

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE of NORTHERN IRELAND

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 TO 2031

Building our future
by preserving our past



Department for
Communities
www.communities-ni.gov.uk



PRONI – STRATEGIC PLAN 2026 - 2031

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“ Building our future by preserving our past ”



Minister for Communities Gordon Lyons MLA

I am delighted to introduce the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland's (PRONI) new strategic plan for 2026–2031. As Northern Ireland's national archive, PRONI has the statutory remit to preserve and make accessible the records and stories of our government, our people, and our place. The archives are unique in enabling us to connect with our past, to reflect on the present and in guiding the future.

Over the past five-years PRONI delivered a range of positive outcomes from its previous strategy by celebrating PRONI's centenary, contributing to historical commemorations during the Decade of Centenaries and in supporting redress schemes.

Looking ahead PRONI's new strategic plan “Building our future by preserving our past” will build on these successes, in expanding access to its collections and by continuing to innovate and inspire people.

The 250th anniversary of the signing of the United States Declaration of Independence in 2026 is a major milestone. PRONI is playing a leading role working with key institutions and providing access to historical records that commemorate the contribution of early settlers from Ulster to the founding of the United States.

PRONI will also have a key role to play in developing a new archives policy as part of the future development of my Department's Heritage, Culture and Creativity programme and framework.

I am confident that with our dedicated staff and cultural partners, PRONI will continue to reach new audiences and inspire more people to discover and better appreciate our shared history by making its records more accessible and further its standing as one of our most respected cultural institutions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons'.

Gordon Lyons MLA

Minister for Communities and Keeper of the Records

June 2026



PRONI - Titanic Quarter, Belfast

Who We Are

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is the national archive for Northern Ireland and has played a central role for over 100 years in managing and providing access to the diverse and unique collection of public and private records in its care.

The archives safeguard our collective memory, connect people to the past, support research and learning, provide a rich resource for local and family history, academic study, and discovery that enriches cultural life. In delivering our statutory responsibilities we support wider government objectives and safeguard the integrity of the public record, ensuring transparency, accountability, and access for all.

As a trusted institution PRONI has earned international recognition among archive bodies reflecting its long-standing commitment to upholding the highest standards and setting the benchmark for professionalism, integrity and impartiality.

PRONI has achieved Archive Service Accreditation – the UK wide gold standard for archive services – and highlights its commitment to quality, access, and innovation.

Purpose

Our vision is to be “a dynamic and engaging citizen-focused archive for all.” Through transforming access to Northern Ireland’s archives, using digital innovation to reach new audiences locally and globally.

This plan sets out our statutory role, priorities, and activities and how we will evolve over the next 5 years in contributing to commitments in both the Executive’s Programme for Government 2024-2027 ‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’ Document and the Department’s business plan.

Key Priorities

We will achieve this through the following key priorities:



Access and representation

Expanding and diversifying collections to reflect Northern Ireland’s society, and improving public access to records for research, inquiries, and redress including Truth Recovery for **victims, survivors and families** impacted by Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses, and their pathways and practices.



Partnership and collaboration

Building local and international partnerships with communities, academia, and cultural organisations to enhance learning, research, and engagement.



Good governance and security

Promoting best practice in records management, developing a new archives policy, and ensuring both physical and cyber security of archival assets.



Digital transformation

Strengthening digital record-keeping, ensuring data integrity and long-term usability, and using technology and innovation to engage new and diverse audiences.



Wellbeing and engagement

Promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of archival engagement and broadening outreach to new audiences.



Capacity and skills

Investing in infrastructure, digital capability, and staff development to meet evolving archival needs and standards.



PRONI receives its Archive Service Accreditation award from Geoff Pick, Chair of Archive Service Accreditation with Colum Boyle, Permanent Secretary, Department for Communities.

PRONI was founded in 1923 and is a vital part of Northern Ireland's cultural heritage. As the national archive, we have the statutory remit to preserve important historical records and make them more accessible.

Today, with technology continually evolving and public interest in digital content growing, our role in collecting, preserving, and providing access to records is more crucial than ever.

The strategic plan reflects insights from an independent organisational review. It sets out the priorities and activities that will guide our work over the period 2026 to 2031. In implementing this plan, we will build on the momentum from the earlier strategy "Protecting and Providing Archives for All."

Our aim is to position PRONI at the forefront of archival innovation combining tradition with modern technology and offering greater access to our records both locally and globally.



