

# Digest of statistics for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland 2019/20

Annual publication

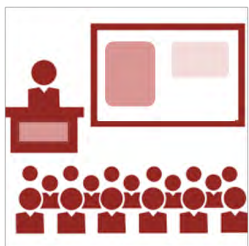
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## Main stories

- In 2019/20, there were 3,024 linear feet of records reviewed to assess their suitability for preservation.
- There were 16,753 new items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue in 2019/20 which contains over 1.5 million item descriptions.
- In 2019/20, there were a total of 19,829 visits to PRONI. These visits included use of the search and reading rooms, group visits and attendance at organised events.
- There were 9.1 million page views of PRONI's website in 2019/20.

### PRONI Events



In 2019/20, there were 64 lectures and PRONI events, 110 group visits and 9 temporary exhibitions held at PRONI.

### New Visitors to PRONI



There were 4,797 new visitors registered in PRONI in 2019/20. Over half (56%) of new visitors were from outside Northern Ireland, with 19% from the USA, 12% from England and Wales and 9% from Australia and New Zealand.

### Government Files



A total of 1,396 government files were released in 2019.

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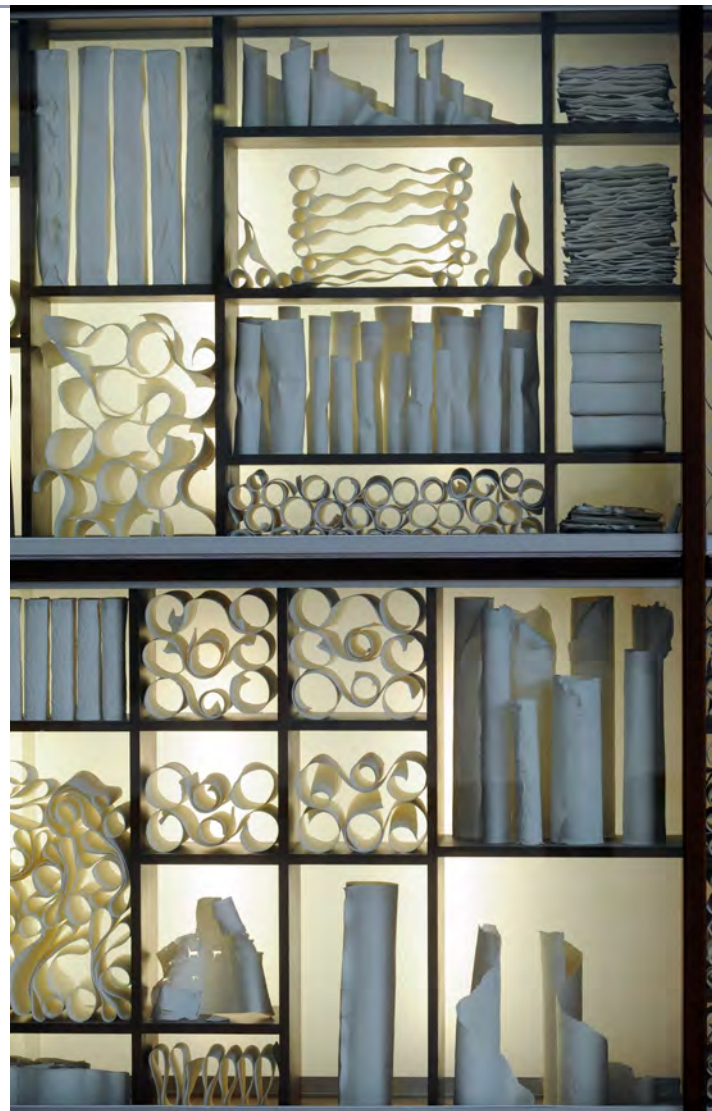
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<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni>

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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 at PRONI during 2019/20. This is an archive 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. From April to September 2019, a Registration of Deeds/House Mortgage Check Service was facilitated by Land & Property Services (LPS) staff in the PRONI Reading Room.

## Methodology and quality of the data

These statistics provide a broad overview of PRONI. The base year is 2019/20 and, where appropriate, other years are also included.

- Figures less than 0.5% are denoted by '0', while no responses are represented by '-'.
- Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.



