



**PRONI**  
Public Record Office  
of Northern Ireland



Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

# Protecting and Providing Archives for All

Values, Key Themes and Strategic Goals  
2018–2023



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# Introduction

This document has a number of strategic purposes. Firstly, it brings together in one place a description of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's (PRONI) Vision and Mission Statement as well as setting out the links to PRONI's Values and Key Themes which in turn inform PRONI's Strategic Goals.

Secondly, it provides the strategic context in terms of Vision, Mission, Values, Key Themes and Strategic Goals which will directly influence PRONI's business planning in the 2018–2023 period.

Finally, bringing PRONI's Vision, Mission, Values, Key Themes and Strategic Goals together in one high-level strategic document allows PRONI's partners, stakeholders, staff and users to more clearly understand the strategic context in which PRONI seeks to deliver against its Vision of 'Protecting and Providing Archives for All'.



Munition workers at Mackie & Sons, 1938.  
PRONI reference: D3964/H/12B

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# The Importance and Value of Archives and Records

Publicly funded archives and record offices such as PRONI provide a valuable public service to the community locally, nationally and internationally.

PRONI's service delivery ranges across a broad spectrum including culture, history, genealogy, education, academic and local history research, business, legal and occupational research and social and economic policy. PRONI's archives and records exist for the enjoyment, information and use of all – including researchers, academics, scholars, social scientists, the legal profession, the media, journalists, students, teachers, government departments and their agencies and the general public.

The International Council on Archives (ICA), Universal Declaration on Archives, 2010, highlights the value of archives in recording decisions, actions and memories:

*'Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to*

*individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.'*<sup>1</sup>

The ICA's emphasis on 'open access to archives' is central to all that PRONI seeks to deliver. Open and public access includes engaging with a wide and diverse range of users both local and from further afield.

Elizabeth Denham, the current United Kingdom Information Commissioner, has frequently remarked on the importance of maintaining records in a National Archive such as PRONI quoting Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist of Canada in 1924 who said:

*'Of all national assets, archives are the most precious, they are the gifts of one generation to another, and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilisation...'*

*As a rule, the papers of a given generation are seldom required after their reception and primary use; but when all personal touch with that period has ceased, then these records assume a startling importance, for they replace hands that have vanished and lips that are sealed.'*

<sup>1</sup> Adopted at the General Assembly of the International Council on Archives, Oslo, September 2010. Endorsed by 36th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO Paris, November 2011.



Members of Women's Legion, 1915. PRONI Reference D3099/14/2/1/1/4/11

Engagement is critical to the public and other services which PRONI delivers allowing PRONI to enhance its archival reputation; develop the knowledge and skills of its staff; make full and effective use of its records, archives and building; partner and collaborate with strategic peers such as Libraries NI, National Museums NI and other archives and record keeping bodies such as The National Archives, the National Records of Scotland and the National Archives of Ireland and attract a wide and diverse range of visitors and users.

The importance and value of public accessibility to archives was eloquently summed up by the then United Nations Secretary, Ban Ki-Moon, in June 2010 when he said that:

**‘Archives hold the key to our human story. They are the root, the source, they are our precious store of eyewitness accounts and original documents.’**

Going on to echo both the ICA 2010 Declaration on Archives and PRONI’s Vision of ‘Protecting and Providing Archives for All’ Ban Ki-Moon concludes:

**‘Archives only come alive when they are open and accessible to all. We must treasure them and preserve them for future generations.’**

Openness and accessibility underpin all the archival and record management services that PRONI seeks to deliver.

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# The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

As the national archive for Northern Ireland, PRONI has a statutory role for the reception, preservation and provision of access to records, established under the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

PRONI is one of four national archival institutions in these islands, the others being the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin, The National Archives in London and the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh. PRONI is unique in providing an integrated archival service that equates to covering the functions of a Public

Record Office, the manuscript department of a National Library and county record offices for the six counties of Northern Ireland.

As the custodian of Northern Ireland's archival heritage, PRONI has a key role in the preservation of its archives and records that help to inform a significant part of our local story across the last nine centuries. PRONI cares for over 3 million unique items and its archives and records are of immense social, economic and historical value to a wide range of individuals, communities and enterprises. PRONI inspires interest, and attracts visitors locally, nationally and from across the world.



