

Design sprints for cloud-based digital services

Equal Experts provides skilled cross-functional teams for a week-long intensive, integrated cloud service design activity, including ideation, prototyping, user research and testing. Design sprint outcomes typically include strategic planning clarity, product feasibility and procurement planning capability. This service ensures senior stakeholders get close to users in a highly effective way.

Design sprints are a structured, time-boxed process for developing a product or service idea. They compress research, hypothesis development, proposal, prototype development and user feedback into one week, and can help validate the business case for proceeding into delivery. Cloud projects benefit from design sprints, as the user-centric approach provides focus and clarity, helps teams make rapid progress, and provides evidence for design decision-making.

Our cross-functional team of designers, researchers and technical architects are adept at facilitating workshops with senior stakeholders and subject-matter experts to put them in the driving seat for innovation. Our design sprint team works collaboratively and intensively with a small group of experts to explore divergent ideas designed around a single user-focused or transformation goal. They then refine, prototype and test one or more of the ideas with real end users.

We support domain experts and leaders to put the ideas they have for service improvements and new ways of delivering public sector services into concrete form. Examples of where this approach has been successful are in 'channel shift' activities, digital transformation, replacing legacy systems, benefits realisation and developing new products and services.

At the end of a design sprint, leaders and organisations will have prototypes and feedback from users on which to build effective strategic planning and resourcing decisions. Subsequent sprints can further enhance and develop ideas in a far more cost-effective way than pilot projects.

Features

- Week-long design workshops facilitated by design and technology experts
- Rapid prototyping of ideas ready to test with real users
- Supports strategic planning
- Develops product strategy using a tried, tested and proven methodology

- Cost-effective way to quickly test feasibility of products and services
- Encourages good user-focused practices from the start
- Enables service delivery teams to start quickly and productively
- Brings together diverse skills and viewpoints
- Develops design thinking skills
- Works effectively with all levels of the organisation

Benefits

- Better outcomes for service users
- Increases understanding of problem space and customer pain points
- Improves user-centred strategy
- Increases design thinking skills among senior stakeholders
- Reduces risk in developing new programmes
- Encourages a strong user-centric focus from the outset
- Increases clarity in procurement planning activity
- Improves digital, product and service strategy
- Increases awareness of opportunities to achieve digital transformation

Design sprints are recommended for any public sector organisation embarking on user-centred, cross-platform or digital cloud-based products and services. Our design and product experts will help to identify and validate innovative new approaches to service delivery and work towards improved outcomes for customers and benefits realisation from transformation.

Our approach to design sprints and design thinking is key to finding out what users actually need, and what opportunities for innovation and fresh thinking there are. We help clients to explore a range of innovative ideas and take these all the way to the prototype stage within a week, and then test with real target users to validate the ideas.

Our intensive workshop approach will help develop a shared understanding and agreement amongst wide-ranging stakeholders, as to the vision, objectives, and scope for service delivery.

Our facilitators have in-depth, hands-on experience and expertise in utilising mature, proven techniques, including lo-fidelity prototyping, lab and pop-up testing, ideation and refinement, and workshops and interviews with key stakeholders. They will help to establish the criteria for the success of the service and meet the Government Digital Service standards.

Our approach to design sprints

Equal Experts facilitators are highly experienced, omni-skilled consultants with in-depth experience of modern agile and lean analysis techniques and approaches. They bring with them experience of a wide range of business domains, and the skills and experience to confidently work with senior stakeholders from across an organisation to effectively apply ideation and refinement techniques in order to produce innovative concepts for new and more effective ways to deliver services.

Our design thinkers are adept at bringing the best and most creative out of people in order to explore and develop new ideas. The design sprint team works collaboratively with senior stakeholders and SMEs to develop and validate ideas into concepts that have been validated with real users as valuable and deliverable in a tangible form.

Equal Experts' design thinking teams are adept at translating opportunities and constraints into real products using their in-depth knowledge of technical, digital and policy environments. The team can help turn the ideas that every organisation has into real products and services. The team works alongside leaders to translate their domain expertise into product and service delivery expertise.

