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Ed Humpherson  
Office for Statistics Regulation  
Via email

05 March 2026

Dear Ed,

I am writing to request the reclassification from Accredited Official Statistics to Official Statistics in Development of the following publications:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality Report 2024-25 (due for release 26 March 2026); and
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Family Resources Survey Report 2024-25 (due for release Spring/Summer 2026).

The data that underpin these outputs are derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS), which in a Northern Ireland (NI) setting is carried out by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). DWP process the NI data on behalf of Department for Communities NI (DfC), as part of the UK-wide dataset.

Over recent years, DWP has been undertaking a major FRS transformation programme to improve the quality, coherence and completeness of income-based poverty statistics, with a central focus on integrating administrative data with survey responses.

Three substantial transformation components are being implemented:

- (i) Benefit linkage - replacing survey reported benefit receipt with administrative records to reduce historical underreporting.

- (ii) Earnings linkage - replacing survey reported earnings with administrative earnings data to address underreporting.
- (iii) A new grossing regime - updating grossing based on 2021 Census household projections and implementing a new methodology.

DWP had originally planned to publish an experimental release covering both benefit and earnings linkage, in parallel with the traditional survey-based results, but this is no longer the proposed approach. Instead, benefit linkage will be incorporated directly into the accredited March 2026 outputs replacing survey data, with earnings linkage and the updated grossing regime planned to follow in later years.

While these developments represent essential modernisation, the scale and ongoing nature of the changes introduce uncertainty that is particularly acute for Northern Ireland, based on preliminary analysis. Given the central role of these statistics in NI social policy, programme targeting and monitoring, we do not believe that we can currently provide the level of coherence and comparability expected of Accredited Official Statistics.

Temporary de-designation will allow further investigation of:

- (i) How NI's smaller sample size and absence of multi-year averaging increase sensitivity to methodological change.
- (ii) How NI's historically larger benefit undercount interacts with administrative data linkage and the comparative impact on NI poverty estimates.
- (iii) The different grossing regimes employed in NI and GB.
- (iv) The effects of data collection mode differences between NI and GB.

We will continue to work closely with DWP to better understand NI specific impacts and aim to produce a revised, consistent back series for Northern Ireland once all transformation components are implemented.

A temporary suspension of accreditation would acknowledge that methods are in transition, enable clearer guidance to users on what is changing and why, and transparently signal uncertainty in the estimates and any trend comparisons. It would also help highlight that figures will be subject to revision as transformation continues.

For the above reasons and to maintain transparency and uphold standards, I request that these two outputs be temporarily reclassified as Official Statistics in Development, starting with the 2024-25 publications, while we work with DWP to understand how the methodological changes impact on NI data.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adele McCauley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Adele McCauley

Deputy Director and Head of Profession for Statistics, Department for Communities NI