The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

# Archive Service Accreditation

In July 2018, PRONI became the first archive in Northern Ireland to be awarded Accredited Archive Service status by the United Kingdom Archive Service Accreditation Committee. This body recognises good practice for archive services across the UK and has validated the quality of services that PRONI provides against a nationally agreed standard. The Committee:

‘...welcomed this hugely positive application and were pleased to celebrate the first Accreditation Award to be made in Northern Ireland.’

Accredited Archive Services such as PRONI ensure the long-term collection, preservation and accessibility of archival heritage. Accreditation is the UK quality standard for archives which recognises good performance in all areas of service delivery. Achieving accredited status demonstrates that PRONI has met clearly defined national standards relating to management and resourcing; the care of its unique collections and what PRONI offers to its entire range of users.

The importance of achieving Archive Service Accreditation for PRONI’s archival standing and reputation was recognised by PRONI Director and Deputy Keeper of the Records, Dr. Michael Willis:



‘This prestigious Award is a significant achievement and important milestone for PRONI and I am both delighted and proud that PRONI has been assessed as reaching the UK standard for archive services. This is welcome recognition of PRONI’s good practices and quality services and is testimony to the ongoing hard work of all PRONI staff to make PRONI the best archive that it can be!’

Archive Service Accreditation is supported by a UK-wide partnership of The National Archives, National Records of Scotland, PRONI, the Welsh Government through its Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales Division, the Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland), the Scottish Council on Archives and the Archives and Records Council Wales.





## Background and Context

PRONI re-opened to the public in its new Titanic Quarter, Belfast, premises in March 2011. The new ‘state of the art’ building delivered archival storage in line with recognised standards for archival institutions, space to accommodate future anticipated demand for archive and records storage and dedicated public and staff facilities. An ongoing programme of public events continues to realise the benefits of the new public space, attracting new visitors to PRONI with lunch-time talks, conferences, exhibitions and ‘how to’ workshops. Nevertheless, the needs and expectations of PRONI’s users are continuing to evolve, with public demand for access to information driving the need to open up archives like never before – to new audiences and facilitated by new forms of delivery media.

The wider archival and records management sector is also changing, driven by the transition from traditional record keeping to the digital preservation and delivery of records. PRONI has already demonstrated significant technical innovation through the development and implementation of its Digital Repository. PRONI will continue to maximise the opportunities of emerging digital technology.

PRONI also remains committed to the professional care of its traditional paper archives and records spanning some 800 years of history. This includes the official records of local authorities, courts, hospitals, schools and the privately deposited records of churches, businesses, charities, solicitors, landed estates and individuals. PRONI

will continue to appraise, catalogue and preserve its archives and records as part of its statutory functions whilst addressing the challenges of digital records. PRONI will also continue to preserve the archives and records it cares for and promote and provide access to these for all users via a range of media both paper and digital.

Changing public expectations and the shift to digital has coincided with a period of significant restructuring of the Northern Ireland public sector following the Reform of Public Administration in Northern Ireland (2002), the St Andrews Agreement (2006) and the reconfiguration of the new Northern Ireland Departments in May 2016. PRONI is currently a Division of the Engaged Communities Group (ECG) within the Department for Communities (DfC) which is part of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

The draft Programme for Government 2016–2021 recognises the positive impact of cultural engagement on general wellbeing, good health and satisfaction with life. As a key cultural resource, PRONI supports DfC commitments to harness the collective resource of culture and heritage to achieve meaningful outcomes for individuals and communities.

Each year, public sector organisations create many millions of records. The majority of these remain of value only for a period of time. PRONI provides advice and guidance to Northern Ireland Departments and the wider public sector to promote good practice in the management of



Volunteers cleaning architectural plans from the Young & Mackenzie Collection. PRONI reference: D2194

their current records and transfer of historical records to PRONI. This supports statutory compliance with the 1923 Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) and recognises the importance of fulfilling the obligations under the legislation.

