

Digest of statistics for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland 2020/21

Annual publication

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Main stories

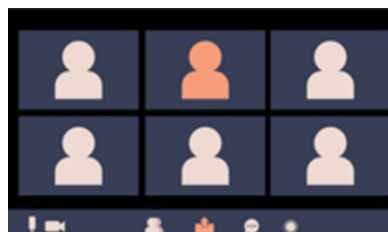
- There were 15,161 new items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue in 2020/21 which contains over 1.5 million item descriptions.
- In 2020/21, there were a total of 5,424 in person and virtual visits to PRONI. These visits included use of the search and reading rooms and attendance at organised on-line virtual events.
- There were 9.2 million page views of PRONI's website in 2020/21.

Digital Images



In 2020/21, there were 19,220 digital frames captured resulting in 31,996 image files being generated.

PRONI Events



In 2020/21, there were 47 online virtual PRONI events.

Government Files



A total of 604 government files were released in 2020.

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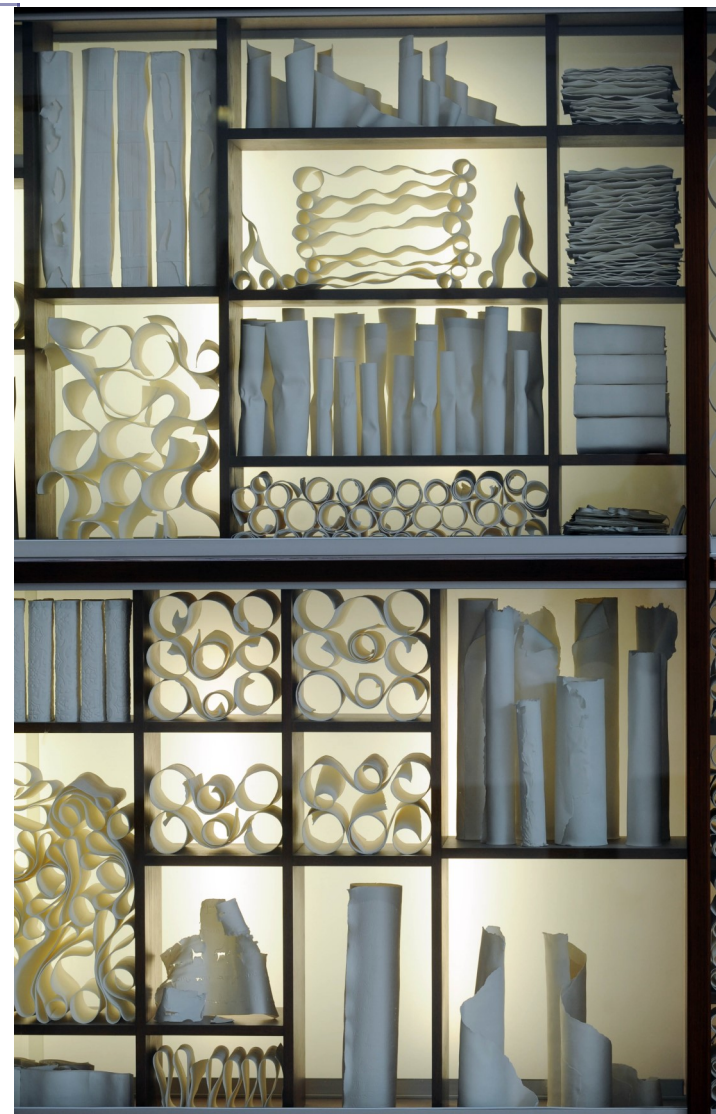
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Contact Information

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Statistician:

2 Titanic Boulevard, Belfast

Clair Stewart

BT3 9HQ

psu@communities-ni.gov.uk

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni>

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Introduction

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is the official archive for Northern Ireland.

It aims to identify and preserve records of historical, social and cultural importance and make them available for the information, education and enjoyment of the public.

PRONI is the official place of deposit for public records in Northern Ireland. In addition, it collects a wide range of archives from private sources. PRONI also advises on and promotes best practice in archive and records management to ensure that today's records will be available for future generations.

PRONI is located in Titanic Quarter Belfast and provides a reading room and search room for visitors.

There are approximately three million documents stored in the archives at PRONI which fall under the categories of either public or private records. PRONI's oldest document is a bull of Pope Honorius the Third, dated 1219.

The UTV archive became available for onsite viewing by appointment at PRONI during 2019/20 however this onsite service was suspended during 2020/21 as a result of the pandemic. This archive consists of approximately 70,000 films and tapes, and a playback room is located on the ground floor of the PRONI building.

PRONI hosts four General Registry Office of Northern Ireland (GRONI) terminals which allow users direct access to GRONI's most up to date Births, Marriages and Deaths database.

Methodology and quality of the data

These statistics provide a broad overview of PRONI. The data presented covers 2020/21 and, where appropriate, other years are also included. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operation of PRONI in 2020/21. Access to PRONI's physical collections was restricted and the majority of PRONI staff were not working onsite on a full time basis, in line with social distancing measures.

Figures less than 0.5% are denoted by '0', while no responses are represented by '-'.

- Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.
- Data is validated by PRONI on an ongoing basis and quality assured by DfC Professional Services Unit.



