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Executive Team – for assurance

Date: 10 June 21

Prepared for: Executive Team

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Approver: Jen Green as Comms and Engagement Board chair

Topic: Digital events, Data Protection Practitioners' Conference

Purpose of report: To inform ET of our updated learning on hosting digital events, informed by our experience of hosting DPPC2021 digitally.

Reason for report: DPPC2021 was hosted digitally due to COVID restrictions, but its success means digital hosting should now be considered as an option for all future events. This paper sets out the successes of DPPC21 in more detail, to inform decisions around the format for future events.

Time required: 10 minutes

1. Background

1.1. DPPC 2021 was very well attended, with more than 4,200 people joining part of the day (vs 800 attendees in previous years).

1.2. All aspects of the day proved popular: the morning plenary, the lunchtime lectures and the afternoon seminars. 96% of respondents rated the overall agenda as good, very good or excellent (40% said excellent).

1.3. The three 'lunchtime lectures' were watched more than 1500 times.

1.4. The seminars were very popular, with 2,500-3,500 people in seminar throughout the afternoon.

1.5. The five most well attended seminars were:

- Accountability in practice (1300 attendees)
- SARs (1100 attendees)
- Data ethics (1100 attendees)

- Learning from complaints (1,050 attendees)
- Navigation the data sharing code (1,000 attendees)

1.6. Social media response to the day was overwhelmingly positive, and the Commissioner's speech was covered in the Times, Sun website and in regional press.

2. Discussion

2.1. <u>Reach:</u> The conference reached a significantly greater number of people. The digital format meant delegates could choose which parts of the day to engage with, which meant we could target a broader audience: for example, the plenary targeted an informed audience, while we still provided 'DP for beginners' seminars to around 500 delegates later in the day. The accessibility of the conference was praised on social media, and 98% of survey respondents described the accessibility as good, very good or excellent.

2.2. Previous DPPCs have offered a livestream facility, but take up has been limited, and the livestream did not offer the same user experience and sense of being 'part of the conference' as this year's digital hosting. People also appear to be more familiar with attending digital events in light of the past year.

2.3. <u>Technical aspects:</u> The hosting of the event was outsourced, and the event ran with no notable technical problems. 95 per cent of post event survey respondents felt the conference hosting platform was good, very good or excellent.

2.4. We are able to host events ourselves, via Teams (examples include last year's GPA closed session, and the ICIC closed session planned for June), but there are practical challenges to hosting events for large numbers of delegates this way.

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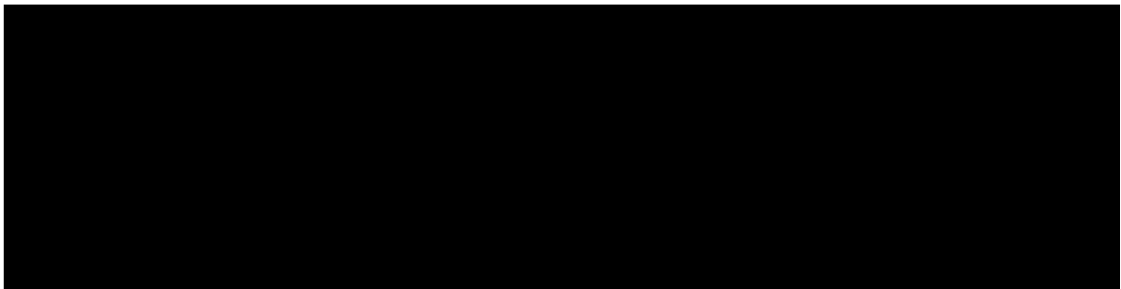
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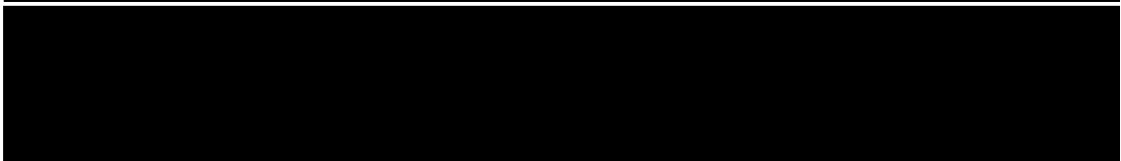
2.7. The digital event required substantially less staff resource, with just a handful of volunteers helping to run the event outside of comms.

2.8. The seminars continue to require staff commitment, with further work needed internally to emphasise the value of the stakeholder engagement offered by the DPPC seminars (there was technical capacity and delegate demand for us to have hosted more seminars). A large number of the recorded seminars have been rewatched via the conference platform, and comms are now looking to repurpose the content for further engagement.

2.9. Interactivity: A digital event lacks the level of engagement of an in-person event. We held seminars, rather than workshops, reflecting the technical limitations, though the Q&A and poll functions worked well to allow some interactivity. The digital event missed the one-to-one meetings the event usually offers, as well as the ability for us to take feedback from delegates on our guidance, which we can usually facilitate through our marketplace stands.

2.10. 77% of respondents would like to have the opportunity for digital networking with other delegates at a future event. 55% of people would like to see a digital marketplace.

3. Recommendations for future DPPCs

3.1. Over the past year, the ICO has developed the technical capacity and expertise to hold digital events, ranging from webinars to membership conferences such as the GPA closed session to full scale events like the DPPC. The success of these events should reassure ET of the viability of hosting digital events in the future.

3.2. We recommend the ICO continues to consider a full or partly digital approach once in-person events become more viable, with the type of event (webinar vs conference, hosted via Teams or via an external provider, a hybrid approach, etc) to be informed by the event's objectives. We have not yet hosted a truly hybrid event, with digital delegates offered the same level of event access as those in the room. This will bring new challenges, though the success of our digital only events leaves us well placed.

3.3. Communications & Engagement Board reviewed DPPC21 when it met in May and agreed that it was an extremely successful event.

The Board agreed that a digital element should be included in future DPPCs to maximise its reach.

3.4. The Board also considered whether a blended event in future years may be the best solution to retain key advantages of a digital event, while mitigating some of the disadvantages.

3.5. Noting the feedback about networking opportunities, the Board agreed that the resource implications / benefits of hosting sector-specific digital events should be considered and has commissioned indicative costs for this approach.

4. Next steps

4.1. A document on specific learnings from DPPC2021 is being produced within Comms. Any feedback from ET can be added to that document.

5. Equality, diversity and inclusion considerations

5.1. In addition to the point on accessibility of the conference raised above, the work to address the gender balance of speakers should also be noted.

5.2. Two people contacted the ICO ahead of the event to raise concerns about the lack of ethnic diversity among speakers. We considered diversity as part of the planning for the event, but we did not record ethnicity of speakers, which makes it difficult to assess. Comms have since met with EDI colleagues to address this issue in future events.

6. Alignment with values

6.1. Turning the challenge of not being able to host our usual 800-person event into an opportunity to host our biggest ever DPPC took an ambitious approach. Organising the DPPC also requires significant internal collaboration, and is service focused, providing our DP practitioner audience with practical and useful advice and guidance.

7. Link to the Information Rights Strategic Plan

7.1. Digital events, and particularly the DPPC, are central to our strategic goal of improving standards of information rights practice through clear, inspiring and targeted engagement and influence.

8.   Publication considerations

8.1.   This report can be published internally and externally. However, the costs of hosting the event at paragraph 2.5 and 2.6 are commercially sensitive and should be removed.