



STRAT 7



PREPARED
FOR:



Qualitative Research on Microsoft Business Software

Final Report

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MAKING SENSE
OF HUMAN
COMPLEXITY

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1. Executive summary

1.1. Background and objectives

1. The CMA initiated an investigation in May 2026 into whether to designate Microsoft as having strategic market status (SMS) in respect of its business software ecosystem.
2. This investigation, conducted under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, focuses on Microsoft's position in productivity software, PC and server operating systems, relational database management systems, and security services.
3. As part of this investigation, the CMA commissioned qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with senior IT decision-makers at UK-based Microsoft customers across all sectors.
4. This research aimed to explore Microsoft's market position through direct customer experience. In summary, it investigated what drives purchasing decisions, what alternatives customers perceive as available, and whether there are barriers to switching. It also examined customer intentions regarding cloud computing and AI adoption and assessed the quality of experiences across Microsoft's products and ecosystem.
5. The specific research questions explored were:
 - To explore **how/why customers purchased** their existing range of business software.
 - To understand what **alternatives to Microsoft's business software** customers consider being available to them, and the strength of these alternatives.
 - To explore any **switching barriers** that customers may face and consider in their decisions.
 - To understand **whether the trend of switching from on-premises to Cloud servers may impact market power**.
 - To understand the **impact AI assistants** are having on customer choices.
 - To explore the **customer experience of quality with Microsoft business software**, as individual products, and in combination with their wider business software ecosystem.
6. The main products explored in this research are outlined below:
 - Productivity Software Suites – including products such as Word, Excel, Outlook, Teams, Copilot, and others
 - PC Operating System – including Microsoft Windows 10, 11
 - Security Software – including Microsoft Defender, Entra ID, Active Directory, Intune

- Server Operating Systems – including Windows Server
- RDBMS – including SQL Server

1.2. Research approach

7. Jigsaw carried out 80 hour-long online interviews with decision-makers on business software in public and private sector organisations in the UK (excluding education), with 10 or more employees, spending at least £7,500 a year on Microsoft business software.
8. The participants were sampled and recruited from a starting sample of 11,217 Microsoft customers. The starting sample itself was drawn from customer lists provided by Microsoft to the CMA (from the population of Microsoft's UK customers which generated more than USD 5,000 in revenue in at least one of Microsoft's three most recent fiscal years (FY23, FY24, or FY25), across the following product areas: M365 suites, on-premises productivity software, Windows Server and SQL Server).
9. Qualitative research focuses on understanding and describing issues, experiences, and motivations rather than providing percentages or numbers. The findings are indicative of the market rather than representative. Participants in this research have provided personal views in their roles as decision-makers on business software. They are based on participants' recall, understanding, and interpretation of the choices made in their organisation, which can be imprecise and, to a degree, post-rationalised.

1.3. Summary of findings

1.3.1. Business software ecosystems

Purchase

10. The purchase of Microsoft business software licences and bundles, particularly for productivity tools and PC operating systems was typically a default decision for participants in our sample, most of whom stated that their organisation had been using Microsoft products for over 10 years.
11. Contract renewal was often the moment when organisations reviewed their licence and/or bundle needs rather than whether to use Microsoft or not. They typically determined what features to bundle together, whether to purchase a mix of licence types for different types of worker (e.g. office and frontline staff) or standardise on a single offering, and how many licences to procure. They often also considered how much flexibility to build in, whether through multi-year commitments, annual agreements, or pay-as-you-go arrangements for all or part of their estate.
12. While the breadth of choice in Microsoft licences and/or bundles was considered to allow some flexibility, it could be frustrating for some in practice. Many stated that security requirements, for instance, meant their organisations chose to

upgrade to higher-tier M365 licences (such as E5) even when they had no need for the other features that tier provided.

13. Intermediaries often played a key role in many participants' decision-making – they may offer discounts and add-on support and can influence choice of licence or bundle and of individual products. One downside to using intermediaries some mentioned is they can act as a filter on understanding and access to Microsoft services.