Receiving and Preserving Records

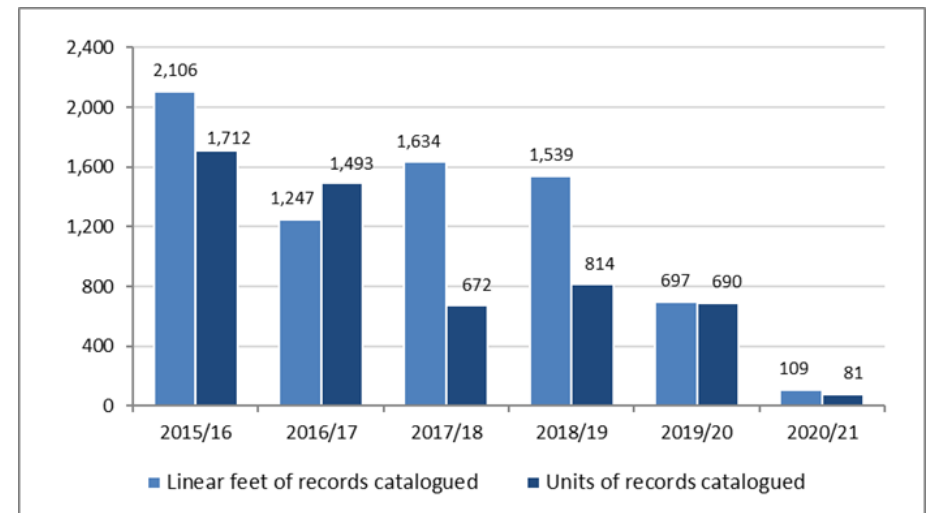
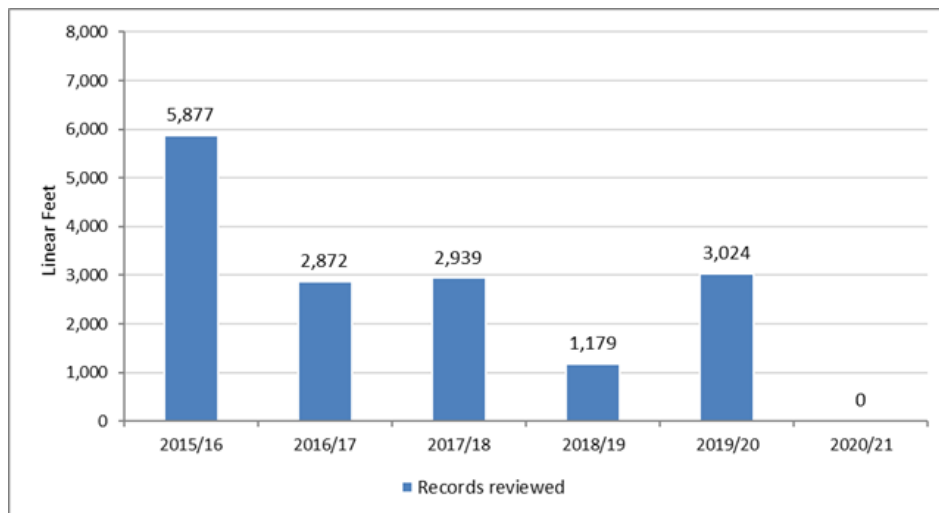
Records reviewed, catalogued and published

Public authority records which are judged to be of lasting value are moved to PRONI for permanent preservation. PRONI also receives records from non-government sources e.g. churches, businesses, charities and families.

Potential deposits are reviewed to assess their suitability for preservation. Records to be preserved by PRONI are accessioned. This involves assigning a reference number and recording information about the collection e.g. a summary description and relevant dates. Once accessioned the records are stored and catalogued. Cataloguing involves creating descriptions of the record/group of records in the PRONI catalogue.



In 2020/21, no records were reviewed on-site due to COVID-19. There were 109 linear feet of records and 81 units of records catalogued in 2020/21. A PRONI box equals one linear foot and the measurement demonstrates the amount of space freed up in storage in public bodies.



1. One linear foot is 0.3 of a metre. In 2020/21, 33 linear metres of records were catalogued.
2. Unit of records catalogued is calculated using the linear feet weighted by degree of difficulty.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operation of PRONI in 2020/21.

Receiving and Preserving Records

Records reviewed, catalogued and published

The catalogue summarises the scope and content of PRONI's archives and contains over 1.5 million catalogue item descriptions. A snapshot of the catalogue is made available to the public via PRONI's electronic catalogue (e-CATNI).

There were 2,724 new items added to the PRONI catalogue in 2020/21 and 15,161 items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue.

Available Collections

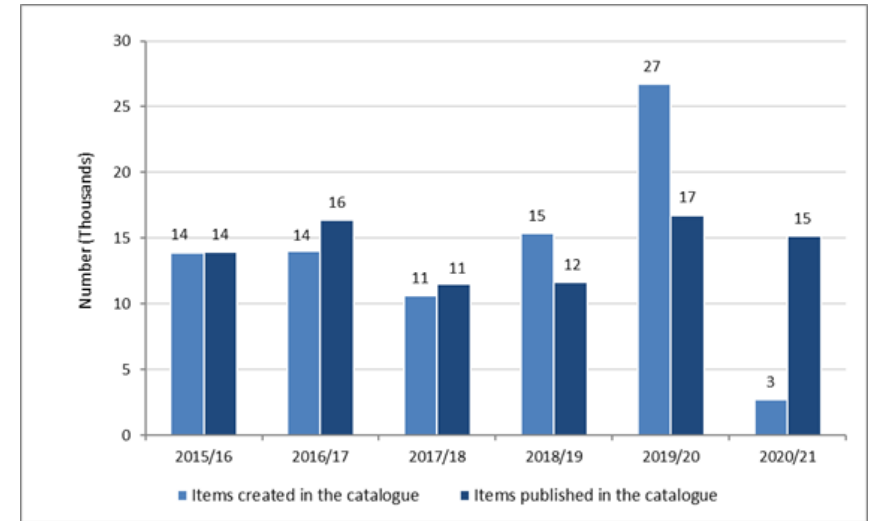
PRONI holds millions of documents that relate chiefly, but not exclusively to Northern Ireland. The records held in PRONI fall into two main categories:

