

## Digest of statistics for the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

### Main Stories

- In 2022/23, there were 6,206 linear feet of records reviewed to assess their suitability for preservation.
- There were 24,090 new items published in PRONI's electronic catalogue in 2022/23 which contains over 1.5 million item descriptions.
- In 2022/23, there were a total of 9,187 visits to PRONI. These visits included use of the search and reading rooms, group visits and attendance at organised events.
- There were 8 million page views of PRONI's website in 2022/23.

An **Official Statistics** publication

**Published by:** Professional Services Unit

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**Tel:** 028 90 823572

**Coverage:** Northern Ireland

**Frequency:** Annual

**Publication Date:** 27 March 2024

## 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 III, dated 1219.

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. PRONI also makes available free access to Ancestry, Find My Past, British Newspaper Archive and Irish State Papers.



PRONI Building

## Methodology and quality of the data

These statistics provide a broad overview of PRONI. The data presented covers 2022/23 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.
- 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

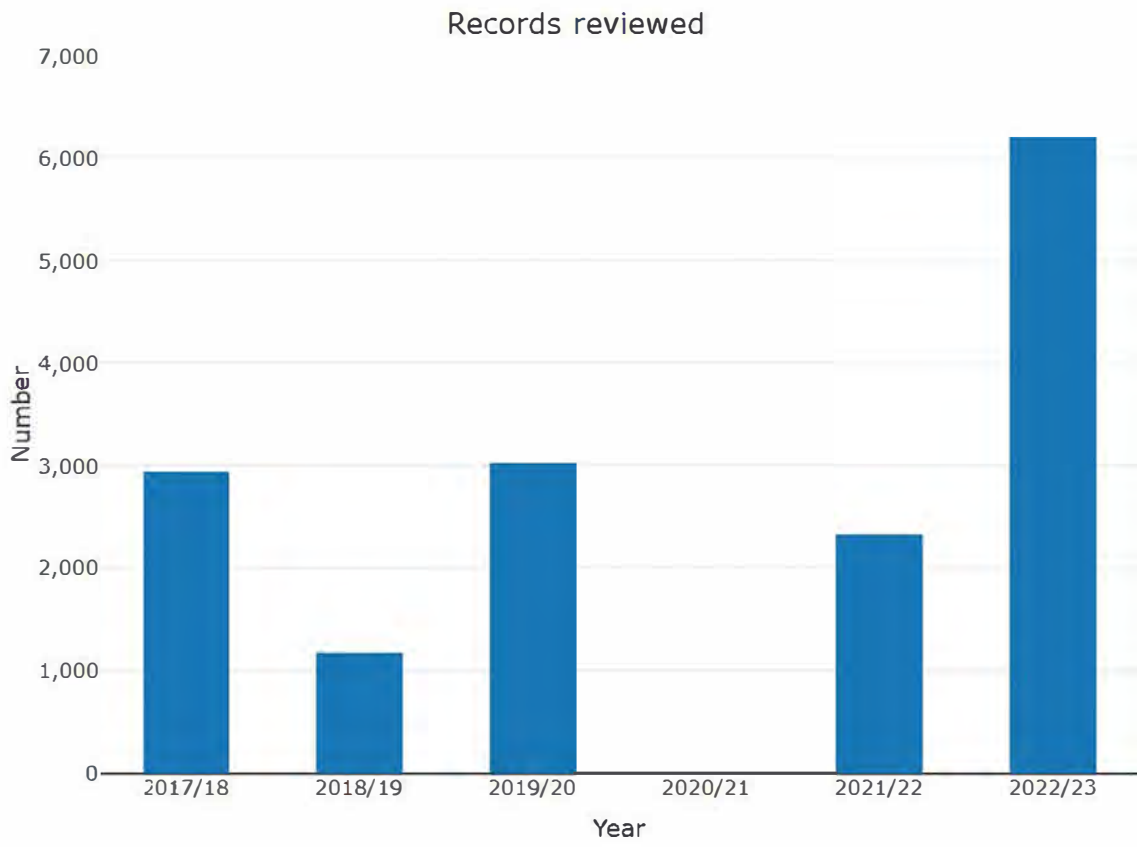
Public authority records which are judged to be of lasting value are moved to PRONI for permanent preservation. PRONI also receives records from non-government sources e.g. churches, businesses, charities and families.

