

September 2021

Charting the UK Data Protection Profession



Foreword

Welcome to the latest research findings from the UK Data Protection Index, brought to you by [Data Protection World Forum](#) and [The DPO Centre](#).

Over the past 16 months, we have quizzed our panel of Data Protection Officers from around the United Kingdom on a quarterly basis, asking a consistent set of baseline questions. Crucially, in the ever-shifting privacy landscape, this has allowed us to track changing attitudes and opinions for the first time.

This quarter, we have also added several new questions for our panel of 465 DPOs to tackle, including asking whether refresher training is provided for staff. Additionally, for the first time, we have asked DPOs to rate the level of their organisation's data protection compliance by category, providing a deeper level of insight.

We also bring you data and commentary on expected budgets, confidence in compliance within organisations, and challenges relating to GDPR.

Nick James, Founder of the Data Protection World Forum, said: "Data Protection and privacy have never been more important to business and society, and the role of the data protection officer is becoming more vital and complex every day. This unique survey provides a privileged insight into the views of privacy professionals - at a time when organisations need all the information they can get about this turbulent and exciting field."

Rob Masson, CEO of The DPO Centre, said: "These are fascinating times for data protection legislation, especially with the UK now setting its own direction. Never before has a survey such as this been of such value in identifying and tracking the sentiments of privacy professionals and helping the industry to chart its future."

The next survey results will be published in December 2021. If you are a privacy professional and you would like to join the panel and add your voice to future surveys, please [click here](#).



The UK Data Protection Index: Q3 2021 Report

Who is on the panel?

Since the Index launched in July 2020, 465 DPOs spread across every part of the United Kingdom have taken part. This can be broken down as follows: 4.9% from Scotland, 1.3% from Northern Ireland and 2.8% from Wales. London & the South East combined now account for over 50% of the respondents. More than three-quarters of the DPOs (77%) are full-time, in-house employees, 14.8% are consultants or outsourced, and 6.5% are employed in-house on a part-time basis. Nearly a quarter (24.1%) work for companies that have between 1,001-5,000 employees. However, there is representation from all sizes of companies; from firms with just 10 employees or less (6.2%) to businesses with a 10,000+ workforce (14.2%).