# Receiving and Preserving Records

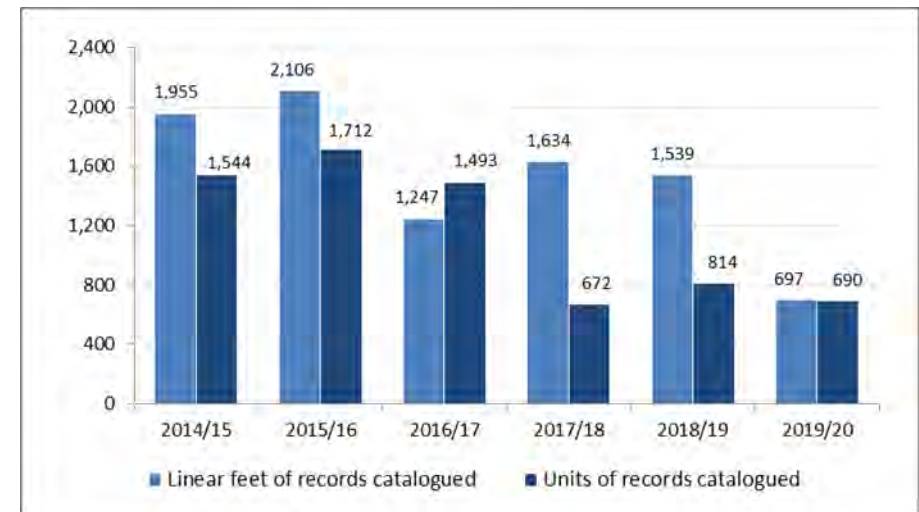
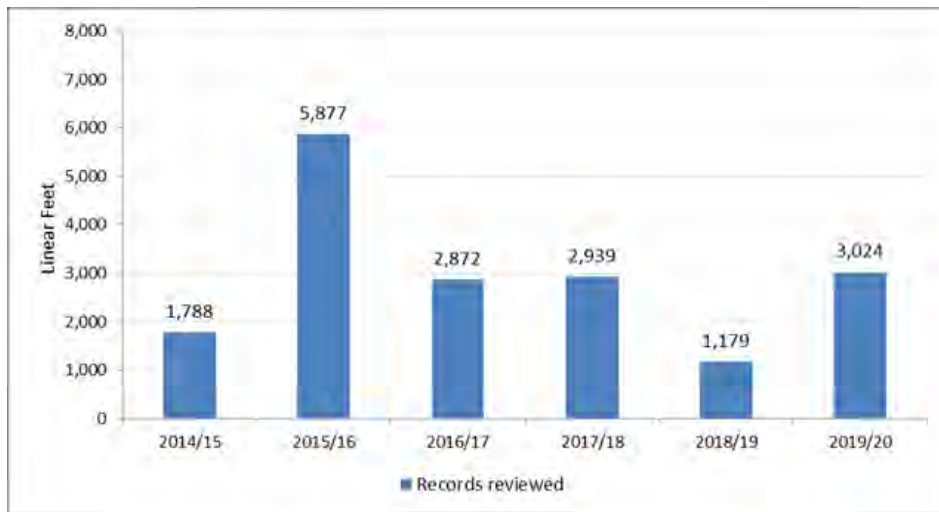
## Records reviewed, catalogued and published

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 2019/20, there were 3,024 linear feet of records reviewed. A PRONI box equals one linear foot and the measurement demonstrates the amount of space freed up in storage in public bodies. There were 697 linear feet of records and 690 units of records catalogued in 2019/20.



Source: PRONI, DfC

1. One linear foot is 0.3 of a metre. In 2019/20, 922 and 212 linear metres of records were reviewed and catalogued respectively.
2. Unit of records catalogued is calculated using the linear feet weighted by degree of difficulty.

# 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 26,718 new items added to the PRONI catalogue in 2019/20 and 16,753 items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue.

## Available Collections

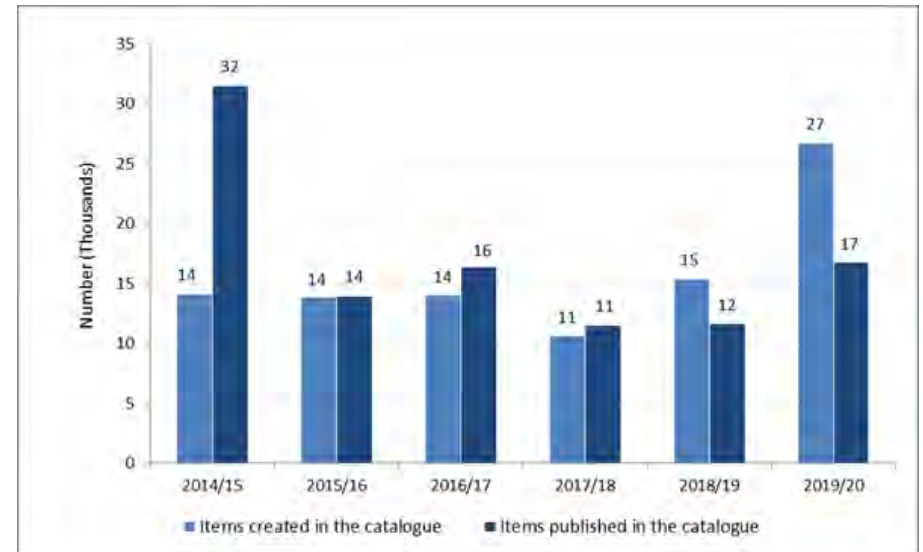
PRONI holds millions of documents that relate chiefly, but not exclusively to Northern Ireland. The records held in PRONI fall into two main categories:

