Crown
Commercial
Service

GDS Discovery

G-Cloud 15 service definition

Healthia®

GDS Discovery

If you need to launch or improve a service, our approach to discovery will uncover user needs and business requirements and identify the sweet spot for a successful service.

Our discovery package is based around the Government Digital Service Standard. It uncovers user needs, technology or legislative constraints and identifies gaps and opportunities to improve.

We take a mixed-methods research approach to discovery, with quantitative and qualitative techniques, to explore user needs and their context, and understand stakeholder perspectives.

We are experienced in inclusive research, including diverse users across socio-economic backgrounds, seldom-heard, under-represented and vulnerable groups.

- We have extensive experience in planning, conducting and managing a wide range of user research, remotely and in person
- We have a dedicated research operations team to manage research logistics and ensure adherence to GDPR
- We take an agile approach to user research and user-centred design, in line with GDS and NHS Service Standard.
- We have supported multiple successful GDS assessments.
- We work in the open as one team to drive decisions collaboratively, taking every opportunity to share knowledge, upskill, build internal capabilities
- We've delivered discoveries for clients including NHS England, NHS Trusts, Acas, Cabinet Office, Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Home Office, Breast Cancer Now

Mixed-methods research approach

- Pre-discovery / inception involves aligning stakeholders on the challenge, purpose, goals and outcomes for the research, creation of recruitment strategy and stakeholder engagement plan.
- Desk / secondary research and expert reviews enable us to deep-dive into existing research, available documentation, and current services.
- Quantitative techniques expose the extent of the problem and identify areas of focus. Surveys and analytics review help us understand behaviour and uncover painpoints, gaps and opportunities.
- Stakeholder research enables us to understand individual contexts, needs, priorities and build on valuable expertise. We take time to understand the background, overarching strategies and policy intent.
- Business analysis and process mapping help us understand the organisation and assess user and business needs, dependencies and system constraints.
- Content and IA evaluation helps us map out existing content types and navigation structure, identifying gaps and opportunities.
- Qualitative research delves deep into user experience, journeys, behaviours, motivations, needs and pain points.

Techniques include:

- Depth interviews
- Contextual research
- Ethnographic research
- Diary study
- Guerrilla research / intercept interviews
- Focus groups and co-creation / co-design workshops
- Usability testing

Inclusive research and design

We take an inclusive approach to our work so that all voices are represented.

We make it easy for people to participate in research, adapting to specific needs or requirements. Recent research has included people with autism, people with no fixed abode / address, and people with English as an additional language.

We have developed ways to effectively engage with diverse groups to co-create and co-design solutions in a collaborative and transparent way, helping design accessible services, policies and places that work for everyone.

We are experienced in researching, collaborating and designing with complex stakeholder groups including staff, local authorities, communities, charities, businesses, partner organisations and technology providers.

Seldom-heard and under-represented groups

- We include diverse, seldom-heard, under-represented and marginalised communities in our research as standard, including low digital literacy
- We include people from outside the mainstream and across socio-economic backgrounds, so we can design for people with markedly different lives and needs
- We have created a guide to conducting research around sensitive topics with vulnerable users to ensure the wellbeing of both participants and our researchers. Please contact us for a copy
- Through experience we have developed a number of techniques for recruiting from these groups which we tailor to each engagement

Research operations

We have a dedicated research operations (ReOps) team to manage logistics and GDPR compliance.

They manage research planning, scheduling, consent, incentive payments and data protection. We regularly conduct and manage research for organisations requiring stringent data security, including NHS and National Cyber Security Centre.

Our ReOps team ensures that research delivery is smooth, timely and on budget. They oversee resourcing, track project progress against objectives and maintain open communication.

This enables our researchers to focus time and effort on the research delivery and the quality of research outcomes.

Recruitment strategy

We have recruited thousands of research participants. This includes the general public, subject specialists, senior / board level, internal / external users, existing / new users, community members, international users, vulnerable and under-represented groups, and people with health conditions and access needs (motor / cognitive impairments).

We work closely with our clients to align on research objectives and agree on clear, unambiguous participant profiles to ensure we speak to the right people. To reach target audience groups we use various recruitment techniques:

- Specialist recruitment partners
- In-house via relevant networks
- Closed lists supplied by clients where we manage the process, adhering to GDPR
- Disability panels

Stakeholder engagement

Engagement is fundamental to our approach and we work hard to keep time-poor stakeholders involved.

We put effort into creating an effective and inclusive engagement plan to understand individual perspectives, wider context, priorities and build on their valuable expertise.

