

Northern Ireland Quarterly Index of Services

Quarter 4 (October - December) 2024

Theme: Economy

Frequency: Quarterly

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland

Date: 20 March 2025

Introduction

The quarterly Index of Services (IOS) provides a timely indicator of change in output within the private sector services industries in Northern Ireland (NI). Included in this publication is the experimental Retail Sales Index (RSI) which refers to SIC 47 (Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles) and is a subset of IOS. Output estimates are calculated from the IOS aspect of the Quarterly Business Survey (QBS). The IOS has a sample size of approximately 3,600 businesses, covering all private sector services businesses with 100 or more employees and a representative sample of smaller businesses. The latest quarterly estimates are compared to revised Quarter 3 2024 and Quarter 4 2023 estimates.

Key Points

- The NI IOS increased by 0.6% over the quarter (October - December) to reach a new series high. NI IOS increased by 3.0% over the year and 2.9% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- UK output increased by 0.1% over the quarter to reach a UK series high, and 1.7% over the year.
- NI services output is now 10.8% above the pre-Coronavirus pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019 while UK services output is 4.7% above its Quarter 4 2019 level.
- NI services output is 41.7% higher than the series low point (Quarter 2 2020).
- Over the quarter the Business services and finance sector increased by 6.5% and the Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service sector increased by 0.5%. In contrast the Other services and Transport, storage, information and communications sectors decreased by 0.9% and 6.0% respectively.
- Over the year there were increases seen in Business services and finance sector (4.3%); Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service sector (4.8%). The Other services sector saw an annual decrease of 0.9% while the Transport, storage, information & communication sector decreased by 4.9% over the year.
- NI RSI increased 0.3% over the quarter, by 6.4% over the year, and by 3.6% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- NI RSI is now 1.1% below the pre-Coronavirus pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019 while UK retail services output remains 3.4% below its Quarter 4 2019 level.

Contents

1. Summary of Index of Services	3
1.1 Changes in the Index of Services	3
1.2 Commentary	4
2. Services output by sector	5
2.1 Business services and finance sector	5
2.2 Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service sector	6
2.3 Other services sector	7
2.4 Transport, storage, information and communications sector	8
3 Retail Sales Index	9
4 Background Notes	11
5 Index of Tables	13

Accredited Official Statistics



[Accredited official statistics](#) are a sub-set of official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation and confirmed as complying with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

These accredited official statistics, the quarterly Index of Services (IOS), were [independently reviewed](#) by the Office for Statistics Regulation in August 2011. 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 Northern Ireland RSI is an "official statistic in development", previously called an "Experimental Statistic", as it continues to be reviewed and undergo development.

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

Since the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics and have made the following improvements:

- Removed pre-release access to enhance trustworthiness and also brought the publication date forward as a result;
- Reduced business burden by offering the option of online data returns.
- Improved accessibility of Index of Services Statistics by amending the format and structure of reports in line with accessibility regulations.
- Consulted users on streamlining the IOS statistical bulletin.