### 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.



Source: PRONI, DfC

1. An item can be a single letter, volume or file or may relate to a bundle of documents.



# Receiving and Preserving Records

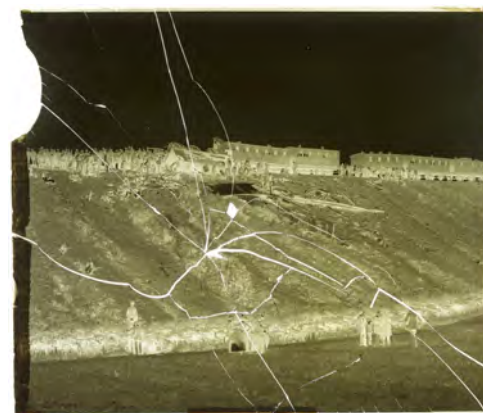
## Digital Images

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 2019/20, there were 18,717 digital frames captured resulting in 56,255 image files being generated.

The table below provides a breakdown of the number of digital frames captured for specific collections that were digitised in 2019/20.

	Unit: Number
	<b>2019/20</b>
Testamentary Will Calendars	4,650
CAIN	3,498
Women in the Archives projects	2,996
Church Records	2,006
J&J Cooke Shipping Lists	1,333
Allison Photographic Collection (Glass Plate Negatives)	1,060
Tithe Applotment Books	627
Rural District Council photographs	444
Partition related records	403
State Pathologists Department	400
Miscellaneous	1,300
<b>Number of digital images captured</b>	<b>18,717</b>



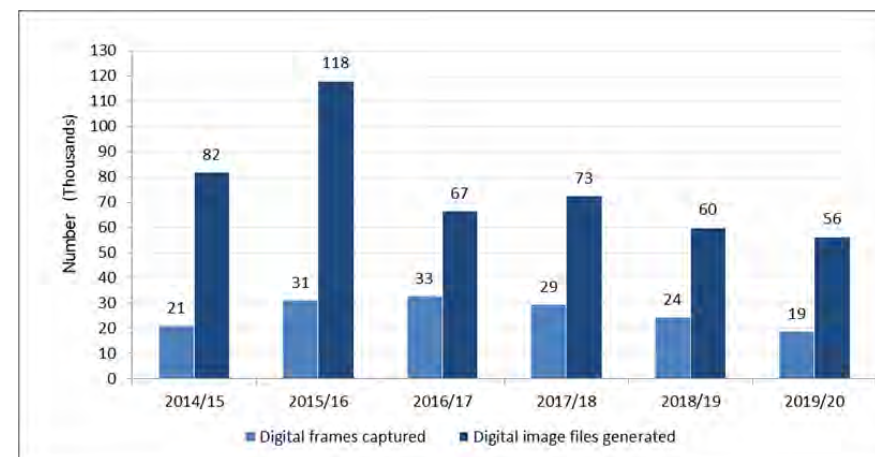
**Preservation Copy**



**Restored Copy**

The images above are of the Armagh Railway Disaster of 1889 (PRONI Ref: D2886/A/2/4/2), before and after digital restoration. The first image is a digital photograph of the original (broken) glass plate negative from the Allison Photographic Collection whilst the second is a digitally restored image.

The disaster occurred on 12th June 1889 on the Armagh to Newry line when a social train carrying the Methodist Sunday School excursion to Warrenpoint was divided after stalling on the steep hill before Hamiltonsbawn. The rear seven carriages ran back and collided with a following passenger train causing eighty-eight deaths and many serious injuries.