Benefits and drawbacks of Microsoft business software ecosystem

14. Many participants described the Microsoft ecosystem as familiar, with bundled products that are more cost-effective than buying separate licences, and as offering good quality software. However, its main, overarching benefit was that it was one integrated system. Microsoft was valued by nearly all participants primarily as an end-to-end software estate where identity, security, device management, productivity, PC operating system, server operating system and cloud services are integrated. Participants said that this reduced friction and the level of day-to-day administration needed by IT and enabled system management to happen in one place. There are commonly interoperability benefits as well, with some third-party apps reported to require or work more effectively on Microsoft (e.g. Windows or SQL Server).
15. The main concern about Microsoft cited by participants was a sense of being “locked in” even though they recognised the many benefits. The aspects that were valued, such as the familiarity, integration and interoperability with other third-party apps made alternatives feel unrealistic even when technically possible. This was exacerbated by the perception that switching can bring cost, disruption, retraining, and risk that can outweigh the benefit of any modest savings, so organisations can feel stuck.
16. Other drawbacks commonly mentioned included rising prices, with some reporting increases year-on-year. Some also cited frustrations with the complexity of Microsoft licensing and also with the performance of the products, stating that they felt “good enough” or sufficient rather than best-in-class, with clunky UX, reliability issues, and frequent forced updates that could confuse and break workflows.

Barriers to switching away from Microsoft

17. Participants cited network, user, operation and cost reasons not to switch away from Microsoft, which often compounded to make them reluctant to choose alternatives even if these could work in principle or were perceived or known to be better or cheaper:
18. **Network barriers** – Most participants said that the bulk of their organisations' clients, partners and suppliers use Microsoft. Many also described dependencies on Microsoft driven by third-party business software that was core to their organisation requiring Windows desktops/ servers and/or Microsoft SQL Server.

19. **User resistance** – Staff were described as familiar with Microsoft interfaces and workflows, especially Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Teams, and participants would expect (or have experienced) pushback, productivity issues and retraining costs if they moved to alternative equivalents. IT resistance, lack of capacity and lack of skills in alternative products were also reported to act as barriers to switching.
20. **Operational barriers** – These mainly related to how intertwined Microsoft services were with each other. The ecosystem enabled effective management and control of identity, access, devices, security and collaboration in one place. Separating one Microsoft component was seen to add administrative time. The potential issues and risks of transitioning to new software were also a concern for many. Migrations were portrayed as high-consequence projects with potential downtime, unexpected compatibility issues, and data-transfer challenges or risk of data loss.
21. **Cost barriers** – Participants highlighted both the one-off cost of transition as well as the ongoing cost of using the product. Even where an alternative product is cheaper, switching was often portrayed as consuming significant internal time, external consultancy/ professional services and training effort, and can require running both environments in parallel (duplicated subscriptions/ licences) to avoid service interruption during migration.

The impact of the ecosystem on individual product choice

22. In summary, for nearly all participants in our sample, the main value of Microsoft was it offered one integrated, effective ecosystem. This strongly influenced decision-making including at product level. Many used other non-Microsoft products in addition to the Microsoft ecosystem for certain use-cases. Fewer chose non-Microsoft products instead of Microsoft, and only when they saw a very strong rationale, such as a major functional or cost benefit.
23. Specific choices by product are covered next.

1.3.2. Productivity software: Office products (excluding AI)

24. For our sample, Office applications were seen as the “backbone” of their organisations’ operations, with Outlook, Excel, Word, PowerPoint being key. For nearly all, the decision on whether to buy these tools was not really an active choice, as their organisations have used these for many years, and the expectation was they would continue to do so. These were not tools that were routinely evaluated.
25. The key benefits reported for this software were its ubiquity, familiarity, quality and accessibility. The software was commonly used and understood by staff and partners and was seen as best-in-class (as Excel is often described) or generally works well, or well enough, that there was no reason to switch away.

26. Teams, plus for many also Power BI, were typically used because they have the value of being integrated with the rest of the Office suite, even if the products themselves were sometimes seen as sufficient rather than leading.
27. Other productivity apps showed varied adoption. Tools like Project, Loop or Whiteboard, were not commonly used, as they were not needed or other software was used instead.
28. Competitor products to Microsoft's productivity software were preferred by some end-users for certain workloads or were said to be cheaper and easier to use but tended to be used as well as Microsoft rather than as a total replacement. Google Workspace and Apple iWork suite (typically used by creative teams) were the main alternatives used by a minority alongside Office. Slack and Zoom (e.g. for internal chat, project management or webinars) were used in addition to Teams, by a minority.