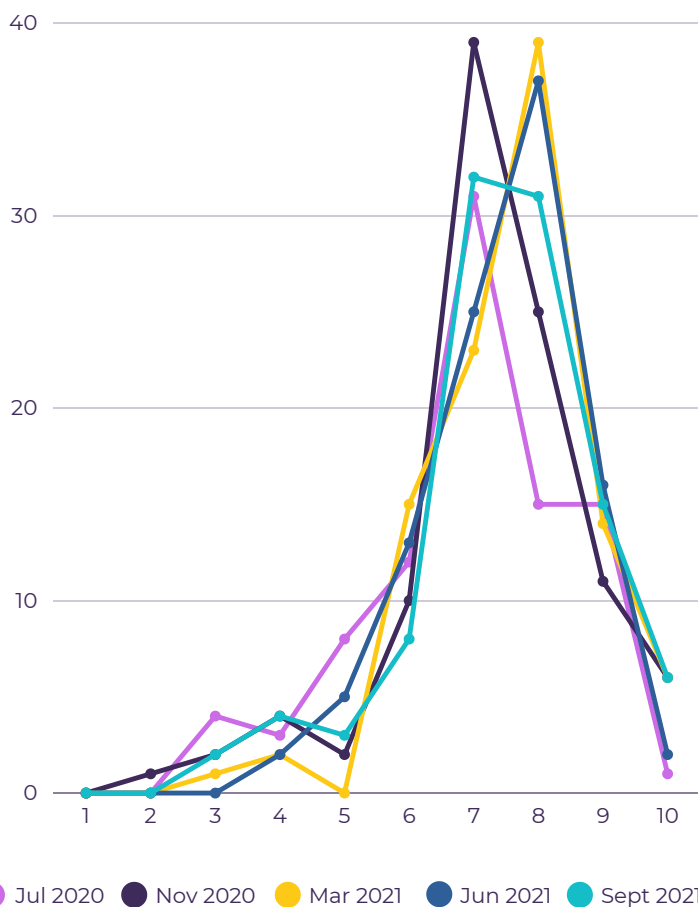


Fig. 1: DPOs' confidence in their organisation's data protection compliance has fallen again for the second quarter in a row. Whilst March 2021 saw 59% give a score of 8 or more, this declined to 56% in June and now sits at 51% for September 2021. This is, however, still well ahead of findings when the study first started in July 2020, when only 35% of DPOs placed their confidence at 8 or above.

Key results:

- DPOs feel that there has been a decline in the level of precedence given to data protection by their organisations (compared with other organisational priorities). Those rating 8 or above (10 being highest precedence) fell by 7 percentage points from 40% in June 2021, to 33% this quarter.
- Confidence towards the effectiveness of the ICO (Information Commissioner's Office) has also dropped back to levels seen in March 2021. When asked to rate their confidence in the effectiveness of the regulator, 37% of respondents gave a score of 8 or more out of 10, this is down from June, where 50% of respondents scored 8 or higher.
- Once more, DPOs reported a quarter-on-quarter decline in Data Subject Access Requests received over the past 30 days. Those reporting ten or more fell from 25% in June to 20% in September. Further, 37% of DPOs reported receiving zero this quarter, compared with 28% in June.

Key results continued:

- DPOs' perception that the UK's data protection laws are more advanced than other countries fell again slightly to a mean average of 7.44 out of 10, compared with 7.47 in June. Likewise, when asked to think about their own personal data being shared with other organisations, DPOs reported an increased concern that their data is becoming less protected over time. Those scoring 3 or lower out of 10 increased to 13% in September, up from 10% in June.
- The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the importance of complying with privacy and data protection laws, whilst remaining high, has declined slightly quarter on quarter. In June, almost one in ten DPOs (9%) said the importance of complying with privacy and data protection laws had significantly increased due to Coronavirus; thus they gave a score of 10 out of 10 (compared with 4% a year prior). However, whilst 40% gave a score of 8 or higher in June 2021, In September this had declined by 2 percentage points to 38%.

