



Department of
**Culture, Arts
and Leisure**

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Experience of Public Records in Northern Ireland – Findings from the September 2006 Omnibus Survey

DCAL Research and Statistical Bulletin 1/2007

KEY FINDINGS

- ❖ Fifty five percent of those surveyed were interested in researching their family history/ genealogy with 48% indicating they would be interested in studying the history of their local area/ town (Figure 1).
- ❖ Sixty-eight percent of those surveyed have heard of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) (Figure 2).
- ❖ Eight percent surveyed had visited PRONI at Balmoral Avenue, Belfast.
- ❖ For over half of those surveyed who had been to PRONI at Balmoral Avenue, their main reason for visiting was to investigate family history/ genealogy (Table 2).
- ❖ Available car parking was the most important factor when considering relocation (Figure 6).
- ❖ Forty-seven percent of respondents said they would access popular archived material online if such a service was available.
- ❖ Almost a fifth (19%) would be willing to pay to access archive material online.
- ❖ Around three quarters of respondents believed that PRONI could do more to publicise its services.

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October 2007



Northern Ireland
**Statistics &
Research**
Agency

INTRODUCTION

In September 2006 questions were placed on the NISRA Omnibus Survey regarding the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). The remit of the Public Record Office, which is a division of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, is to acquire, preserve and make available to the public records of historical interest relating to Northern Ireland. PRONI is located at Balmoral Avenue in Belfast.

The survey was commissioned in order to provide valuable information allowing Senior Management to take into account public opinion when forming policy.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Omnibus Survey is a sample survey conducted by NISRA's Central Survey Unit (CSU) which provides a representative snapshot of public opinion in Northern Ireland. It is based on a systematic random sample. 2200 addresses are selected from the Valuation and Lands agency list, which is sorted by local government district council and ward and then an individual in

that household is selected to complete the survey.

The achieved sample size for this survey was 1072.

There were 17 PRONI related questions in this survey. This bulletin presents top line analysis on the following topics:

- level of interest in researching historical information,
- awareness of the Public Record Office,
- use of the Public Record Office information,
- visits to the Public Record Office,
- the opening hours of the Public Record Office,
- the relocation of the Public Record Office,
- accessing archives online,
- and marketing.

More detailed tabular information and analyses is contained in the report produced by CSU which is available on the DCAL website:

www.dcalni.gov.uk/PRONI_Detailed_Tables.pdf

Level of interest in researching historical information

The survey started with some questions regarding the services that PRONI provides.

Those surveyed were asked the following two questions:

- 1) How interested would you be in researching your family history/ genealogy?

- 2) How interested would you be in studying the history of your local area/ town?

Just over a half of respondents stated that they would be very interested or interested in researching their family history/ genealogy (55%). (See Figure 1)

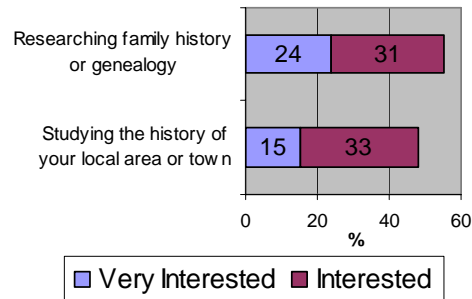
Thirty-nine percent stated that they would not be interested or not at all interested in researching their family history/ genealogy.

Around half of respondents indicated that they would be very interested or interested in studying the history of their local area/ town (48%). (See Figure 1)

Twenty-one percent would not be interested in studying the history of their local area while a quarter

would not be interested at all in this type of study.

Fig 1: Level of interest with various services



Awareness of the Public Record Office in Northern Ireland

Just over two thirds of respondents had ever heard of PRONI (68%). (See Figure 2)

Those surveyed were presented with a list of options of how they may have become aware of PRONI. The most popular way for respondents to have become aware of PRONI was through a friend or other user (34%) while 12% of respondents became aware

of PRONI through television (Table 1).

Fig 2: Have you heard of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland?

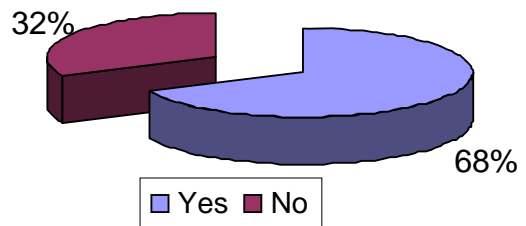


Table 1: How did you first become aware of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland?