1.3.3. Productivity software: AI Assistants

Current use

29. Many participants said their organisations were using AI to help save time with administrative tasks, such as drafting or summarising text, plus IT teams were using it for coding.
30. Copilot Chat, the free version of Copilot, was commonly used by our sample, as it was felt to be easy to access within the user interface (UI) for those already using the Microsoft ecosystem. Some were using paid versions, often buying a few licences and running pilots. Alongside this, many were also testing alternatives, including Claude, ChatGPT and a very wide range of other AI assistants for specific workloads.
31. Copilot was seen by many to have the benefits of being integrated and secure but was often described as "good" or "good enough" rather than leading, with Claude and ChatGPT seen as better for coding and more advanced tasks (e.g. creative and visual design). The paid version of Copilot was also deemed expensive by many.
32. The main barriers to switching away from Copilot to alternatives were seen as the increased IT workload and security risks of using software outside the tenant. Some said they were blocking AI assistants other than Copilot to help reduce risk and prevent data loss. Data sovereignty was also a barrier to using Claude and ChatGPT for a few. Some partners or clients mandated that data had to be stored in the EU, and these AI competitors were reported to store data in the US.

Anticipated future use

33. Use of AI assistants was reported to be evolving and likely to expand, and the providers used and nature of use was not set. As mentioned, many participants said their organisations were experimenting with Copilot and multiple other AI assistants and were keen to keep exploring how to make best use of emerging capabilities.

34. Most said they anticipated growth in their organisation's use of AI in a staged and selective way. They predicted AI will be used for automating more tasks over time (e.g. customer-service, data warehouse queries via natural language, etc.) but will continue with pilots before scaling up as they remained uncertain of its value and had some concerns around security and cost.
35. Many planned to continue using Copilot for more tasks because of its Microsoft integration and security benefits, but also to continue using and testing other AI assistants where they proved more effective or fitted specialist needs (e.g. for coding, advanced reasoning, image generation etc).
36. A minority felt that the integration of Copilot would add to their sense of being "embedded" with Microsoft, but conversely a similar proportion felt that the evolution of other AI tools could reduce their reliance on the Microsoft ecosystem. A few saw AI as a potential "disruptor" for software in general, for example, with AI agents creating a layer on top of underlying functions of other software, leading to a lower degree of software lock in.

1.3.4. PC operating systems

37. Similar to Microsoft productivity software, Microsoft Windows was said to be a given by most of our participants. Microsoft Windows was a default decision for most organisations and often a longstanding part of the Microsoft ecosystem.
38. The key benefits described for this software were that most staff had experienced using it before and it was integrated with the rest of the Microsoft software estate. It was also reported to be essential for a wide range of critical business applications that were Windows-first or Windows-only, for example, ERP software and commonly required industry platforms like Bloomberg and Autodesk.
39. Choosing Windows was typically influenced by or related to hardware choice. Some said Windows PCs had the benefit of being generally cheaper than common alternatives like Macs, as well as being familiar for staff.
40. Most saw no rationale that makes it worthwhile switching away from Windows. It would mean losing an operating system that is familiar and is relied upon by staff, directly to use the Microsoft productivity suite, and indirectly as their only way to use third party software systems that rely on it.
41. Some participants' organisations used MacOS and a few used ChromeOS or Linux (with various distributions) in addition to Windows. MacOS was typically favoured by those involved in creative work (e.g. design) and development work (e.g. iPhone/ iPad app development). It was also preferred by a few who felt the Microsoft ecosystem was more prone to cyberattack or was less secure. In these cases, in our sample, there were also select Windows licences bought for IT staff (to use to manage Microsoft software) or for other staff roles.
42. ChromeOS and Linux were only used by a few in our sample e.g. for web workloads or IT tasks such as penetration testing.

