Welcome, new starter!

Below are the essential things you need to know about user-centred design (UCD) in Government

This document is **for designers and user researchers**, whether you're new to government or moving into a new role.

We know that starting a new job can be an overwhelming experience, so the information is broken down into bite-size chunks.

This document is still in development, so [please tell us](#) if there is anything missing, something you don't understand, or if you have a suggestion to make it better.

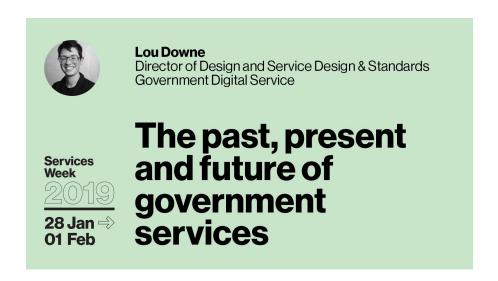## Contents:

In your first few days:

Don't worry, the acronyms will make sense eventually! Here are some things to do to get started.

1. Watch this welcome from our head of design
Lou Downe, the Head of Design at UK Government, explains the history of design in government. Watch talk from Services Week 2019 on YouTube

Making connections:

2. Have a chat with your team
Try to get the lowdown on the background to the projects you'll be working on. You probably have lots of questions already, but just in case, these commonly asked questions are a good starting point.

3. Have a chat with other people doing your role in your department
Your line manager and team should be able to introduce you to them. If not, pop a message out on Slack *(see below)* to meet people from other departments.

4. Join the community

There is a whole community of us across government, and you're part of it.

Departments across government often face similar challenges, and so the cross-government design and user research communities allow everyone in the public sector working in digital to share their knowledge, challenges and best practice.

They include a mailing list, Slack channels, regular meetups around the UK and training.

[Find out more about the design community](#)
[Find out more about the user research community](#)

5. Sign up to training

i. The Government Digital Service (GDS) run free training courses in design and user research, usually at their London office.
They fill up fast, so it's good to book as soon as possible.

Topics include:
- Introduction to accessibility - 1 day *(recommended for all UCD staff)*
- How to use the Prototype Kit - 1 day *(recommended for all designers)*
- [Basic training on user research in Government](#) - 2 days *(recommended for junior user researchers or those new to government)*
- Introduction to Service Design - 1 day *(recommended for junior designers, those working with service designers, those who want to find out more about service design)*

[Find out more about UCD training](#).

ii. GDS Academy run a free entry level training in UCD:
- **[Introduction to design and research in government](#)** *(recommended for those working with designers and user researchers)*
  Various Locations

iii. User Focus offer a [5 day User Research Fundamentals course](#)
This is a paid course that your department can book, offering 5 days of practical user research experience. *(recommended for junior and mid-level user researchers)*

6. Start to read about *how we work* below

How we work:

Whatever your role, these are the key things you need to know.

1. Why UCD?

User-centred design (UCD) is about putting users' needs first in how we design services. It is integral to making government work better for users, and so making government much cheaper for government. Simple, right? It hasn't always been this way.

The Government Digital Service (GDS) was founded in 2012 to transform UK government's online services from being siloed and department-led to a single website, GOV.UK, which delivers public services that are simple to follow and user-led.

2. How we define what 'good' looks like across government

For each citizen-facing service the government creates, the Government Digital Service (GDS) manages the *'mainstream'* informational content (everything surrounding a service), and your department manages anything that's specialist and *'transactional'* (like the service itself). There's a relationship between the two.

The user shouldn't spot the difference between informational and transactional GOV.UK. It's all one website, it just happens to be managed by different people.

Most transactional services follow the same principles and style (more on that below), though internal services may have slightly more complex requirements.

The production of services go through different phases: [discovery](#), [alpha](#), [private beta and public beta](#) before they go [live](#). At the end of each phase, depending on what the service is, it has to go through an [assessment](#) of how well it meets the criteria of a good service (see point 6 below) prior to progressing to the next stage.

3. [We work in agile teams.](#)

Agile methods encourage teams to:
- build quickly
- test what they've built
- iterate their work based on regular feedback.

[Blog: Why agile helps teams to work better](#)
[Blog: What GDS have learned from scaling agile](#)

4. [What each role in your team does](#)

We work in agile service teams. Each team must include certain roles - the link above explains the difference between them.

For more information on different types of designer in government, [check out this GDS blog](#).

5. [The GDS design principles inform how we create services](#)

We start with user needs, not government needs. If in doubt, always refer back to these.

6. [The Digital Service Standard is a set of 18 criteria government services must meet](#)

All public facing transactional services must meet the standard. It covers design, user research, agile working and also things like hiring the right team.

The standard is used by the Government Digital Service to assess whether a service is good enough for public use. It also offers great guidance to follow on how to design good services that are user-led, accessible and simple to use.

Services with over 100,000 users are assessed by GDS itself.

The standard is currently being updated. [This blog explains how and why](#).

7. [The Service Manual is a best-practice guide to digital services](#)

Key sections to check out are:
- [Design](#)
- [User Research](#)
- [Agile Delivery](#)
- [Accessibility](#)

This is a working document - you will be expected to both use and contribute to it in your role.