# 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 2019/20, there were 30,362 documents requested and produced.

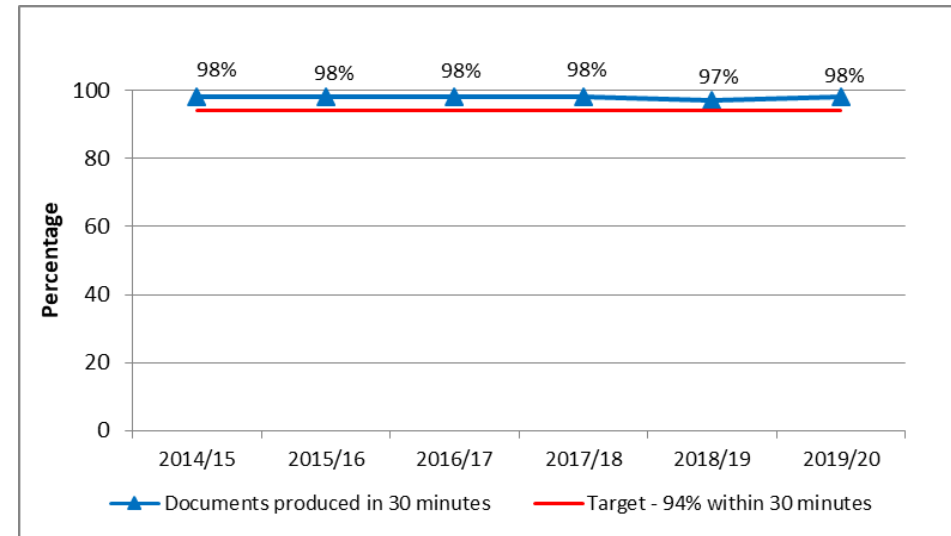
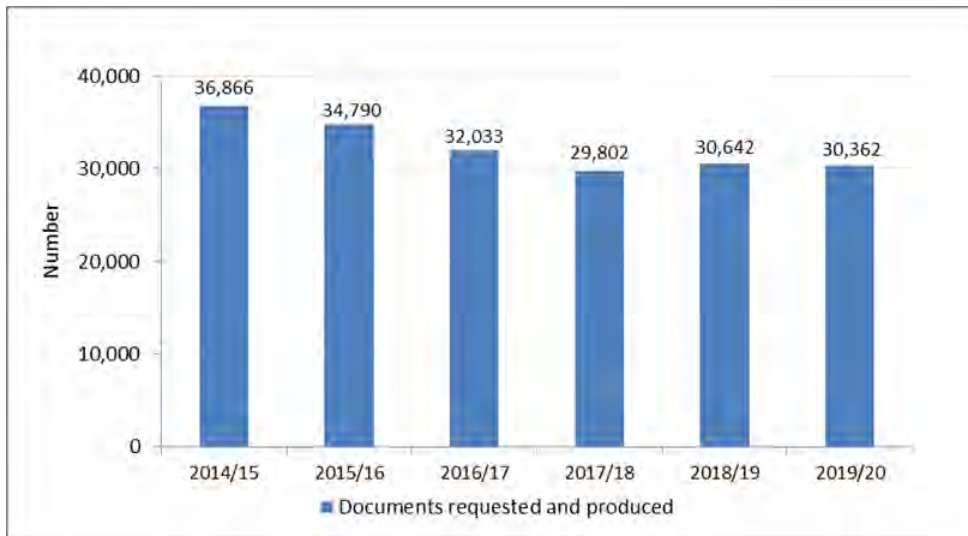
PRONI has a number of targets to measure performance. Original documents requested by visitors are retrieved from the stores, produced in the Reading Room for consultation and then returned to their designated locations in the stores.

The document production target for PRONI states that 94% of documents should be produced within 30 minutes of being requested.

In 2019/20, 98% of documents were produced within 30 minutes. The average retrieval time per order was 13.25 minutes.



PRONI Search Room

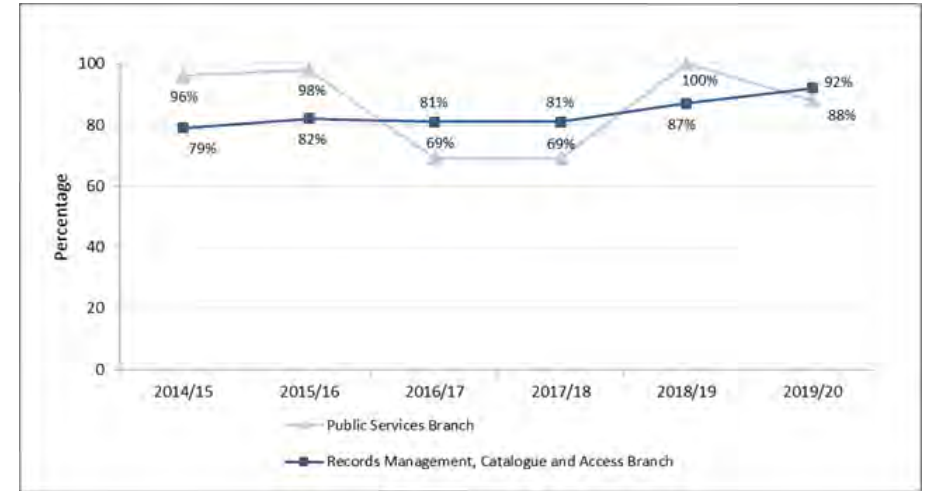


# Making records available to the public

## Written Correspondence

In 2019/20, 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 3,342 written enquiries to PRONI's Public Services branch in 2019/20. All queries were answered, with 88% of responses to written correspondence meeting the target. For Records Management, Cataloguing and Access branch, 92% of the responses to the 769 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](#)



**A PRONI workshop**

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 2019 and March 2020, 16,753 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 2019/20 include architectural drawings from Young & Mackenzie, Chartered Architects, Donegall Square West, Belfast, 1825-1937 (D2194); images from the exhibition 'Capturing the Conflict' which includes photographs marking fifty years since the start of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland; and merges of old and new photographs of Enniskillen, created as part of a workshop for the 'Women in the Archives' project. During 2019-20, PRONI added 57 photographs to the Flickr photo-stream. This brought the total number of PRONI photographs available to view on Flickr to 3,245.

