

# Digest of statistics for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland 2021/22

Annual publication

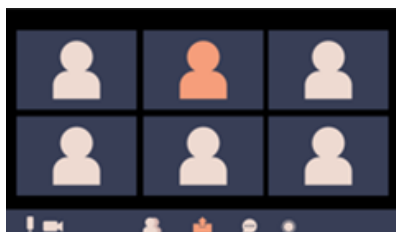
Published: 30 March 2023

Coverage: Northern Ireland

## Main stories

- In 2021/22, there were 2,330 linear feet of records reviewed to assess their suitability for preservation.
- There were 12,790 new items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue in 2021/22 which contains over 1.5 million item descriptions.
- In 2021/22, there were a total of 8,407 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 8.3 million page views of PRONI's website in 2021/22.

### PRONI Events



In 2021/22, there were 84 online virtual PRONI events.

### New visitors to PRONI



There were 458 new visitors registered in PRONI in 2021/22. Around a third (32%) of new visitors were from outside Northern Ireland, with 11% from England and Wales, 8% from the Ireland, 4% from Canada, 4% from the USA and 4% from Australia and New Zealand.

### Government Files



A total of 697 government files were released in 2021.

# Contents

Introduction

Page

3

Receiving and Preserving Records

Records Reviewed, Catalogued and Published

4

Available Collections

5

Digital Preservation

6

Digital Images

7

Making Records available to the Public

Document Production

8

Written Correspondence

9

PRONI website

10

Release of Government files

12

PRONI on CAIN

12

Providing information to Public Authorities

Written Requests

13

Visits and Visitors

New Visitors

14

Visitors to PRONI

15

Continuous Household Survey

16

PRONI website

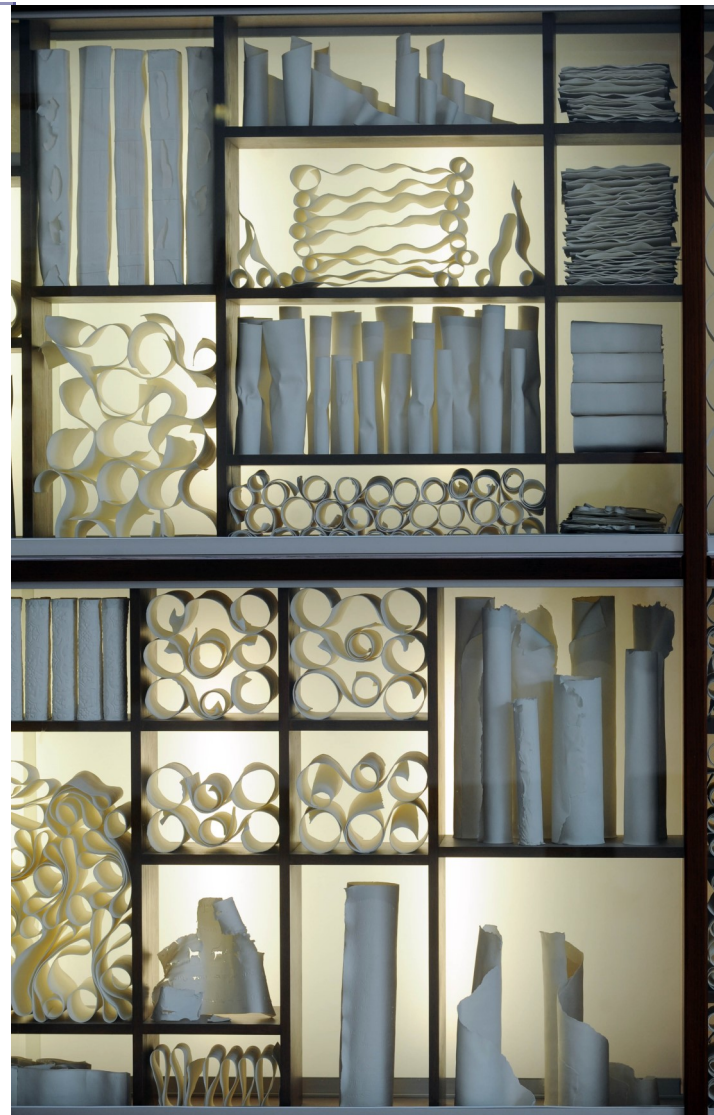
17

Satisfaction with PRONI

18

Glossary

19



Contact Information

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Statistician:

2 Titanic Boulevard, Belfast

Clair Stewart

BT3 9HQ

[psu@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:psu@communities-ni.gov.uk)

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

© Crown copyright

## 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 was initially made available for onsite viewing by appointment at PRONI during 2018/19 however, this onsite service was suspended during 2020/21 and this continued throughout 2021/22 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 2021/22 and, where appropriate, other years are also included. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on the operation of PRONI in 2021/22. In order to comply with government guidelines regarding social distancing, the majority of staff were only able to access the PRONI building on a part-time basis. There were also significant restrictions on the number of members of the public allowed in the building in order to adhere to social distancing requirements. Not all services were available during 2021/22.