We have extensive experience collaborating with SMEs and stakeholders at all levels and adapt our communication to meet technical and non-technical needs.

Through our work with Government and NHS clients, we have developed ways of effectively engaging with complex stakeholder groups across organisations and government departments. We bring stakeholders together to align priorities and collaboratively drive evidence-based decisions.

“They are capable of liaising with and managing stakeholders at all levels so for us they’ve interacted with people at board level all the way down, sensitively and empathically building relationships with customers who are often at a point of crisis. That can be quite a difficult thing to do and those softer skills really matter”

- Service owner, Cabinet Office

“They work openly and collaboratively with stakeholders to plan, execute and act on the research and design. This is so important when you are looking to transfer skills into the organisation and unlike other agencies or consultants we have worked in the past they do not exclude clients from the process or take specific parts of the project, work on it and then deliver a finished product.”

- Insights and Engagement Manager, NHS BNSSG

Discovery approach

Activities:

- Workshops
- Stakeholder mapping
- Stakeholder interviews and engagement
- Prioritisation workshop and KPIs definition
- Detailed recruitment and research plans
- Analytics review
- Survey design and analysis
- Contextual research / depth interviews
- Facilitated research observation
- Research playbacks
- Content audit
- Co-creation, sketching and storyboarding

Outputs:

- Roadmap and service concepts to explore in alpha
- Discovery report with prioritised recommendations
- Documented, prioritised user needs and journeys
- Personas
- As-is and to-be service maps
- Service blueprints
- Service vision
- Sketches and storyboards
- Content and IA findings report

Our experience

Acas: GDS-aligned discovery for a human-centred AI strategy

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) supports millions of workers and employers across Britain to resolve workplace disputes. With Day One employment rights set to increase demand significantly, Acas faced growing pressure to scale services while maintaining quality and reducing strain on the Employment Tribunal system.

Acas recognised that AI could play a role, but needed clarity on where it could genuinely improve outcomes for citizens and staff. Legacy systems, manual workarounds and limited forecasting capability meant that exploring isolated tools would not deliver meaningful change. Healthia led a rapid GDS discovery, focusing on user needs, outcomes and feasibility rather than technology first thinking.

What we did

- Worked as one integrated team with Acas, bringing together digital, operational, policy and frontline perspectives.
- Ran a programme of user research, discovery workshops and 1-1 sessions to understand pain points, constraints and opportunities across the service.
- Identified 14 outcome-led opportunity areas, grounded in real user and staff needs rather than pre-defined AI solutions.
- Assessed organisational readiness across technology, data, skills, culture and governance.
- Used multi-criteria decision analysis to prioritise opportunities based on user impact, feasibility and strategic value.
- Developed transformation themes and a roadmap to support a robust business case.

Impact

- A credible, evidence-based business case delivered within five weeks.
- Clear strategic direction and increased organisational confidence in people-first AI.
- A future-ready framework that aligns with GDS standards while remaining adaptable as AI capabilities evolve.

“For our project team, this has been the best experience we’ve had working with a consultancy. There was a laser focus on delivery, collaboration, and a genuine sense of one team. “

- Kate McCaul, Head of Digital, Acas

NHS England: GDS-aligned discovery to shape a system-wide vision for video in elective care

With more than seven million people waiting for elective treatment, NHS England needed better ways to support patients during long waits. Video offered clear potential to improve understanding, reduce anxiety and promote self-care, but its use across the NHS was fragmented. Quality, clinical assurance and accessibility varied, leaving patients unsure what to trust.

Healthia was commissioned to lead a GDS-aligned discovery to create a shared, evidence-based vision for how video could be used consistently and safely across elective care pathways.

Our approach

We embedded with national teams and brought together clinicians, Royal Colleges, patient representatives, content creators and digital leads. Using collaborative workshops, in-depth research and synthesis, we focused on user needs, system constraints and long-term sustainability. Video was treated not as a standalone digital asset, but as part of a wider service transformation challenge.

What we found

To make video work at scale, the system needs five core capabilities:

- Content creation and curation
- Quality assurance and clinical maintenance
- Hosting and accessibility across pathways
- Proactive distribution to patients
- Ongoing impact monitoring and improvement

We tested early prototypes to explore how these capabilities could operate in real NHS contexts.

Outcomes

- A shared, system-wide strategic model for video
- Evidence-led insight into patient and clinician needs
- Practical next steps bridging strategy and delivery

“Working with the superb team at Healthia has been an absolute joy... The project helped us devise strategies around the long-term future of educational video content in the NHS.”

- Digital Innovation Manager, NHS Transformation Directorate