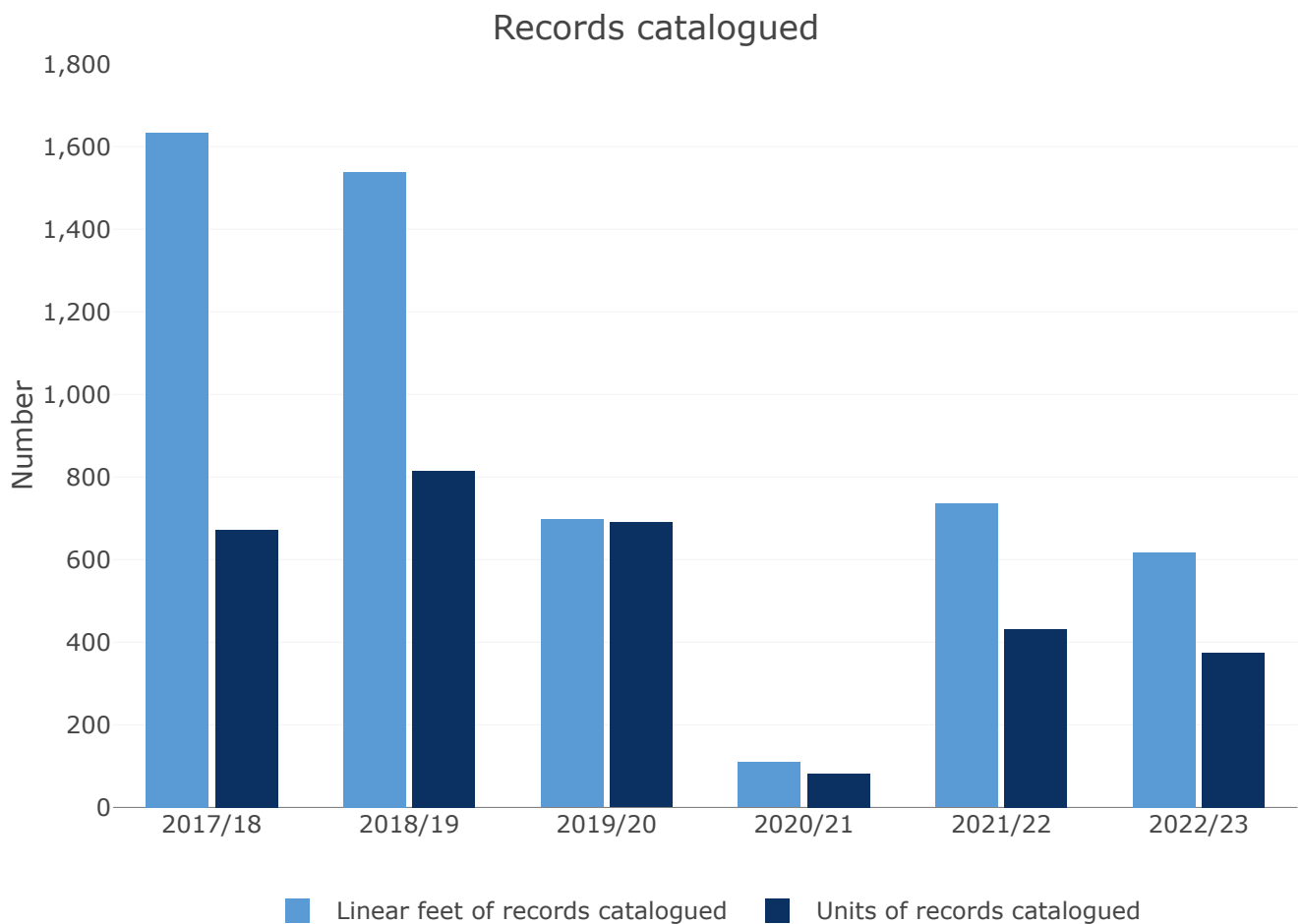
Potential deposits are reviewed to assess their suitability for preservation. Records to be preserved by PRONI are accessioned. This involves assigning a reference number and recording information about the collection e.g. a summary description and relevant dates. Once accessioned, the records are stored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



PRONI storage room

In 2022/23, 6,206 linear feet of records were reviewed by PRONI. There were 617 linear feet of records and 375 units of records catalogued in 2022/23. 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.

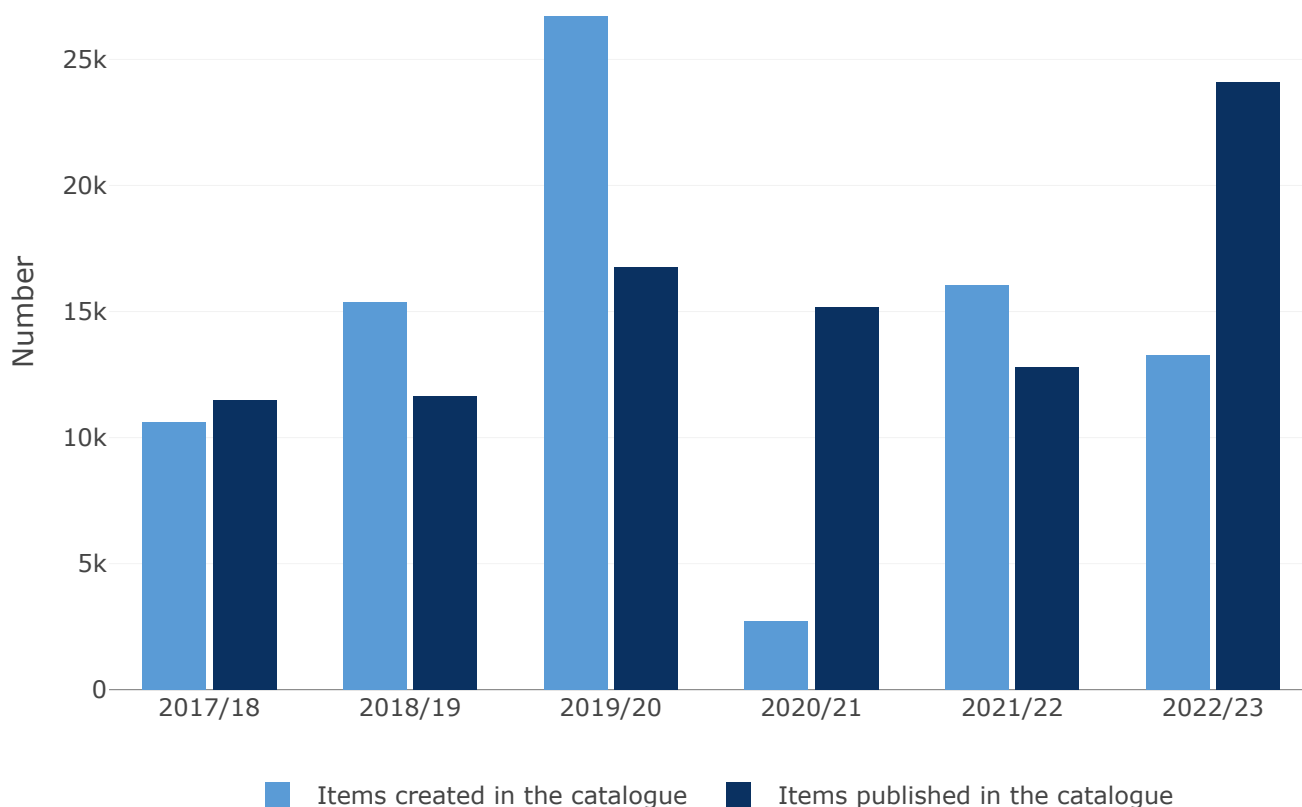




Note: 1. One linear foot is 0.3 of a metre. In 2022/23, 188 linear metres of records were catalogued. 2. Unit of records catalogued is calculated using the linear feet weighted by degree of difficulty. 3. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operation of PRONI in 2020/21 with physical 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.