SECTION 3

WHAT WE DO



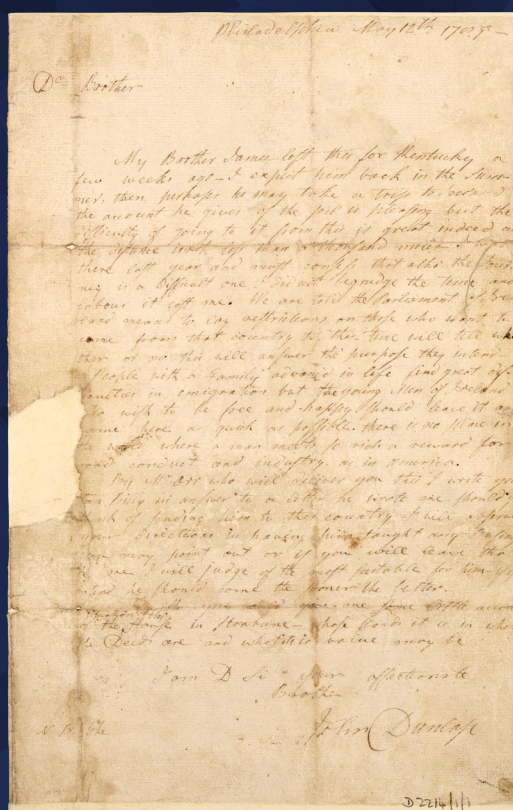
Joe Kennedy III US Special Envoy opening the Declaration of Independence Exhibition at PRONI in partnership with the Ulster-Scots Agency.

As the national archive we are responsible for collecting, preserving, and providing access to public records. Our powers and duties stem from the Public Records Act (NI)1923 as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

We are one of four national archival institutions in these islands, the others being the National Archives of Ireland in Dublin, The National Archives UK in London and the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh. We play a unique role by combining the functions of a national archive, the manuscript department of a national library, and county record offices for Northern Ireland.

Our key responsibilities include:

- Advising the Minister as Keeper of the Records on all matters relating to PRONI and archives.
- Collecting, cataloguing, preserving and conserving records to ensure they are accessible.
- Promoting best practice in archive and records management.
- Providing access to and awareness of the archives through engagement and outreach.
- Providing access to records to support inquiries, investigations, and redress schemes.
- Partnering with a wide range of organisations to unlock archive collections through research, creativity, and innovation.



Letter from John Dunlap, Philadelphia to Robert Rutherford, Strabane, Co. Tyrone, 12 May 1785, extolling the virtues of the New World (PRONI Ref: D2214/1/1/1)

We currently hold over three million records, spanning over 800 years which are key to understanding our history and heritage across the last nine centuries. A considerable number of our public records date back to the 18th and late 17th centuries.

We also hold a wide and diverse range of important archives from private sources. These include business records and church registers and can range from a single emigrant letter to a vast landed estate archive holding thousands of items and spanning many hundreds of years.

Historic Environment Record of NI

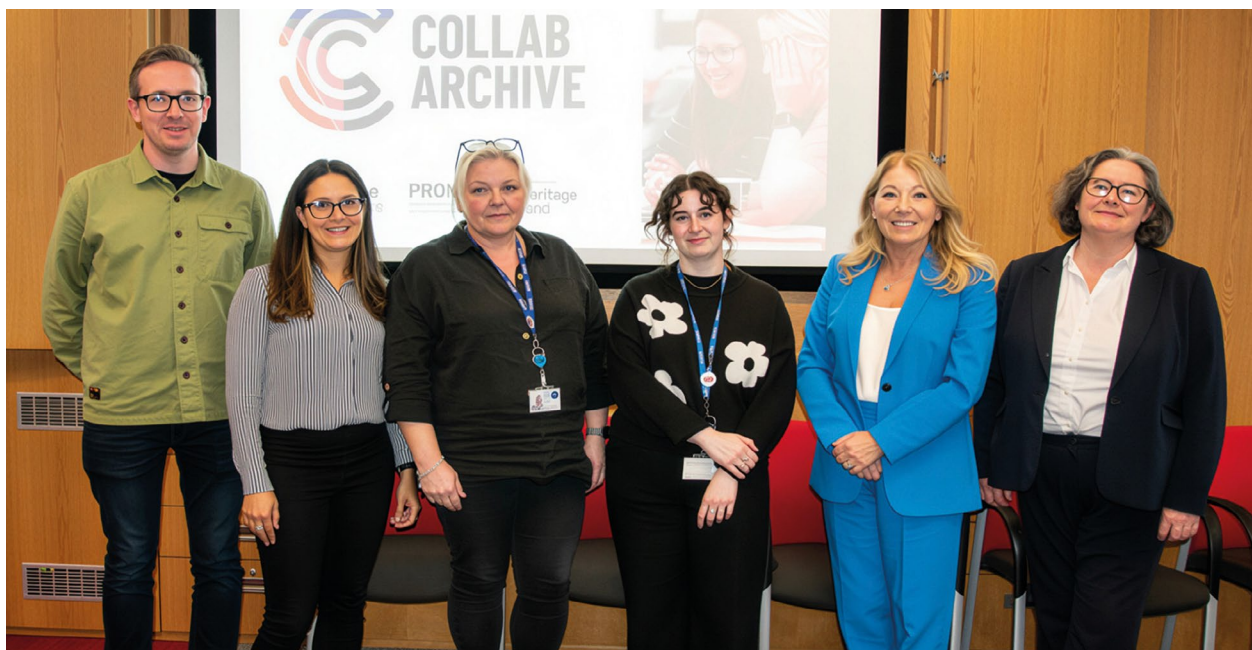
We work closely with colleagues in the Historic Environment Record of NI (HERoNI). HERoNI holds valuable information on the historic environment including maps, photographs, records, and digital material. As PRONI and HERoNI are in a shared building we bring together several thousand years of our history and heritage which has significant social, economic, and historical value.



