# How we're using Agile to deliver NMDS-SC2

Agile is a particular approach to project management and its origin is in software development. Agile started in 2001 in the USA as an approach to developing software more efficiently.

There are four values behind working in this way:

✓ **Individuals and the tasks they have to perform are more important than processes and tools.**

✓ **Something that actually works is more important than lots of paperwork about it.**

✓ **User collaboration is more important than having a complicated contract.**

✓ **Responding to change is more important than rigidly following a plan.**

For us, it means being user-led and establishing really clear expectations about what we can deliver. It allows us to develop and design the service in phases and to keep checking back with the sector to make sure NMDS-SC2 is fit for purpose and what people want.

To get us there, we've planned NMDS-SC2 development in very distinct phases:

## Discovery

Commissioned by the Department for Health and Social Care and carried out independently, this objective investigation looked into the rationale for continuing with the current NMDS-SC or developing a completely new service. In this phase, we sought feedback from a wide range of users and put together a business case.

**Questions we asked included:**

- Is the existing NMDS-SC service fit for purpose?
- Do users see value in it?
- How would the sector/users like it to work?

## Alpha

This is where we build and test prototypes of the new service. We listen to users and find out what they want and need, test prototypes with users, collect feedback and then feed this into the next phase.

We have to prioritise what is a 'must-have' for users on day one of the new service e.g registration for a new user or adding and editing a worker record.

## Assessment

### by Government Digital Service (GDS)

The Government Digital Service is a centre of excellence in digital, technology and data and helping services transform. They've won design awards and similar teams have already been successful in US, Australia and New Zealand.

The assessment is 3-4 hours long and involves a group of experts who review, in great detail, the proposed service to ensure it meets GDS standards.

You must have met all the standards in order to apply to the Cabinet Office for agreement to proceed. This is to stop any further Government digital project failures. This is only relevant for Government digital projects.

Skills for Care met the standards with four recommendations. It is a great achievement to pass first time around, as very few are successful.

## Beta

β

We start using user feedback from Alpha phase (the one above). Based on the prototypes developed in Alpha and using all the user feedback, we start to:

- develop (build) specific parts of the new service
- test at every stage with users
- make any changes highlighted by user feedback (called iterative)
- test again.

**Beta** is in two stages, **Private** and **Public**.

In **Private Beta** all developments are tested with users as experimental experience (like a pilot). A selection of organisations will work alongside the team using the new service.

In **Public Beta**, users will use a new service.

There will be an element of user-testing whilst using the new service and as issues are uncovered, they will be addressed by the development team.

## Live running

Before the service can be live, we have to ensure that it meets all the needs of the users, that the data is secure, that analytics are set up properly to measure the success of the service and that we have a plan for the transition or integration with other services.

When we go to live running, we will have ensured that the service meets; the needs of all types of users, both data inputters and data users; best practice guidelines for security and governance and that the transition to the new service has been completed successfully.

All the way through the entire process, data security and protection is monitored, reviewed and implemented.

We also need to continue to gather user-feedback and will need to apply for funding to develop the service further in the future.

# Glossary of terms

**Working in this way involves lots of component parts to make sure everything is done properly. Agile uses specific terms to help us with this work as follows:**

### Daily stand-ups
A very short 15 minute daily meeting where we'll be working on that day and if we're experiencing any difficulties or barriers. It keeps everyone involved as people can join by video conferencing and just listen if they wish.

### MVP - minimum viable product
This is what we must have available for users on day one of public beta and is the basic product that we promise to deliver. For example, part of the MVP is that employers must be able to edit worker records.

Having more exciting ways of seeing your data is really important but is not an absolute must-have for day one, so wouldn't be part of the MVP. We use this MVP to decide on priorities and which bits are a priority to develop and which parts of the service we can look at in the future.

### Sprints
A sprint is a set period of time during which specific work has to be completed and made ready for checking and testing. This is how we've agreed to prioritise our work for NMDS-SC 2 by dividing the development into chunks.

### Sprint planning
Agreeing exactly what is going to be worked on in a sprint (often 2-3 week cycles), who will do what and by when. There is little room for slippage.

### Retrospective
At the end of a sprint we have a 'lessons learned' session. Here we share 'what worked?', 'what didn't?' and 'what do we need to do better next time?'.

### User stories
These describe very specific tasks that users have to be able to carry out. The user story describes the type of user, what they want and why. For example, one story might be that they need to be able to log-in if they are an existing user or register for an account if they are a new user. Another story would be that users need to be able to edit worker records, for example when there is a pay increase.

**The Agile approach is about putting users at the heart of whatever we do. Much of this approach can also be used for non-digital projects. It's all about making sure that whatever we produce (a service, a resource) is both wanted by and meets the needs of those who will use it.**

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