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 13,266 new items added to the PRONI catalogue in 2022/23 and 24,090 items published in PRONI’s electronic catalogue, of which 5,121 items were published in the catalogue for the first time.

## Items created and published in catalogue



Note: 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.

### 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.



Digitisation of records

## 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 2022/23, 1,526 digital records were published via PRONI's electronic catalogue, 3,186 digital records were published via CALM and 27,835 digital records were processed to PRONI's digital repository. 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.

In 2022/23, PRONI, in partnership with NI Screen and under the terms of an agreement with ITV, continued to hold UTV's film and tape archive, to digitise and preserve key elements of this archive and encourage public engagement with the content within it. This archive consists of approximately 70,000 films and tapes, and a playback room is located on the ground floor of the PRONI building. In 2022/23, a total of 782 film reels and tapes were digitised and accessioned into PRONI and 665 of these were processed to PRONI's Digital Repository. In 2022/23, PRONI and NI Screen, collaborated on a major digitisation project to preserve the content of over 6,000 tapes from the UTV archive that were at risk of degradation. The project was led by the British Film Institute and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

## Web Archive

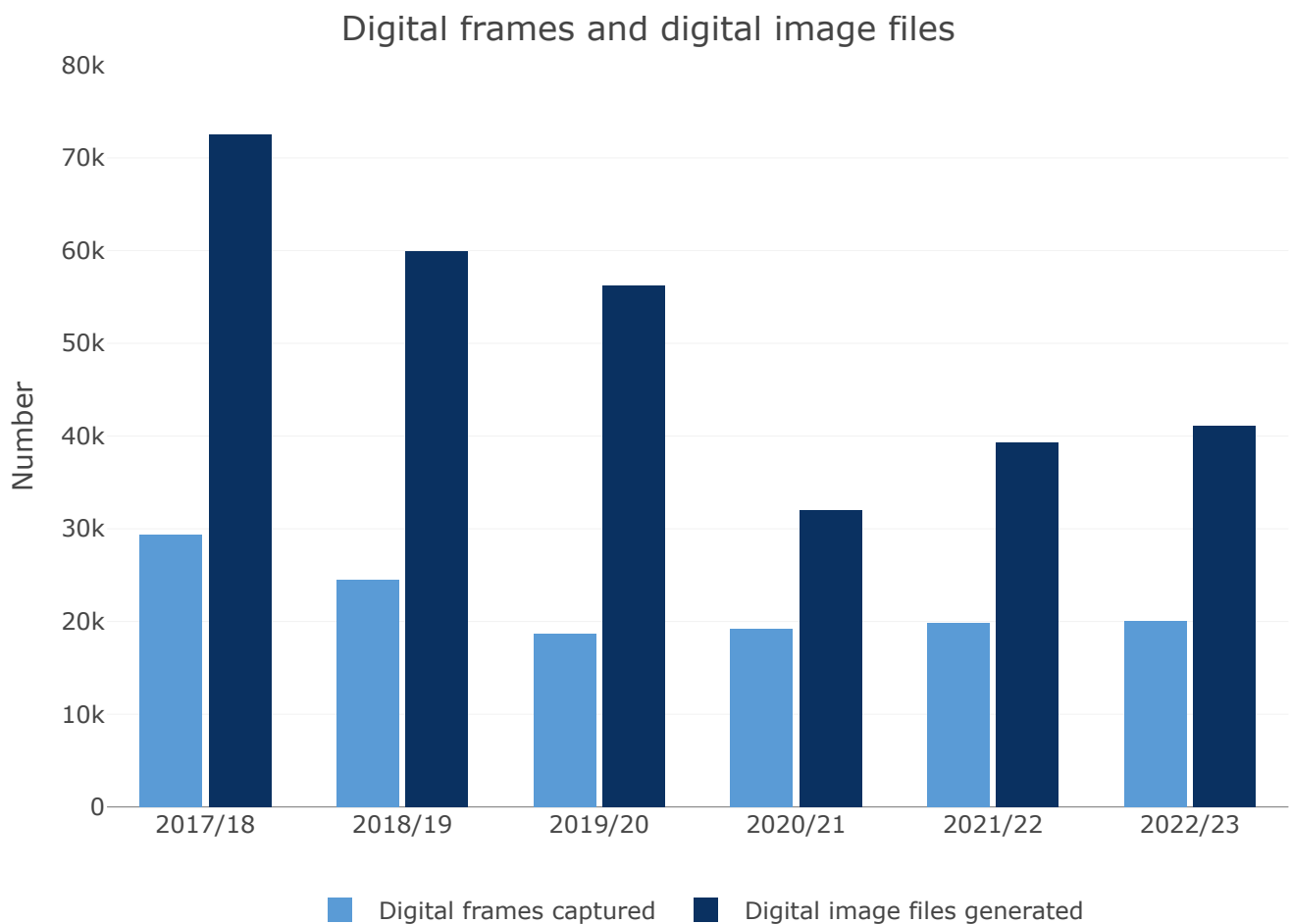
PRONI provides a web archiving service whereby a selection of websites from across Northern Ireland's public sector are harvested from the internet and stored in the PRONI Web Archive (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/proni-web-archive>). Privately funded websites 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 2022/23, 206 web crawls were published on the PRONI Web Archive and 222 individual websites were crawled.

## 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 2022/23, there were 20,005 digital frames captured resulting in 41,065 image files being generated.





The table below provides a breakdown of the number of digital frames captured for specific collections that were digitised in 2022/23.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Number</b>
Hospital Records	6,093
Boundary Commission papers 1926, within the NI Cabinet records - CAB/9/Z	4,385
Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland Project. A collaborative project led by Trinity College, Dublin, and partners National Archives Ireland, National Archives UK, which identifies surrogates and copies of records destroyed in the fire at the Public Record Office of Ireland in Dublin in 1922	2,759
Records of New Industries Development Act (NI) 1937, including applications by Jewish businesses to relocate to NI - COM/17	1,418
CAIN - Records relating to the Northern Ireland Troubles which are populated on the Conflict Archive on the Internet	1,243
Copies requested by general public	880
Church Records	790
Collab Archive - a digital volunteering project led by the Nerve Centre and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.	696
Annesley Photos (D1854). Photographs taken by Hugh, 5th Earl Annesley of Castlewellan, County Down, one of the pioneers of amateur photography in Ireland, with work spanning c.1855 to c.1880s.	646
Harry Madill photos (D4790)	473
Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (D3762)	359
Miscellaneous	263
<b>Number of digital images captured</b>	<b>20,005</b>



Conservation work on a map depicting the Siege of Londonderry, c1690s, PRONI Ref. D651/1.