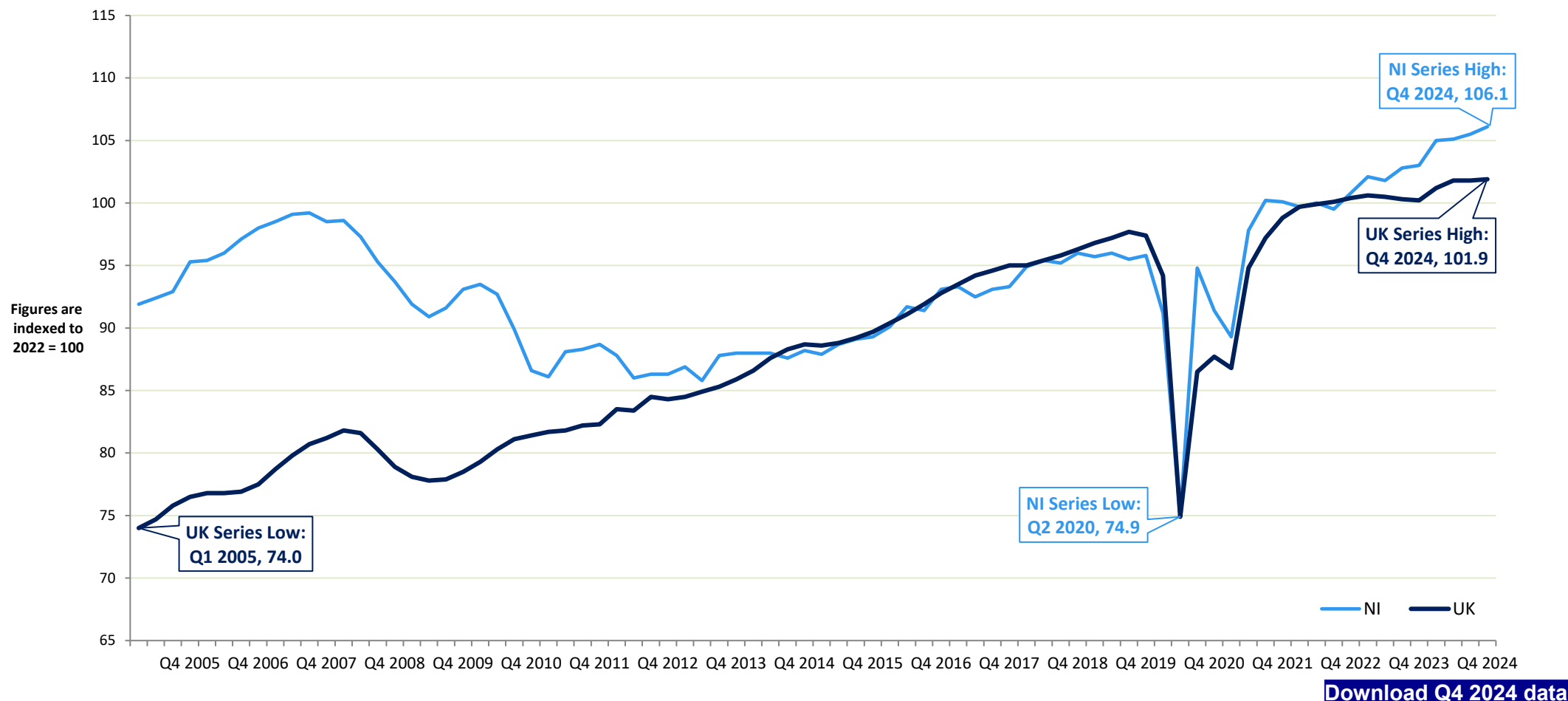
1 Summary of Index of Services

1.1 Changes in Index of Services

The seasonally adjusted estimate for the NI IOS for Quarter 4 2024 showed:

- an increase of 0.6% over the quarter from the Quarter 3 2024 revised estimate;
- an increase of 3.0% over the year from the Quarter 4 2023 revised estimate; and
- an increase of 2.9% when the most recent four quarters are compared to the previous four quarters.