Public Records

PRONI holds public records mainly dating from the formation of Northern Ireland (1921) to the present day. However, a significant number of records also date back to the nineteenth century and some to the eighteenth century and includes the archives of courts, schools, valuation, Board of Guardians, Ordnance Survey, land registry, hospitals including asylums, local authorities and prisons.

Private records

PRONI also holds a diverse range of privately deposited records such as letters, journals, diaries, photographs and albums. There are also extensive archives of churches, landed estates, businesses, charities, sporting bodies, and political parties.



1. An item can be a single letter, volume or file or may relate to a bundle of documents.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operation of PRONI in 2020/21.



Digitisation of glass plate negatives

Digital Preservation

The primary aim of PRONI's Digital Repository is to store, preserve and provide access where possible to digital records. The records received by PRONI are created by government departments, public sector bodies and private depositors. The digital records and associated metadata are stored permanently in PRONI's Digital Repository. Access copies are created for digital records which are open to the public and are made available through PRONI's online web application, eCatalogue, and the onsite electronic catalogue system, CALM.

In 2020/21, 105 digital records were published via PRONI's electronic catalogue, 235 digital records were published via CALM and 22,092 digital records were processed to PRONI's digital repository¹.

Web Archive

PRONI provides a web archiving service whereby a selection of websites from across Northern Ireland's public sector are harvested from the internet and stored in the [PRONI Web Archive](#). Privately funded websites may also be included where the content is considered appropriate for inclusion. A selection of Northern Ireland websites are harvested each year using a web crawler. In 2020/21, 380 web crawls were published on the PRONI Web Archive and 174 individual websites were crawled.

1. A digitised volume may be comprised of hundreds of individual records (tiff files) in the Digital Repository whereas the access copy made available to the public via the eCatalogue or CALM is a single pdf file containing multiple pages.

Receiving and Preserving Records

Digital Images

One method of preserving is capturing images of the records digitally. Making digital copies allows the information to be accessed without the original record being handled and also allows access by more than one person at a time. Many collections of records are now available online. Increasingly, more time and professional expertise is required to produce an enhanced image suitable for wider access, in addition to the preservation master copy. The images generated include the master copy, a high resolution restored image for archival purposes and a small image (usually in jpeg or pdf format) for access purposes.

In 2020/21, there were 19,220 digital frames captured resulting in 31,996 image files being generated.

The table below provides a breakdown of the number of digital frames captured for specific collections that were digitised in 2020/21.

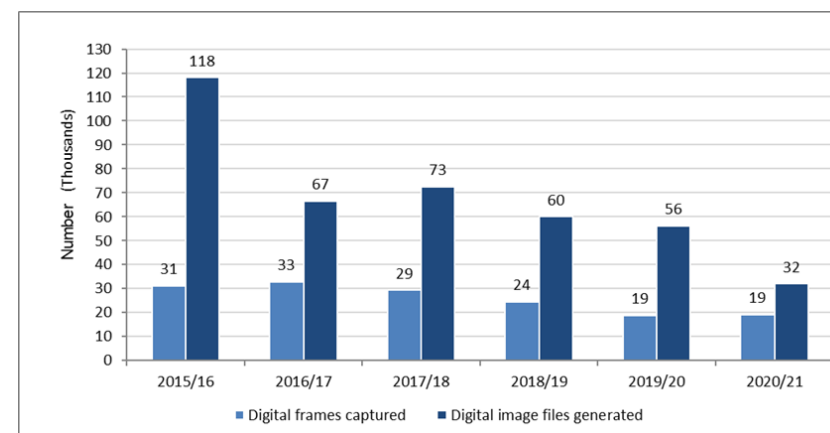
	Unit: Number
	2020/21
Index to Indoor Relief Registers - Belfast Board of Guardians (BG/7/GK)	9,082
Local Authority Welfare Committee Minute Books (LA/79/28 & LA/5/28)	5,789
CAIN (various official records)	1,344
Prison Registers (HMP)	633
Annesley Photographic Collection (D1854/5/1)	615
Ministry of Home Affairs - Child Care - Minutes of Welfare Committee (HA/13)	603
Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations (D2661/D)	297
Allison Photographic Collection - Digital Restoration (D2886)	266
Beyond 2022 Project: Groves Manuscripts (T808)	262
Miscellaneous ¹	329
Number of digital images captured	19,220



Donard Lodge .

Photograph of Donard Lodge, County Down taken by The Honourable Hugh Annesley, March 1855 (PRONI Ref: D1854/5/1/1 No. 2).