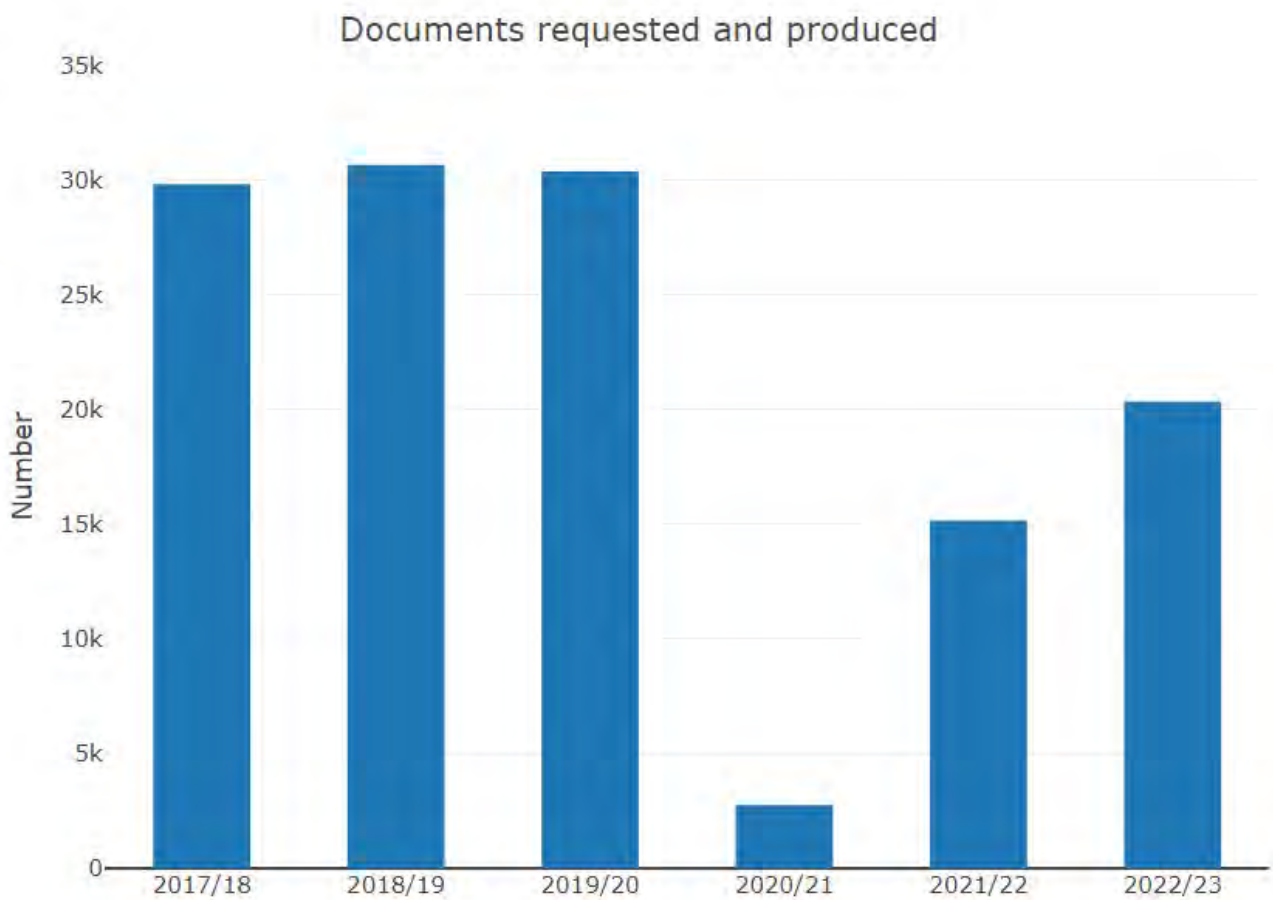
## Making records available to the public

### Document production

Anyone can access documents in PRONI. By registering with PRONI, visitors can request documents through the onsite ordering system. In 2022/23, there were 20,334 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 2022/23, 96% of documents were produced within 30 minutes. The average retrieval time per order was 16 minutes.



Note: 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.



