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Dear Ed,

### **Family Resources Survey transformation**

I am writing to update you on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) transformation and the forthcoming FRS-based poverty and income statistics due for publication on 26 March 2026. I also note the letters from the Chief Statisticians in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland requesting that their related publications be reclassified from *Accredited Official Statistics* to *Official Statistics in Development*.

This letter also sets out my view, as DWP Head of Profession for Statistics, that the FRS and related outputs produced by DWP should continue to be published as *Accredited Official Statistics*. This covers the following releases:

- Family Resources Survey
- Households Below Average Income
- Pensioners' Incomes

The Separated Families release will continue to be published as *Official Statistics*.

These reports focus on analysis at the UK level although there are a limited number of regional breakdowns provided in tables. These are presenting headline information for the regions and countries, and in our income analysis we present using a three-year average. My view is that these should continue to be part of our *Accredited Official Statistics*. We will add a note to the tables to advise users on the decision of Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland

DWP is implementing substantial modernisation to improve the quality, coherence and completeness of income-based statistics, with a central focus on integrating administrative data with survey responses.

The increased use of administrative data, particularly for benefit income, is a quality improvement. We have previously set out that survey-based FRS undercounts benefit income compared with administrative sources, and the integration of administrative data improves the underlying measurement.

The integration of administrative data into the FRS is one of the overarching development projects in our published DWP Statistical Work Programme and was an OSR recommendation in your 2021 review of income-based poverty statistics.

To support this project, we established an Expert Advisory Group on Survey-based Income Statistics to complement our internal governance. The purpose of the group is to provide advice on plans to implement the integration of administrative data into the FRS and related outputs and discuss technical issues as they arise. Members of the Group include key users of the FRS and related outputs including academic experts, users from third-sector organisations and methodology input from the Office for National Statistics.

We have shared our research at the annual Family Finance Surveys User Conference, one of our main routes for user engagement. Users have generally been positive about the change as benefit underreporting is a known issue in the FRS. A key milestone was a technical paper we published in March 2024 outlining the linking approach and demonstrating the potential reduction in underreporting. We outlined plans for our March 2026 publications in March 2025 FRS release strategy and updated this document during the year to keep users informed as our plans evolved.

In March 2025 we also published the first FRS Quality Assessment Report (QAR), which we developed with input from OSR, and which outlines our long-standing approach to FRS quality assurance. This includes the independent validation of HBAI data by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) to check and verify the income data and grossing factors underlying the main results.

Having completed our internal quality assurance and sign-off processes for the March 2026 outputs, I am content that DWP can continue to meet the standards expected of *Accredited Official Statistics*.

In reaching this judgement, I have placed particular weight on the following features of the March 2026 implementation:

- This is a processing improvement, not a change in survey collection. There is no change to the underlying survey sample or mode of data collection associated with the March 2026 change; rather, it is a processing change to replace self-reported benefit receipt with administrative benefit data to improve quality.
- We are providing users with consistent, comparable time series covering six years, back to 2018/19. A consistent time series is central for these statistics, which is why changes are being applied with back series approaches rather than creating a break without context. Due to the complexity of this, the revisions to the back-series will take place in two stages – in March 2026 (back to FYE 2022) and summer 2026 (back to FYE 2019).
- Consistent with this, we are producing back series materials to support interpretation of the impact of benefit linkage and support user understanding and continued public trust in the statistics.

I recognise that the devolved governments have reached a different judgement for their own publications. They have welcomed the developments as essential modernisation while noting their view that the nature of the changes introduces

uncertainty that is acute for estimates below UK level which needs to be reflected in the Official Statistics reporting for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

I also acknowledge the practical factors that contribute to this position, this is data which we have been working with for some time but which we have only recently been able to share with our colleagues in devolved governments following the completion of our internal quality assurance.

While I consider continued accreditation appropriate for DWP's outputs, I agree it is essential that users are supported to understand what is changing and why.

Accordingly, DWP will:

- Publish clear documentation alongside the March 2026 outputs explaining the methodological change, its rationale, and the expected impacts, including signposting users to relevant supporting material.
- We will publish an updated FRS QAR and technical paper outlining the approach to the integration of administrative data into the survey; and across the FRS-related outputs we will be including information for users about the changes and how to interpret them.
- Provide consistent back series coverage to help users interpret movements over time.
- Continue active engagement with devolved governments and other key users, including supporting devolved analysts as they interpret their country-level results and prepare their own communications.

In summary, I consider that the March 2026 UK FRS-related outputs produced by DWP remain suitable to be published as *Accredited Official Statistics*, given the nature of the change as a quality-improving enhancement, the completion of quality assurance and sign-off, and the provision of supporting documentation and back series material to aid interpretation.

There is already planned work for a compliance review to support the development of our Official Statistics, and I would welcome continued engagement with OSR as the transformation programme progresses and as further components are implemented.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Ellerd-Elliott

DWP Chief Statistician and Head of Profession for Statistics