Minister Lyons views one of HERoNI's exhibitions.

SECTION 4

LOOKING BACK



CollabArchive, a digital volunteering project based at PRONI, with representatives from PRONI, Nerve Centre and National Heritage Lottery Fund.

We made considerable progress in delivering on our strategic priorities as set out in **“Protecting and Providing Archives for All”** – 2018 to 2023.

Despite the impact of COVID and other resource challenges we:

- Delivered a range of innovative community outreach programmes e.g. Making the Future and CollabArchive.
- Acquired new privately deposited collections of significant historical value e.g. Prisons Memory Archive.
- Expanded our online presence by making archives more accessible.
- Engaged new audiences through partnering with organisations e.g. PRONI on Tour with Libraries NI.
- Led the Decade of Centenaries commemorations (2012-2023).
- Assisted The Executive Office with information and evidence retrieval for several redress schemes.



PRONI vaults at Titanic Quarter

- Maximised digital technologies and preserved records in the PRONI digital repository.
- Partnered with NI Screen and ITV to safeguard the UTV film and tape archive.
- Helped to make more records accessible as a core partner of the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland.
- Preserved the records of the pandemic through the “Stay Home Memories Census.”

We also launched a special publication “PRONI 100 Treasures’ that marked the end of our centenary year which features fascinating documents, dating from 1219 to the present day.



HRH The Duke of Gloucester views records during a visit to PRONI to mark its 100th anniversary.



Emer Morelli, David Huddleston and Stephen Scarth, Engaged Communities Group at the launch of the PRONI 100 publication.

SECTION 5

THE BIG PICTURE

In charting our course, we have considered the bigger picture and the environment in which we operate.

The Northern Ireland Executive “Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most” sets out its Programme for Government (PfG) for the period 2024-2027 with a focus on collaborative decision-making and outcomes-based approaches.



The Department for Communities (the Department) contributes to PfG outcomes in delivering a wide range of services to the public and through its Arm's Length Bodies in supporting people, building communities, and shaping places. The Department's Business Plan for 2025-26 set out its strategic objectives. It included a commitment to:

“Identify, protect, conserve, promote and provide access to our historic environment and records of historical, social and cultural importance to inform and encourage understanding of how our rich and diverse cultural heritage shapes us now and, in the future.”

The Departments new “Heritage, Culture & Creativity Programme” focuses on the development of new policies for the Arts, Museums, Historic environment, and Libraries sectors to maximise their value and impact across society, The Programme will also include an archives policy for Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, the Executive's 10 Year Action plan for tourism recognises that our culture and heritage assets are a key part of our tourism offer. PRONI's archives add significant value to cultural tourism by offering unique insights and access to our history and heritage through documents that enrich visitor experiences and deepen cultural understanding.

PRONI Forum

PRONI's work is supported and informed by an established Stakeholder Forum that meets on a quarterly basis. The forum plays an important role in offering perspectives, sharing experiences, feedback and in contributing to the development and implementation of PRONI's strategies and operations.



PRONI staff celebrate the 100th anniversary of the organisation.

The commitment and professionalism of our people is central to our success. In delivering on this plan, we will continue to support our people through focusing on the key priorities in the “NICS People Strategy 2025-30.”