Figure 1.1 IOS, NI & UK, Q1 2005 – Q4 2024

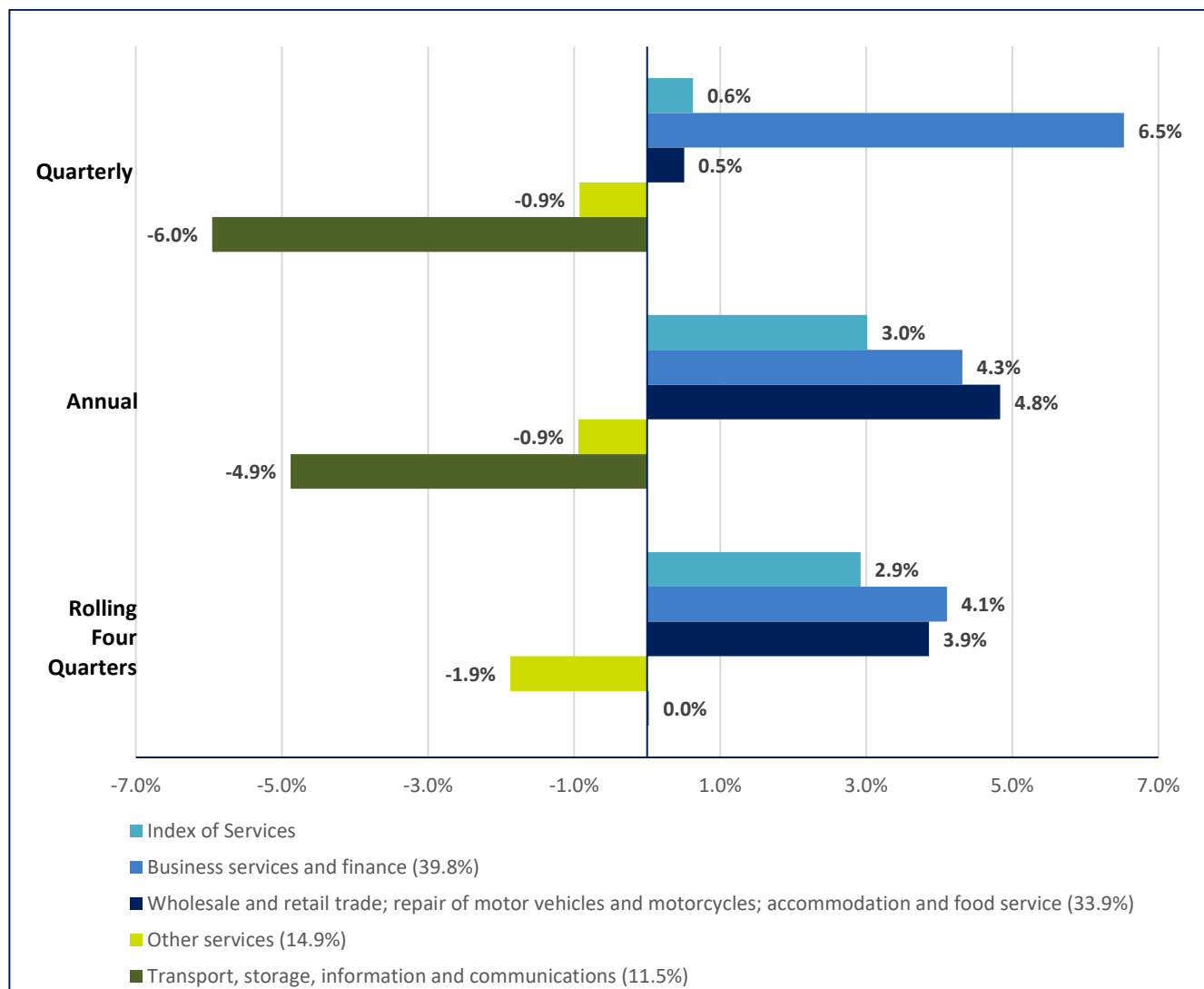


1.2 Commentary

NI services sector output increased over the fourth quarter of 2024 to reach a new series high. Services sector output increased by 0.6% over the quarter and 3.0% over the year. Output in the NI services sector is 41.7% higher than the series low seen in Quarter 2 2020.

Both the NI and UK indices have followed an upward trend since Quarter 1 2015, with the exception of the Coronavirus pandemic period, beginning in Quarter 2 2020. The two series showed a similar level of decline in Quarter 2 2020 and have followed a similar trend in the subsequent recovery, with the NI index now slightly outperforming the UK index. The NI Index of Services is now 10.8% above its pre-pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019, and the UK IOS is 4.7% above its pre-pandemic level.

Figure 1.2 NI IOS Quarterly, Annual and Rolling Four Quarter Changes at Sector Level¹



¹ Note that each broad sector index and the overall IOS index are seasonally adjusted independently of each other. It is not appropriate to directly compare the changes in the broad sectors to the changes in the overall IOS index.

2 Services output by sector

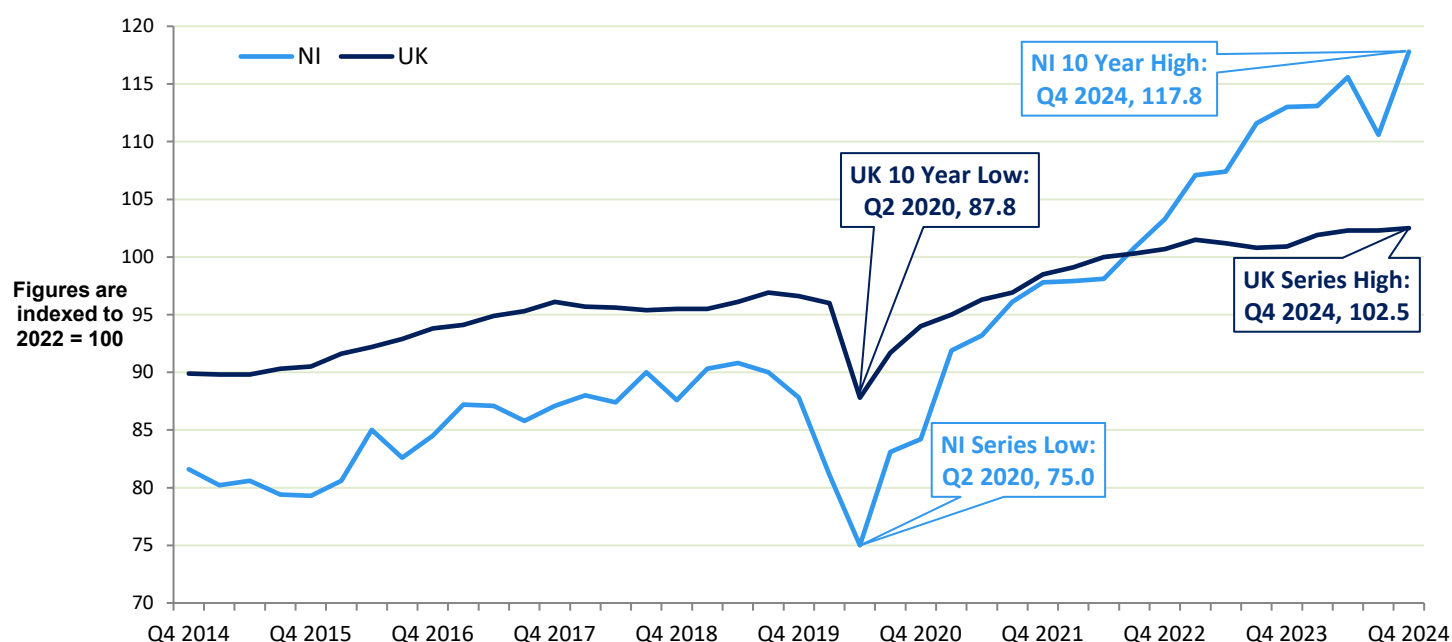
2.1 Business services and finance sector

(SIC 07 Section KLMN) - (weight = 39.8% of IOS): includes financial service activities, real estate activities, specialised professional, scientific and technical activities and a variety of activities that support general business operations.