An unwavering focus on putting services live means that our analysts do not spend extended periods producing copious documents and spreadsheets. Instead, their experience enables them to quickly zone in on the key requirements, conducting detailed analysis 'just in time', and ensuring that ideas are made concrete and testable as early, and as cost-effectively, as possible.

We use techniques such as service blueprints, impact mapping, story mapping, sketching and rapid prototyping to build a shared understanding and agreement amongst a broad range of stakeholders, as to the vision, objectives, and high-level scope for product or service vision.

Service blueprints are a technique to visualise customer experience and how organisations and service delivery contribute (and hinder!) users in achieving their goals.

Impact mapping is a strategic planning technique that helps organisations focus on what's important when deciding on investment in building software products by clearly communicating assumptions. Impact maps model the activities of project teams with overall business objectives and ensure better decisions about product roadmaps.

We provide experienced support to participants to make their ideas visual through sketching. And then follow up with rapid prototyping techniques to produce artefacts with sufficient fidelity to take in front of real users and to share with other groups of stakeholders.

A design sprint is often a transformative experience for those taking part. Design sprints have been used all over the world in the last few years by a huge range of organisations. They were designed and the structure refined by a team at Google, but have since broken out into all varieties of environments and uses.

The intensive and immersive experience of working with design experts for a week to take ideas and flesh them out into something tangible that customers, staff and stakeholders can 'touch' and interact with is a powerful experience.

We've found that the benefits of a design sprint are in allowing organisations to become 'unstuck' or to commit with confidence to a strategy or course of action that will deliver innovative experiences and achieve transformative goals.

Because the activity is 'time-boxed' to a single week and is based on a tried and tested technique, results are predictable in terms of delivery, but always surprising to participants themselves as they collaborate to produce something much greater than the sum of the parts.

By partnering with experts in design, technology and delivery, it's possible for organisations to iterate over tangible ideas in a way that other techniques and approaches cannot deliver. We've seen public sector organisations able to take ideas they've been working on for several months and turn them into actionable plans within a very short period of time.

Senior leaders are critical to the success of any truly innovative or transformational work as they control approvals and budgets. But sometimes the same leaders are remote from frontline services and even customers due to the pressures of their working environments. The design sprint brings executives 'face to face' with real customers and experience in a way hard to replicate by observation of the 'as is'. Co-creating products and service ideas means leaders are involved in ideas in a meaningful way from the outset -- and can go on to support effective delivery or procurement of services at scale.

In an ideal world, design sprints result in exciting ideas and approaches that can lead to successful product and service launches. But, even when this doesn't happen,

organisations can eliminate weak ideas or ill-founded concepts in a very short space of time, at relatively low cost -- while learning a lot about users, customers and service delivery. The approach also provides a sound foundation for continuous improvement, with users' needs and understanding customers firmly at the heart of the concept and the work.

Equal Experts can add immense value to the design sprint process by leveraging in-depth knowledge of how digital products and services are delivered in public sector organisations. Our experience of the 'art of the possible' in the public sector, drawn from extensive experience working with government departments to Government Digital Service standards and service assessments, is hard to match.

Examples of design sprints in action

Equal Experts recently engaged with the Mobility Team of a major government department to help identify, from a population of over 13,000 iPhone users, the main areas where mobile native application development could solve a real user problem. The outcome of the research was to be used by the senior leadership team to assess whether further funding should be provided to take these opportunities through to production. We ran a couple of one-week design sprints during the course of the engagement to increase our understanding of the problem space and pain points for users, and conduct rapid prototyping of ideas, which we tested with real target users.

We kicked off with proposition and user research, with mobility users surveyed as to their tasks/satisfaction/usage & attitudes, and correlation analysis used to identify cohorts. This was followed by a rapid understanding of the domain through close collaboration and knowledge transfer from client stakeholders, with a combination of quant (surveys) and analysis/exploration of current roles and responsibilities to validate user cohorts and their burgeoning needs and frustrations.

We conducted 28 user interviews across 22 roles to extend our understanding and motivation, and deepen cohorts, with 18 follow-up interviews across 4 roles looking at time on task/frequency/frustrations to validate efficiency and cost savings for primary and secondary cohorts.

