



PRONI Digital Records Statement (02/11/2005)

The Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 and the Disposal of Records Order 1925 require Government Departments and Public Bodies to transfer public records deemed to be of archival value to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) for permanent preservation. The Act does not make any distinction with regard to the media on which the records were created; PRONI will therefore be accepting the transfer of digital records, including those managed by the NICS EDRM. PRONI will be developing a series of policy and guidance documents to assist Departments to meet the requirements of the 1923 Act in relation to digital records.

Agreed Disposal Schedules between the Departments and PRONI identify the records for permanent preservation and transfer to PRONI – traditionally this amounts to approximately 10% of all records created by Departments annually. Selection of digital records for permanent preservation will be undertaken by PRONI using macro-appraisal methodology (the Grigg Review system will still apply for traditional paper records) and in consultation with the Departmental Information Manager.

The adoption of macro-appraisal by PRONI is in line with archival approaches elsewhere, like the National Archives UK and Canadian Archives. For digital records, appraisal decisions must be taken as early as possible in the life of a record and traditional file-by-file review is impractical, macro-appraisal seeks to address these issues. PRONI will therefore be formally adopting macro-appraisal techniques – which allows for the identification of functions within government as a whole, worthy of permanent preservation and subsequently the selection of records associated with those functions.

New guidance on disposal scheduling of digital records will be issued by PRONI. It is envisaged that generic schedules agreed with PRONI will be applied for the seven functions of the Corporate Fileplan at the functional class level and inherited within the fileplan. In cases where there are exceptions, specific schedules will be applied to folders or groups of folders in agreement with PRONI. All operational fileplans will also have a disposal schedule applied at class level, with specific schedules applied where retention decisions necessitate. All such schedules will be quality assured by PRONI.

Transfer to PRONI of digital records for permanent preservation will take place after the current business retention requirements have ended (normally 5 to 7 years after the file is closed). However, where retention requirements are longer than 5 to 7 years and the records have been identified for permanent preservation, PRONI will accept the transfer of digital material at an agreed date with the Department to ensure the long-term access to the record is maintained. Access and security of the records will be managed in accordance with legal requirements.

Development of a digital archive at PRONI will be based on the Trusted Digital Repositories model and OAIS standard. Transfer of digital material from the Managed Service Provider on behalf of Departments will only be accepted when submissions have been verified and are accompanied with metadata defined as acceptable by PRONI. Further policies and digital transfer guidance will be developed by PRONI.