1.3.5. Security software

43. Decisions around security products – covering endpoint protection, identity and access management, email security, firewalls and security monitoring – depended on weighing up the relative importance of risk, convenience and cost. Microsoft's security products offer was seen by many to have improved considerably: Defender was seen as having made substantial recent gains, and its integration with Entra ID, Intune and Office reduced friction for many organisations. However, security was noted as fast-moving, and some participants deployed third-party solutions alongside Microsoft's products where they perceived capability gaps – particularly in email security (Mimecast, Check Point), endpoint security (CrowdStrike, Sophos) and SIEM (Splunk, Rapid7).
44. The main barriers to switching from Microsoft were commercial and technical. Security products bundled into licence tiers meant additional third-party tools felt expensive to some and the tightly coupled nature of the security ecosystem (especially the link between Windows, Entra ID and Active Directory) made unpicking it administratively costly and felt risky. Few organisations seriously considered wholesale replacement with non-Microsoft security, instead some added third-party tools to Microsoft. Cost and capability gaps were the primary drivers for adding competitors, although some organisations deliberately layered Microsoft security with external options as a policy of 'defence in depth'.

1.3.6. Server operating systems

45. Windows Server was said to be prevalent in the software estate in most participants' organisations, supported by seamless integration with the broader Microsoft ecosystem (particularly SQL Server, Entra ID and Azure). Linux was the main alternative mentioned and was deployed by some for specific workloads – web hosting, containerisation, development environments – rather than as a wholesale replacement. The decision to use Windows Server typically dated back years and it was treated as a default. Consequently, it was generally actively reviewed only at points of cloud migration, when Azure integration tended to reinforce the Microsoft choice.
46. Key benefits of Windows Server centred on compatibility with dependent applications (ERP, line-of-business software), ecosystem integration and IT team skillsets. The main drawback cited was cost – both licensing and, for those in Azure, cloud compute. Barriers to switching were substantial – applications often mandate Windows, while retraining IT staff in Linux represented time and cost with unclear payback. On top of this, migrations were seen by many as high-consequence, high-risk projects not to be undertaken lightly. Only a small number of organisations were motivated to explore alternatives, and primarily when deploying new workloads tended towards Linux particularly in the area of web hosting or web development.

1.3.7. RDBMS

47. Microsoft SQL Server was overwhelmingly the most common relational database platform discussed. In nearly all cases, Microsoft SQL Server was not an active choice but a requirement driven by third-party applications that demanded it for support and operation. Once embedded in the software estate – often for years – Microsoft SQL Server became deeply coupled with .NET development, Power BI, Azure, SharePoint and other ecosystem elements, making migration technically and organisationally difficult.
48. The few participants using alternatives did so primarily on cost grounds. SQL Enterprise and Azure SQL licences were described as expensive, and organisations looking to replace legacy applications sometimes considered Oracle Database, PostgreSQL or MySQL. However, vendor lock-in (whereby software vendors mandate Microsoft SQL Server), ecosystem coupling (linking Microsoft SQL Server to broader Microsoft workloads), IT skills alignment and inertia all acted as substantial barriers. Switching was contemplated only when an entire application was being replaced, not as an independent product decision.

1.3.8. Final thoughts from participants on quality, choice and suggested improvements in the market

49. Overall sentiment towards the Microsoft ecosystem was cautiously positive, though often expressed passively as “what we use” rather than as an active choice. Praise centred on three areas: integration and consolidation, dependability of core tools (Office, collaboration), and recent improvements in security. Criticism was less forcefully expressed and tended to be product specific. Frustration with update disruption and uneven reliability (notably Azure complexity and 'New Outlook'); perceived weak Copilot quality relative to cost and competition; and inconsistent support, particularly for smaller organisations seeking direct Microsoft assistance.
50. When asked about desired market changes, participants expressed hesitation at interventions that might disrupt operational efficiency. However, some suggested: clearer, more stable pricing structures and more predictable Azure usage costs; optionality to unbundle features they did not use; easier migration paths and improved interoperability to make switching technically and operationally feasible.

2. Background, objectives and approach

2.1. Background to the research

51. The CMA launched a strategic market status (SMS) investigation into Microsoft's business software ecosystem in May 2026.
52. This investigation, conducted under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, focuses on Microsoft's position in productivity software, PC and server operating systems, relational database management systems, and security services.
53. As part of this investigation, the CMA commissioned qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with senior IT decision-makers at UK-based Microsoft customers across all activities within the scope of the investigation.