We conducted broad-brush analysis for alignment of primary needs across user cohorts, and to aid prioritisation of key problem areas or opportunities to take forward into deep-dive exploration, using observation and interviews with each of the identified cohorts - to map their workflow and pain points to inform hypothesis generation during the design sprint.

A summarised and open reporting of mapped research findings was provided to client stakeholders at each step. Our survey confirmed that while there was some dissatisfaction with basic features such as attachments, contacts, accessing documents, carrying two phones, and tethering, an agreed roadmap for change was addressing the most important areas of dissatisfaction.

We also found that interviews proved more valuable for understanding people's day-to-day work, giving insights into where mobility could solve a real problem. Frontline staff provided a rich source of opportunities, with visiting officers identified early as a high-impact opportunity. Fraud investigators, trainers, surveillance officers and other specialist roles are highly mobile, with likely many opportunities to solve real day-to-day problems with mobile.

A collaborative research-lead design sprint (during week two, and repeated again later in the engagement) with the core user roles/cohorts represented, led to an alignment of identified primary user needs and opportunities, evolution of a number of hypothesis solutions for primary aligned issues, and we collaboratively (across cohorts) designed lightweight prototypes based on the identified journeys in order to build a focused proposition to solve the primary need.

We developed a clickable prototype to take our proposition through usability testing across the personas to measure success, with the initial proposition and user research iterated further based on feedback and research findings. Amongst a 'low-tech' user group (average age ~50), the response was overwhelmingly positive in that they could see themselves using the app. Our testing surfaced that they had considerable 'downtime' between visits, and were underutilised due to a lack of access to office-based information, with visiting officers telling us that they estimated the app could save them significant time.

Services

We have four core UK-based teams that provide expertise and advice to the organisation, our clients and our partners:

Data and AI

The Data and AI service helps clients make better use of data and create powerful AI solutions that improve and transform any business. We use our deep expertise in data engineering to improve the quality of data that flows through the organisation, providing better insights into customers and operations. Applying our expertise in MLOps,

Generative AI, AI in the SDLC and algorithms, we help upskill client teams, automate key services and create new ones.

Design and Product

The Design and Product service helps clients increase adoption and user satisfaction by designing exceptional digital products and services. We use our expertise in user-centred design and product management to discover and solve the most valuable problems, aligned to a client's digital strategy. We help to create delightful customer experiences that deliver real business value, increased user engagement, better brand reputation and additional revenue.

Technology Strategy

Our Technical Strategy service helps teams to confidently navigate the technology landscape and make decisions that will sustain long-term value. Our expertise covers all aspects of technology strategy, including architectural choices, operating model changes and the adoption of emerging technologies. Using our extensive industry and technology experience, we help to plan the practical steps clients need to be ready for the future.

Modernisation and Platforms

Our Modernisation and Platforms service helps to accelerate time-to-value and reduce total cost of ownership, while scaling digital products and systems. Using modern engineering practices, we help to build and run cloud-native services and improve heritage systems. We bring deep expertise in cloud architectures, secure delivery, "you build it, you run it", and platform engineering on AWS, Azure and GCP clouds.

Team

Our core culture and business model prioritise providing value and doing what is best for all our stakeholders, particularly our clients, rather than maximising short-term profits and shareholder returns. Our founders sold the business to an Employee-Owned Trust (EOT) in May 2024 to secure the long-term future of our collaborative approach, highlighting this commitment. The EOT trustees include the founders and representatives of our employees, Associates and clients, ensuring the interests of all stakeholders are considered and balanced in our operations.

Equal Experts is a worldwide network of technology experts who are dedicated to driving innovation. We have Business Units in the UK (London and Manchester), USA, South Africa, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia and India. Our resourcing model is based on a

core of permanent senior consultants and a supply chain of 4,000+ carefully selected, expert, independent SME consultants - our Associate network. On a typical engagement, we pass ~£2 in every £3 of our contract income directly to this network, creating opportunities for entrepreneurship and helping new SMEs to grow.

