus Vehicles

In 2023/24, DVA issued 3,590 public service vehicle (bus) licences, an increase of 3.4% (118) relative to 2022/23 (3,472) (Table 6.1). The number of licensed bus vehicles at the end of this quarter was 3,354 compared to 3,303 for the same quarter the previous year, and 3,348 for the previous quarter (Table 6.3).

Bus Operators

During this financial year, DVA issued 4,261 bus operators' licences for bus vehicles, 4,241 international and 20 national, compared with 3,134 in 2022/23 of which 3,073 and 61 were international and national respectively. (Table 6.1)

At the end of March 2024 there were 197 licensed bus operators an increase of 8 from the previous quarter (191) and 3 in respect of the same quarter the previous year (194) (Table 6.3).

Goods Licensing

There were 5,262 licensed goods operators at the end of this quarter, 76 fewer than the previous quarter, and 230 below that for the same quarter in 2022/23. Associated with these 5,262 operators were 21,939 goods vehicles, the lowest on record since the same quarter in 2020/21 (Table 6.4).

There were 1,863 standard international operators at the end of this quarter, 7 fewer than the previous quarter (1,856) and the eighth consecutive drop in the numbers of operators since quarter four of 2021/22 (1,953) (Table 6.4).

There were 3,084 operators with restricted licenses at the end of this quarter, 80 less than at the end of December 2023 (3,164) (Table 6.4).

7 Enforcement & Compliance

Enforcement falls within the Compliance and Enforcement directorate within the DVA, and is responsible for the enforcement of legislation pertaining to roadworthiness standards and public transport licensing 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 2023/24 the DVA were active across the full range of enforcement activities, having checked 2,761 vehicles, issued 579 fixed penalty notices to the amount of £81,230 in fines, carried out 39 joint operations with the PSNI, 17 cross border operations with An Garda Síochána, and 50 spot checks on school buses (Table 7.1 to Table 7.4).

Enforcement Activities

Enforcement checks during 2023/24 (2,761) were just over 4% (133) fewer than in 2022/23 (2,894) but they remained well below levels achieved prior to the pandemic at circa 5,000 checks per annum. There were 899 spot checks this quarter well above the 519 for the previous quarter and the highest for a single quarter in 2023/24 (Figure 7.1 and Table 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Vehicle Checks

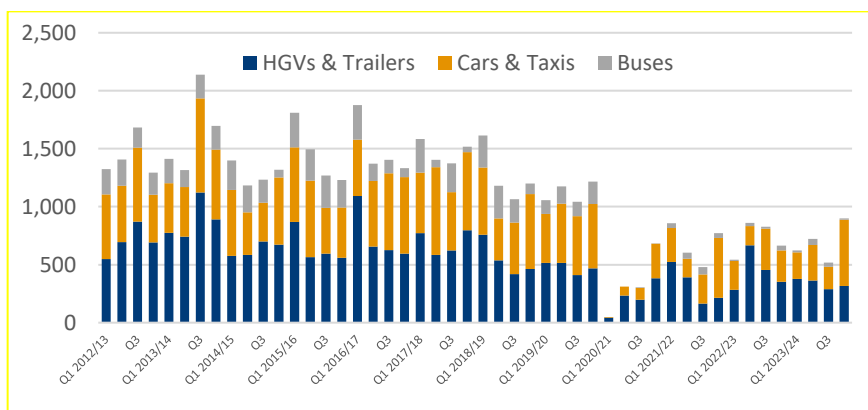
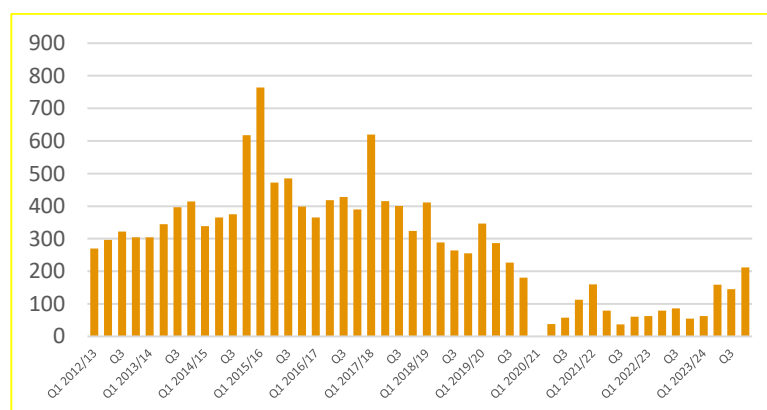