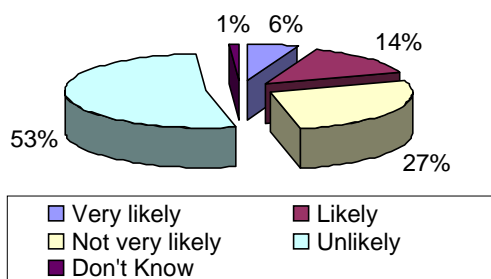
	Percentage		Percentage
Family History Society	3	Friend/ Other user	34
Heritage Centre	0	Through work	9
Local History Society	1	The Internet	2
Library	3	Talk/ Lecture	4
Museum	0	Other	11
Newspaper/ Magazine	11	Don't know	5
Radio	4	<i>Total (base number)</i>	<i>722</i>
Television	12		

Note: Numbers do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Use of Public Record Office Information

The respondents were asked in detail about their actual use of PRONI services and if they were likely to use PRONI in the future.

Fig 3: Likelihood of using the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland service in next 12 months

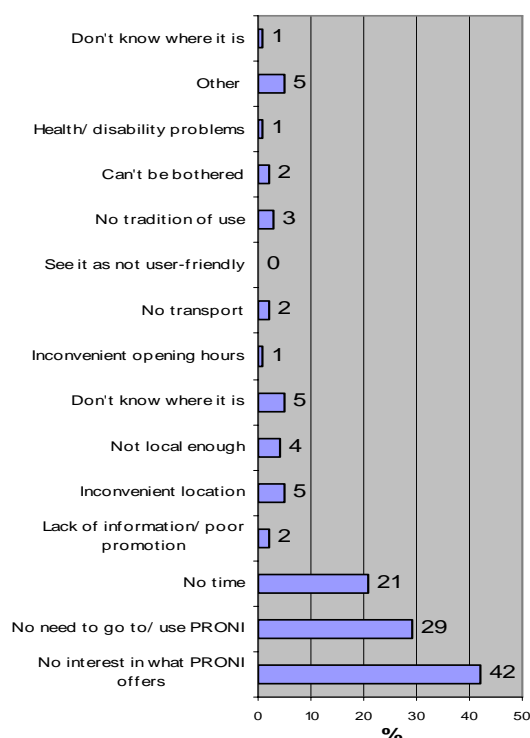


A fifth of respondents were either very likely or likely to want to use the type of information that PRONI provides within the next 12 months (See Figure 3). This information could include documents such as registers of baptisms, marriages and burials from churches, wills, workhouse records, school records, valuation books.

The most common reason for not being likely to use the information

provided by PRONI is having no interest in what the Public Record Office offers (42%). Twenty-nine percent of respondents stated that they had no need to go to or use PRONI (See Figure 4).

Fig 4: Reasons for not being likely to use PRONI



Visits to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

Ninety people interviewed (8%) had visited the Public Record Office at Balmoral Avenue in Belfast. The main reason for having visited PRONI in Balmoral Avenue was family history/ genealogy (41). (See Table 2).

Fourteen respondents had other reasons for visiting PRONI headquarters, which included such things as work related reasons, or accompanying others.

Reasons for visiting Public Record Office of Northern Ireland	Number
Family history/ genealogy	41
Studying the history of your local town	7
Checking ownership details of your residence	2
To find missing/ unknown parents/ siblings/ friends/ relatives	4
Checking court records (eg. wills)	2
For undergraduate or post-graduate study at university or college	8
For school work/ project	9
For academic research as a teacher or university or college lecturer	2
As part of a school visit	1
Other	14

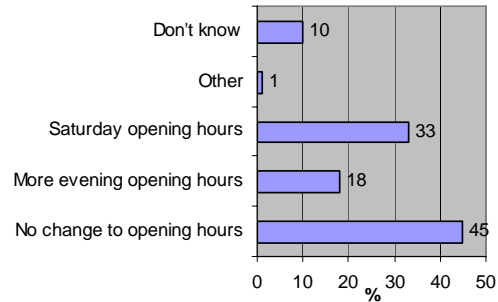
Public Record Office of Northern Ireland Opening Hours

The survey considered the public's views on the opening hours of PRONI at Balmoral Avenue in Belfast.

Respondents were asked for their preferences if the opening hours were to change. Forty-five percent indicated they would not like to see any change in the opening hours. A third would like to see Saturday opening hours, while 18% would

like PRONI to be open more in the evening (See Figure 5).