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

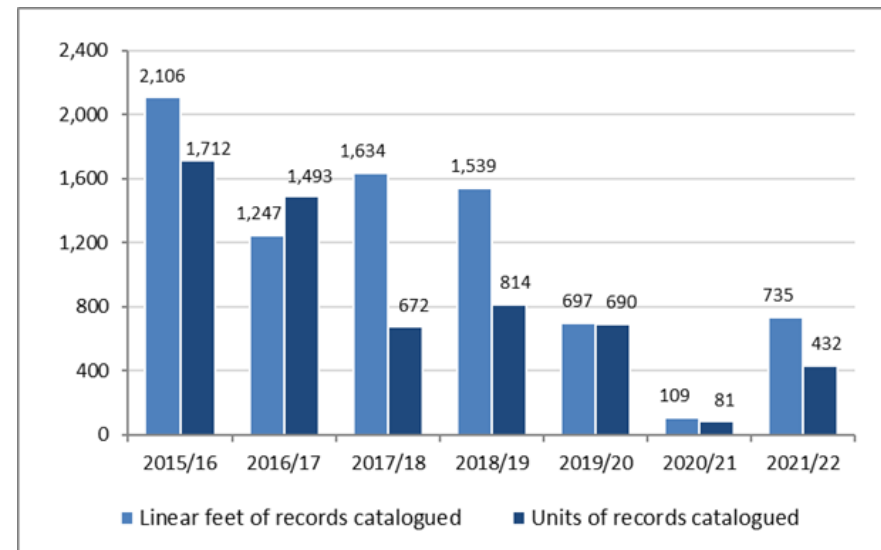
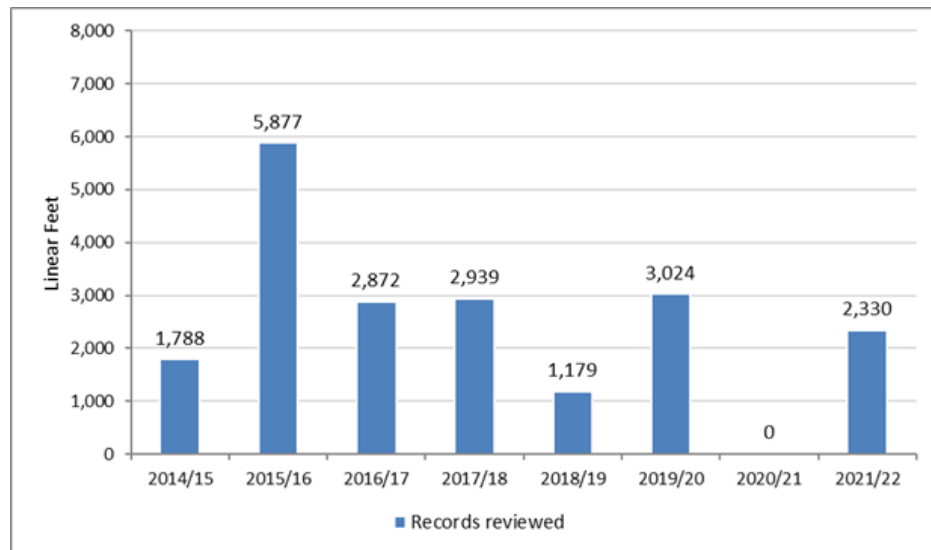
## Records reviewed, catalogued and published

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 2021/22, 2,330 linear feet of records were reviewed by PRONI. There were 735 linear feet of records and 432 units of records catalogued in 2021/22. A PRONI box equals one linear foot and the measurement demonstrates the amount of space freed up in storage areas in Government Departments and other public authorities.



1. One linear foot is 0.3 of a metre. In 2021/22, 224 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 with physical access to the PRONI building and the archives severely restricted.
4. In 2021/22 the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on the operation of PRONI. In order to comply with government guidelines regarding social distancing, the majority of staff were only able to access the PRONI building on a part-time basis.

# 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 16,063 new items added to the PRONI catalogue in 2021/22 and 12,790 items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue.

## Available Collections

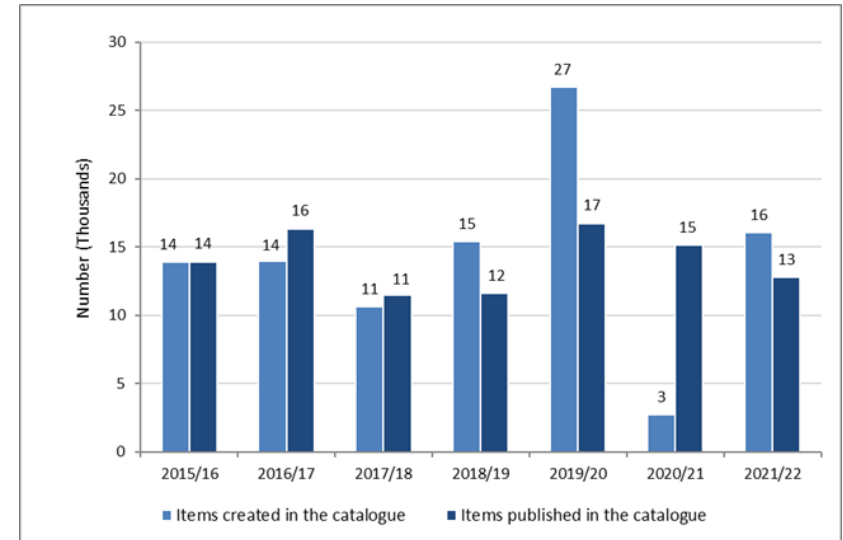
PRONI holds millions of documents that relate chiefly, but not exclusively, to Northern Ireland. The records held in PRONI fall into two main categories:

### 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 with physical access to the PRONI building and the archives severely restricted.
3. In 2021/22 the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact on the operation of PRONI. In order to comply with government guidelines regarding social distancing, the majority of staff were only able to access the PRONI building on a part-time basis.