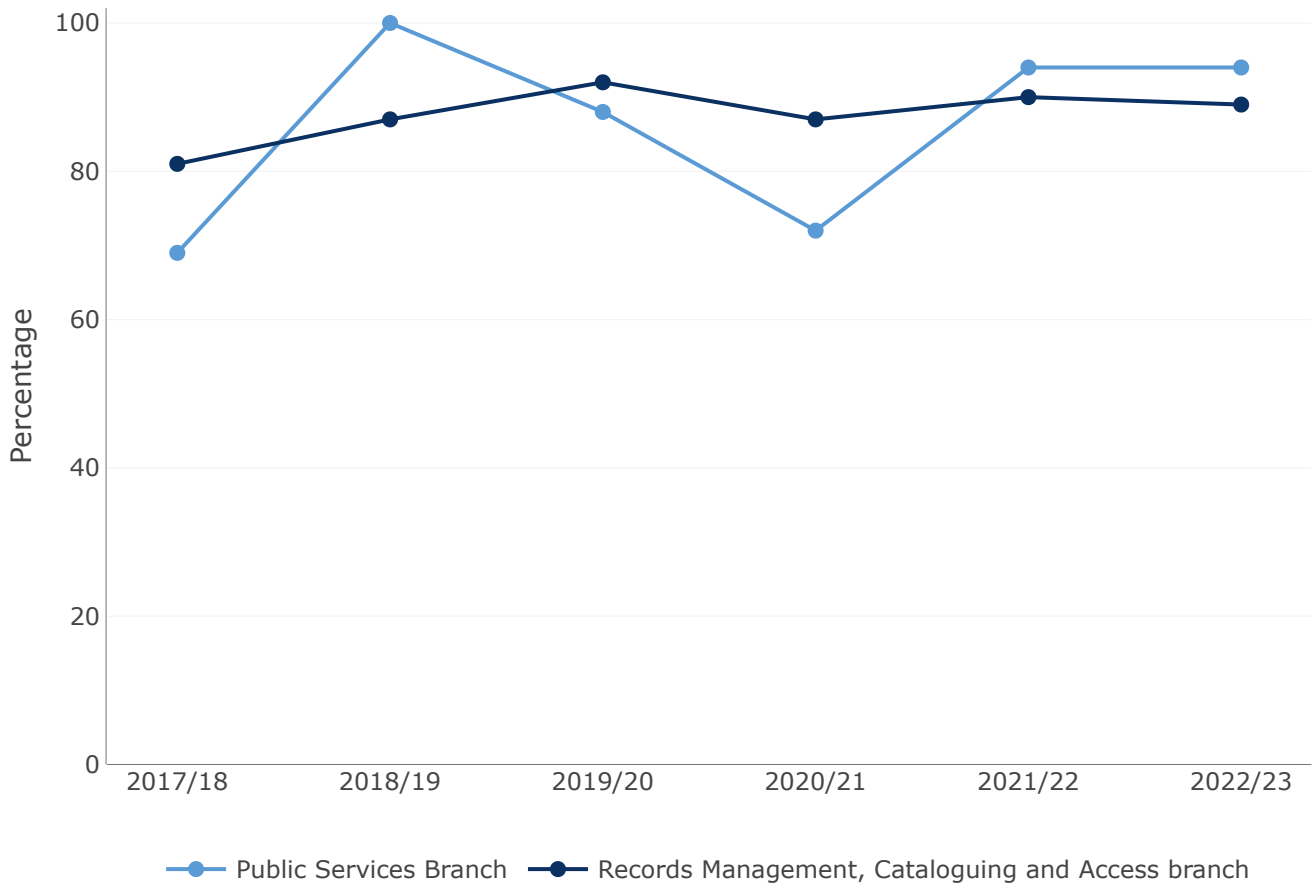
Filming The Long and Short of It - Tim McGarry, David Hume and Professor Marie Coleman

### Written requests received from the Public

In 2022/23, 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, Cataloguing and Access branch 80% of requests should be responded to within 20 days.

There were 3,209 written enquiries to PRONI's Public Services branch in 2022/23. All queries were answered, with 94% of responses to written correspondence meeting the target. For Records Management, Cataloguing and Access branch, 89% of the responses to the 305 written correspondence enquiries met the target.

From 22 October 2022, PRONI was unable to respond or complete requests for access to information contained in closed historical transferred files which were submitted by applicants under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Court Files Privileged Access Rules (NI) 2016 due to the absence of a designated Minister responsible for PRONI. As a result, PRONI had to temporarily suspend these requests and this remained the position for the remainder of the reporting year.



## Written requests received from other Public Authorities

Records Management, Cataloguing and Access Branch received 517 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 5 days. Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 PRONI responded to 55% of the 883 requests received within the 5 day target. PRONI responded to 100% of requests within 20 days.

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. Due to the large volume of requests received from the Victims Payment Board during the reporting period, an agreement was reached between PRONI and the Victims

Payment Board to extend the 4 week target to a maximum of 12 weeks to allow PRONI to respond appropriately. Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 PRONI responded to 99.3% of the 649 requests received within the 12 week target.



Lord Mayor of Mid and East Antrim, Grace Gordon and David Huddleston in PRONI stores

## 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 (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/ecatalogue>)
- Freeholders Records (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/freeholders-records>)
- Londonderry Corporation Records (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/londonderry-corporation-records>)
- Name Search (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/name-search>)
- PRONI Historical Maps viewer (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/proni-historical-maps-viewer>)
- PRONI Web Archive (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/proni-web-archive>)
- Street directories (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/street-directories>)
- Ulster Covenant (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/ulster-covenant>)
- Valuation Revision Books (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/valuation-revision-books>)

- Will calendars (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/will-calendars>)



Ulster Vintage Commercial Vehicle Club conference

### Image Gallery

Images from the PRONI archives are available to view on the photo-sharing website Flickr (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/proni> (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/proni>)). No new photographs were added to the stream in 2022/23 as the priority for digitisation has been to populate a Digital Asset Management System (DAMS).

### 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 'Map Monday' and 'On this Day'. By March 2023, PRONI had 7,358 followers on Facebook, an increase of 912 on the previous year.

### Twitter

PRONI publishes tweets throughout the week on Twitter. By March 2023, PRONI had 3,200 followers on Twitter.

### Instagram

By March 2023, PRONI had 1,389 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 2022/23, an additional 57 talks were made available on PRONI's YouTube channel. The Channel

received 42,400 views with 702,650 impressions during this year. The number of subscribers rose by 472. The most viewed video on the channel was 'LeisureWorld Belfast'.

### 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> (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/subscribe-pronis-enewsletter>). At the end of 2022/23, approximately 6,000 people had subscribed to receive the eNewsletter.



Launch of Phase 3 of the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland at Dublin Castle

### 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 being phased in over 10 years, with two years of records being reviewed and released each year. However, the impact of COVID in 2020/21 and 2021/22 has resulted in the phasing taking a little longer.



As a result, in 2022/23, it was only possible to review the records of NI Departments and the NIO with terminal dates of 1999, which were brought forward for release during December 2022. 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 732 government files were released in 2022. Of these, 220 files had some information blanked out, with the main reason for this being 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 2022/23, 504 documents selected from files dating from 1997-1998 were added to CAIN. By 31 March 2023, there were 3,708 PRONI documents available to view on CAIN.