2.2. Research objectives

54. This research aimed to explore Microsoft's market position through direct customer experience. In summary, it investigated what drives purchasing decisions, what alternatives customers perceive as available, and what barriers prevent switching.
55. It also examined customer intentions regarding cloud computing and AI adoption and assessed the quality of experiences across Microsoft's products and ecosystem.
56. The specific research questions explored were:
 - i. To explore **how/why customers purchased** their existing range of business software.
 - ii. To understand what **alternatives to Microsoft's business software** customers consider being available to them, and the strength of these alternatives.
 - iii. To explore any **switching barriers** that customers may face and consider in their decisions.
 - iv. To understand **whether the trend of switching from on-premises to Cloud servers may impact market power**.
 - v. To understand the **impact AI assistants** are having on the market.
 - vi. To explore the **customer experience of quality with Microsoft business software**, as individual products, and in combination with their wider business software ecosystem.

2.3. Products explored in the research

57. The main Microsoft products explored in this research are outlined below:

Microsoft’s Business Software Ecosystem

- Productivity Software Suite – Office, Copilot, Teams
- PC Operating System – Windows 10/11
- Security Software – Defender, Entra ID, Active Directory, Intune
- Server Operating System – Windows Server OS
- RDBMS – SQL Server

2.4. Research method

58. An overview of the research process is set out below:

1. Set up	2. Recruitment	3. Fieldwork	4. Analysis
Immersion	Screening	Pilot	Interim analysis
Sample design	Recruiting	Main fieldwork	Final reporting

1. Set up

59. **Immersion:** The Jigsaw project team of seven interview moderators received a detailed briefing from the CMA on the sector and background to the research. This enabled Jigsaw to design the research to take account of the complexities, ensure we would speak to a good cross-section of Microsoft customers, and have an open and unbiased conversation about their views and experiences.
60. **Sample design:** The research was carried out among Microsoft customers recruited from customer lists provided by Microsoft to the CMA. The customer list data came from the population of **Microsoft’s UK customers which generated more than USD 5,000 in revenue in at least one of Microsoft’s three most recent fiscal years (FY23, FY24, or FY25), across the following product areas: M365 suites, on-premises productivity software, Windows Server and SQL Server.**

61. There were some definition and data quality issues in the initial list, which can be expected given the data is administrative. For example, a customer is defined by an internal ID, which in many cases equates to a single organisation, but there may be multiple IDs per organisation depending on its buying practices (e.g. if an organisation devolves IT purchasing to individual divisions). 'UK customers' were determined by the billing address location for each customer, which may in some instances not be aligned with other geographic considerations. There was also a large minority without valid contact details.
62. A target of 80 hour-long online interviews was set with the CMA.
63. The target profile of participants to interview from the lists was agreed with the CMA and was designed to reflect the types of organisations in the customer lists, including those likely to use a range of Microsoft licences and product types, and excluding those likely to be low spenders on Microsoft. The specific requirements and quotas put in place were:
 64. Requirements:
 - Private and public sector customers, excluding education customers, which tend to have different licensing arrangements with Microsoft than other types of organisation.
 - Organisations with 10 employees or more
 - Spending at least £7,500 a year on Microsoft business software
 65. Minimum quotas to ensure inclusion and a good mix of:
 - Types of business sector (private and public sector, excluding education)
 - Types of software used (Productivity, PC operating systems, Security, Server operating systems, RDBMS, AI assistants, Microsoft and non-Microsoft use)
 - Types of licence used (Enterprise Agreements and other)
 - Different levels of spend on Microsoft business software
66. From the list, the CMA provided Jigsaw with a sample of 108,623 contact names from 11,217 organisations (estimated to be sufficient to achieve the target number and range of interviews required given typical qualitative research response rates among senior business audiences).
67. Jigsaw worked with STRAT7 Specialist Audiences (a team within Jigsaw's sister agency STRAT7 Audiences with expertise in reaching niche business audiences), who managed the sample, screening and recruitment.

68. Emails were deduped and validated, and 38,656 records were identified as usable over those that were “unverifiable” or “bad” (e.g. likely to bounce or not exist), and further validation was carried out using LinkedIn. Outreach to candidates was staggered in batches split proportionally across all quotas. Job titles which were probabilistically more likely to be decision-makers in IT were prioritised (e.g. those in senior IT or operational roles). Staggering the overall number of potential participants contacted meant we focused on getting the most interviews we could from the least amount of sample. This kept the number of contacts with organisations and people within these to a minimum and helped avoid only speaking to those most motivated to take part, for example, those with very positive or negative views.
69. Overall, 12,079 contacts were contacted at 6,861 organisations in order to achieve 80 interviews across a range of quotas, limited to one interview per organisation.
70. Participants were given an incentive fee, or the option of giving money to charity. This helped to encourage participation and also to reduce the likelihood of hearing only from the most motivated voices.