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 2021/22, 662 digital records were published via PRONI's electronic catalogue, 815 digital records were published via CALM and 49,271 digital records were processed to PRONI's digital repository<sup>1</sup>.

### 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 2021/22, 280 web crawls were published on the PRONI Web Archive and 215 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.

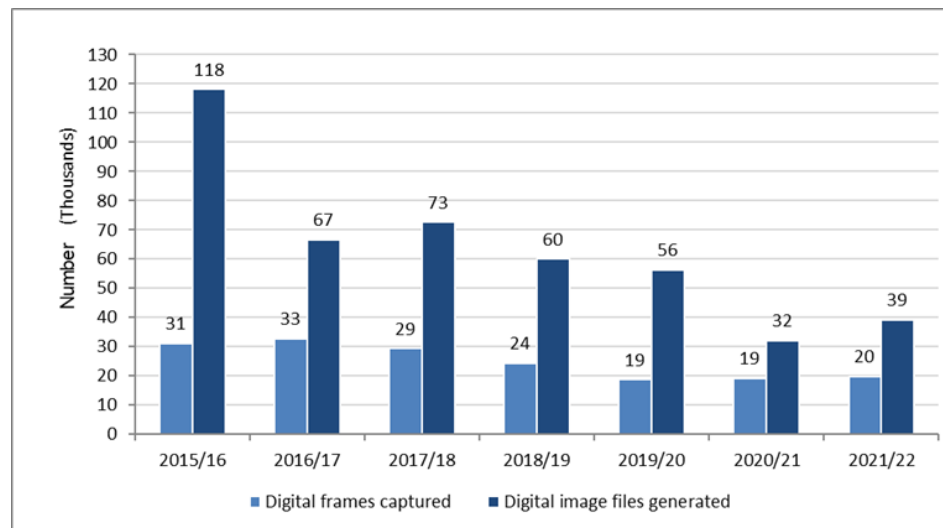
In 2021/22, there were 19,823 digital frames captured resulting in 39,249 image files being generated.

The table below provides a breakdown of the number of digital frames captured for specific collections that were digitised in 2021/22.

	Unit: Number
	<b>2021/22</b>
Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland Project (Beyond 2022)	4,510
CAIN (various official records)	3,849
Mary Alice Young photographic collection (D3027)	3,655
Church Records	2,434
Whyte Family Photograph Album (D4803)	1,315
Boundary Commission (CAB/9/Z)	1,242
Centenary of Northern Ireland / Partition related records	1,166
CollabArchive Project (Roberta Hewitt Diaries, D3838)	803
N.I. Women's Football Association (D4673)	275
Behind the Hill Exhibition	100
Jewish Applications (COM/17)	95
Ottile Patterson (D4581)	92
Miscellaneous	287
<b>Number of digital images captured</b>	<b>19,823</b>



The images show repairs to a glass plate negative (PRONI Ref: D3027) before and after digital restoration.



# Making records available to the public

## Document Production

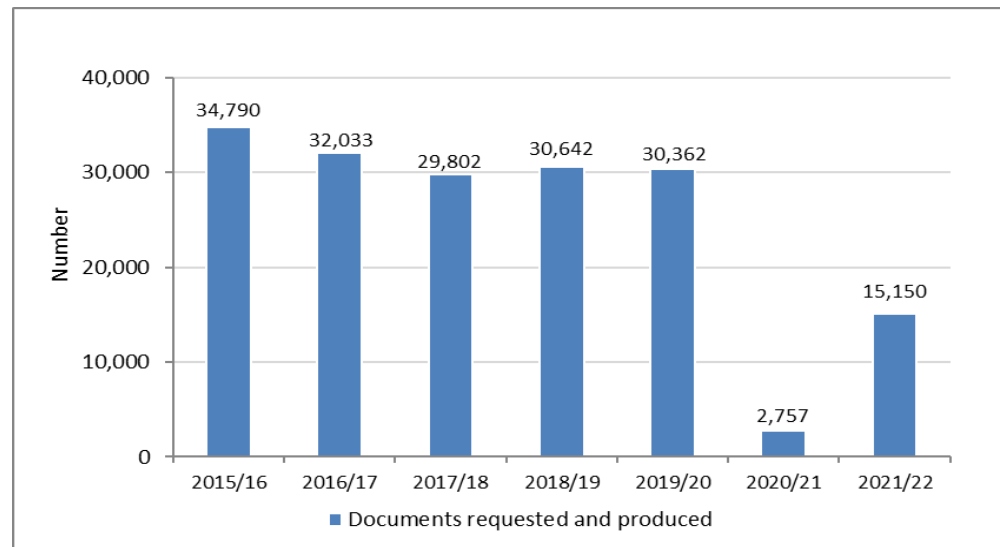
Anyone can access documents in PRONI. By registering with PRONI, visitors can request documents through the onsite ordering system.