### 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 2019/20, an additional 38 talks were made available on PRONI's YouTube channel.

### 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 2019/20, a total of 5,378 people had subscribed to receive the eNewsletter, an increase of 1,307 for the 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. This year, the records of NI Departments and the NIO with terminal dates of 1995 were brought forward for release during August 2019 and the records of 1996 were brought forward in December 2019. 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 1,396 government files were released in 2019. Of these, 404 files had some information blanked out, with the main reason for this being to protect personal information.

A further 94 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

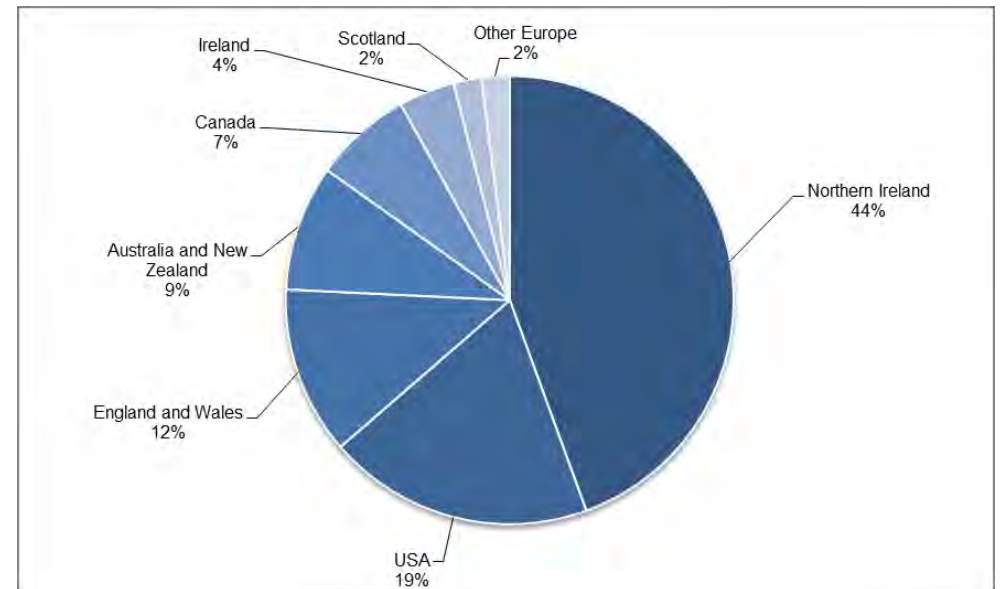
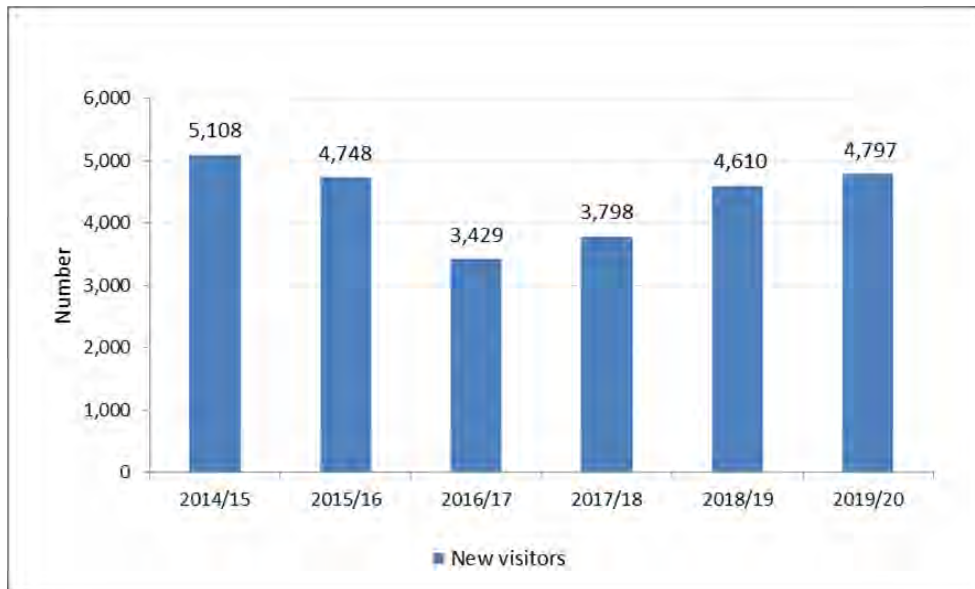
The PRONI at CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) partnership publishes conflict-related documents selected from the Northern Ireland Office and NI Departmental files. [CAIN](#) is hosted by Ulster University. In 2019/20, 340 documents were added to CAIN, mainly relating to the years 1991 and 1992. Over 2,500 PRONI documents are currently available on CAIN.

# Visitors and Visits

## New Visitors

There were 4,797 new visitors registered in PRONI in 2019/20. In total, 53% of new visitors were female and 47% were male. Fifty three per cent of new visitors registered in 2019/20 were aged between 25 and 64 years, whilst 37% were aged 65 years and over and 5% were under 25 years of age<sup>1</sup>.