This image above comes from an album which contains some of the earliest examples of photography held at PRONI. It is a salted paper print, the technique created by one of the inventors of photography, Henry Fox Talbot, in the 1830s. Paper is dampened with a weak solution of ordinary table salt (sodium chloride), then brushed with a strong solution of silver nitrate. This produces silver chloride which is light-sensitive. The paper darkens where it is exposed to light.



Making records available to the public

Document Production

Anyone can access documents in PRONI. By registering with PRONI, visitors can request documents through the onsite ordering system.

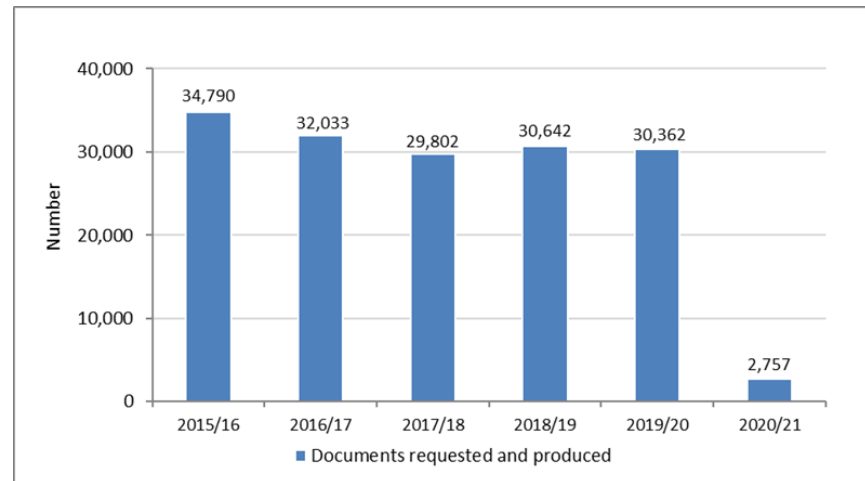
In 2020/21, there were 2,757 documents requested and produced. This number was much lower than for previous years due to the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

PRONI has a number of targets to measure performance. Normally original documents requested by visitors are retrieved from the stores, produced in the Reading Room for consultation and then returned to their designated locations in the stores. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of the CALM document ordering system by the public was suspended in 2020/21. Whilst the tightest restrictions were in place all orders for records were placed by staff in advance, to facilitate quarantining of the records.

Document quarantine during 2020/21 meant that it was not possible to adhere to the document production target.



PRONI Search Room



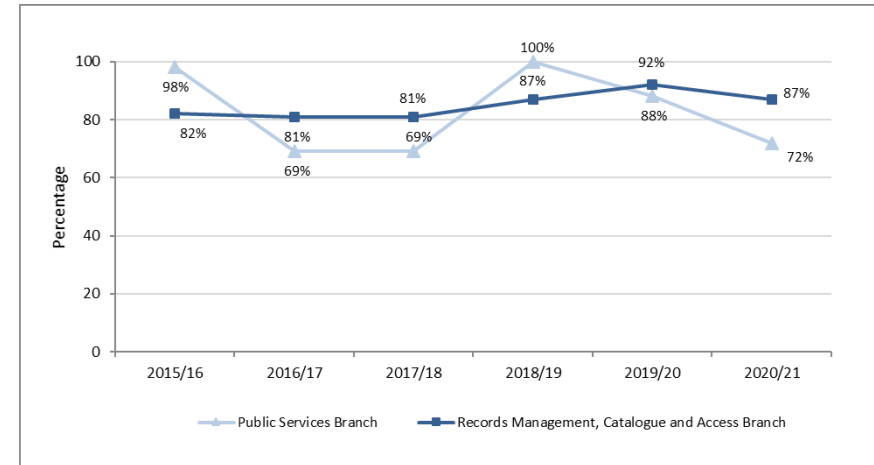
1. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operation of PRONI in 2020/21.

Making records available to the public

Written Correspondence

In 2020/21, the written correspondence target for PRONI's Public Services branch stated that 95% of written enquiries for open material should be responded to within 20 days. For Records Management, Catalogue and Access branch 80% of requests should be responded to within 10 days.

There were 2,050 written enquiries to PRONI's Public Services branch in 2020/21. All queries were answered, with 72% of responses to written correspondence meeting the target. For Records Management, Cataloguing and Access branch, 87% of the responses to the 1,078 written correspondence enquiries met the target.



Making records available to the public

PRONI website

[Search the archives online](#)



PRONI has a programme of digitising significant archives to make them accessible to the public online. The PRONI website provides a number of applications allowing users to search the archives:

- [eCatalogue](#)
- [Freeholders Records](#)
- [Londonderry Corporation Records](#)
- [Name Search](#)
- [PRONI Historical Maps viewer](#)
- [PRONI Web Archive](#)
- [Street directories](#)
- [Ulster Covenant](#)
- [Valuation Revision Books](#)
- [Will calendars](#)



'Stay at Home Memories' archive

The eCatalogue is a fully searchable database containing over 1.5 million catalogue entries relating to PRONI's archives which is updated on a quarterly basis. Between April 2020 and March 2021, 15,161 item descriptions were added to the PRONI online catalogue.

[Image Gallery](#)

Images from the PRONI archives are available to view on the photo-sharing website Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/proni>). Photographs added during 2020/21 include collection D4069 which contains photographs taken by various Rural District Councils between 1959 and 1964 for the production of official guides and publications. During 2020-21, PRONI added 218 photographs to the Flickr photo-stream. This brought the total number of PRONI photographs available to view on Flickr to 3,463.