In 2021/22, there were 15,150 documents requested and produced. This number was lower than for the years prior to 2020/21 due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.

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. The use of the CALM document ordering system by the public was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020/21 and 2021/22. 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. In 2021/22, Covid restrictions limited the number of staff who could safely work in the business area. Due to these restrictions, it was not possible to adhere to the document production target in 2020/21 or 2021/22.



**PRONI Search Room**



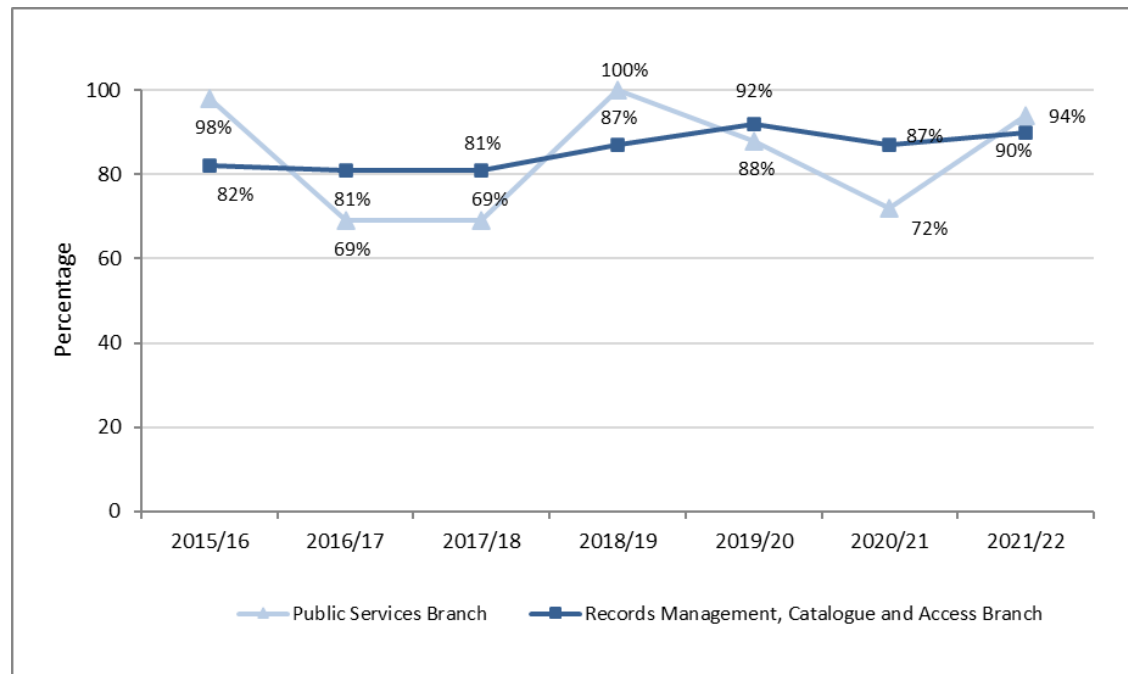
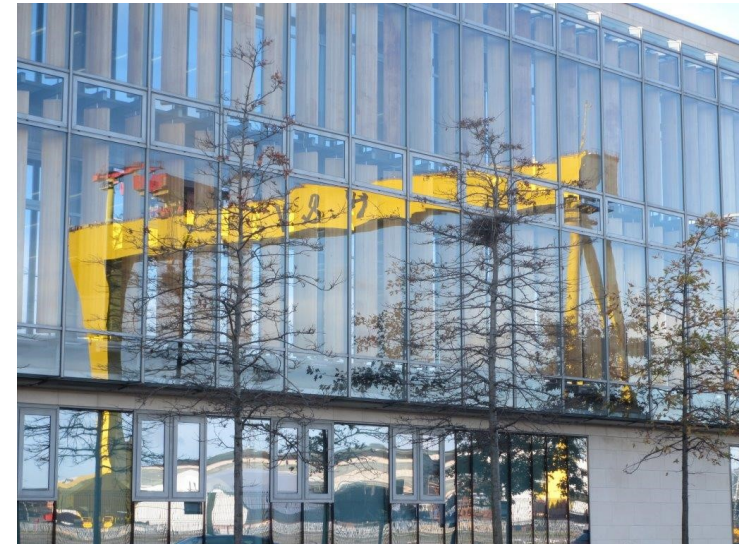


# Making records available to the public

## Written Correspondence

In 2021/22, 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 20 days.

There were 3,172 written enquiries to PRONI's Public Services branch in 2021/22. All queries were answered, with 94% of responses to written correspondence meeting the target. For Records Management, Cataloguing and Access branch, 90% of the responses to the 344 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](#)



Photograph of Roberta Hewitt, wife of poet John Hewitt, from the CollabArchive project (PRONI Ref: D3838).