Whilst acknowledging drivers for change such as increased demand and the challenges of digital agenda, the current economic climate remains uncertain. Fulfilling statutory obligations to select, preserve and make available the records in its care, remains PRONI's core task and PRONI is committed to working collaboratively, creatively and innovatively to seek new ways for people to engage with archives and records. Strategic planning is essential to make the best use of PRONI's resources and to maintain professional standards in the delivery of a quality archival and records management service.

The 2018–2023 period is one of great significance as PRONI looks forward to marking its centenary as the national archive and record office established under the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923.

There is value in setting out in one document PRONI's vision, mission, values, key themes and strategic goals which will inform PRONI's business planning and delivery over the next 5 years.

This document also brings together a diverse range of case studies which highlight the contemporary relevance, value and importance of protecting, preserving and providing access to PRONI's archives and records. The case studies also showcase PRONI's key themes of Trust, Memory and Engagement.

## Vision and Mission

PRONI's Vision is focussed on 'Protecting and Providing Archives for All'. This Vision is supported by PRONI's Mission Statement which is 'To identify, preserve and promote public access to Northern Ireland's archival heritage'.

PRONI plays a key role in preserving Northern Ireland's archival heritage, promoting public access and improving cultural participation through engagement with its archives and records. Clearly setting out PRONI's values, key themes and strategic goals will allow the public, PRONI's partners, stakeholders, staff, current and future users to better understand the strategic context in which PRONI seeks to deliver against its vision of 'Protecting and Providing Archives for All'.



The Scottish Provident Institution, Belfast (1899–1902), first phase, Donegall Square West elevation by Architect firm Young & Mackenzie. PRONI reference: D2194

## Values

There are a number of values which underpin all that PRONI seeks to deliver and which are important to its staff, stakeholders and users. These include:

- Leading archival and records management best practice locally, nationally and internationally
- Providing a dedicated, professional, friendly and accessible archive and records management service
- Being committed to training and development of its staff

PRONI's values are central to the delivery of PRONI's Key Themes and Strategic Goals.

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# Key Themes

## 1. Trust – archives support the integrity of public records

- PRONI users are able to access authentic, accurate, reliable records
- PRONI promotes professional practice in archival care and records management
- PRONI is accountable through legislation

Case Studies 1 and 2 are examples of how PRONI is trusted by diverse stakeholders as a source of reliable records which contribute to the public good.

### Case Study 1: Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Since early 2012, PRONI assisted the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry to fulfil its statutory role to determine whether there were systemic failings by institutions or the State in their duties towards children in their care, in Northern Ireland, between the years of 1922–1995.

The Inquiry accumulated vast numbers of documents from various sources, including many which had been deposited in PRONI. Altogether 355,891 pages were included in the evidence bundles for the fifteen Modules into which the Inquiry divided its public hearings. The volume of material resulted in a painstaking and time-consuming task for the Inquiry legal team to collate and analyse the documents to establish what needed to be examined in the public hearings.

Sir Anthony Hart noted the success of the relationship between the Inquiry and PRONI (in his Report published in early 2017):

‘Before and during the public hearings they were embedded in PRONI where they worked in close conjunction with the Inquiry legal team and PRONI staff. Their excellent working relationship with PRONI meant they were able to trace and examine huge numbers of departmental files, as well as files deposited by former public bodies such as welfare authorities. In several instances it was due to their researches that the Inquiry decided to investigate a particular institution or topic. In the future other inquiries of a similar type might well find that embedding their research staff in PRONI in this way would be valuable.’<sup>2</sup>

### Case Study 2: Board of Guardian records

PRONI received a request from the Belfast Post Adoption Team to search the Belfast Midnight Mission maternity register for a baby born in 1938. A social worker was working on behalf of the individual to trace his mother. A PRONI member of staff located an entry in the register and this provided additional information for the Post Adoption Team. A related search was carried of the 1939 National Registers and this revealed further details about the family and other relatives.

The Post Adoption Team were able to trace the mother, who was in her 90s. She was delighted to be reunited with her son. The Team reported

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hiainquiry.org/historical-institutional-abuse-inquiry-report-chapters>

that it was an emotional reunion and that mother, son and grandchildren remain in close contact.