And finally:

1. We believe that making things open makes them better.

Please tweet and blog about what you do and what you've learned (#govdesign and #govur on Twitter), including as a contributor to the [Design Notes](#) or [User Research](#) blog. If you're not sure whether something is suitable for social media, check with your manager or communications team.

2. Change comes from acts of leadership

We're counting on you to use all your skills in the service of your users, your team, and the wider general public.

On a day-to-day basis, you may be the only designer or user researcher on a team, so you'll need to work with a high degree of autonomy. We trust you to get on with the job, and know when to ask for help. Reach out to the community when you need them - they're friendly, and full of expert knowledge.

Our freedom to operate grows in proportion to our alignment around a shared vision, mission and goals.

3. You couldn't have arrived at a better time.

Government is radically transforming over the next few years as we learn how to create better digital services and as we create new and better ways to do things as a country outside the EU. User-centred design is at the centre of that transformation. We're lucky to have you.

Good luck and welcome!

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In your first week:

+ For designers:

Some tools, resources and extra reading to help you on your way.

Resources:

1. [The GOV.UK Design System is a library of styles, patterns and guidance](#) that you can use in your own digital designs.

The Design System offers best practice solutions to design challenges, and allows you to learn from the research and experience of other service teams to avoid repeating work that's already been done.

Use this as a starting point when prototyping. It contains code that you can copy directly into your work.

2. [The Prototype Kit is a tool which allows you to rapidly create HTML prototypes](#) of GOV.UK services.

Use it with the GOV.UK Design System and GOV.UK Front End. This tutorial offers a great way to [get started with the prototype kit](#).

[GDS also run Prototype Kit training every few months](#).

3. [A list of tools for sketching and designing used by the cross-government design community](#)

4. Your department may also have its own patterns, templates, learning tools and frameworks to follow.

Check in with your line manager to find out more.

5. [A framework of skills to learn and develop in your role](#)

The DDaT Capability Framework details the expected skill level for every digital role in government.

Further reading:

The [Design notes](#) blog:

For designers across government to share their projects, ideas and concepts, or just to think out loud. Some highlights are:
- [Service design: Isn't it just UX with a different name?](#)
- [What we mean by service design](#)
- [Common challenges with government services](#)
- [Why we use user journey maps in government](#)
- [Things to consider when designing in alpha](#)
- [How to prototype in the browser](#)
- [Graphic design for government services](#)
- [Tips for creating good typography](#)

Other reading:

- [Leading Service Design workshop](#) - slide deck from UX London 2017
- [The actual problems to be solved](#) - slide deck from Service Design in Government 2017
- [Most of government is mostly service design most of the time. Discuss](#).
- [Leading Service Design Medium publication](#)
- [WTF is Policy](#)

+ For user researchers:

Some tools, resources and extra reading to help you on your way

Resources:

1. [The Service Manual contains best practice guidance on how to do good user research](#)

It includes:
- How to do user research during different design phases
- User research methods and techniques
- How to prepare
- How to analyse what you've learned
- Handling data and consent

2. [Read the slides from GDS' User Research Training](#)

These don't offer the full context of training, but contain some useful tips to get started

3. [A framework of skills to learn and develop in your role](#)

The DDaT Capability Framework details the expected skill level for every digital role in government. [The User researcher career path may offer more context](#).

Further reading:

The [user research blog](#):

Showcasing the projects user researchers are working on across government. Highlights include:
- [So, you're going to be a user researcher: top tips to get you going](#)
- [User research for govt: 8 strategies that worked for us](#)
- [Doodles on why doing user research in the right place matters](#)
- [Anatomy of a good sticky note](#)
- [6 case studies: using research and data to improve a live service](#)
- [Have you had your recommended dose of user research?](#)

Other useful resources:

- [Coursera's Understanding Research Methods](#) - a great free online course that teaches the basics of how to do research

- [Acumen's Introduction to Human Centred Design](#) - a free 9 week course including how to build an effective interview guide and synthesising your answers
- [Book: Don't make me think by Steve Krug](#) - how to think like a useability expert

+ Make things accessible:

Whether you're a designer or a user researcher, making services accessible will be a key part of your work.

As a user researcher, this means doing research and testing with a wide diversity of users, including those with disabilities.

As a designer, this means designing with awareness of the abilities and access requirements of all users.

Resources:

1. [The Service Manual contains best practice guidance on making your service accessible](#)

2. [There is an accessibility community](#)

The community includes a Slack channel, Google group, quarterly meetups and lots of useful resources

3. [GDS run a free 1 day introduction to accessibility training](#) *[Recommended for all designers and user researchers]*

Further reading:

The [accessibility blog](#):

The accessibility blog helps to raise awareness and to share the knowledge, tools, techniques and research that will be needed to make government services accessible to everyone.

Highlights include:
- [Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility](#)
- [Consider the range of people that will use your product or service](#)
- [An accessibility reading list](#)
- [Creating the UK government's accessibility empathy lab](#)
- [Dump your mouse for an hour](#)

+ Content needs to be designed too:

How content is designed to meet user needs quickly and effectively is essential to creating successful services.

[This guidance describes what good content design is and why it's important](#).

Join the content community

The cross-government content community allows everyone in government working in digital to share their knowledge, challenges and best practice.

It includes a mailing list, Slack channel, meetups around the UK and training.

[Sign up to the cross-government Slack channel here](#).

[Sign up to the content newsletter here](#).