Facebook

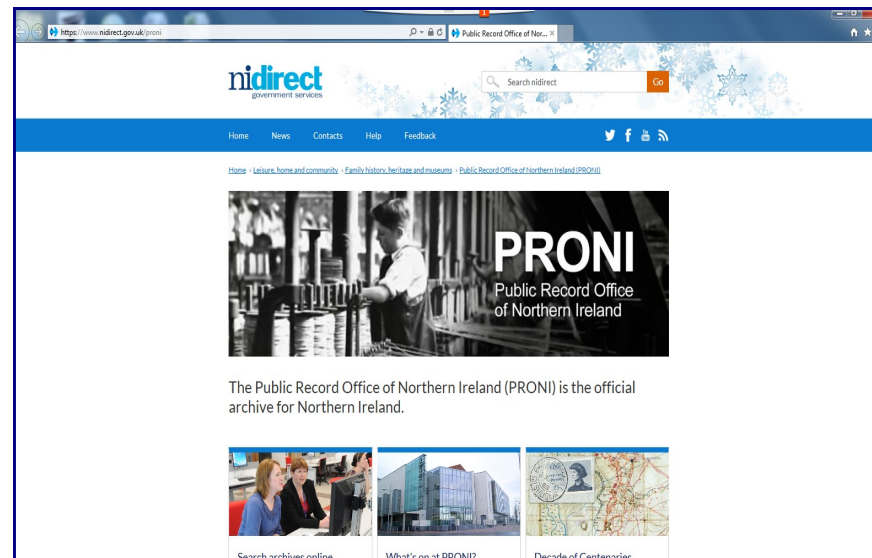
PRONI publishes a number of new Facebook posts each week. Posts include promoting new events, reminders of upcoming events and drawing attention to PRONI's resources and services. Popular posts have included 'Guess the Image' and 'On this Day'.

YouTube

PRONI aims to record its public events and talks when possible. These recordings are continuously being collected and added to PRONI's [YouTube channel](#). In 2020/21, an additional 20 talks were made available on PRONI's YouTube channel. The most popular videos for the year were: 'Leisureworld' (6,745 views); 'Irish Language & Culture, History of the Irish Language' (4,482 views); and 'The Hidden History of Protestants & the Irish Language' (3,973 views). The most viewed PRONI video of all time is 'Irish Language & Culture, History of the Irish Language' with 15,855 views.

PRONI Express

PRONI's monthly eNewsletter, the PRONI Express, includes information of forthcoming talks, events and new resources. Members of the public can subscribe to receive the eNewsletter at the following link: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/subscribe-pronis-eneewsletter>. At the end of 2020/21, a total of 5,670 people had subscribed to receive the eNewsletter, an increase of 292 in comparison to the previous year.



Making records available to the public

Release of Government Files

Each year, PRONI makes historical government records publicly available; generally these are the files of NI Departments and the Northern Ireland Office (Belfast). The annual release of selected official files continues against a background of greater public access through the Freedom of Information Act (2000), balanced against the need to protect personal information.

Annually since 1976, official records held by PRONI which were 30 years old have been reviewed with a view to making them publicly available ("the 30 year rule"). In September 2011, the Assembly accepted a Legislative Consent Motion to reduce the time limit for release from 30 years to 20 years ("the 20 year Rule"). This is underpinned by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the amendments made to it by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. The 20 year rule is being phased in over 10 years, with two years of records being reviewed and released each year. In 2020/21, as a direct consequence of COVID-19, it was only possible to review the records of NI Departments and the NIO with terminal dates of 1997, which were brought forward for release during December 2020. This process involves the referral of the files to the Responsible Authority for sensitivity review. This entails a page by page examination to ensure that a record contains nothing sensitive as defined by the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act.

A total of 604 government files were released in 2020. Of these, 154 files had some information blanked out, with the main reason for this being to protect personal information.

A further 35 government files could not be released at all, again this was usually to protect personal information.

The released files are listed in the [PRONI catalogue](#) and they are available to consult at PRONI.

PRONI on CAIN

The PRONI at CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) partnership publishes conflict-related documents selected from the Northern Ireland Office and NI Departmental files. [CAIN](#) is hosted by Ulster University. In 2020/21, as physical access to PRONI's collections was restricted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic no documents were added to CAIN. Over 2,500 PRONI documents are currently available on CAIN.



Dr Eamon Phoenix and Sam McBride were the speakers at PRONI's 'Secrets from the files' event which highlighted the recently released government records.

Providing information to Public Authorities

Written Requests

Records Management, Cataloguing and Access Branch received 242 official requests from Public Authorities seeking access to information contained in transferred historical records which are not open and not readily accessible. These requests can be received from Northern Ireland Government Departments and other public bodies.