Key Findings:

- The NI seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - an increase of 6.5% over the quarter;
 - an increase of 4.3% over the year; and
 - an increase of 4.1% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- The UK seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - an increase of 0.2% over the quarter;
 - an increase of 1.7% over the year; and
 - an increase of 1.2% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- NI output is now 34.2% above the pre-pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019.
- UK output in Quarter 4 2024 is now at a series high.

Figure 2.1 Business services and finance sector, NI & UK, Q4 2014 – Q4 2024



[Download Q4 2024 data](#)

The UK index in the Business services and finance sector generally outperformed the NI index between 2014 and Quarter 2 2022. NI output saw a larger decline in 2020 than UK output and reached a series low in Quarter 2 2020. Subsequent recovery has seen the NI index outperform the UK series and reach a ten year high in Quarter 4 2024.

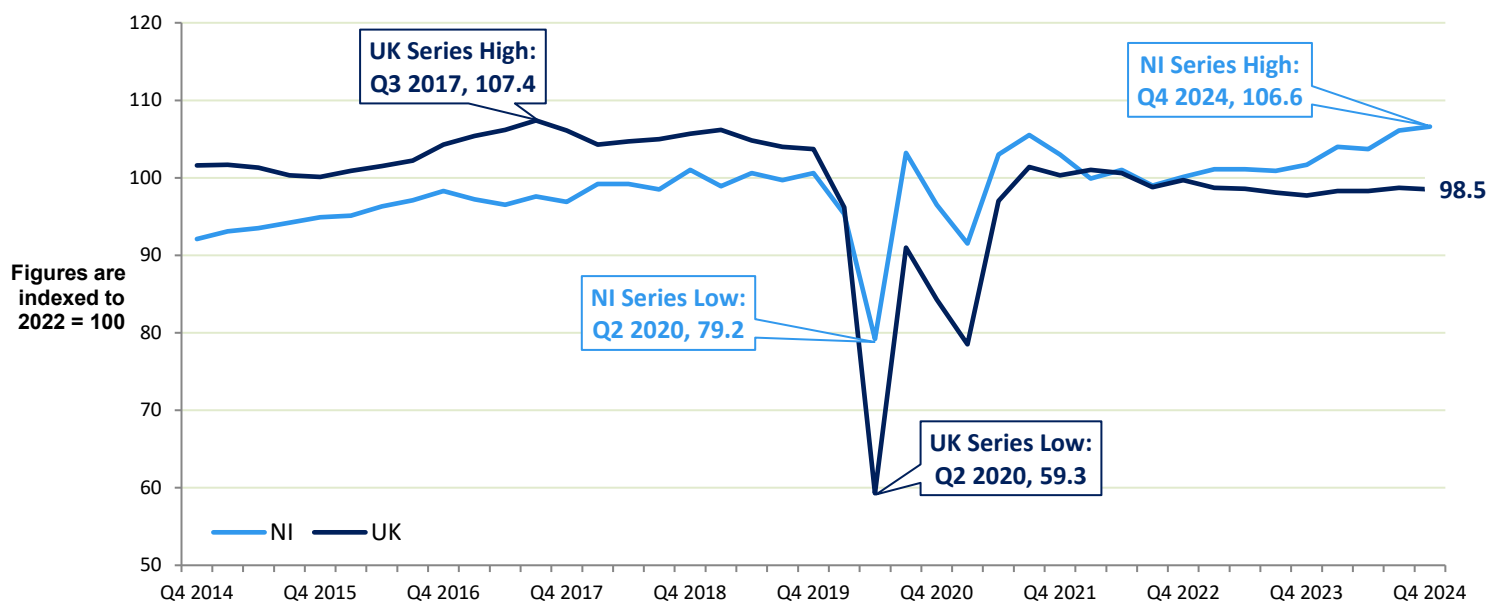
2.2 Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service sector

(SIC 07 Section GI) – (weight = 33.9% of IOS): includes the wholesale and retail sale and the supply of services incidental to the sale of merchandise as well as the repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles. This sector also includes the provision of short-stay accommodation for visitors and the provision of complete meals and drinks fit for immediate consumption.

Key Findings:

- The NI seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - an increase of 0.5% over the quarter;
 - an increase of 4.8% over the year; and
 - an increase of 3.9% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- The UK seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - a decrease of 0.2% over the quarter;
 - an increase of 0.8% over the year; and
 - an increase of 0.2% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- NI output in Quarter 4 2024 is 34.6% higher than the series low (Quarter 2 2020).
- NI output is now at a series high in Q4 2024.