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 2021 and March 2022, 12,790 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 2021/22 include records of Roberta Hewitt, wife of poet John Hewitt (D3838); the Opening of Parliament at Belfast City Hall in 1922 (various collections); late 19<sup>th</sup> century Young & Mackenzie architectural drawings (D2194); and Earl Annesley of Castlewellaan Photographs (D1854). During 2021/22, PRONI added 160 photographs to the Flickr photo-stream. This brought the total number of PRONI photographs available to view on Flickr to 3,624.

### 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'. In 2021/22, there were 643 new followers on Facebook and posts were read by 172,748 accounts. By March 2022, PRONI had 6,446 followers on Facebook.

### Twitter

PRONI publishes tweets throughout the week on Twitter. In total, PRONI registered 342 new followers on Twitter in 2021/22 and tweets published by PRONI reached approximately 190,000 accounts. By March 2022, PRONI had 2,692 followers on Twitter.

### Instagram

By March 2022, PRONI had 1,170 followers on Instagram.

### 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 2021/22, an additional 51 talks were made available on PRONI's YouTube channel. The most popular videos for the year were 'My Life in Loyalism' (623 views); 'Olympic and Titanic by Mark Chirside' (281 views); 'Olympic and Aquitania' (274 views); 'Titanic at 100' (266 views) and 'Secrets from the Files (1998)' (179 views). The most viewed PRONI video of all time is 'Irish Language & Culture, History of the Irish Language' with over 16,000 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-enewsletter>. At the end of 2021/22, a total of 5,703 people had subscribed to receive the eNewsletter, an increase of 33 in comparison to the previous year.



**'Making the Future artwork launch'**

# 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 was planned to be phased in over 10 years, with two years of records being reviewed and released each year. However, in 2021/22, 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 1998, which were brought forward for release during December 2021. 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 697 government files were released in 2021. Of these, 132 files had some information blanked out, with the main reason for this being to protect personal information.

A further 31 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 2021/22, 950 documents selected from files dating from 1993 -1996 were added to CAIN. There are currently 3,453 PRONI documents available to view on CAIN.

# Providing information to Public Authorities

## Written Requests

Records Management, Cataloguing and Access Branch received 1,568 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 2021 and March 2022 PRONI responded to 100% of the 1,181 requests received within the 7 day target.

Since September 2021, PRONI has also been required to respond to requests from the Victims Payment Board and provide any requested information within a 4 week target. Between April 2021 and March 2022 PRONI responded to 65% of the 168 requests received within the 4 week target.

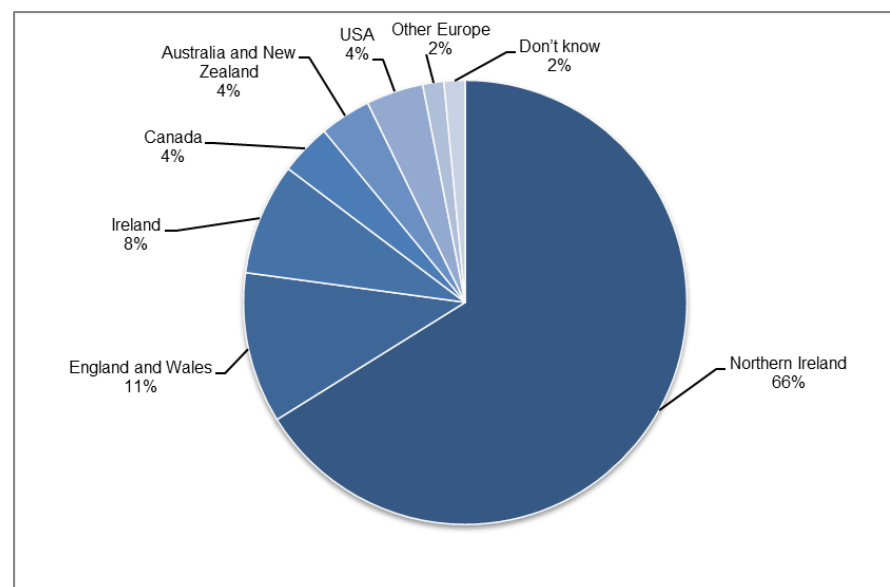
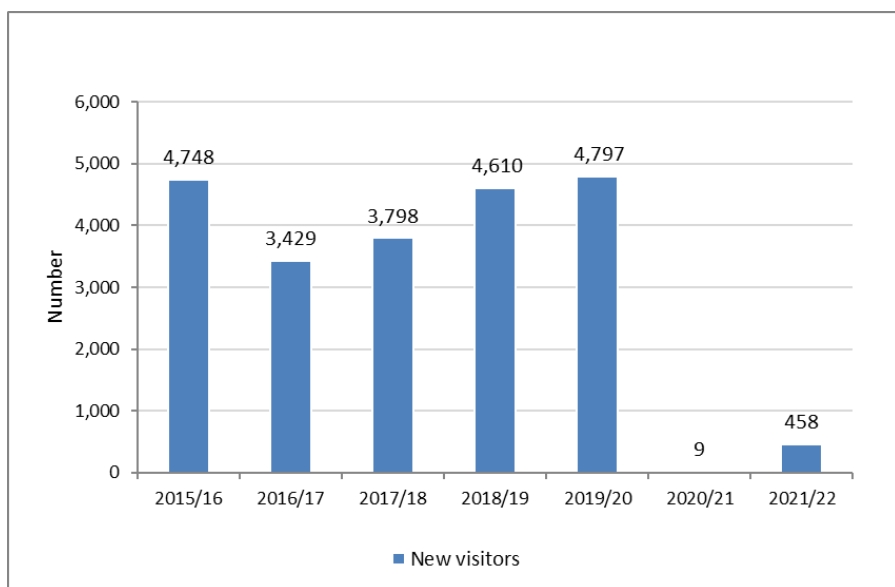