2. Recruitment

71. **Screening:** A screener questionnaire was developed by Jigsaw, working with the CMA, to be used by our sister agency STRAT7 Audiences to identify the correct individuals for interview. *A copy of the recruitment screener is available in Appendix section 4.1*
72. **Recruitment:** Progress against recruitment quotas was monitored weekly with the CMA to ensure a variety of organisations were included, and no voices were left out. Online interview appointments were scheduled and carried out via Zoom.

3. Fieldwork

73. **Pilot:** An initial discussion guide was agreed with the CMA. The CMA listened to the first five interviews (with participant permission) as an informal pilot running from 18 to 19 June 2026. This pilot led to some small refinements to the discussion guide. *A copy of the final discussion guide is available in Appendix section 4.2.*
74. **Main fieldwork:** Following the pilot, the remaining fieldwork ran until 30 July 2026. Each of the seven Jigsaw moderators carried out 11-12 interviews to ensure each heard a range of different perspectives.

4. Analysis

75. **Interim analysis:** The interviews were audio or video recorded (with permission from the participants) and were uploaded and stored securely by Jigsaw. This meant the evidence was collated systematically and no voice was lost. Analysis was carried out collectively with input from all moderators involved in interviewing to identify key themes, supported by use of CoLoop AI tools solely for the purpose of transcription and to source quotes. Please note that AI outputs were quality checked by moderators. Jigsaw presented interim headline findings to the CMA on 16 July 2026 based on the interviews completed at that point in time (around half of the 80 interviews planned). Some additional details to explore were added to the discussion guide.
76. **Final reporting:** Once all fieldwork was complete, Jigsaw presented overall findings to the CMA in a PowerPoint debrief presentation on 13 August 2026. This report follows on from the debrief with further iteration and detail based on ongoing analysis of the data.

2.5. Sample structure

77. We achieved a good spread of interviews with IT decision-makers in a range of types and size of organisation, many of them saying their business IT systems were hybrid or mostly cloud-based:

Qualitative sample profile – types of organisation

Business sector	Total	Business size	Total
Business & professional services	18	Small (10-49 employees)	11
IT	10	Medium (50-249 employees)	29
Retail, consumer, hospitality	8	Large (251+ employees)	40
Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry	8	Total	80
Banking, insurance & financial services	7		
Telecoms, media & entertainment	6	Cloud adoption	Total
Healthcare and life sciences	6	Cloud for few functions, critical systems on premise	10
Other business sector	4	Hybrid, cloud integration & some on premise	36
Public sector (non-education)	8	Most/ all core business systems cloud-based	34
Third sector (charity/not-for-profit)	5	Total	80
Total	80		

78. Most participating organisations said they had been using Microsoft for over 10 years and bought through resellers or third-party IT support organisations rather than direct. They described a range of different spend levels with Microsoft and Microsoft products, but many said they also used non-Microsoft products:

Qualitative sample profile – Microsoft usage

Microsoft tenure	Total	Microsoft spend per year	Total
Less than 2 years ago	1	Low spend (£7,500-£25,000)	10
2-5 years ago	4	Mid spend (£25,001-£75,000)	13
6-10 years ago	12	High spend (£75,001-£500,000)	34
11-20 years ago	24	Very High spend (£500,001+)	23
Over 20 years ago	39	Total	80
Total	80		

Microsoft product use (multi-code)	Total	Contract type (self-defined)	Total
Productivity Software: Office	80	Product & Service (standard/off-shelf pricing)	32
Productivity Software: Teams	80	Enterprise Agreement (volume discounts)	43
Productivity Software: Copilot	77	Other/Don't know	5
PC OS: Windows	80	Total	80
Security Software: Defender or others	76		
Server OS: Windows Server	70	Microsoft purchase channel	Total
RDBMS: SQL Server	67	Direct from Microsoft	25
Total	80	Via a third-party reseller	43
		Via an IT consultant/ third-party support	12
		Total	80

2.6. Methodological note on qualitative research

Interpretation and limitations of qualitative research

79. When carrying out qualitative research, the focus is not to quantify but to explore and describe views, experiences, and motivations. Qualitative samples are purposive and quota-driven in nature; they are designed to achieve specific outcomes such as including a good range of different groups relevant to the research. Consequently, they cannot be used to identify proportions of populations holding stated views. For these methodological reasons, it is not appropriate to present qualitative findings in terms of the numbers of participants expressing certain views. The responses should not be seen as representative of the universe but can be seen as indicative. The findings in this report are therefore described in qualitative terms. To give an indication of the strength of a finding from the interviews conducted we have used terms such as 'a small number', 'some', 'many', and 'most'.