Figure 2.2 Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service sector, NI & UK, Q4 2014 – Q4 2024



[Download Q4 2024 data](#)

The NI and UK indices followed a similar trend in this sector until Quarter 1 2020 when the UK series saw a greater decrease than the NI series. Subsequent recovery has seen the series diverge slightly but follow similar trends. In Quarter 4 2024 the UK index is 8.2% lower than the series high seen in Quarter 3 2017 and is now 5.0% below its pre-pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019. The NI index remains 6.0% above its pre-pandemic level.

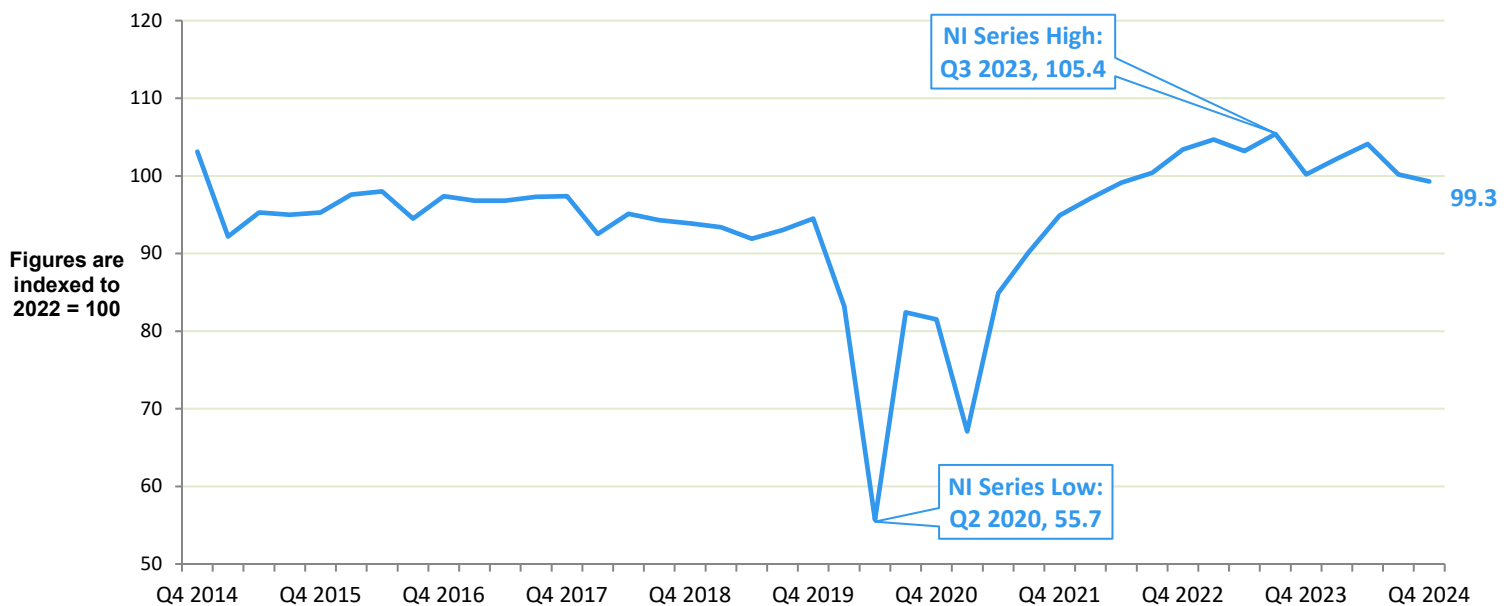
2.3 Other services sector²

(SIC 07 Section PQRS) - (weight 14.9% of IOS): includes other activities not covered elsewhere - education, health & social work, arts, entertainment and recreation and other services.

Key Findings:

- The NI seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - a decrease of 0.9% over the quarter;
 - a decrease of 0.9% over the year; and
 - a decrease of 1.9% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- NI output in Quarter 4 2024 is 5.8% lower than the series high seen in Quarter 3 2023.
- NI output in Quarter 4 2024 is 78.3% above the series low seen in Quarter 2 2020.

Figure 2.3 Other services sector, NI, Q4 2014 – Q4 2024



[Download Q4 2024 data](#)

The NI index followed a consistent trend in this sector between Quarter 1 2015 and Quarter 4 2019. The index fell to a series low in Quarter 2 2020 and has since recovered to a series high in Quarter 3 2023. Quarter 4 2024 is 5.1% above the pre-pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019.

² The UK does not publish results on the same basis as NI so there are no UK results to compare against.