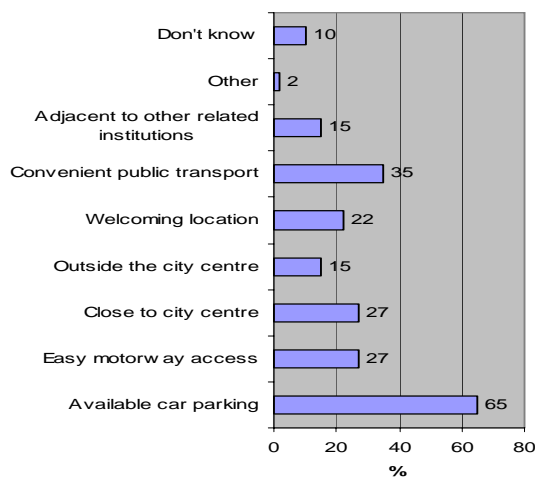
Fig 5: Respondents' preferences if opening hours were to change



Public Record Office of Northern Ireland Relocation

Opinions about the possible relocation of PRONI within the Belfast area were explored. Respondents were asked what issues they would consider most important when thinking about relocation within the Belfast area from the current location at Balmoral Avenue in South Belfast.

Fig 6: Most important considerations regarding PRONI relocation within Belfast (all preferences)



Those surveyed were also asked to state their most important consideration concerning possible relocation to the city centre and also

outside Belfast city centre but within the Belfast area. The most important consideration for all three options offered was the availability of car parking followed by good public transport.

If PRONI were to relocate within the Belfast area, available car parking was the most important consideration (65%) when considering all preferences, followed by convenient public transport (35%) (See Figure 6).

Considering relocating the Public Record Office to Belfast City Centre, 59% stated that car parking was the most important factor, while 26% suggested good public transport.

Similar results were found for the most important consideration if PRONI was to relocate within the Belfast area but **outside** Belfast city centre. Fifty-five percent stated car parking, while 29% suggested good public transport would be most important to them.

Accessing material from the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland online

Respondents were then asked to consider the possibility of accessing the most popular archives held by PRONI online.

Forty-seven percent of respondents stated that they would access popular archived material such as valuation records online if it was available.

Fig 7: Archive collections respondents would like to see online

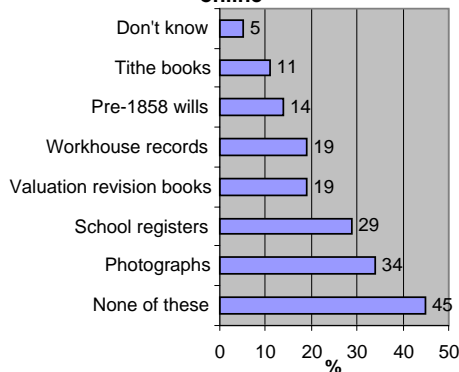
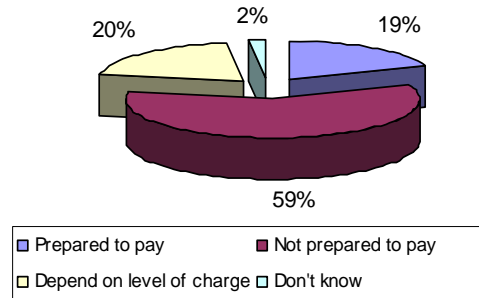


Figure 7 shows various types of records held by PRONI and the level of support for accessing these

online. While almost half of respondents (45%) would not access any of the options given online, 34% would access photographs online followed by school registers (29%).

Fig 8: If you could access archives on the Public Record website would you be prepared to pay for access?



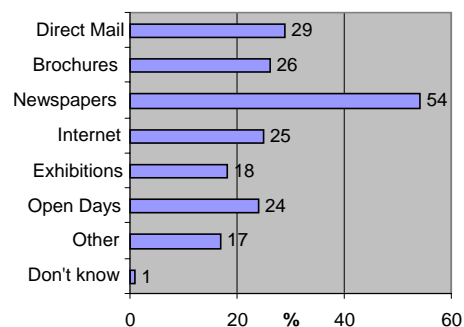
When asked if they would be willing to pay to access archives on the Public Records Office website, 19% said they would be prepared to pay, 59% said they would not, and a fifth said it would depend on the level of charge (See Figure 8).

Marketing

Finally the survey looked at how PRONI could publicise its services. Around three quarters of respondents believed that PRONI could do more to publicise its services (74%) while 17% did not think this.

Over half of respondents believed newspapers would be the best method for PRONI to use to allow it to better advertise its services (Figure 9).

Fig 9: Best methods for the Public Record Office to use in better advertising its services



Produced by Research and Statistics Branch,
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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