In doing so we will aim to equip our people with the skills and capabilities to meet current and future requirements: to create a positive and supportive work environment: to foster a culture of strong leadership, inclusivity, and diversity and to deliver better outcomes for our people and the public we serve.



PRONI outreach team at the Balmoral Agricultural Show.

Core values

We will be guided by the following values:



Professionalism

Upholding the highest standards in archival practice, conservation, preservation, and records management.



Inclusion

Making our archives open and accessible to all.



Public value

Delivering greater public value by contributing to key NI Executive and Departmental priorities.



Collaboration

Working closely with a range of partners to achieve shared goals.



Integrity

Working with honesty and transparency, engaging respectfully with users, colleagues, and partners.

SECTION 7 OUR VISION

We have developed a Strategic Framework and Roadmap to enable us to deliver our priorities over the next five years.

PRONI STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



VISION

A dynamic and engaging citizen focused archive for all



**Impact within
NI Public Sector**



**Impact
on Society**



**Archival Sector
Leadership**



People and Structure



Digital Capability

The Core PRONI Purpose

Receiving, preserving and providing access to records

Strategic Priorities

We will focus on maximising our impact and the value of our collections more widely and will be guided by the following priorities:



Impact within NI Public Sector

- Deliver value through leading best practice public records management across the public sector to ensure good governance and statutory compliance.



Archival Sector Leadership

- Develop a new archives policy as part of the Heritage, Culture and Creativity Framework and improve standards for archives within NI.



Impact on Society

- Build the value of our collections and develop opportunities to connect archives to new audiences, to diversify PRONI's holdings and to increase visitor numbers.
- Increase global connections through access to archive collections that explore shared heritage and provide support to victims and survivors including Truth Recovery.



People and Structure

- Invest resources to ensure that PRONI can deliver on its statutory functions and ensure public access.



Digital Capability

- Provide leadership in public records standards and develop the infrastructure and resources necessary to support the expansion and long-term preservation of digital collections and enhance our digital record keeping role.

Implementation Plan

This implementation plan sets out the sequence and timetable for the target actions to be delivered over the 5-year period starting in 2026 and focuses on people and structure, digital capability, impact, and digital transformation.

Establish Governance	Programme Governance		
Programme Team	Programme Management		
 0 – 6 months People and Structure • Set-up Programme • PRONI 5-year Strategy • Restructure Roadmap • Analysis of gaps across key skills and roles and a prioritised recruitment plan • NICS Digital Engagement • Comms Campaign	 6 – 12 months Digital Capability • Director and Deputy Director, Head of Digital recruited / appointed • Digital Transformation Strategy • Digitisation of Assets Plan • Digital access Partnership • Outreach and Marketing resources recruited	 12 – 24 months Impact • HR Collaboration • Digital Transformation • PRONI Champions • Record Management Standards • Raising the Profile Community Engagement • Establish Volunteer Programme • Establish Archive Studentships • Archive Gap Analysis • NI Archival Engagement	 24 – 60 months Digital Transformation • Digital Transformation • NI Archival Standards • Receipt of born digital records becomes business as usual • Continue to raise PRONI's profile • Continue to provide expert guidance as an archival leader



Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tracy Kelly; Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA; the US Consul General Belfast, James Applegate, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service; Jayne Brady, and PRONI Staff.

We have set up a Transformation Programme Board to advise and oversee the delivery of the plan. A number of Task and Finish Groups have also been created, to work on a range of workstreams aligned to our strategic priorities. We will also strengthen the senior management team to build a more agile and resilient organisation.

We will progress a Digital Transformation Programme led by the new Head of Digital. The long-term prioritisation of digital transformation will require substantial new investment to build the necessary capability and capacity in infrastructure and an expanded digital services team. The staffing model will remain under review to take account of future policy and operational needs and seek to secure additional resources as appropriate.

SECTION 9

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?



A group of international visitors to PRONI with the Ulster Historical Foundation.

By 2031 we will have:

- **Delivered a step-change in digital capability and access** - transforming how records are preserved, catalogued and used, with seamless access for all users.
- **Connected more people to their heritage**, enabling individuals and communities to better understand their identity, history, and place in society.
- **Reached more people**, ensuring wider participation from all backgrounds and improving user satisfaction and engagement.
- **Enhanced Northern Ireland's cultural and international profile**, positioning PRONI as a key contributor to tourism, education, and global engagement.
- **Enhanced our position as a leader** in the fields of conservation, preservation, cataloguing, records management, and access.
- **Further our reputation as a high-performing, innovative organisation**, with the skills, partnerships, and digital capability to continuously improve services.