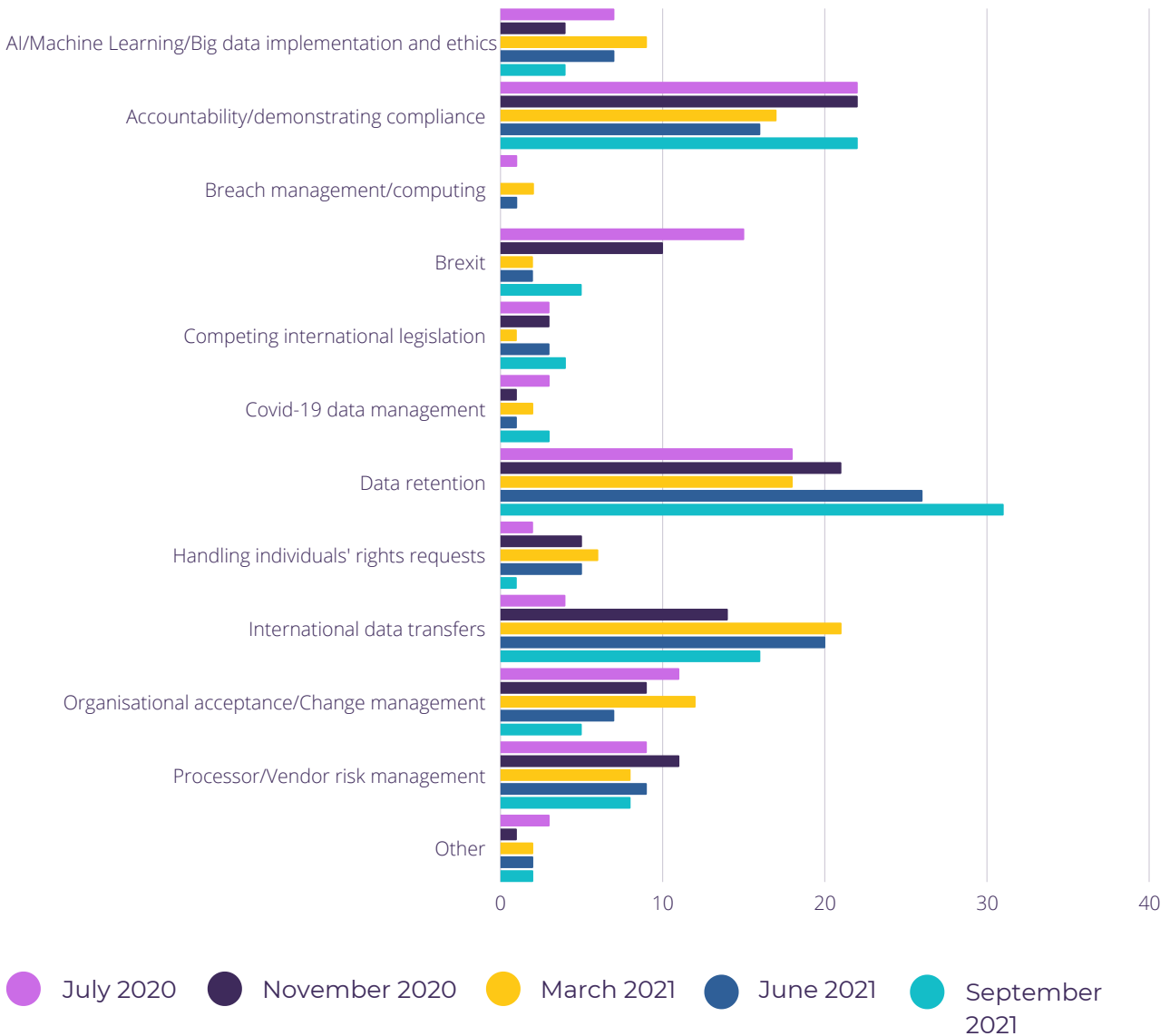


Fig. 2: Data retention remains the leading issue, again experiencing quarter on quarter growth, up 5 percentage points compared with June 2021. DPOs also highlighted accountability/ demonstrating compliance as a leading issue over the next 12 months, with this matching the previous high of 22% of respondents recorded when our survey began.