# Visitors and Visits

## New Visitors

There were 458 new visitors registered in PRONI in 2021/22. PRONI had to suspend registration of new visitors due to the COVID-19 pandemic for most of 2020/21 and 2021/22. In total, 49% of new visitors were female and 50% were male<sup>2</sup>. In 2021/22, 60% of new visitors registered were aged between 25 and 64 years, whilst 23% were aged 65 years and over and 7% were under 25 years of age<sup>3</sup>.

In 2021/22, 33% of new visitors were from outside Northern Ireland, with 11% from England and Wales, 8% from the Ireland, and 4% from each of the following, Canada, USA and Australia and New Zealand.



1. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the registration of new visitors in PRONI in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

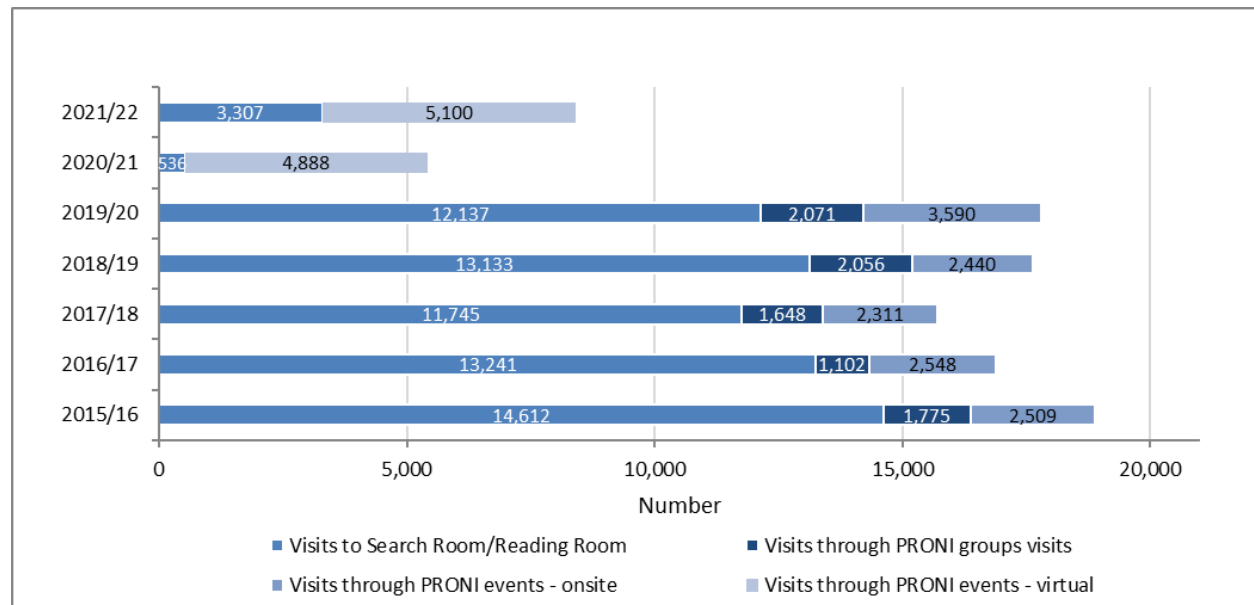
2. 2% of new visitors did not specify their gender when registering  
3. 10% new visitors did not specify their age when registering.

# 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 3,307 visits by the public to PRONI in 2021/22, all visits were to the Search Room / Reading room. As was the case in 2020/21, there were no group visits or in person events due to restrictions to service as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eighty-four on-line virtual events were held which were attended by 5,100 members of the public.



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



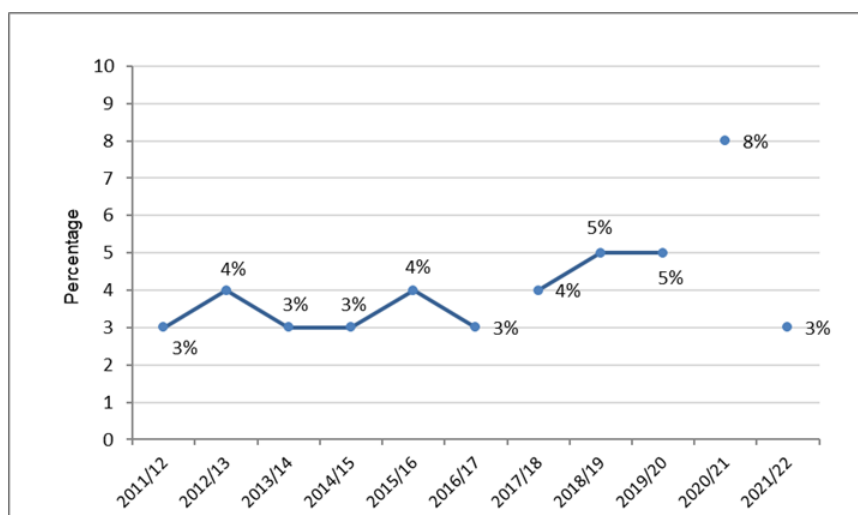
**'Behind the Hill' exhibition comprising photographs, collage drawings and sculpture, March 2022, Susan Hughes and Emily Esdale.**

# 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 2021/22 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, heritage and sport by adults in Northern Ireland 2021/22 | Department for Communities \(communities-ni.gov.uk\)](#) (Definitions and technical notes section).