In 2019/20, 56% of new visitors were from outside Northern Ireland, with 19% from the USA, 12% from England and Wales and 9% from Australia and New Zealand.



1. 6% new visitors did not specify their age when registering.

# Visitors and Visits

## Visitors to PRONI

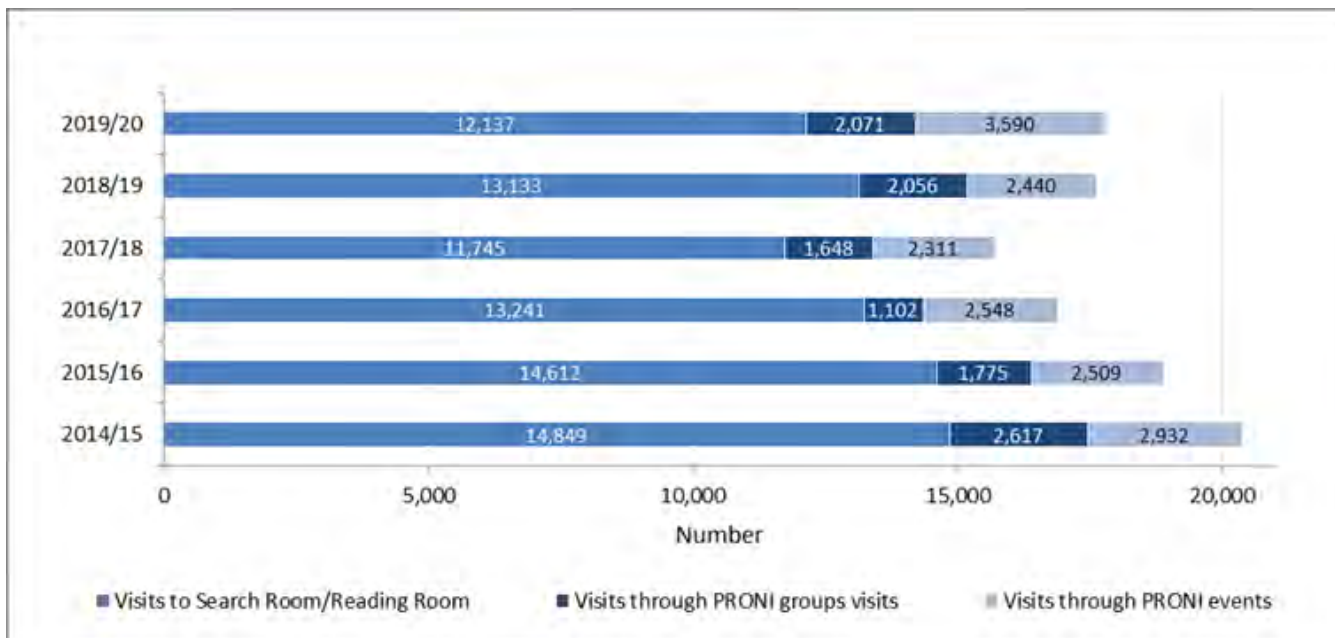
PRONI is committed to improving and increasing cultural participation. A series of public lectures, events and group visits takes place throughout the year.

There were 17,798 visits by the public to PRONI in 2019/20. The majority (68%) of visits by the public were to the Search Room / Reading room in PRONI, while 20% of people attended PRONI events and 12% attended as part of a group visit. In addition, a further 2,031 visited as part of events organised through PRONI's Facilities Management contractor. The overall number of visits to PRONI in 2019/20 was 19,829.

There were 64 lectures and PRONI events, 110 group visits and 9 temporary exhibitions held in 2019/20.