90% of our consultants have more than 12 years of experience (average more than 18 years) in the development, delivery, operation and maintenance of digital services using agile methods. Many have significantly more and, in some cases, are global influencers, authors and presenters. Their maturity and pragmatism mean they are highly collaborative, happy to transfer knowledge and keen to help clients build internal capability.

We have grown organically, mostly through personal referrals, prioritising quality, experience and cultural fit above all else. After a rigorous selection process, experts are added to our network, whether we need them immediately or in the future.

We select the most suitable people for any contract role from this large pool, not just from a bench of off-charge employees. Our model is resilient and efficient; we form small expert teams, reducing cost and risk for our clients, while achieving outcomes faster than less experienced teams. Our experts train and upskill the whole supply chain, including client staff and those of other suppliers. We have delivered many public and private sector systems (e.g., for HMRC, HMPO, Defra, DWP and MoJ), including CNI, over the past 17+ years using this model. Our approach is data-driven, user-focused and sustainable, allowing us to deliver results quickly and efficiently, using small teams of real experts.

Our standard working model for teams is hybrid remote/on-site, with a core generally based close to client offices, minimising travel costs and environmental impact. This ensures they can be on-site for workshops, meetings and onboarding activities, and can work collaboratively with client team members, stakeholders and other suppliers. In the words of one client, *"your consultants truly leave their Equal Experts badges at the door"*.

Our focus on senior talent means that all our consultants have the skills and experience required to thrive in dynamic, challenging client environments. It means we can focus on work that adds real value, rather than micro-managing more junior consultants. Our non-hierarchical structure also allows us to operate with lower overheads. For our teams, this creates a mature, pragmatic and innovative working environment, where they can implement the best solutions of their already distinguished careers. And for our clients, it translates to better services, delivered faster and at lower overall cost. We were ranked 2nd in Glassdoor's UK Best Places to Work 2025, up from 4th in 2024, and 15th in Newsweek's Most Loved Workplaces 2022.

For more information and case studies, please visit <https://www.equalexperts.com/> or contact us at solutions@equalexperts.com.

Roles

Collectively, our consultants have the multi-disciplinary experience and expertise needed for successful transformation to cloud-first delivery, live service maintenance and new operating models. Our network gives us fast and flexible access to the DDaT skills our clients need. We have specialists in all areas required for digital success, including:

- Delivery managers
- Change managers
- Product managers
- Engagement managers
- Strategic advisors
- Security specialists
- Data scientists
- Data engineers
- Data architects
- Technical leads
- Technical architects
- DevOps consultants
- Developers
- Testers
- Business and performance analysts
- Accessibility experts
- Service designers
- User experience designers
- Content designers
- User researchers

When a client needs specialists or niche skills, we can rapidly and confidently engage with other organisations in our established ecosystem of proven partners. EE interviews each partner consultant to ensure a high level of knowledge and cultural fit before we assign them to clients.

Public sector clients

We're proud to be one of the top suppliers to the public sector via the G-Cloud and DOS frameworks. Our services are also available through RM6190 Technology Services 4, RM6195 Big Data and Analytics (the only supplier on all 6 capabilities), RM6335 DALAS (Lot 2a) and DPS Frameworks including RM3764 Cyber Security 3, RM6173 Automation Marketplace, RM6094 Spark, RM6200 Artificial Intelligence and RM6235 Space-Enabled and Geospatial Services.

The Equal Experts approach has a successful track record of delivery across the private and public sectors. Some recent award-winning deliveries include:

- HMPO's passport renewal service,
 - ranked #1 public service with a score of 81.2/100 in the July 2025 ICS customer satisfaction survey.
 - Winner of Public Sector Project of the Year and Development Team of the Year at the UK IT Industry Awards 2024.
- HMRC's Data Platform Services Core Engineering Platform, winners of Computing DevOps Excellence Awards 2025 Best Implementation of DevSecOps.
- John Lewis & Partners Best Implementation of DevSecOps at the DevOps Excellence Industry Awards 2023

We know what it takes to implement and support cloud-based applications within complex public sector organisations and across large multi-vendor programmes. We understand and adhere to the GDS digital service standards for delivering solutions and handling and securing data within critical national systems. We have experience in consulting, deploying and supporting security-accredited solutions and have passed numerous GDS assessments. Many of our consultants hold current SC clearance (some have DV) as they have previously worked with public sector clients.