- In 2021/22, only 3% of adults had used PRONI services within the last 12 months. Use of PRONI services includes, 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. While direct comparisons should not be made with previous years, it is important to note that usage of PRONI services in 2021/22 will have been negatively impacted by closures throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Those living in the least deprived areas were more likely to have used PRONI in the last 12 months than those living in the most deprived areas (5% and 2% respectively). In addition, adults with a disability were more likely to have used PRONI compared to adults without a disability (4% and 2% respectively).
- There were no differences in the use of PRONI services for gender, older and younger adults, adults with and without dependants or living in urban and rural areas.



**St Matthews exhibition, Shankill, Belfast**

1. The results from the CHS 2020/21 and 2021/22 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.

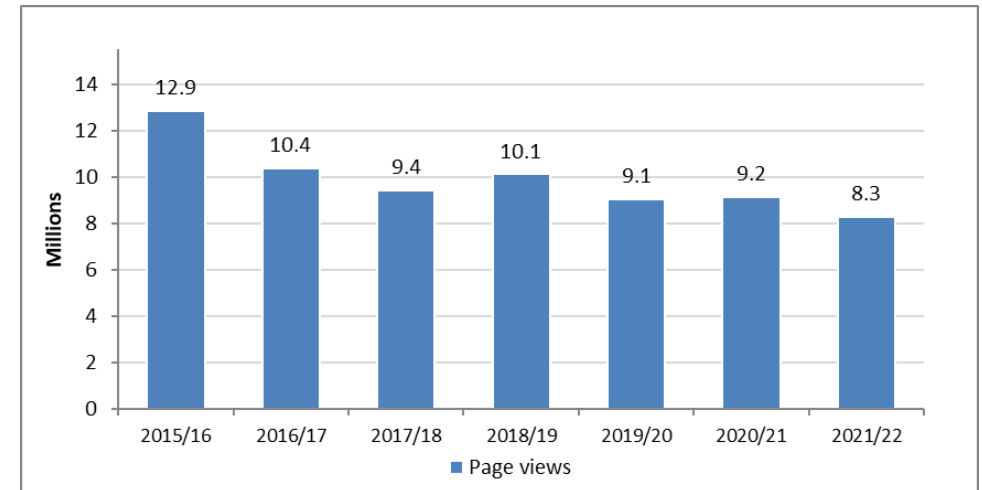
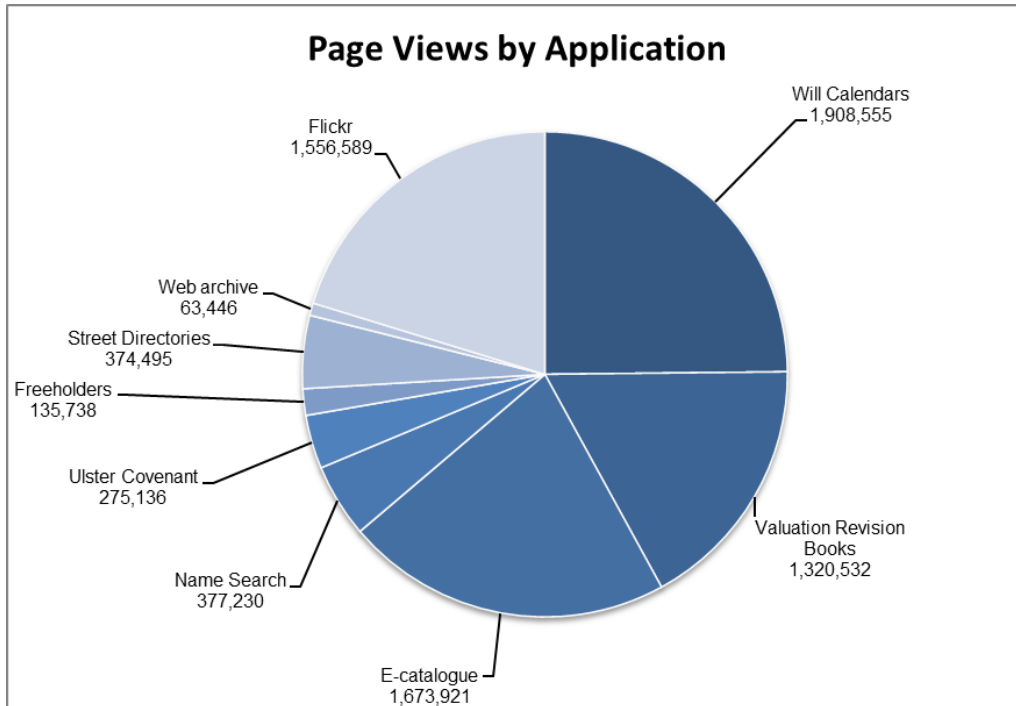
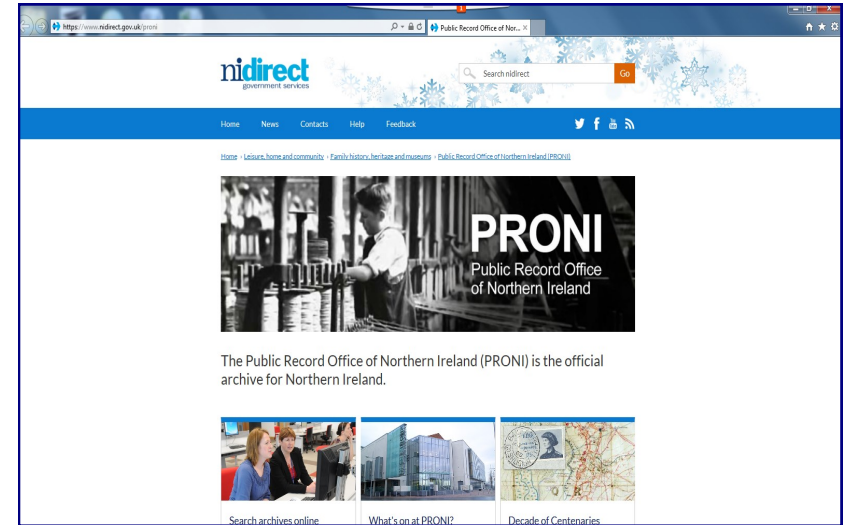


