

Troubles archive should be funded long-term

Garrett Hargan

Reporter

A lecturer at one of the world's most respected universities has called on Ulster University and the Northern Ireland Executive to adequately fund a Derry-based Troubles archive.

It comes after the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) was last week granted a lifeline in the form of €66,561 in funding from the Irish government's Reconciliation Fund.

Earlier this year, Ulster University said that the CAIN website would be frozen.

The latest funding announcement will allow those running the website to extend the chronology of the conflict through the years 2002-2014.



Professor Bonnie Weir

They will also work to better integrate the documents from the National Archives, Ireland and PRONI into the Chronology.

The funding covers four months of work but the timeframe will be spread out over a longer period because workers are involved in other activities and tasks.

However, the future of CAIN is still in doubt and long-term funding is needed to put it on a sustainable footing.

The last funding that CAIN received from any Northern Ireland government agency was in 2012 from the office of the First and Deputy First Ministers.

A lecturer at one of the best universities in the world believes it is unacceptable that those running CAIN are constantly having to devote their time to the pursuit of funding.

Bonnie Weir is a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Yale University, whose work focuses on political violence.

She is adamant that the 'world-renowned' archive should receive backing from Ulster University and the Northern Ireland Executive.

She said: "I've come to believe that the senior leadership of Ulster University is detached from the reality of the effects of its series of bad decisions re: CAIN web service, even just in terms of its global image.

"Academics, institutions, students, and journalists around the world rely on CAIN for accurate and updated information about Northern Ireland.

"The web service's audience is the largest it has ever been since its creation, perhaps as a function of multiple developments of international import, for example Brexit and broadening discussions around constitutional questions.

"The fact that CAIN must perpetually divert time and energy to finding sources of funding – despite the fact that its operating costs are so small relative to UU's total budget – begs the question of why the University's senior leadership simply doesn't allocate adequate resources to its most successful and recognised global project.

"And if UU doesn't provide full funding then why doesn't the NI government supplement it."

CAIN is viewed as one of the most important sources of information about the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It is based in Derry and has been curated by a team of two full-time researchers and an ICT Officer since March 1997.