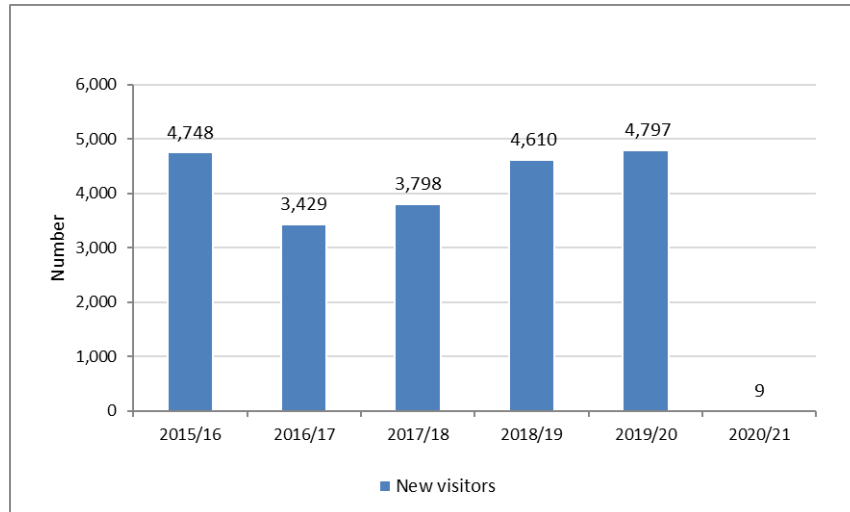
Since April 2020, PRONI has been required to respond to requests from the Historical Institutional Abuse Redress Board and provide any requested information within 7 days. Between April 2020 and March 2021 PRONI responded to 100% of the 620 requests received within the 7 day target.



Visitors and Visits

New Visitors

There were 9 new visitors registered in PRONI in 2020/21. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and issues around quarantining, it was not possible to facilitate the registration of new visitors for most of 2020/21.



1. Due to the small number of new visitors registering in 2020/21 it is not possible to provide a breakdown by age and country of origin.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operation of PRONI in 2020/21.



Visitors and Visits

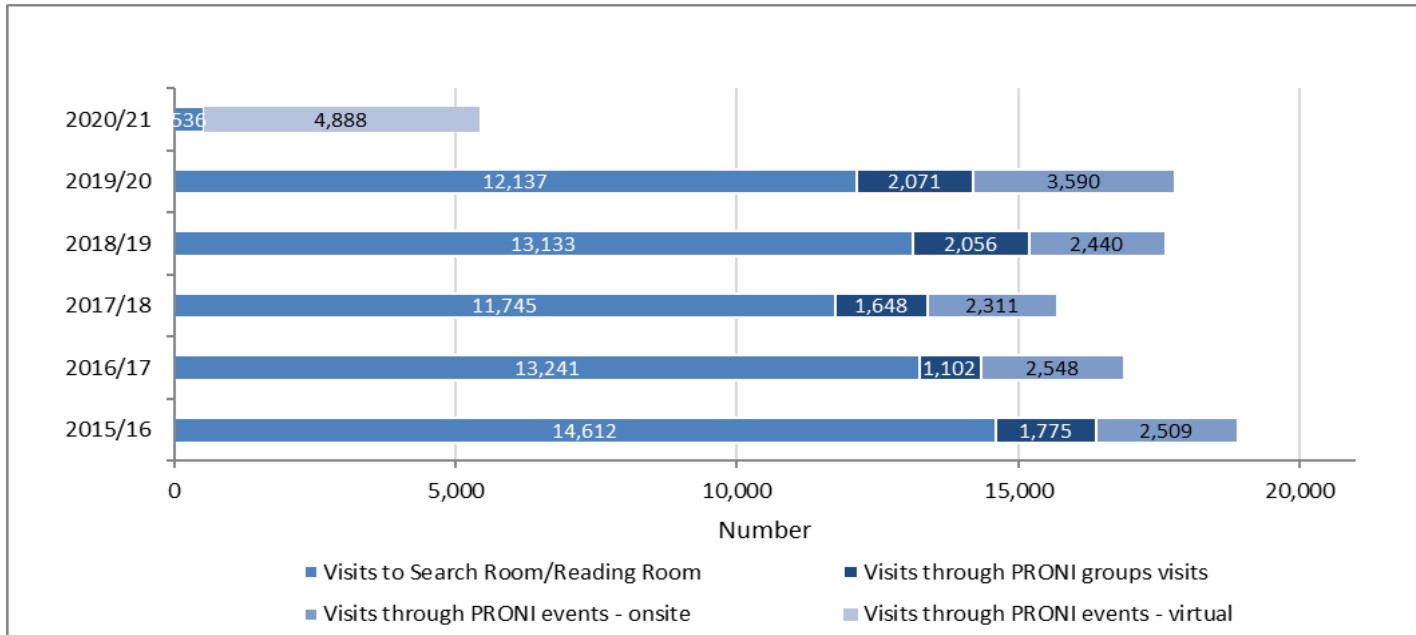
Visitors to PRONI

PRONI is committed to improving and increasing cultural participation. A series of public lectures, events and group visits takes place throughout the year.

There were 536 visits by the public to PRONI in 2020/21, all visits were to the Search Room / Reading room. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic no group visits or in person events took place at PRONI. Forty seven on-line virtual events were held which were attended by 4,888 members of the public.