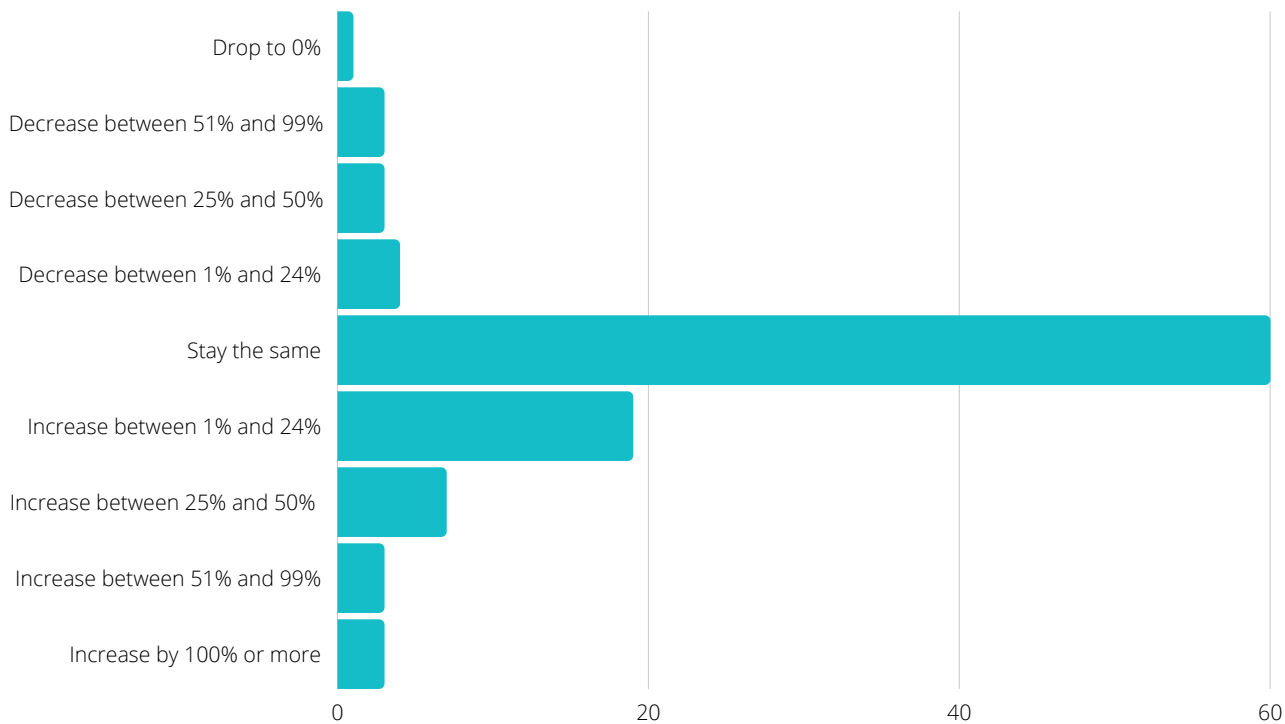


Fig 3: The majority of DPOs expect their data protection budgets to remain the same over the next 12 months. However, the proportion of DPOs expecting their budget to increase has fallen to its lowest level so far in 2021, down to 31%, compared with 38% in June.