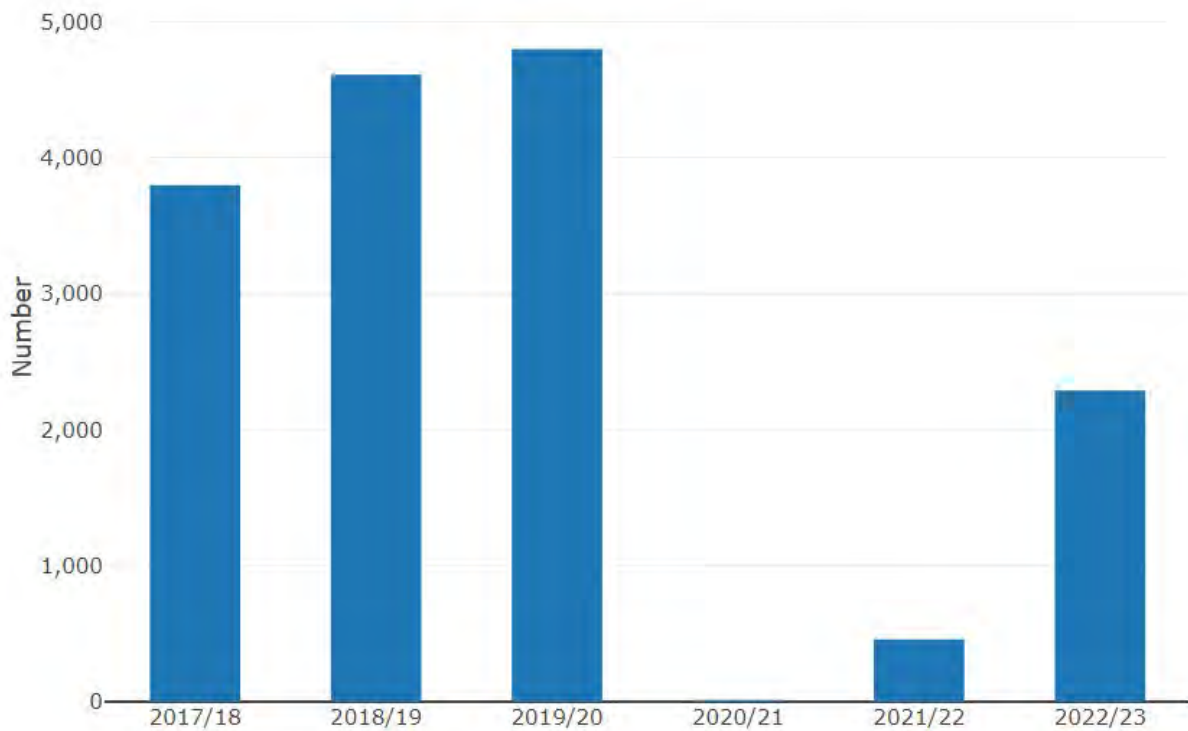
PRONI Building

## Visitors and Visits

### New visitors

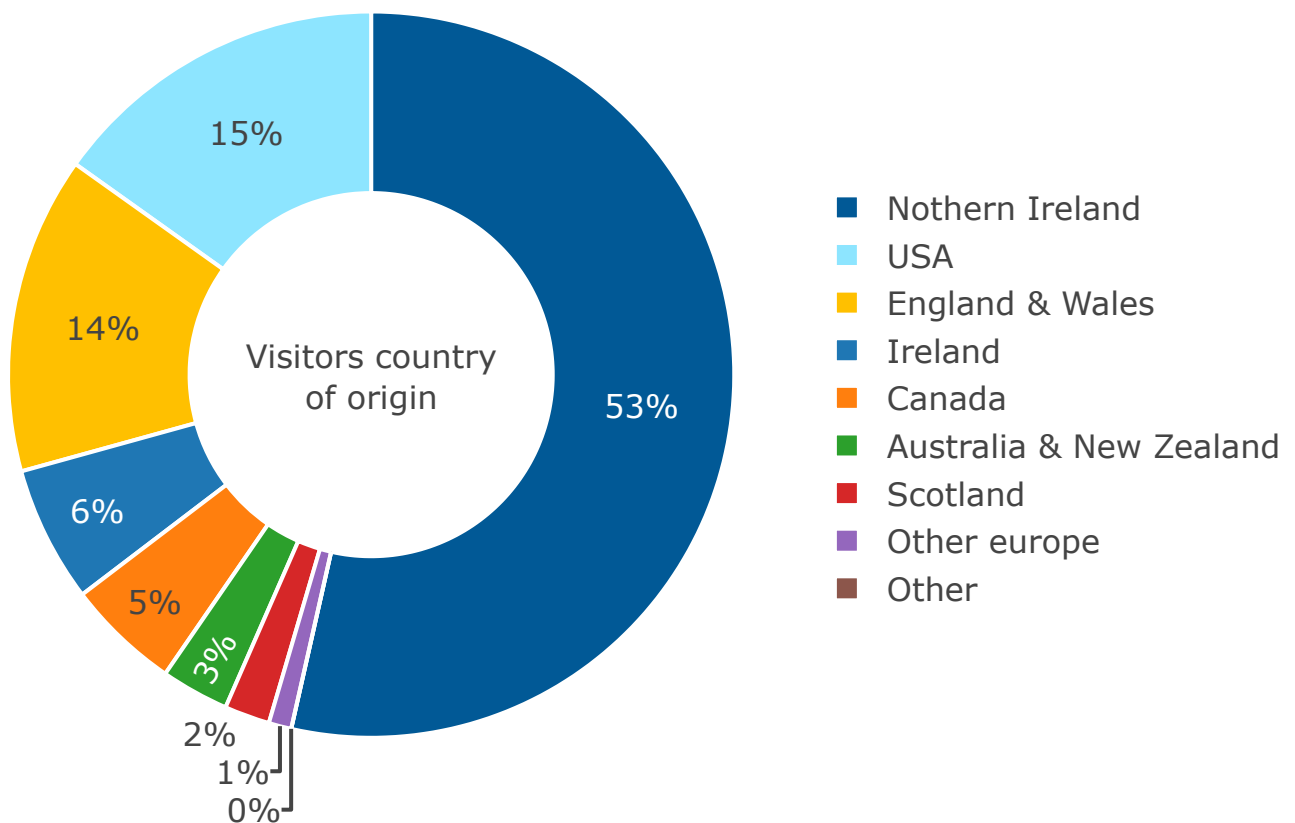
There were 2,288 new visitors registered in PRONI in 2022/23. In total, 50% of new visitors were female and 50% were male. In 2022/23, 55% of new visitors registered were aged between 25 and 64 years, whilst 38% were aged 65 years and over and 5% were under 25 years of age. Note that 2% of new visitors did not specify their age when registering.