## 2. Memory – archives sustain the community memory for future generations

- PRONI selects, preserves and cares for records and archives from both public and private depositors
- The records and archives selected for permanent preservation by PRONI reflect the rich diversity of society
- PRONI's archives and records demonstrate the value of different narratives in understanding the past

Case Study 3 is an innovative example of PRONI demonstrating through partnership working the key role that oral archives can play in preserving a diverse range of narratives and community memories from the past for future generations.

### Case Study 3: Prisons Memory Archive

The Prisons Memory Archive (PMA) was recorded in Armagh Gaol and Maze and Long Kesh Prison in 2006 and 2007. The core of the collection comprises 175 audio-visual digital recordings of a diverse range of participants including prison staff, probation officers, prisoners, chaplains, teachers and prison visitors at the prison sites. This approach was taken to encourage viewers to regard others as 'ourselves in other circumstances' and to challenge assumptions about the past. The collection also includes extensive film footage of the Maze and Long Kesh site, the majority of which has now been demolished, and over 1,000 digital photographs of both prison sites.

PRONI is working in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and the PMA Management Group to preserve and catalogue the collection and make it publicly available. The development phase of this project was supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Eighteen participant recordings have been transferred to PRONI to date. Additional HLF funding has been secured to transfer the remaining collection between 2017 and 2019.

The participant recordings, filmed site footage and digital photographs will be catalogued and, where appropriate, made available to the public onsite in PRONI. Making the PMA archive available within PRONI will enable individuals to engage both with it and with a range of other complementary records from both official and privately deposited sources. The collection will be securely stored in PRONI's Digital Repository, thereby ensuring that this valuable resource will be safeguarded for future generations.

## 3. Engagement – expand access to archives

- PRONI is open and accessible to all
- PRONI is a neutral shared space where all feel welcome to engage with its archives and records
- PRONI promotes community engagement and improved cultural participation
- PRONI is committed to collaborative and partnership working to extend awareness, knowledge and reach of its archives and records

The importance for PRONI of promoting engagement with its archives and records is showcased in Case Studies 4 and 5. These demonstrate the wide range of activities that PRONI delivers in relation to the theme of 'Engagement'.

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#### **Case Study 4: Collaborative Engagement with Groups**

PRONI delivers a group visits programme for more than 1,500 participants each year, working in collaboration with over 100 partners. PRONI offers a range of options encouraging and empowering individuals to engage with their archival heritage, develop their information technology and research skills, and undertake independent exploration of PRONI's original documents. The group visits programme underpins PRONI's ability to meet core commitments under the draft Programme for Government, 2016–2021, and in particular to improve cultural participation.

Some of the partners PRONI works with include local authorities, essential skills providers and community groups who facilitate opportunities for local people to visit PRONI, learn new skills and meet new people – sometimes from different community backgrounds – in a safe and shared environment. Original documents are used to engage people with their history and heritage and encourage interaction and dialogue. This in turn helps build confidence, promotes wellbeing, and develops skills which helps people get back into employment. In 2017, PRONI worked collaboratively with the International Council on Archives to encourage local communities to celebrate International Archives Day, providing behind-the-scenes tours and an opportunity to meet staff and discuss the work undertaken to protect archives and make them available to the public.

PRONI also works with university groups, and such engagement is an important aspect in advocating the use of archives and their importance in a

global context. In 2017/18, PRONI worked with local and other universities, for example from the United States, France, England and Norway to champion the value of original archives for emerging researchers in subjects such as history, geography, archaeology, law, politics and the performing arts. PRONI also engaged with new or aspiring entrants to the archive and/or records and information management profession.

PRONI will continue to strengthen existing partnerships with universities and archival institutions. For example, the Beyond 2022 project – which is a collaboration with Trinity College Dublin, National Archives of Ireland, The National Archives and the Irish Manuscripts Commission to reconstruct virtually the Public Record Office (Dublin) destroyed in 1922 – presents an opportunity to work at the forefront of technical innovation and enhance access to several important collections accessioned in the decades after PRONI's foundation in 1923.

PRONI's group visits programme also contributes to additional economic activity in Northern Ireland, particularly those groups who promote 'roots tourism'. These include family and local history organisations, for example the Ulster Historical Foundation and the New England Historic Genealogical Society. In 2017/18, PRONI welcomed visitors from all over the world, including the United States of America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Belgium, reinforcing PRONI's significance as a global research centre for the Irish diaspora.