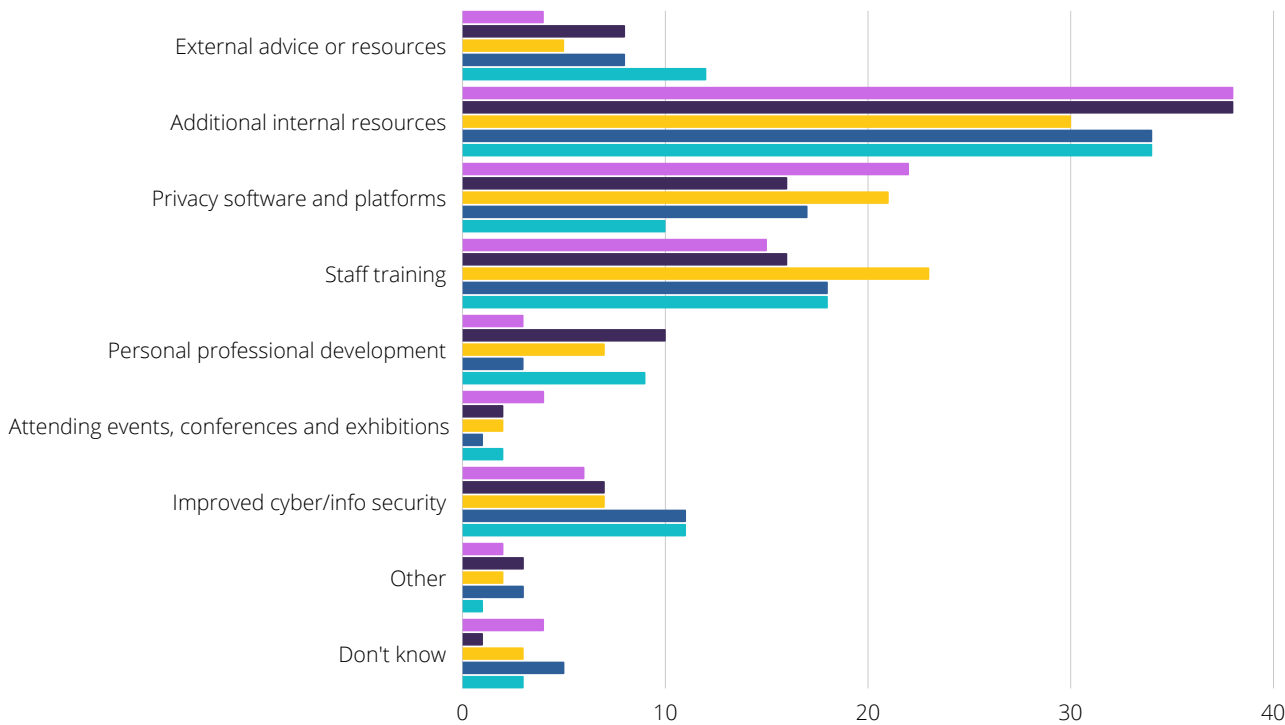


Fig 4: September again saw DPOs place higher priority on additional external and internal resources when asked which areas they would focus on with an increased budget. We also saw a significant increase in professional development, but a decline in privacy software platforms.



DPOs are showing a declining confidence in both compliance by their organisation, and the precedence given to data protection.

DPOs' confidence in their organisation's data protection compliance has fallen again for the second quarter in a row. Whilst March 2021 saw 59% give a score of 8 or more, this declined to 56% in June and now sits at 51% for September 2021. This increased pessimism is also reflected in several of our other questions. When asked about the level of precedence given to data protection by each DPOs own organisation (compared with other organisational priorities), a smaller proportion rated 8 or above (10 being highest precedence) than last quarter, with this down from 40% in June 2021, to 33% this quarter.

Additionally, where we had seen increased confidence last quarter, this time confidence towards the effectiveness of the ICO

(Information Commissioner's Office) has dropped back to levels seen in March 2021. Just 37% of respondents gave a score of 8 or more out of 10, down considerably from the 50% reported back in June. Lastly, DPOs' perception that the UK's data protection laws are more advanced than other countries fell once again, with a mean average of 7.44 out of 10, compared with 7.47 in June. Likewise, when asked to think about their own personal data being shared with other organisations, DPOs reported an increased concern that their data is becoming less protected over time. Those providing a score of 3 or lower out of 10 increased by 3 percentage points, up from 10% in June.

