QUALITEST™

From Sub-Par to Superb: UK Government Department Elevates Quality and Performance with Staff Augmentation Services

Challenges

Sub-par performance by former QA & Testing vendors threatened the operations of a major UK

Poor quality, project delays and skyrocketing costs had become the rule.

Solutions

A three-step strategy emphasized automation, best practices and skilled resource management.

Transparency and ongoing collaboration with Client stakeholders restored trust and ensured positive outcomes.

Results

Skilled resource management and release of under-performers eliminated overtime costs.

Defect leakage into production was eliminated and a new automation framework reduced data generation time by 85%.

Client overview

The Client is a large policy-making department of government in the United Kingdom that supports the courts and legal system through a network of agencies in dozens of locations. Millions of people across the UK access their services every year, obtaining vital, time-sensitive communications and support. Reliable, up-to-date, defect-free software is essential for users and for smooth interagency coordination.

QAT staff augmentation services needed—and fast

With little warning, the Client was thrust into an untenable position. The approach and methodologies adopted by the QAT (Quality Assurance & Testing) vendors they had been using had caused serious project delays, spiraling overtime costs and under-delivery against requirements and program planning. Defect leakage into production was now the new normal.

Unable to change course, the vendors opted not to renew their contract, leaving the Client with no QAT coverage. With costs and chaos piling up, the Client contracted with Qualitest for staff augmentation services.

Leaping ahead, one step at a time

Given only two weeks transition time to receive a handover from the incumbent vendor, we hit the ground running. Quickly but carefully, we implemented a three-step strategy with three major goals: reduce overall costs, increase delivery cadence and quality, and make up some of the project delay.

Step 1: Onboarding & assessment

We brought in 15 contractors from the incumbent, another at the Client's request, and added 8 Qualitest staff. At the same time, we assessed existing processes to see where we could innovate and add value.

It soon became apparent that several contractors lacked the interpersonal skills, collaborative approach and knowledge to be effective. Over several weeks, we replaced under-performers with experienced Qualitest staff, executing effective knowledge transfer for a seamless transition at no additional cost to the Client.

Our input into overall program planning & strategy allowed for more accurate estimates of effort and time, which led to program revisions with more informed and attainable timelines. We scaled up the team to complete the work within normal working hours, reducing burnout and addressing the cause of previous high attrition rates. Reducing overtime immediately reduced net costs, even though we were now employing 3x more staff than the previous incumbent.

At 40+ strong, the team was able to start hitting program milestones for sprints, features and change requests with no increase in overall costs.

Step 2: Governance & reporting

We instituted weekly meetings to focus on assignments and identify requirements fulfilment, as well as to suggest tactical improvements to our team. We also conducted monthly meetings with Client teams and stakeholders, which were devoted to assessing service quality.

These regular, focused sessions allowed us to refine report content over time and ensure that the correct metrics and measures were in place to provide stakeholder transparency as our services evolved. This turned out to be a critical piece of the process, as the Client's budget and program scope requirements changed constantly.

Step 3: Innovation & best practices

To raise quality in line with stakeholder expectations and restore trust, we set out to introduce innovation and best practices. Collaborative input into sprint planning rationalized sprint targets, enabling the development team to deliver consistently on time and at the required level of quality.

A key innovation was the implementation of a new automated test framework, which allowed expansion of both coverage and technical reach while saving time and money. The framework also enabled enhancements to legacy test cases with poor traceability, cutting root cause analysis effort in half and eliminating inconsistencies in execution across lower environments. These actions raised efficiencies in day-to-day operations even more.

For transparency and stakeholder buy-in, we made sure all regression packs were formally assessed and approved by Client stakeholders.

Key benefits

This UK public sector program gave us the opportunity to address core issues, while fostering collaborative ways to work in a complex multi-vendor services environment. Automation and other innovations we introduced have led to a strategic enhancement of the Client's QAT capabilities, reducing test failures and increasing quality.

Some specific outcomes and improvements
- Defect leaks into production dropped from frequent to zero percent.
- Multiple NFT tests runs were completed within a single day for the first time ever.
- Regression coverage increased from below 40% to 200% and was expanded at UI, API and database layers.
- UI regression runtime decreased by more than 70% through automation.
- Automation increased reliability and reduced data generation time by more than 85%.
- Developer workload was reduced through identification and elimination of false positives in legacy test scripts.

After several extensions of our agreement, the current team will complete the program with just 10 people, utilizing the advanced QAT collateral we helped build to work more efficiently than ever.