Launch of 'In Her Words' exhibition at Parliament Buildings

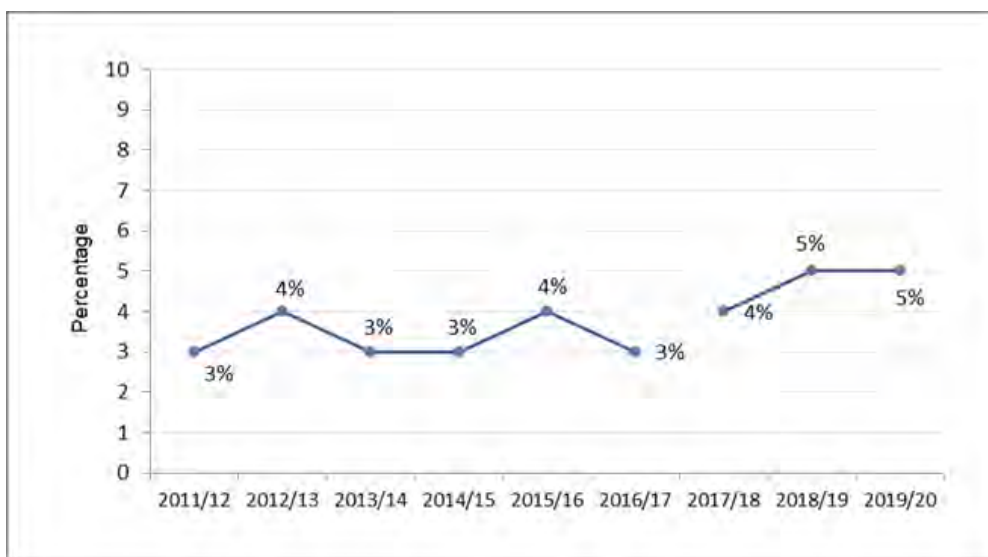


# Visitors and Visits

## Continuous Household Survey

The graph below presents data from the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to visits to and use of PRONI services. In 2017/18, the PRONI question was extended to include contact with PRONI both online and by telephone as well as visiting PRONI. Given the change in the 2017/18 question to capture full utilisation of PRONI services, figures up to 2016/17 cannot be directly compared with more recent figures. 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 2019/20 | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](https://communities-ni.gov.uk) (Definitions and technical notes section).

- In 2019/20, 5% of adults had visited PRONI or used PRONI services within the last 12 months, similar to the proportion in 2018/19.
- Analysis by age showed that older adults aged 65 years and over (6%) were more likely to have visited PRONI or used their services than younger adults aged 16-24 (2%). Adults who lived in the least deprived areas were more likely to have visited PRONI or used PRONI services than those who lived in the most deprived areas (8% and 4% respectively).
- In 2019/20, respondents were also asked how often they have used PRONI services over the previous year. Four per cent of adults visited PRONI or used PRONI services at least once in the previous year but not more than once a month and just one per cent used PRONI services at least once a month.



Note: The figures for 2017/18 onwards are not directly comparable to previous years given the change to the question relating to PRONI in the Continuous Household Survey 2017/18.



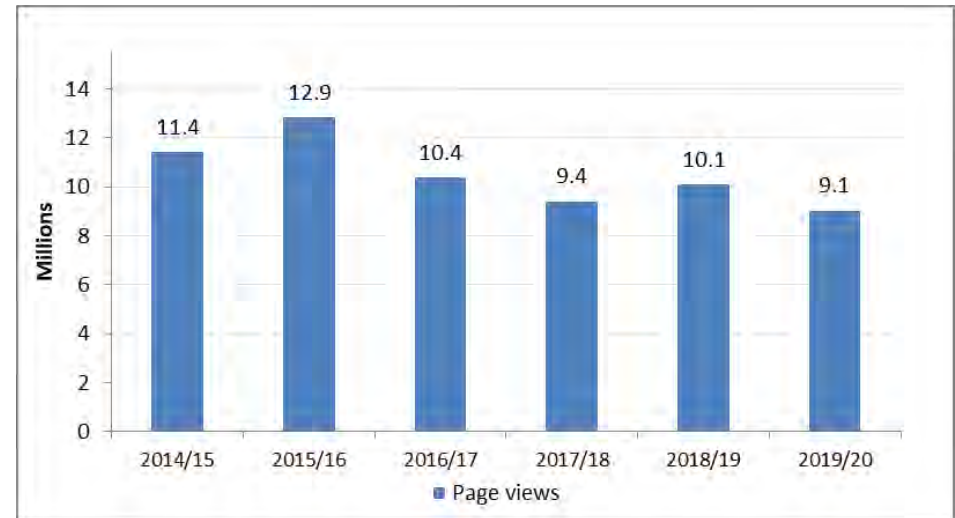
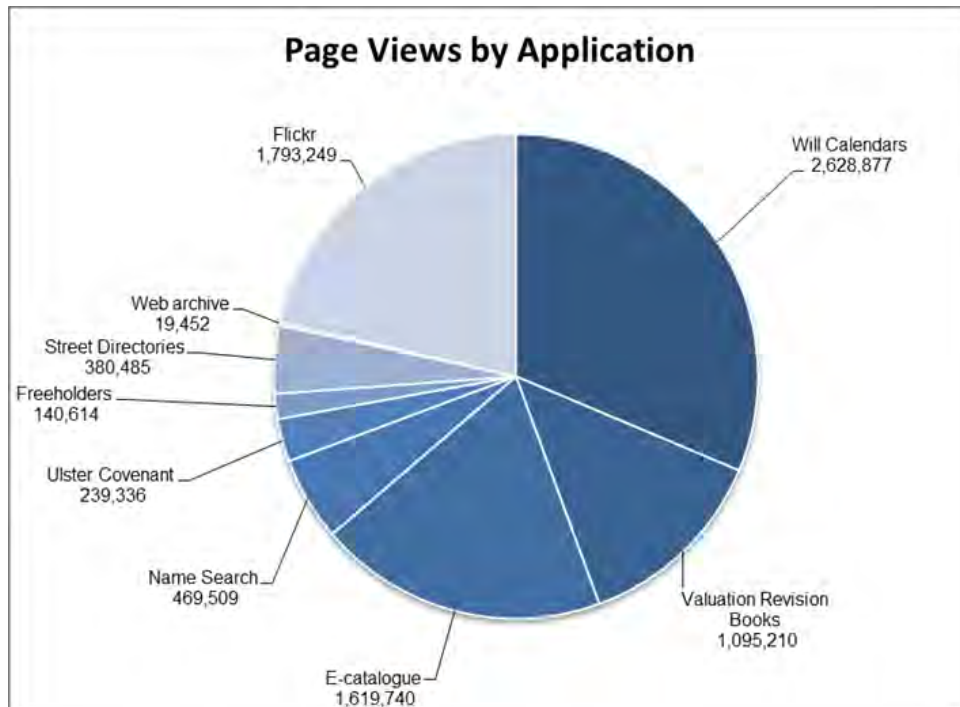
# Visitors and Visits