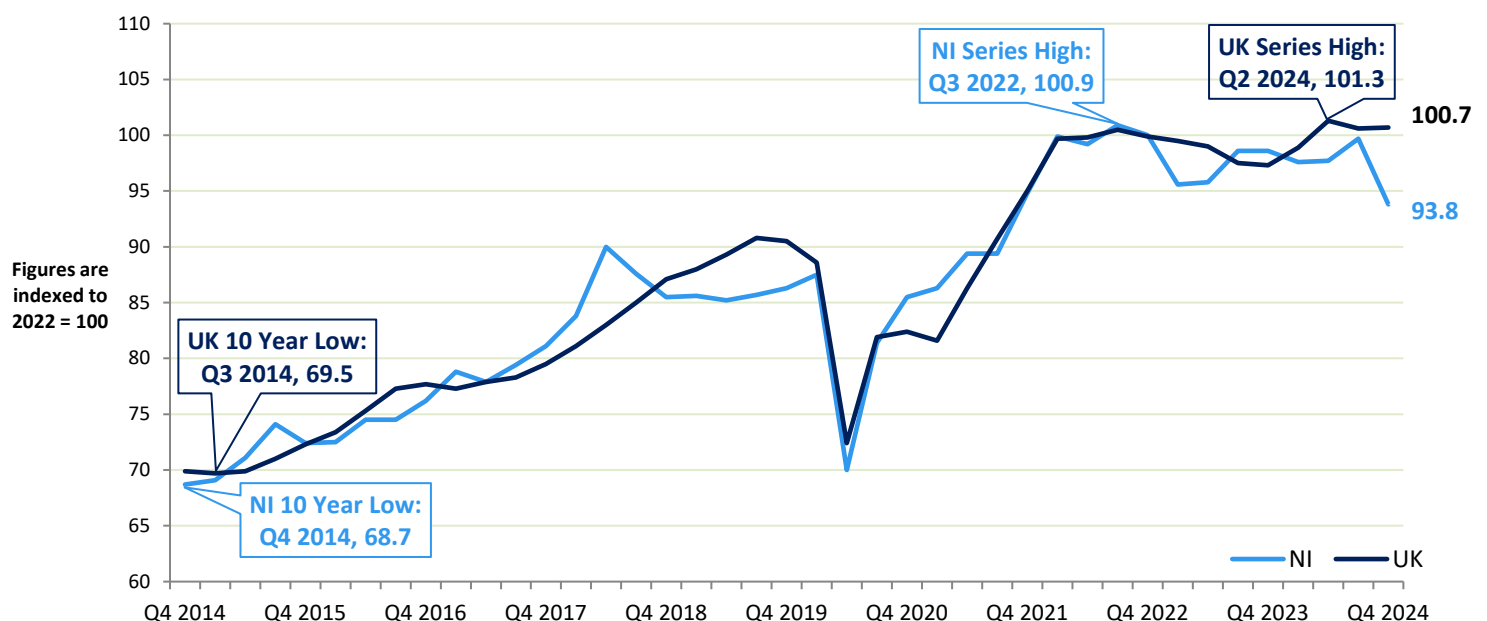
2.4 Transport, storage, information and communications sector

(SIC 07 Section HJ) - (weight 11.5% of IOS): includes the provision of passenger or freight transport and associated activities, postal and courier activities, the production and distribution of information and cultural products, as well as data or communications, information technology activities and the processing of data and other information service activities.

Key Findings:

- The NI seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - a decrease of 6.0% over the quarter;
 - a decrease of 4.9% over the year; and
 - no change on a rolling four quarter basis.
- The UK seasonally adjusted figures showed:
 - no change over the quarter;
 - an increase of 3.5% over the year; and
 - an increase of 2.1% on a rolling four quarter basis.
- NI output is now 7.1% below the series high seen in Quarter 3 2022 while UK output is 0.6% below its series high seen in Quarter 2 2024
- NI output in Quarter 4 2024 is 36.5% above the ten year low seen in Quarter 4 2014.

Figure 2.4 Transport, storage, information and communications, NI & UK, Q4 2014 – Q4 2024



[Download Q4 2024 data](#)

The NI and UK indices were both on an upward trend in the Transport, storage, information and communications sector throughout the series until the decline seen in Quarter 2 2020. Since then both the NI and UK indices have recovered and are now above the pre-pandemic levels seen in Quarter 4 2019, with the NI index reaching a series high in Quarter 3 2022, and the UK index reaching a series high in Quarter 2 2024. The NI index is now 8.6% above the pre-pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019, while the UK index is 11.2% above its Quarter 4 2019 level.

3 Retail Sales Index

The quarterly RSI provides a timely indicator of change in output within the private retail service industries in Northern Ireland (NI). The retail sales sector refers to SIC 47 (Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles) and is a subset of the Index of Services (IOS) aspect of the Quarterly Business Survey (QBS). The Northern Ireland RSI is an “official statistic in development”, previously called an “Experimental Statistic”, as it continues to be reviewed and undergo development.

