

# Build, run and operate Azure-based digital services

Build, run and operate resilient, feature-rich security-accredited digital services on Azure-based infrastructure. Rapid development, continuous improvement and responsiveness to change based on user feedback and evolving business needs. User-centred design with robust testing, metrics and monitoring to serve the needs of users and meet KPIs.

Live services on Microsoft Azure environments change continuously, and customer workloads are highly variable. Our build, run and operate service ensures project teams adapt to change in a structured way, by embedding operability in every part of the process. We help with telemetry, auto-scaling, provisioning, sizing and failover planning to ensure digital by default service standards.

Public sector organisations with service offerings in Azure may need help with keeping a resilient, feature-rich, accredited digital service in production on cloud-based infrastructure. And our mature, proven user-centred approach to implementation of digital services can be applied at every step of the transition to cloud software, whether the initial build and migration of services to the cloud, or the enhancement and maintenance of live services.

There will always be a need to evolve any service in response to changes based on continually evolving user needs and policy changes, and public sector organisations will need a partner experienced in the building, running and operating services designed, built and deployed using agile methods for continuous improvement. Our experience in user-centred design with robust testing, metrics and live service monitoring helps to serve the needs of users and meet key performance indicators for the service.

## Features

- End-to-end Azure-based services compliant with GDS service standards
- Production-ready test-driven code that meets performance requirements
- Continuous delivery with automated testing and deployment to the cloud
- Ongoing user testing, including AB testing for actionable feedback
- Monitoring of live service in a cloud-based production environment
- Supported by fully automated test coverage
- Automated deployment pipeline across development, test and production environments
- Achieve security accreditation and ensure business readiness

- Responsive to changing requirements based on user and business needs
- Multidisciplinary agile team collaborates closely with stakeholders and other agencies

## Benefits

- Robust, production-ready software that meets acceptance criteria
- Strong processes and experience with remote working
- Mechanisms to respond to quantitative and qualitative feedback and metrics
- Feedback and analytics from real users to inform development
- Short feedback loops enable rapid changes to the service development
- Assured guidance through Digital by Default service standard assessments
- Continuously improved service, fully integrated and ready to go live
- Impact of changes in development measured against key performance indicators
- Can include Chaos Days to help improve resilience of service
- Fit-for-purpose digital service that meets end-user needs

## Our approach to building, running and operating services

Our build, run and operate service is delivered by a multidisciplinary team collaborating closely with client team members and stakeholders to evolve and maintain high-quality, fully resilient, cloud-based digital products and services in response to changing user needs and behaviours. We follow iterative approaches that allow us to investigate and mitigate technical, design, delivery and business process risk throughout the course of development.

This service offering is ideally placed to help public sector organisations meet Government Digital Service standards e.g. in the ongoing operation of cloud-based digital services that meet all security and performance standards. The highly collaborative, interactive processes we follow foster continual learning and improvement of services, and help to establish and evolve the overarching service design and management processes and team.

We can either augment an existing delivery team with specific skills and expertise on a co-sourced basis or we can take full responsibility for digital products and services in the cloud as a managed service. Expertise we provide may include some or all of delivery management, user experience design and research, business analysis, architectural design and strategy, software engineering, testing and deployment to cloud-based infrastructure.

We build and test technical proof of concepts to validate the feasibility of alternative technical solutions and tackle technical and requirements risk early. Technical spikes, user research and clickable prototypes, in concert with regular showcase demonstrations of the evolving solution, help to develop a greater understanding of a service, its users' needs, the legacy systems it needs to integrate with or replace, and its path to production in the cloud.

We follow user-centred design and research processes, based on an understanding of user personas, behaviours and scenarios, on an ongoing basis to gain a greater understanding of user needs, including assisted digital support. We use lo-fidelity paper-based or clickable prototypes to test early-stage improvements to user journeys and interactions with users and gain actionable user feedback early and often before investing in production implementation.

We aim to release new features and functionality to production as early as possible, where required, often alongside the existing version of the service as AB-versions of functionality that can be used to test hypotheses with real users, who are funnelled to the appropriate version. These improvements may follow a reduced version of the whole process (discovery, alpha, beta and live) for smaller pieces of work as the service continues running.

Continuous delivery enables new functionality and improvements to be deployed to production as soon as they add value. We measure and respond to the impact of changes to agreed key performance indicators for the fully working and integrated Live service.

We also continually test and evolve the assisted digital support for the service.