Figure 7.2: Fixed Penalties Issued



Enforcement officers in 2023/24 issued 579 fixed penalty notices which is more than double that for 2022/23 (283) but below half that for 2019/20 (1,041). The total value of fixed penalties issued in 2023/24 amounted to £81,230 in fines.

In the last quarter of this year, DVA issued 212 fixed penalty notices amounting to £30,790 in fines relative to 145 and £22,350 respectively for the previous quarter (Figure 7.2 and Table 7.2).

Figure 7.3: Convictions

There were 73 successful convictions during 023/24 the same as in 2022/23.

This quarter of saw 27 convictions in respect of 69 offences, relative to 11 and 102 respectively for the previous quarter (Table 7.2 and Figure 7.3).

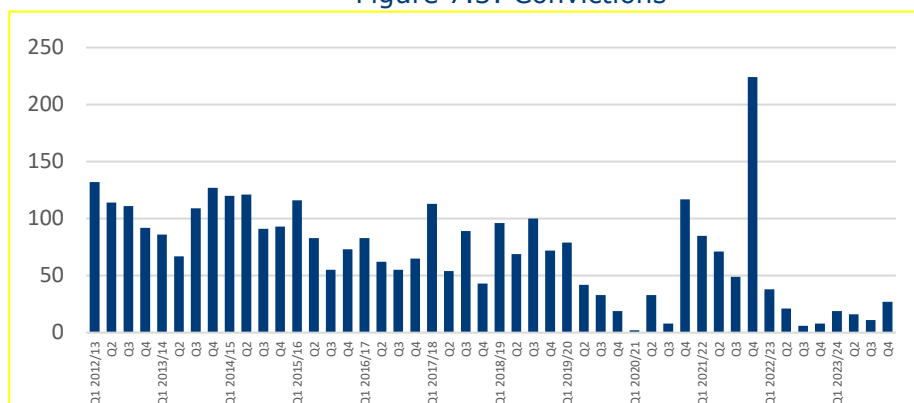


Figure 7.4: Joint and Cross-Border Operations

During 2023/24 there were 39 DVA joint operations with the PSNI, relative to 36 for 2022/23.

In this quarter, DVA conducted 12 joint operations with the PSNI and 6 cross border operations with the PSNI, the Road Safety Authority, and An Garda Síochána (Table 7.3 and Figure 7.4).

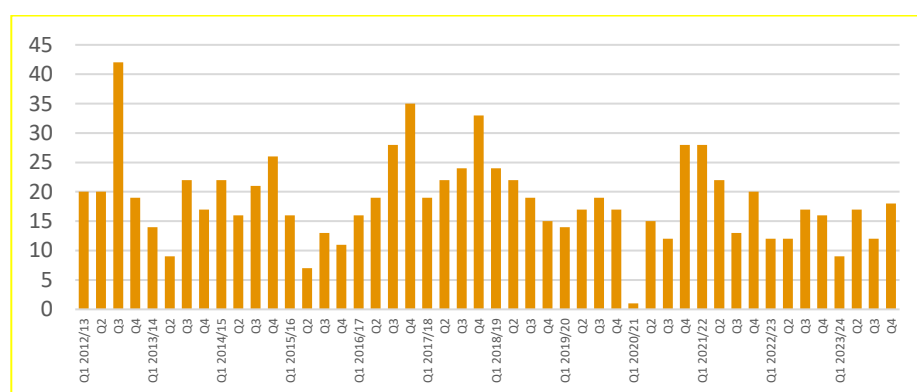
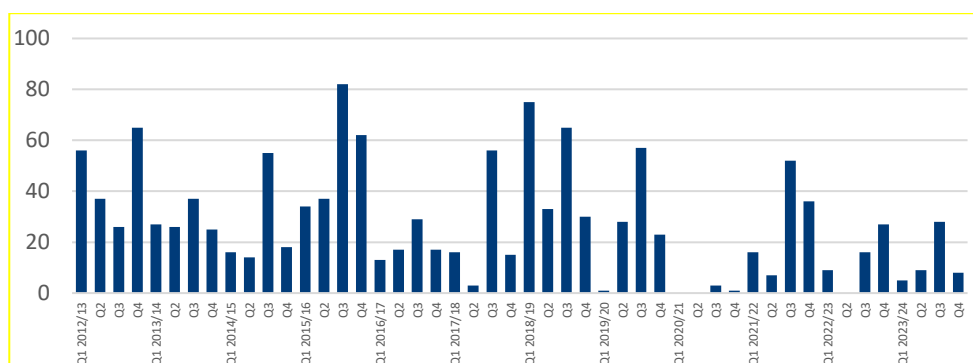