Equal Experts has helped implement digital services to government digital service standards (including passing many formal GDS service standard assessments) for:

- His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- The Home Office and His Majesty's Passport Office (HMPO)
- Ministry of Justice (MoJ), His Majesty's Prisons and Probations Service (HMPPS) and His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS)
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)

- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
- Border Force
- Department for Education (DfE)
- Registers of Scotland
- Office for National Statistics (ONS)
- Intellectual Property Office (IPO)
- States of Guernsey
- Cabinet Office
- Government Digital Service (GDS)
- Valuation Office Agency (VOA)

Planning

To build detailed knowledge of the context and domain for any project, an initial phase of planning, definition and knowledge transfer will generally take place at the start of an engagement.

We have found that this takes place most effectively through a short time-bound inception to develop a shared understanding and agreement on vision and objectives across a broad stakeholder group. This covers the business, technical and user aspects of the project and the outputs may include user personas and scenarios, key user journeys, as-is and desired business processes, a prioritised backlog of user stories, technical constraints and vision, and a release roadmap and plan. The techniques and principles applied are also used on an ongoing basis throughout the course of delivery, to ensure the solutions developed are fit for purpose and meet real and changing user needs.

This initial inception phase can be contracted separately if required.

Setup and migration

In addition to ongoing development and operation of live cloud-based services, we can help with the initial set up and migration as part of a transition to cloud. We look for opportunities to automate processes (for example, test, deploy) that will yield real benefit and high ROI. Our approach helps to address integration, dependencies and risk early. We capture actionable metrics to measure and manage progress towards meeting the agreed success criteria and KPIs identified for building and operating the service. The highly collaborative, interactive processes we follow foster continual learning and improvement of services. They help to establish and evolve the overarching service design, management processes and the team capabilities.

We can ensure projects hit the ground running through our experience in designing, configuring and setup of many continuous delivery and automated cloud deployment environments. These techniques allow software to be repeatably and reliably deployed and tested through each stage into production on the cloud. We have substantial experience when it comes to the tooling required for continuous delivery and automated software deployment, greatly facilitating the software set up, build and migration process, which increases programme productivity and reduces project risk and cost.

Quality assurance and performance testing

We hold ISO9001:2015 Quality Management System certification. All our consultants have extensive experience in both manual and automated testing, including performance testing, continuous integration and delivery into production environments at scale. With all clients, we actively encourage the adoption of robust and meaningful automated test coverage, delivery and test techniques, to reduce risk and safely increase delivery velocity. We are happy to work with a client's existing quality management system (QMS) where appropriate.

Security services

We hold ISO27001:2022 Information Security Management System, Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus certifications.

We can provide the following security services if required:

- Security strategy
- Security risk management
- Security design
- Security incident management
- Security audit services

Training

For every client, we aim to transfer and embed knowledge of technology and process innovation. Our consultants have the expertise, skills and enthusiasm to help transfer knowledge of new technologies and ways of working to our clients' team members, upskilling staff and helping to build their internal delivery competence and capability. This improves internal competencies and builds long-term sustainable capability, as clients migrate to modern cloud-based products and services. We tailor particular practices to address specific organisational constraints – we recognise that every organisation is different and there is no “one size to fit all”.

We tend not to offer classroom-based training as our consultants are happy to share their knowledge throughout a project. They take responsibility for helping individual client team members adopt new practices and ways of working.

Ongoing support

Our operational philosophy is “you build it, you run it”. The delivery team responsible for the development of a live service usually also takes responsibility for its operation. We have found that development teams which support their own products are motivated to deliver higher quality, more robust and maintainable code.

When a service is live with real users, we expect the delivery team to provide 2nd line (infrastructure, in conjunction with hosting support agreements) and 3rd line (applications) support during business hours. We can agree on an appropriate model for 24/7 on-call coverage if required - see our G-Cloud On-Call Support offering for details. We typically establish an on-call rota with delivery team members assigned weekly.