# Visitors and Visits

## PRONI website

There were 8.3 million page views to the PRONI website in 2021/22. A breakdown of page views by application is presented in the chart below.

In 2021/22, the public marked 943 PRONI photographs on the Flickr photo-stream as favourites, 29 new comments were added to photographs and there were 1,556,589 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).
5. Due to issues with amended reporting functionality in Google Analytics, data for PRONI website page views were not available for the period 6-7-2021 to 1-10-2021. Data for application page views (as detailed above) were unaffected.

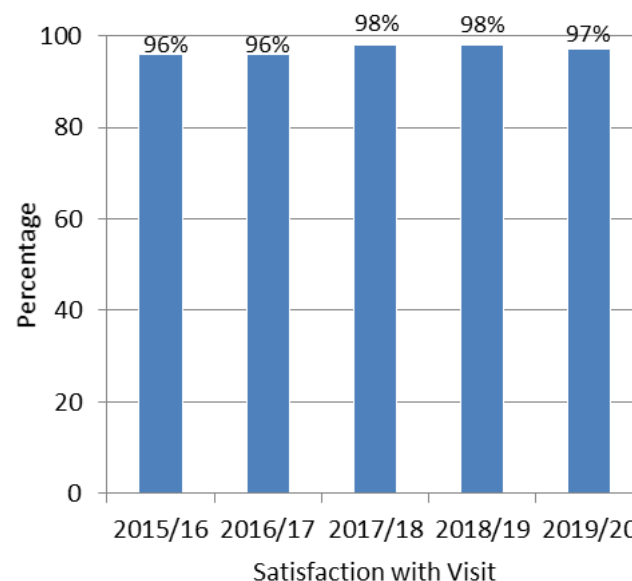
## Visits and Visitors

### 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 and 2021/22, 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.

PRONI receives customer feedback via its website ([Your comments or complaints | nidirect](#)) and by email.

A selection of feedback received from customers in 2021/22 is included below.



- *Many thanks for all your help today. My visit to PRONI went well. I was reminded what a great institution PRONI is. Beautiful building, very helpful staff, wonderful archives.*
- *Thank you very much, it is amazing that all these documents still exist and can be accessed. You've put a smile on my face!*
- *My sister and I just want to thank you and the team for accommodating us yesterday and for all the help, advice and guidance you gave us. We really appreciate it. I am keen to come back and view more records, but I fear it will have to wait until my next visit! We've been working on ancestry non stop since I arrived. So it's perhaps time for a day off haha! Thank you again and best wishes and perhaps we will see you again!*
- *I'm really appreciating the new PRONI system of not having to pre-order 10 documents 3 weeks in advance. Great progress!*
- *I'm delighted to get these attachments. It is very much appreciated and very timely. I really think yourself and the PRONI staff have done remarkably well.*
- *Thank you for the opportunity to attend PRONI's holocaust memorial event this week. [...] presentation was fascinating and heart-breaking in equal measure and you handled it really sensitively and respectfully [...]. I often feel that the important work you do doesn't get the recognition it deserves so want you to know how grateful I was to be able to attend. I'm looking forward to more normal times when I can get into your building to see the records you hold around this period.*

1. In 2015/16 customer satisfaction was measured through feedback forms which accompanied all events and lectures. From 2016/17 to 2019/20 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.



**PRONI conservators, Maud Gallagher and Sarah Graham.**