Figure 7.5: School Bus Checks

In 2023/24 DVA carried out 50 School Bus checks relative to 52 in 2022/23. There were 8 spot checks on School Buses in this the last quarter of 2023/24 (Table 7.4 and Figure 7.5).



DVA Target Monitoring

In 2020/21, and 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 processing for driver licensing applications in 2023/24 at 98.7% was 3.7 percentage points above the 95% target level for the year. Quarterly performance reached over 97.0% in every quarter and over 99.0% for the latest two quarters standing at 99.8% at the end of quarter four (Figure 8.2) (Table 8.1).

Paper applications performance was 96.5% for this financial year, 6.5 percentage points above the 90% target level, and higher than the 92.6% achieved the previous year in 2022/23. Quarterly performance was above target for each quarter in 2023/24 ending the year at 96.2% for quarter four and never dropping below 95.0% for any quarter within this year (Figure 8.2) (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

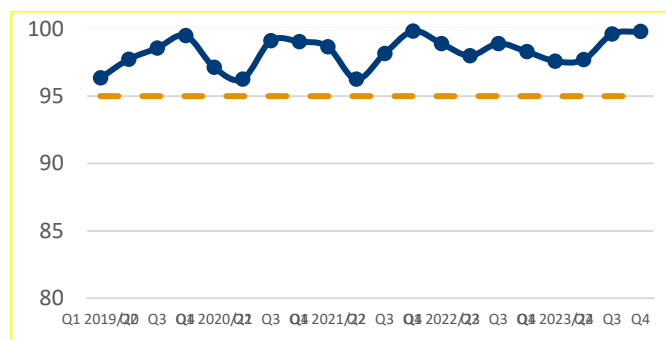
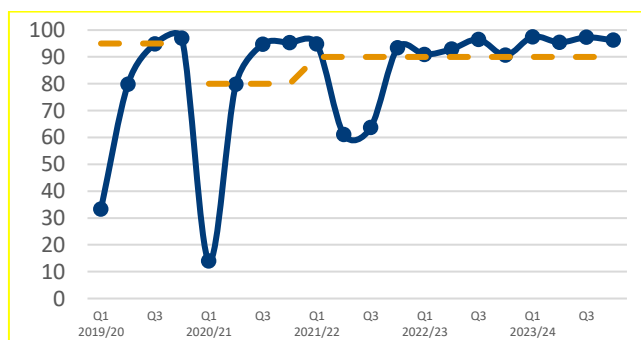


Figure 8.2: Paper Driver Licence Application Waiting Time Performance



(Note this section does not have National Statistics accreditation but continues to have Official Statistics status).

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

Volumes.