### New visitors registered in PRONI



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

In 2022/23, 47% of new visitors were from outside Northern Ireland, with 15% from USA, 14% from England and Wales, 6% from Republic of Ireland and 5% from Canada.



## 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 6,819 visits by the public in 2022/23 to the Search Room / Reading room in PRONI and there were 21 group visits comprising 440 visitors. PRONI delivered 34 onsite and virtual events in 2022/23 which were attended by 1,928 members of the public.

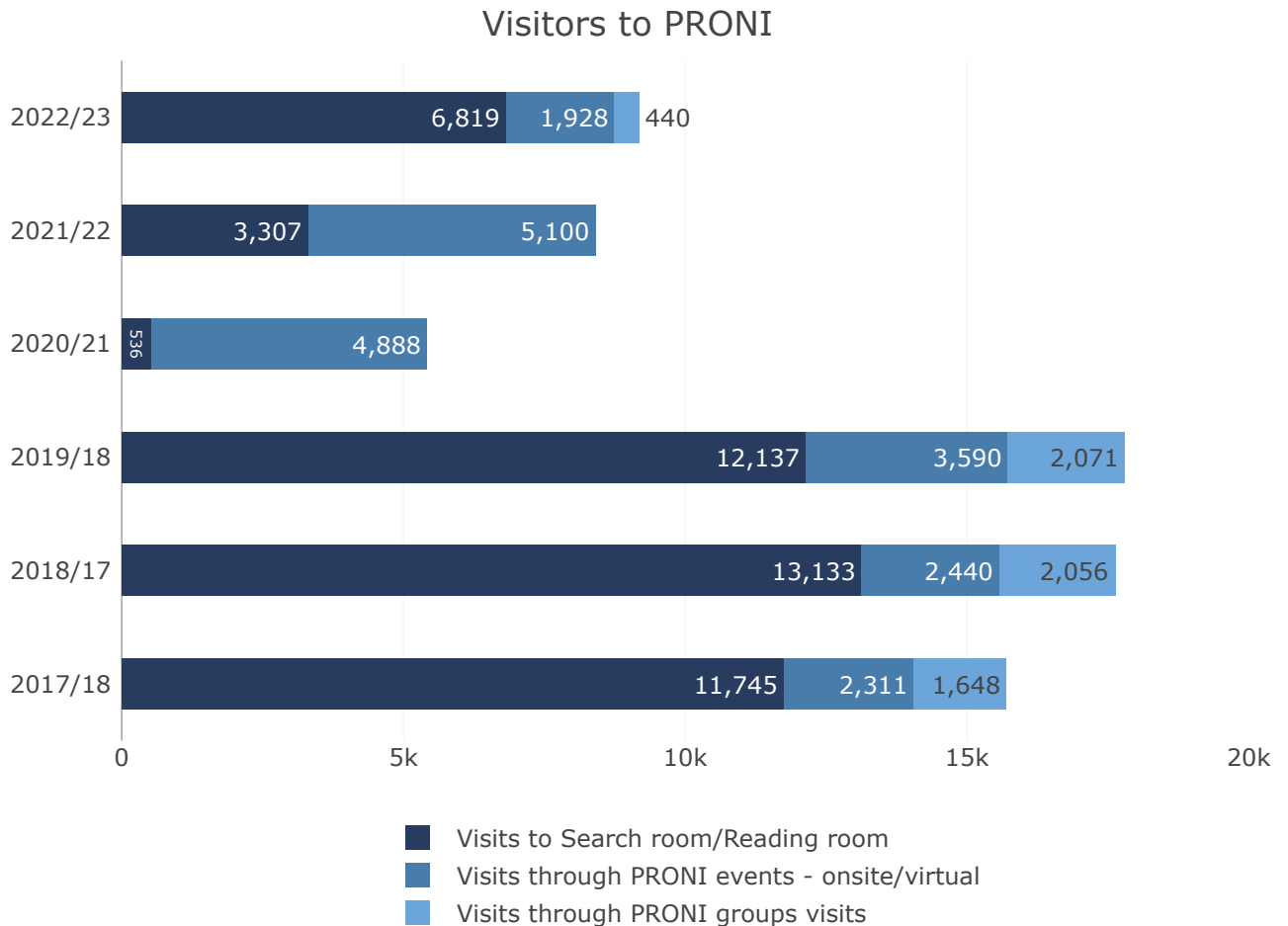


Image Nation

## Continuous Household Survey

In 2022/23, 5% of adults had used PRONI services within the previous year, an increase on the 2021/22 figure of 3%.

- Those living in the least deprived areas were more likely to have used PRONI in the previous year than those living in the most deprived areas (6% and 3% respectively). In addition, adults living in urban areas were more likely to have used PRONI in the previous year compared to those in rural areas (5% and 4% respectively).

There were no differences in the use of PRONI services for gender, older and younger adults, adults with and without dependants or those with a disability.

- While comparisons can be made between 2021/22 and 2022/23, it is important to note that use of PRONI services in 2021/22 would have been impacted by closures due to COVID-19.