PRONI will continue to evolve - combining tradition with innovation - to ensure that Northern Ireland's records remain a living resource for generations to come.

We will develop an evaluation framework and performance metrics to assess progress annually and to measure the impact of our strategic objectives in contributing to Departmental and PRONI outcomes as follows:

Measuring our strategic objectives			
 Departmental Outcomes	 Well-being & inclusion	 Sustainable & Inclusive Growth	 Agility & Innovation
Objective: to demonstrate social, economic, cultural value and impact.	Objective: to broaden access, improve wellbeing, strengthen communities; To expand digital access and modernise services.	Objective: to support economic growth, skills and participation.	Objective: to lead, support and influence the archives sector.
Evaluation framework (performance metrics) developed and implemented. Annual impact report.	Records digitised or made available digitally. Total physical and digital users. Underrepresented users. New digital audiences. Community groups engaged. Participation. Wellbeing. Sense of belonging.	Tourism contribution. Jobs supported. Revenue generated. Confidence/skills improved.	Partnerships. Training/support / programmes provided. Engagement initiatives. Archives accreditation.

SECTION 11

WHAT WILL WE DELIVER

By 2031 we will deliver on our statutory responsibilities through the following activities.

People and Structure To be resourced and organised effectively to secure and preserve NI public records.	Developed and implemented a roadmap for restructuring.
	Established interim and future operating models.
	Secured resources to prioritise critical business areas.
	Reduced reliance on temporary staffing arrangements.
	Invested in workforce skills, capability, and infrastructure.
	Developed innovative partnerships and funding models.
	Delivered green energy and climate initiatives.
Digital Capability To lead public record practice in the digital age.	Developed and implemented a Digital Transformation Strategy.
	Delivered a prioritised digitisation programme.
	Agreed and implemented a sustainable approach to digital access.
	Developed a Moving Image Strategy.
Impact within the NI Public Sector To deliver value through leading best practice in public records management.	Engaged senior stakeholders on the effective management of digital public records.
	Reviewed and published records management standards.
	Acted as an expert advisor on records management and digital transfer.
	Advocated for increased investment in archives and records management.
Impact on Society To connect archives with local and global audiences.	Delivered a strategic marketing and communications plan.
	Expanded education, outreach and community engagement programmes.
	Increased access through partnerships (local, UK, Ireland, international).
	Delivered major programmes (e.g. US/NI 250th anniversary).
	Completed collections audit with key partners and adopted a strategic framework.
	Identified gaps in PRONI holdings and developed plans to address them.
	Established volunteer and student internship programmes.
	Improved data collection to support evaluation and decision-making.
	Connected more people and diverse audiences with collections.
Leadership in the Sector To set direction and standards for archives in NI.	Secured renewal of Accredited Archive Service status.
	Established and promoted archive standards and guidance.
	Engaged sector stakeholders to shape future direction.
	Strengthened sector advocacy and confidence.
	Built a strong network across archival organisations.



Grace Gordon (PRONI) showing children from St Eugene's Primary School a 125 year old register for their school at Derry Central Library as part of PRONI on Tour with Libraries NI.

This strategic plan reflects on the key opportunities and challenges that we face over the next 5 years and beyond. To deliver on our vision, our statutory responsibilities, and strategic priorities we need to build on our capacity and capabilities and foster greater innovation, agility, and growth.

We will need to navigate many new challenges, including managing the transfer of access to and preservation of “born-digital” records from the public sector; meeting growing demands for online access to records, extending our reach to new audiences, developing a new archives policy and forging new partnerships and commercial opportunities.

Over the coming years we will lead the necessary transformational change in combining our traditional role as record

keeper with leading-edge technology, such as the increased use of new technology including Artificial Intelligence (AI). We will invest in strengthening our digital capacity, capabilities and infrastructure and new operating models.

We will review and decide on organisational priorities to take account of increased environmental priorities and manage our resources as part of our annual business planning process, adjusting the focus as needed. This will ensure that our work stays relevant and impactful as new challenges and opportunities arise.

This represents an ambitious agenda in charting the course for PRONI with the focus on meeting our statutory responsibilities and in delivering tangible outcomes that add real value to individuals, communities, and wider society.



Mrs. Sharada Bhat and her daughter preparing the costume for...

Ethnic minority culture reflects the



Handwritten letter fragment with text in a historical script, possibly Gaelic or Irish, mentioning names and dates.

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Fragment of handwritten text in a historical script, possibly Gaelic or Irish, located in the middle right section.

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