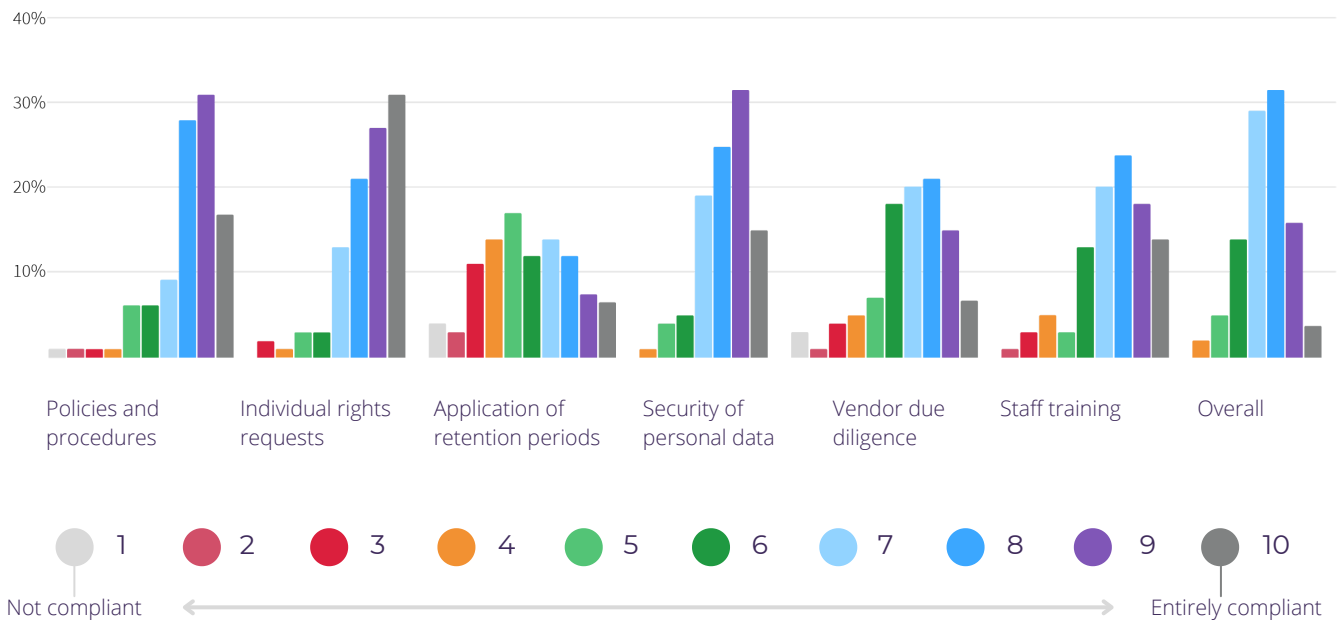


Fig 5: DPOs displayed less confidence in the application of retention periods for data, when asked to rate their organisation's compliance in particular areas.

For the first time, the survey asked DPOs to rate the compliance levels of their organisations in certain areas of data protection. Whilst the application of data retention scored significantly lower than other areas, policies and procedures, individual rights requests and staff training were all felt to rate highly in terms of compliance.

Last quarter saw data retention become the biggest challenge for GDPR compliance (26%), and in 31% from last quarter.

DPOs also highlighted accountability/ demonstrating compliance as a leading issue over the next 12 months, with this matching the previous high of 22% of respondents, first recorded when our survey began.

There has been an uptick in respondents saying that the CJEU ruling relating to Schrems II has increased their workload, with this growing from 21% in June, to 25% this quarter.

DPOs have once again shown optimism around relaxation of personal data transfer restrictions with other third countries following the adoption of an adequacy agreement with the EU. In March, the average score sat at 4.9 out of ten (one indicating strong disagreement and ten agreement that restrictions would be relaxed), this has now improved to 6.1, with 64% giving a score of 6 or higher (compared with 36% in March).

DPOs increasingly expect the UK to strike its own agreement with the US to allow for the free flow of personal data between the countries within the next three years.

Asked to give a mark on a scale from one to ten, this quarter DPOs gave a higher average score of 7.2, up from 6.54 in June. Overall, 80% of DPOs gave a score of six or more.

Lastly, regarding budgets.

Prioritisation continues to revolve around both external advice & resources, as well as additional internal resources, when we ask DPOs about their 'Wishlist' if they were to be given a 20% budget increase. However, there was also a significant increase in desire for professional development (+6 percentage points), alongside a contrasting decline in the demand for privacy software platforms (-7 percentage points).