Our approach includes the following principles and engineering practices:

- Close collaboration: Collaborate before negotiating, share problems, retrospect frequently.
- Rapid feedback loops: Risk is reduced by frequently demonstrating progress to the business in showcases at the end of each short, time-bound iteration, allowing for regular feedback from users and ongoing quality assurance.
- Keeping it simple: We do what is necessary, not what “might” be needed.
- Empowered teams: Teams are fully accountable for their deliverables and are involved in all decision-making.
- Test-driven: Tests are coded as requirements are defined, driving design, preventing gold-plating and creating comprehensive regression coverage. We “test

early and often” to de-risk delivery and look to automate regression, performance, capacity and soak tests.

- Continuous delivery: Automating the path to production from day one ensures that deployment is a repeatable, dependable process. Building and automatically testing after every code change means any issues are identified and fixed immediately.
- Constant learning: Collaboration is the most efficient way to ensure the whole team is as productive as possible and knowledge is shared between all members. Refactoring across the code base reduces the cost of delivery of each feature and the total cost of ownership.

Our approach helps to address integration, dependencies and risk early. We capture actionable metrics to measure and manage progress towards meeting the agreed success measures and key performance indicators identified in the building and operation of the service, and the cost/benefit of live service operation.

Operational support takes the form of proactive monitoring to help monitor system performance, optimise the code and ensure the service remains secure. The build, run and operate service provides office hours level three support to the Live service. We can also provide out-of-hours 24/7 support - this is a separate Equal Experts service offering also available on G-Cloud.

Our in-depth, hands-on experience of successfully taking multiple public sector digital services through appropriate Digital by Default service standard accreditation, will be applied to ensure service standards are met with this service delivery as well.

## Examples of build, run and operate in action

At HMRC, we have been a key programme delivery partner for HMRC's award-winning Multi-channel Digital Tax Platform from its outset at the start of 2013. The aim is to move approximately 600M+ transactions a year, across 50M+ customers, from traditional/voice channels to digital channels.

In 2020, this platform underpinned the UK Government Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme for furloughed employees, successfully delivering a total of £1.8bn for 220,000 eligible claims in the first 24 hours of live operation. The whole solution was built and delivered within 1 month.

This tax platform was one of the UK Government's totemic 'exemplar' projects, and therefore had to be Digital by Default – a continuously improving service that sets the

standard for how digital solutions can enhance the Government's ability to offer straightforward, accessible services.

Integrated transactional services provide seamless end-to-end experiences for business and individual customers, with self-service applications 'bundled' together to provide services based around life events (eg. a customer setting up a business), and address tax risks.

To deliver all this, the tax platform needed to be as technically robust and flexible as possible. We have provided multiple multidisciplinary delivery teams, working collaboratively with HMRC team members and stakeholders to deliver the platform to Digital by Default service standards for Alpha, Beta and Live services. We also helped establish and build HMRC Digital's 1000+ strong delivery organisation comprising 50+ feature teams across multiple locations in different delivery centres. This included introducing and embedding modern agile working practices such as iterative delivery for frequent feedback loops, test-driven development, pair programming, refactoring and continuous integration.

A set of seven platform teams consisting of Developers and WebOps engineers has iteratively built the Platform as a Service that underpins the tax platform, across multiple cloud providers (to provide resilience and disaster recovery). It has provided build, test and live environments that meet stringent security and data compliance regulations, and monitoring and deployment pipelines that allow for an automated, repeatable path to production.

Delivering a digital service of this size and scope takes more than technical proficiency. The culture in which development takes place and the processes underpinning it are equally important, and Equal Experts has played a key role in both these areas. Our consultants work side-by-side with HMRC's own internal resources, mentoring on a day-to-day basis by 'sharing the pain'.

It's an approach that not only gets things done – it helps to embed successful working practices that make delivery a smoother, more frequent occurrence.

Our approach at HMRC allows services to be tested and deployed independently within a Continuous Delivery environment, without impacting other production services. Teams are able to release at will across each of their digital services. We practice zero downtime deployments driven from Jenkins and can rollback using the same mechanism.

Delivering a digital service requires extensive experience, pragmatism, enthusiasm for great software and the working practices that best make it, all traits you can expect from every Equal Experts consultant.

## 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.

### **Making Software. Better.**

The information contained in this document is confidential and proprietary. Copyright © 2022-6 Equal Experts. All rights reserved.

## 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

### **Making Software. Better.**

The information contained in this document is confidential and proprietary. Copyright © 2022-6 Equal Experts. All rights reserved.

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](mailto: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

**Making Software. Better.**

The information contained in this document is confidential and proprietary. Copyright © 2022-6 Equal Experts. All rights reserved.

- 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.:

- [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.