Virtual event showing online viewers how to use the PRONI Map Viewer



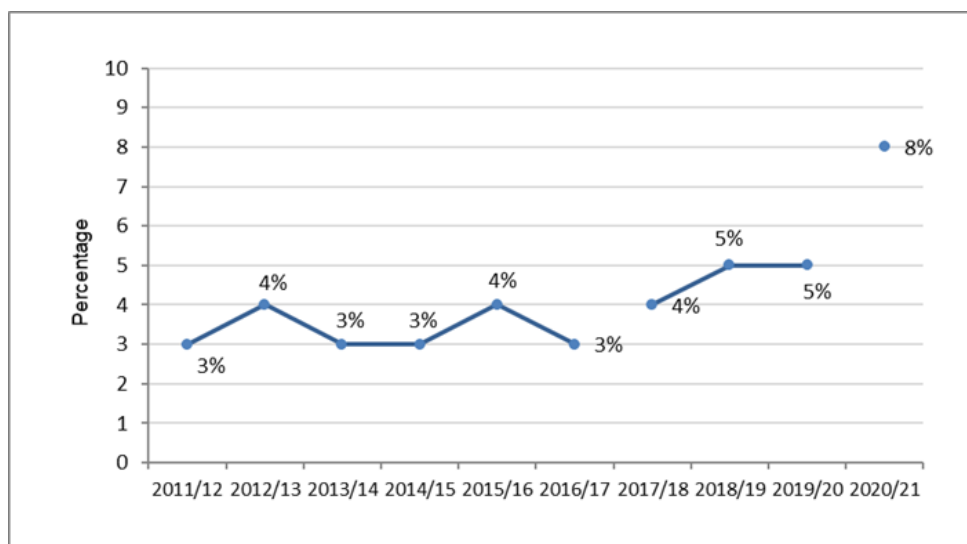
1. Virtual online events were introduced in 2020/21.

Visitors and Visits

Continuous Household Survey

The graph below presents data from the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to visits to and use of PRONI services. The results from the CHS 2020/21 are not directly comparable to previous years due to the significant changes to the survey in terms of methodology and content. More information relating to the CHS, methodology, definitions and the interpretation of the figures can be found in the report entitled [Engagement in culture, arts and sport by adults in Northern Ireland 2020/21 | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#) (Definitions and technical notes section).

- In 2020/21, almost one in every ten adults (8%) had used PRONI services within the last 12 months. Use of PRONI services includes, in addition to visiting PRONI, the use of the PRONI website to access the online catalogue or other applications, contacting PRONI by email to request information and engaging with PRONI through social media or viewing a PRONI exhibition at another public building.
- There was no difference in the use of PRONI services between those aged 45 and over and those aged less than 45 (both 8%).
- There were no differences in the use of PRONI services for gender, for those adults with dependants or when comparing the least deprived with the most deprived areas or urban and rural areas.



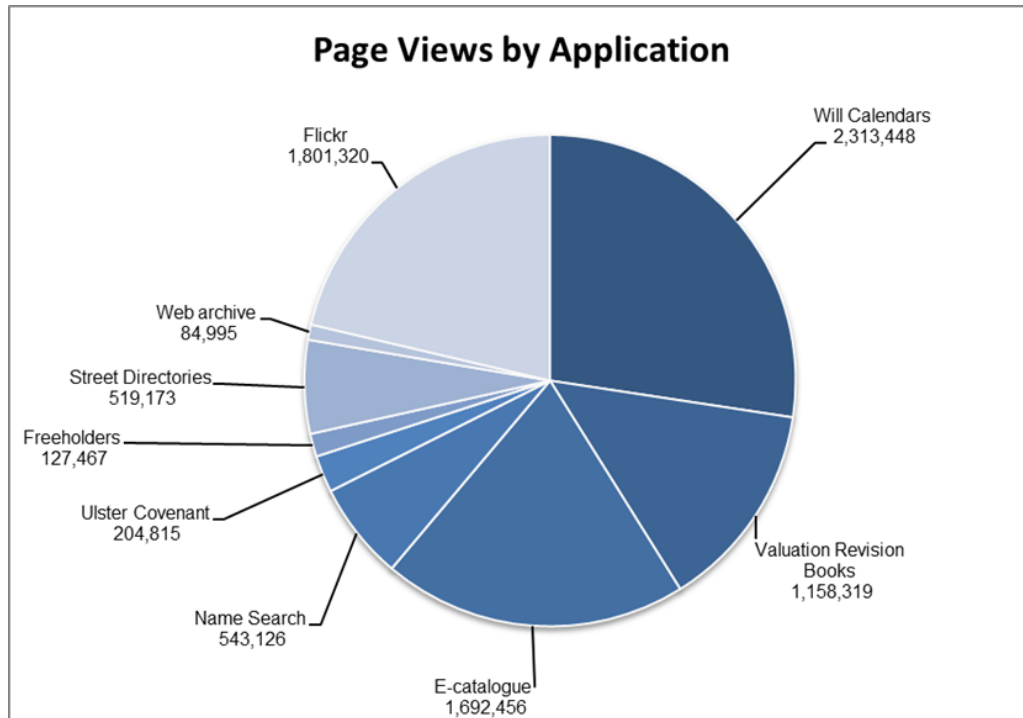
1. The results from the CHS 2020/21 are not directly comparable to previous years due to the significant changes to the survey in terms of methodology and content.
2. In 2017/18, the PRONI question was extended to cover other contact with PRONI in addition to visiting PRONI, including the use of the PRONI website to access the online catalogue or other applications and also contacting PRONI by telephone or email to request information.