Training and accreditation

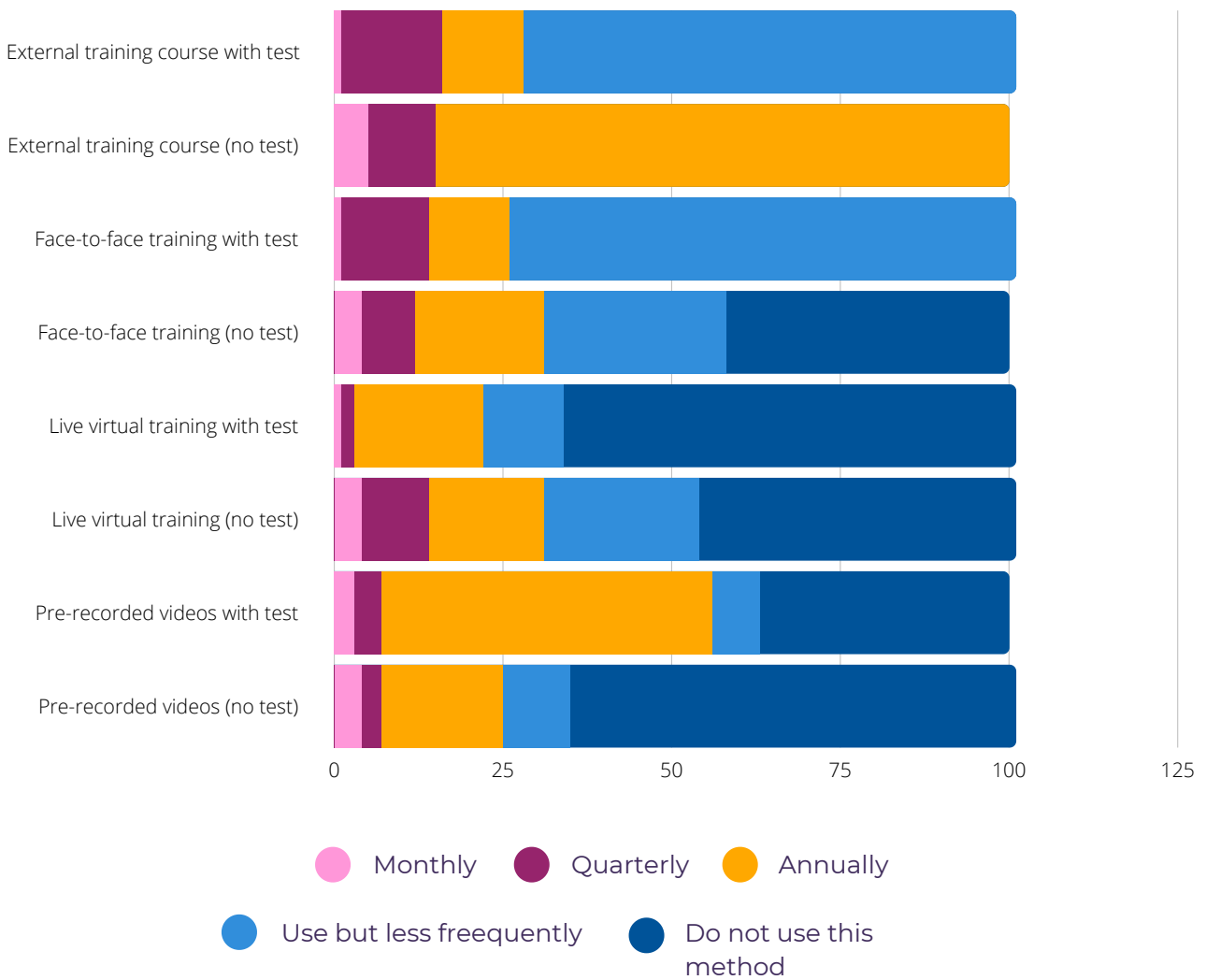
This quarter, we expanded our survey to include questions relating to data protection training for both new joiners, as well as refresher courses for existing staff members.

How do you provide data protection training to new joiners?

Face to face	18%
Live virtual training	27%
Pre-recorded virtual videos	29%
External training course	8%
Other	19%

The majority of DPOs stated that new joiners are provided with either live virtual training, or pre-recorded videos. Fewer than 10% said they utilised external training courses. In terms of refresher training relating to data protection, the overwhelming majority (94%) said that this was provided for staff. When asked how frequently, and which data protection refresher training methods DPOs used, the preference was for pre-recorded videos with a test, conducted annually. This was followed by less frequent face-to-face, and live virtual training, both conducted without a test. When asked whether training is tailored per function or standard across the business, this was split roughly 60/40 in favour of generic training given to all new starters.

How frequently do you deliver data protection re-fresher training for staff and which methods do you use?



For More Information

If you are a privacy professional and you would like to join the panel and add your voice to future surveys:

Join the Data Protection Index