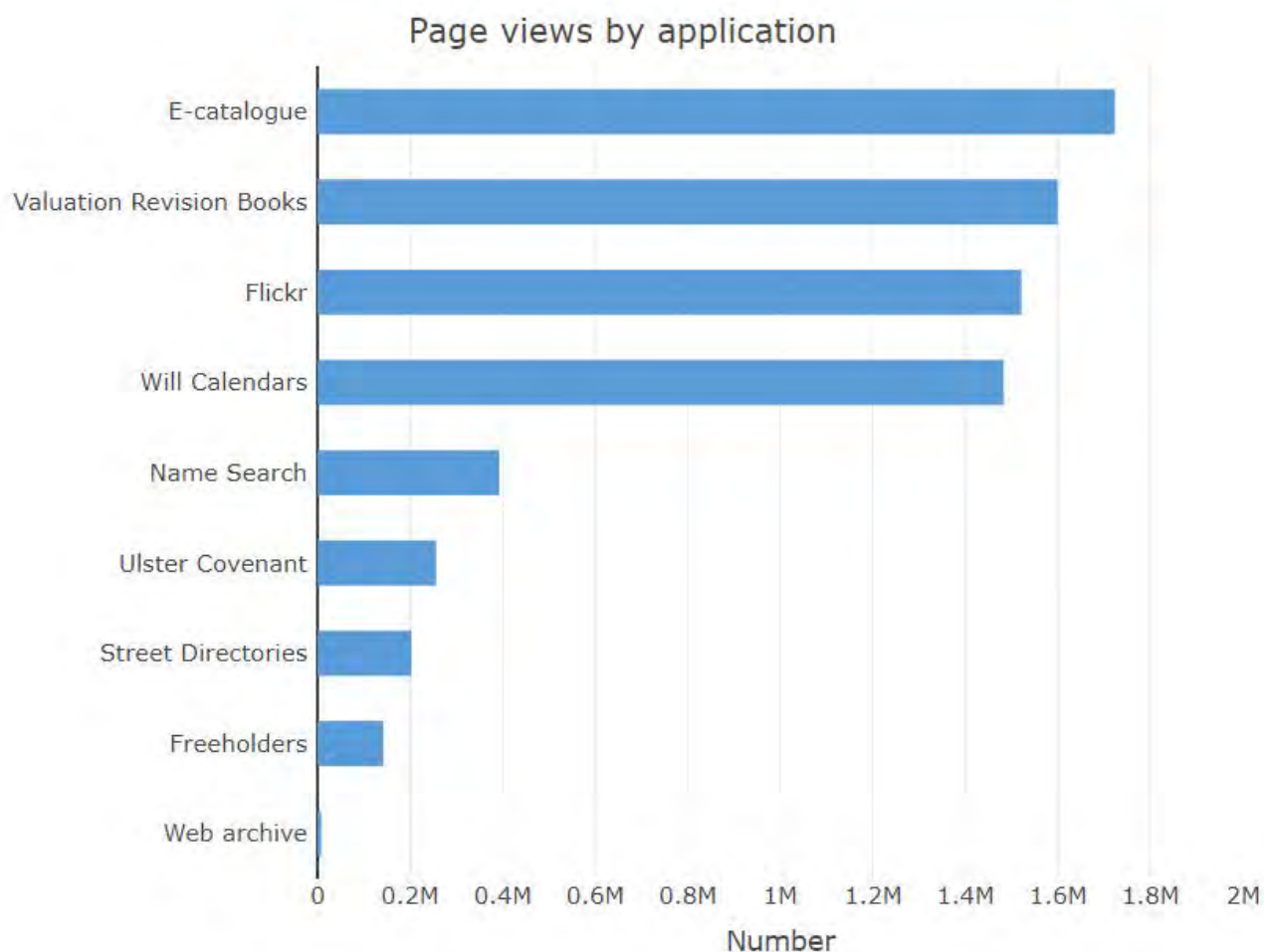
More information relating to the CHS, methodology, definitions and the interpretation of the figures can be found in the report entitled Engagement in culture, arts, heritage and sport by adults in Northern Ireland 2022/23 | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk) (<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/engagement-culture-arts-heritage-and-sport-by-adults-northern-ireland-202223>) (Definitions and technical notes section).



Making the Future Participants

## PRONI website

There were 8 million page views to the PRONI website in 2022/23. A breakdown of page views by application is presented in the chart below.



Note: 1. A page view is a hit to any file classified as a page. 2. Glossary provides explanations of the categories of pages. 3. No data is available for the 'Street directories' category for December 2022 and March 2023.

## Satisfaction with PRONI

### Customer feedback

PRONI receives customer feedback via its website (Your comments or complaints[nidirect) (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/make-comment-or-complaint-proni>) and by email. A selection of feedback received from customers in 2022/23 is included below.

- *Thank you for your assistance. Your help has certainly provided more clues in my research and inspired me to make the trip to Belfast next month. I've made an appointment to visit PRONI in May and perhaps then I can thank you in person.*
- *[...] and I visited PRONI yesterday and we were able to look at the papers in question kept in four separate archive boxes. The success of our visit is down to you organising the "Permission to see" forms, the friendly welcome from the two ladies at the search desk, and the staff in the reading room, especially [...] who was most helpful in enabling us to photocopy some of the documents. Thank you all for your assistance.*
- *Belated thanks for all your patience and guidance last Wednesday. You opened a lot of new avenues of research which I was hitherto unable to access. I really had a rewarding visit and found much relevant material. When I have had a chance to process what I have and do some further investigation from home I will pay another visit to PRONI. 5 \* service - pity I can't rate you on trip advisor! Cheers and thanks a million.*

• *I was off most of last week but wanted to follow up the event from the week before. Can you please thank all the staff at PRONI for their help and consideration during our week-long event. That includes the search and reading room staff, those who bring the records, and the facilities team in reception, room hire and the café. They were all superbly helpful to our visitors and staff, as usual. I know it might leave you a little embarrassed to hear it, but I hope also pleased too, quite a number of our visitors commented on the very positive experience they received in Belfast compared to that experienced at some of the archives in [...]. And they were very pleased that PRONI had returned to 'normal' hours compared to others who are still offering a restricted service.*



Jayne Hutchinson (left) and document display, Ulster Vintage Commercial Vehicle Club conference.

## Glossary

**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.



## Technical notes

### **Official Statistics**

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 (<https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/the-code/>) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. Contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards - email: [psu@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:psu@communities-ni.gov.uk) (<mailto:psu@communities-ni.gov.uk>). Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) (<mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk>) or via the OSR website (<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>).