Visitors and Visits

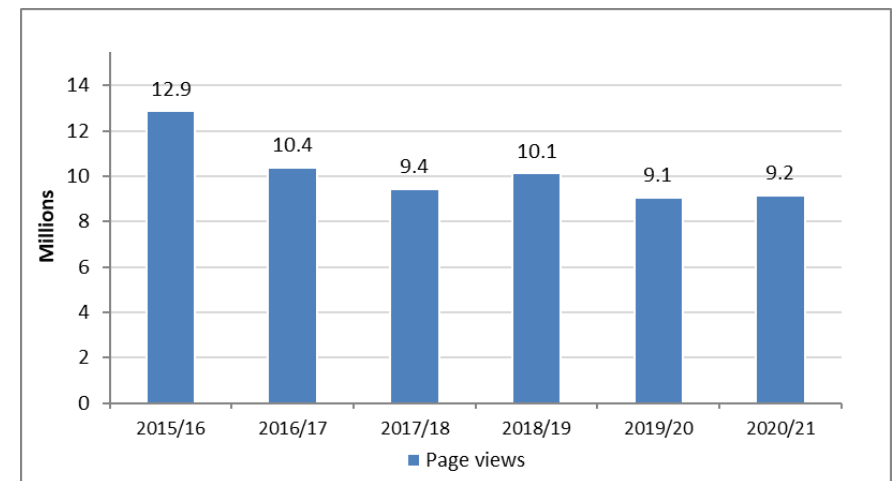
PRONI website

There were 9.2 million page views to the PRONI website in 2020/21. A breakdown of page views by application is presented in the chart below.

By March 2021, PRONI had 5,803 followers on Facebook, 1,170 followers on Instagram and 2,350 followers on Twitter. In 2020/21, 1,139 PRONI photographs on the Flickr photo-stream were marked as favourites by the public, 88 comments were added to photographs and there were 1,801,320 photo views.



Dr Leon Litvack launches “Dickens Irish Friends and Family Ties”

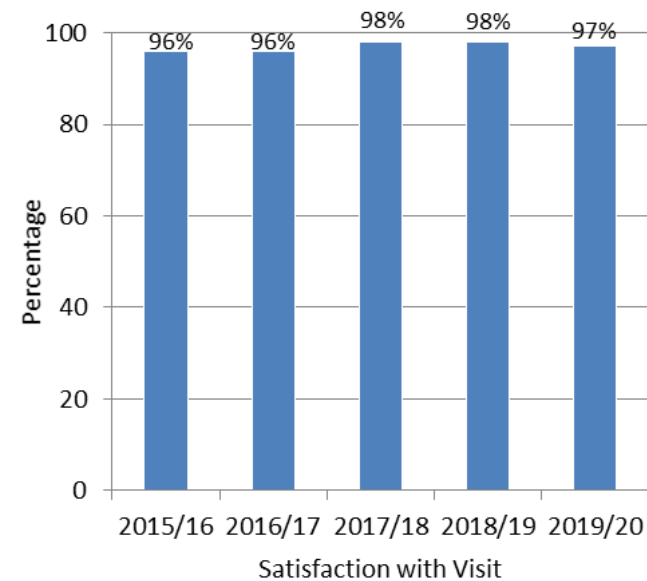


1. A page view is a hit to any file classified as a page.
2. Glossary provides explanations of the categories of pages.
3. From 2015/16 onwards 'Flickr' page views have been included in the total page views figure.
4. A new supplier has provided the number of Web Archive page views from 2018/19 onwards and the data is not comparable to previous years. The number of Web Archive page views for 2018/19 onwards is included in the total page views but has been removed for previous years (2014/15 to 2017/18).
5. Data is not available for the 'Will Calendars' category for October 2020 and data is not available for the 'Ulster Covenant', 'Freeholders' and 'Valuation' categories for October and November 2020.

Visits and Visitors

Satisfaction with PRONI

A number of surveys have been used to measure customer satisfaction in PRONI in previous years (see footnote below). From 2016/17 to 2019/20, customer satisfaction was measured using customer comment cards and event feedback forms where customers were asked to rate the visit, event or lecture on a 5 point scale. In 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no group visits or in person events took place at PRONI. In addition, comment cards were not used to collect information of those using the PRONI Search room / Reading room.



1. In 2015/16 customer satisfaction was measured through feedback forms which accompanied all events and lectures. From 2016/17 customer satisfaction has been measured using customer comment cards and event feedback forms. Customers are asked to rate the visit, event or lecture on a 5 point scale.

Glossary

Category	Description
E-catalogue	The eCatalogue is a fully searchable database containing over 1.5 million catalogue entries in PRONI's archives.
Freeholders	Freeholders were men who either owned their land outright or who held it in a lease for the duration of their life, or the lives of other people named in the lease. The freeholders' records application includes pre-1840 freeholders' registers and poll books.
Name search	The Name Search database is a searchable index listing pre-1858 diocesan wills and administration bonds; and surviving fragments of the 1740 and 1766 religious census returns and 1775 dissenters petitions.
Street Directories	Searchable database and associated digitised images of Belfast and Ulster Street Indexes, 1819-1900 listing names of principal inhabitants, merchants, shopkeepers, etc.
Ulster Covenant	The archive of the Ulster Unionist Council, held by PRONI, has just under half a million original signatures and addresses of the men and women who signed the Ulster Covenant or corresponding women's declaration on 28 September 1912.
Valuation revision books	PRONI holds valuation records relating to the valuation of property in Northern Ireland from the 1830s to 1993. The original purpose was, and remains, the assessment of every building and every piece of land and an estimation of its financial value.
Web archive	Together with the Internet Archive (and previously the Internet Memory Foundation), PRONI manages a programme to capture and preserve a selection of Northern Ireland's websites that are of historical and cultural importance to Northern Ireland.
Will calendars	Searchable catalogue of will calendar entries for the period 1858-1965.