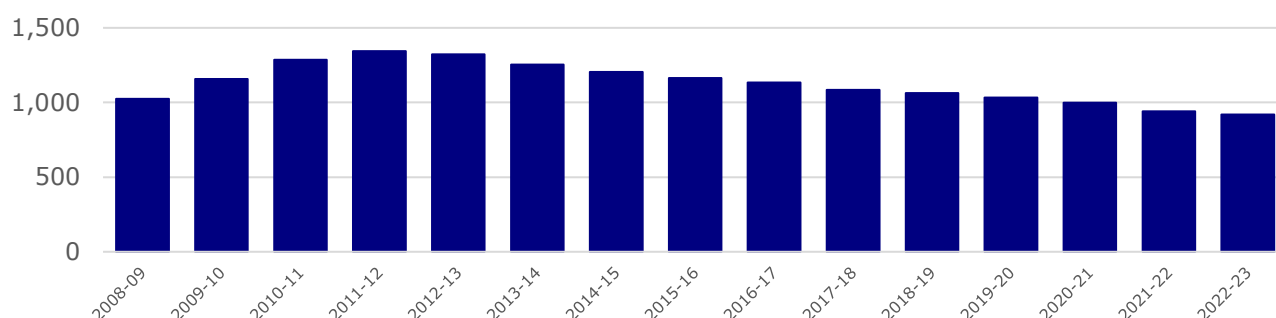
Please note that data relating to volumes of approved driving instructors (ADI) and approved motorcycle instructors (AMI) and test checks for 2024/25 was not available for inclusion in this section of the report. The reason for this is a newly introduced system to support the administration of ADI/AMI was producing unreliable figures for this period. This section will be updated at the earliest opportunity.

As of 31st March 2023, 919 ADI were registered with DVA, slightly below the 940 at the end of 20i22, and over 100 lower than the 1034 registered at the end of 2019/20 (figure 9.1) (table 9.1). This is the eleventh successive fall in numbers, from the peak of 1,344 in 2011/12.

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

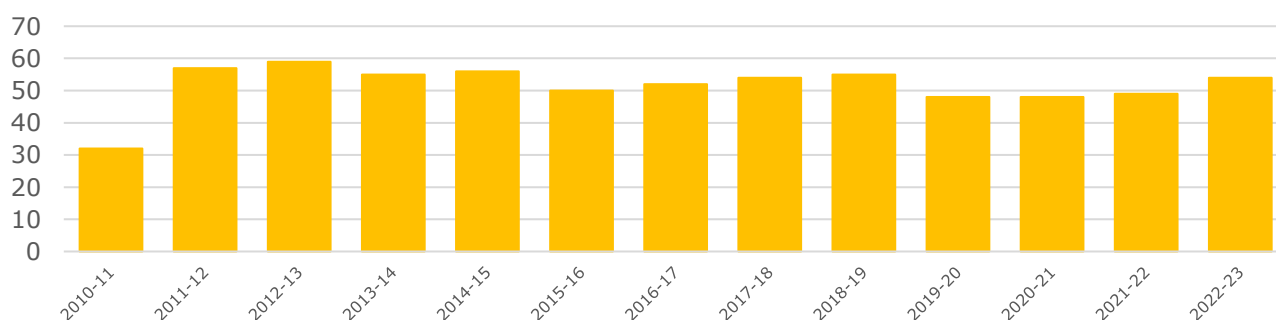
There were 10 new ADI registrants this year, up by 3 on 2021/22 and the third smallest number recorded in our time series, with 31 leaving the register during this period. Given recent increased levels of demand for driver testing (table 4.3) it is difficult to explain the downward trend in ADI over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

Fig 9.1: Approved Driving Instructors in Northern Ireland



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

Fig 9.2: Approved Motor Cycle Instructors in Northern Ireland



Test Volumes & Pass-Rates

The numbers undertaking each exam-element of the ADI assessment process during 2024/25 are higher than for the previous year 2022/23 for Theory and Hazard Perception and Instructional Ability with respective increases from 150 to 241 and 48 to 102 respectively. Numbers taking the Driving Ability element of the process fell by 1 from 108 to 107 in the same period (table 9.3).

The pass-rate for the Theory & Hazard Perception test in 2022/23 was 47%, and 56% and 38% for the Driving Ability and Instructional Ability tests respectively, relative to 37%, 75% and 48% respectively in 2023/24. Note that changes in pass-rates from year to year may be due to small numbers variability for each test within the assessment process (table 9.3 and table 9.4).

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 \(statisticsauthority.gov.uk\)](https://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/driver-and-vehicle-statistics-in-northern-ireland). 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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