## PRONI website

There were 9.1 million page views to the PRONI website in 2019/20. A breakdown of page views by application is presented in the chart below.

At the end of 2019/20 PRONI had 4,976 followers on Facebook.

In 2019/20, 446 PRONI photographs on the Flickr photo-stream were marked as favourites by the public, 26 comments were added to photographs and there were 1,793,249 photo views.



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).

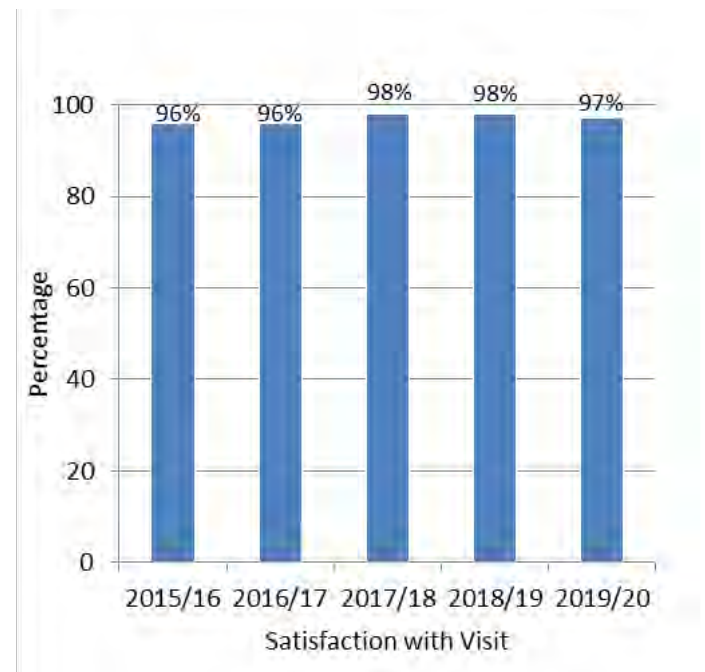
# Visits and Visitors

## Satisfaction with PRONI

A number of surveys have been used to measure customer satisfaction in PRONI in previous years (see footnote below). In 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 2019/20, 97% of customers who provided feedback rated their visit as 'Excellent'/'Good' or 4 or 5 out of 5 (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest).

PRONI receives customer feedback via its website (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/forms/feedback?s=/proni>) and by email. A selection of feedback received from customers in 2019/20 is included below.

- I don't even know how to express how happy you just made me!! Thank you for all of this information!! My Dad is gone and to be able to know more about our family is beyond priceless!! I will use all of these resources! If you ever find yourself coming to California, please ring me up and let us return the hospitality!*
- I completed a week long programme with the Ulster Historical Foundation last week, and most of the time was spent in your superb facilities at PRONI. I want to thank you most sincerely for the incredible way your staff carried out their duties, from [...], who gave us a wonderful introduction, to the team both at reception, in the research room and reading room. The staff, who were on the floor, or helping me to turn page of delicate conservation books, were always so courteous and helpful. I was unable to get the names of most of the ones who assisted me, however I would like in particular to thank the staff who worked behind the scenes, [...], who was absolutely fantastic and so helpful on so many levels..... All were so pleasant despite the huge demands that were placed on them during a very busy week.*
- On behalf of the staff, trustees and chairman of [...], we want to formally express our gratitude and appreciation for your assistance in gaining access to the War Operations Death Certificates.... All of this would not have been possible without your support and assistance and [...] is indebted to you and the Public Record Office for enabling us to carry out this important research. We will of course keep you updated in future and continue to direct visitors and researchers to PRONI.*
- A big thank you to you both and all the team for your help during our conference, everyone commented on how helpful and friendly the PRONI staff all were.*
- My sincere thanks to you for the time and effort you have put in to trying to help me. These valuable leads you have provided will be a great help in my research. I will be sure to contact both organisations.*



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.



**Dr Eamon Phoenix, PRONI's Leona Fearon and BBC's Stephen Walker at the annual release of government files**