WW1 - Soldiers of 10th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in training, 1915. PRONI reference: D1357/1





### **Case Study 5: Decade of Centenaries**

PRONI leads on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) on marking of anniversaries relating to the Decade of Centenaries, 1912–1923. This relies on collaborative working with other parts of the DfC Engaged Community Group's arms-length bodies and other relevant peer institutions. The Northern Ireland Executive had endorsed an inclusive approach to the Decade of Centenaries informed by principles developed by the Community Relations Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. These are:

1. Start from the historical facts
2. Recognise the implications and consequences of what happened
3. Understand that different perceptions and interpretations exist
4. Show how events and activities can deepen understanding of the period

PRONI worked with its partners in both formal and informal arrangements. The formal setting included participating in the Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund led Decade of Centenaries Round Table which organised events for the whole sector. PRONI was also represented on the official First World War Committee which led on commemorative activities. PRONI also had representation at the national level through the Imperial War Museums led First World War Centenary Partnership.

PRONI also had less formal arrangements with broadcasters such as the BBC and RTE, making records and images available for use in documentaries or social media. PRONI had already pre-empted media, academic and public interest by publishing its own guide to First World War sources in 2015. PRONI also worked with the Government of Flanders to mark the Battle of Messines in 2017, and facilitated the Nerve Centre's launch of their official 1916 programme at PRONI.

The outcome of these activities has been that PRONI has expanded the reach of its collections whilst simultaneously promoting visibility of the archive and demonstrating that PRONI is both a neutral space and an archive that wants to engage collaboratively with others.

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# Strategic Goals

Flowing from PRONI's Vision and Mission are a number of Strategic Goals which underpin PRONI's service delivery and public impact.

## **1. A Visible and Accessible Archive and Records Service**

- To raise awareness, understanding, use and enjoyment of PRONI as an archival and cultural resource for all locally, nationally and internationally
- To seek to better understand, help and engage with stakeholders and users and be responsive to their evolving needs and expectations
- To learn more about the barriers to accessibility and find ways to break these down
- To promote and develop creative ways for users and stakeholders to engage with and access archives and records both physical and digital

## **2. Growth and Development of PRONI People which Builds Capacity for the Future of the Archive**

- To recognise, value and develop the diversity of staff talent in PRONI
- To foster a positive working environment which encourages all PRONI staff to give of their best

- To deliver relevant skills, training, learning and development for all PRONI staff
- To support archival, conservation and information and records management training and development
- To further digital archive and records training and development

## **3. Strategic Leadership**

- To lead by example in the development of positive working relationships with archives in Northern Ireland, Ireland, Great Britain and further afield
- To advocate for archives and records locally, nationally and internationally by demonstrating archival values and influencing policies and strategies which impact on the future sustainability of the archive and records management sector
- Set an example of archival best practice locally, nationally and internationally
- To advise and support Northern Ireland Departments and public bodies on information and records management
- To be a leader in the field of digital preservation and information management

#### **4. Fulfil statutory obligations for the selection, preservation and making available the archives and records in PRONI's care**

- To comply with the 1923 Public Records Act (Northern Ireland)
- To comply with access to information legislation
- To professionally care for, maintain and develop PRONI's unique holdings of privately deposited archives and records
- To develop further PRONI's understanding of the risks to archives and records
- To build a sustainable model for conservation
- To develop a programme to address legacy cataloguing
- To review acquisition policies to address areas of under-representation within PRONI

#### **5. Collaboration and partnerships**

- To develop and build on existing partnership work to strengthen and extend access to PRONI's archives and records
- To develop creative ways to sustain and expand access to PRONI's archives and records through new strategic partnerships
- To develop new partnerships in support of diversity in PRONI's collections development

#### **6. Enhance PRONI's digital capacity**

- To further develop digital preservation
- To more fully integrate digital archiving into records management procedures
- To embed consistent digital archiving standards
- To develop a long term digitisation strategy informed by preservation priorities and user need
- To seek new platforms for integrating access to collections

# Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland 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.

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The entrance and central atrium at PRONI

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