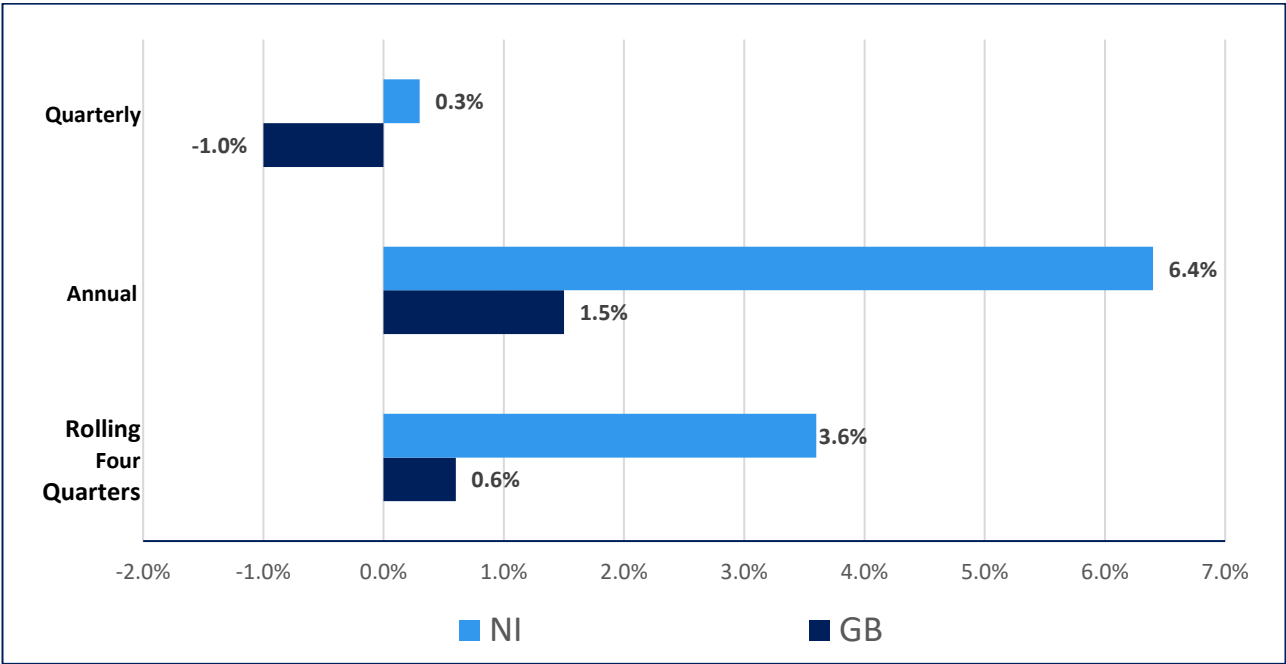
Key Points

- Retail output in NI increased by 0.3% over the quarter to Quarter 4 2024 and increased by 6.4% over the year.
- GB RSI output saw a decrease of 1.0% over the quarter and an increase of 1.5% over the year.
- NI RSI output remains 1.1% below the pre-Coronavirus pandemic level seen in Quarter 4 2019 while GB RSI output is now 3.4% below its Quarter 4 2019 level.
- When the most recent four quarters are compared to the previous four quarters the NI RSI increased by 3.6% and the GB RSI increased by 0.6%.
- NI RSI output is 4.9% below the series high seen in Quarter 3 2020.
- NI RSI output is 9.3% higher than the lowest point (Quarter 3 2022) since the series began.

3.1 Commentary

Historically the NI and GB Retail indices followed the same general upward trend between Quarter 1 2014 and Quarter 2 2019. The GB index then saw a greater level of decline in Quarter 2 2020 than the NI index but has subsequently recovered 9.3% to reach its current level. In comparison the NI index went on to reach its series low in Quarter 1 2021 but has subsequently recovered 8.8% to reach its current level.