Our experience is that digital services are never really finished and that it is important to retain some level of investment to allow the addition of new features as the needs of customers (both internal and external) change. Our design of the end-to-end service can include establishing Service Level Agreements for ongoing service evolution and operational support (ensuring agreed levels of service availability).

User support

We provide an engagement manager on all G-Cloud engagements with responsibility for ensuring clients objectives are met and for addressing any issues with service delivery. Our engagement managers act as an escalation point and can be reached via phone or email to respond to issues beyond the control of the team providing the service. Engagement management is included within our service pricing.

When a service is live with real users, we expect the delivery team to provide 2nd-line (infrastructure, in conjunction with hosting support agreements) and 3rd-line (applications) support during business hours, within the agreed service cost. We can agree on an appropriate model for 24/7 on-call coverage if required - see our G-Cloud On-Call Support offering for details. We typically establish an on-call rota with delivery team members assigned weekly.

Social Value, the Environment and CSR

Our values and ethos extend beyond our organisation and people, and we take our corporate social responsibility seriously. We are committed to working with all our clients to share our knowledge and learnings, and contribute to their CSR goals, e.g. we will facilitate discussions with their designated digital sustainability leads, to collaborate on environmental policy goals, discuss current practices for greening software and agree enhancements aligned with industry policies, like the Greening Government Strategy.

We willingly collaborate closely with our clients, other suppliers, competitors and the wider ecosystem to discuss, share and test innovative environmental and social value ideas and initiatives, to improve sustainable practices and create added value throughout any contract.

We will follow our proven social value methodologies for any G-Cloud 15 contract, aligned with the UK's Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, PPN002 (PA2023) and the Social Value Model, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to actively create additional opportunities to develop, measure and improve social value for our client and their entire supply chain. In a recent [Government Transformation Magazine interview](#), Mike Potter, ex-UK Gov CDO recalled his HMRC experience partnering with us for transformative results. *"We didn't just buy their capability - we bought their culture,"* he said. *"Cultural alignment is key. When you pick partners who share your values and ways of working, you find areas of mutual advantage."*

We review, update and publish our Carbon Reduction Plan, Modern Slavery and EDI statements annually, are a Disability Confident employer, a member of the Business Disability Forum and a participant in the Government Digital Sustainability Alliance (GDSA). Our commitment to providing a fulfilling workplace for everyone is reflected in Glassdoor's Best Places to Work in the UK, voted for by our staff, ranking us 4th in 2024, 2nd in 2025.

We complete the [EcoVadis](#) assessment tool, which evaluates performance across four dimensions: Environment, Labour and Human Rights, Ethics and Sustainable Procurement. We complete the assessment, create an improvement plan and review and update it annually. We willingly share the results with clients and use their feedback and learnings to influence our improvement plans.

Examples of other social value initiatives for clients include:

HMRC Joint Value Initiatives: we work closely with HMRC to organise and fund JVs, e.g.:

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- [School visits](#) to encourage children to pursue STEM careers & find future data engineers,
- Data Engineering Academy - supporting HMRC to onboard and upskill new starters and develop their technical expertise through bootcamps and placements on EE projects,
- Hosting the [Women in Tech & Leadership Conference 2025](#) in collaboration with HMRC's Women in Tech Network.

Hace: We co-funded a [project](#) to develop an AI-based data analysis tool to objectively quantify a company's Child Labour performance.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF): We staffed a pro bono project to build the [Malaria Anticipation Project \(MAP\)](#), deployed in Lankien, South Sudan and being planned for Anka, Nigeria.

John Lewis: We shifted to lower-footprint GCP cloud data centres in Switzerland to meet JL's environmental sustainability goals.

Government: We are an active member of the Government Digital Sustainability Alliance ([See more details here](#)) and are actively working with Defra to implement exemplar projects such as:

- Implementing Green coding Standards ([See Version 1 Github](#)) in our teams working with Defra to help support learnings for wider Government.
- Working with Defra and our partner [Heata](#) to develop an innovative decentralised cloud compute project. The aim is to reduce the carbon footprint of cloud workloads by 80% and heat farmers' domestic water tanks to save them money.