Figure 3.1 NI and GB RSI Quarterly, Annual and Rolling Four Quarter Changes

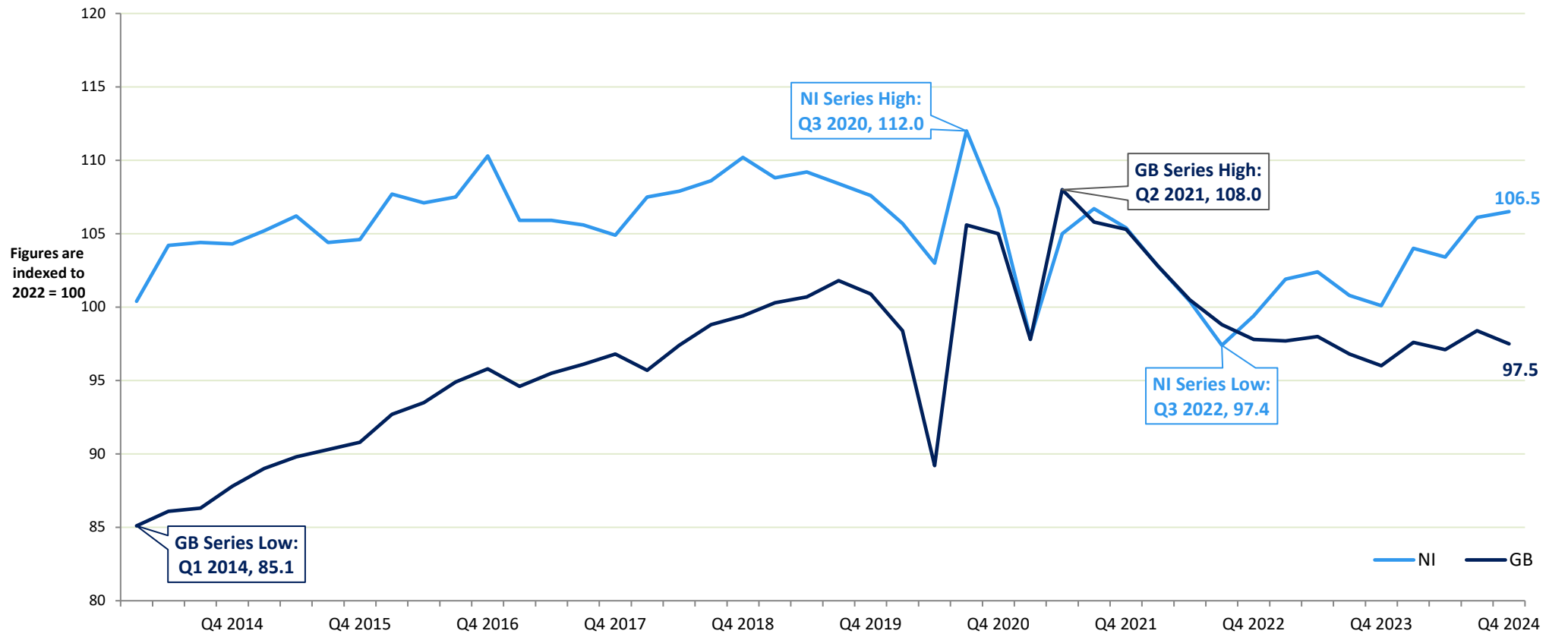


3.2 Summary of the Retail Sales Index

The seasonally adjusted estimate for NI RSI output for Quarter 4 2024:

- increased by 0.3% over the quarter from the revised Quarter 3 2024 estimate;
- increased by 6.4% over the year from the revised Quarter 4 2024 estimate; and
- increased by 3.6% when the most recent four quarters are compared to the previous four quarters.

Figure 3.2 RSI, NI & GB, Q1 2014 – Q4 2024



[Download Q4 2024 data](#)

4 Background notes

Further Information

Data published within this bulletin is available to download from our [website](#) and the new NISRA [Data Portal](#).

Detailed background information documents and methodology information have also been published [online](#) for users to refer to for more detailed information on the IOS.

Changes to recent releases

Quarter	Change	Detail
Quarter 1 2024	Revised 2019 GVA	Figures in this publication have been weighted using the revised Northern Ireland 2019 GVA which became available on 24 April 2024.
Quarter 3 2024	Updated 2022 GVA Reference Year	The UK National Accounts, The Blue Book: 2024 was published on 31 October 2024. For the last three years the reference year and base year have remained at 2019 due to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the economy. In line with Blue Book 2024, we have moved the base year on to 2022 as part of our production process. Because the base year has been moved forward over a longer time period than usual, the revisions to volume estimates as a result of changing base years may be larger than usual.

Next publication

The next bulletin is due to be published on 12 June 2025.

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5 Index of Tables

(Links below will open in a new window)

<u>1.1</u>	<u>IOS, NI and UK</u>
<u>2.1</u>	<u>Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service – SIC07 Sections G & I, NI and UK</u>
<u>2.2</u>	<u>Business services and finance – SIC07 Sections K-N, NI and UK</u>
<u>2.3</u>	<u>Other services – SIC07 Sections P-S, NI only</u>
<u>2.4</u>	<u>Transport, storage, information & communication – SIC07 Sections H & J, NI and UK</u>
<u>3.1</u>	<u>IOS percentage change, NI and UK</u>
<u>3.2</u>	<u>IOS percentage change by Broad Industry Group, NI</u>
<u>3.3</u>	<u>Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; accommodation and food service percentage change, NI and UK</u>
<u>3.4</u>	<u>Business services and finance percentage change, NI and UK</u>
<u>3.5</u>	<u>Other services percentage change, NI only</u>
<u>3.6</u>	<u>Transport, storage, information & communication percentage change, NI and UK</u>
<u>3.7</u>	<u>IOS – Quarterly, Annual and Rolling Annual average changes by sector, NI only</u>
<u>3.8</u>	<u>NI IOS by Broad Sector – Annual Average</u>
<u>4.1</u>	<u>Retail Sales Index, NI and GB</u>
<u>4.2</u>	<u>NI Retail Sales index and Index of Services</u>
<u>4.3</u>	<u>Retail Sales Index percentage change, NI and GB</u>
<u>4.4</u>	<u>NI Retail Sales Index - Quarterly, annual and rolling average change</u>
<u>4.5</u>	<u>NI Retail Sales Index - Annual Average</u>