Interpretation and limitations of the sample

80. Interpretation is limited by the characteristics of the sample. This report cannot describe the views of decision-makers in organisations that do not use Microsoft, spend below the £7,500 per year on Microsoft or have fewer than 10 employees.

Participant recall

81. All information reported is based on interview participants' recall and interpretation, which can be imprecise and to a degree post-rationalised. Sometimes there is uncertainty because time has passed, or in other cases, participants may simply be unsure about key facts or events they convey. Their answers reflect their best and subjective understanding of their choices. We asked participants to prepare for the interviews to encourage them to reflect on their views and behaviours. However, it was not part of the research objectives to fact-check, for example, to review any specific Microsoft or competitor software contractual arrangements.

Individual expert perspective

82. Participants in this research have provided their personal views in their roles as decision-makers on business software. Each response should be interpreted as being from an individual with relevant knowledge rather than as an official collective submission from their organisation. Participants also drew on their wider expertise and knowledge, garnered from the previous positions they have held and from industry sources and contacts.

Snapshot in time

83. The information gathered in this research is from a snapshot in time in June-July 2026. For context, notable activities at this time were the recent launch of Microsoft 365 E7 licensing (low awareness among participants) and the ongoing evolution of Copilot licensing.

Anonymity

84. Individuals who have taken part have done so with the understanding that the CMA will receive a research report based on aggregated data from which neither they (as an individual) nor their company can be identified. This is standard practice in social and market research (and an industry requirement of the Market Research Society Code of Conduct). It aims to encourage open and honest answers from those who take part without fear of any personal repercussions.

Quote anonymity

85. Verbatim quotes are annotated with the relevant business sector in which the participant's organisation mainly operates and the level of spend with Microsoft, to indicate the type of participant but preserve their anonymity. Please note that:
- Some organisations have the same sector and spend level, so not all quotes with the same profile information are from the same individual.

- Spend levels referenced are as defined in the recruitment quotas:
 - Low spend – £7,500-£25,000 per year
 - Mid spend – £25,001-£75,000 per year
 - High spend – £75,001-£500,000 per year
 - Very high spend – £500,001+ per year

3. Main findings

3.1. Business software ecosystems

86. Section 3.1 covers the overall headlines on the buying process for Microsoft business software, benefits and drawbacks of Microsoft and barriers to switching away from Microsoft. More detail on individual products is in sections 3.2-3.8.

3.1.1. Microsoft buying process

Purchasing of Microsoft business software licences and bundles, particularly for productivity tools and PC operating systems was typically described as a default decision by participants in our sample, most of whom stated that their organisation had been using Microsoft products for over 10 years.

Nature of Microsoft business software contract renewal

87. Microsoft contract renewal was typically a given for this audience, particularly for Office productivity tools and PC operating systems.
88. Contract renewal points often did not trigger a full market reappraisal of alternative software solutions. Most within the sample interviewed said their organisation had used Microsoft for over 10 years and most described renewal as a point to review what is bought from Microsoft rather carry out a comprehensive competitive evaluation.
89. This reflects a reported mindset, or formal policy in some organisations, of being a “Microsoft House” or being “Microsoft first”. Microsoft works well in most people’s view, its products integrate well together, and there was little perceived rationale for any major change. Switching away from Microsoft would represent a significant upheaval, involving substantial costs and operational risk.
90. Some participants said that their organisations have to use Microsoft. This reportedly can be because they were bound by requirements set by parent companies or operated under regulatory or sector policies that mandated Microsoft tools, for example, public sector procurement frameworks. Others stated that they have to use Microsoft's operating systems, servers, or relational databases as a foundation for essential third-party software, making Microsoft a de facto requirement rather than an elective choice.
91. Another reason some Microsoft products were chosen was down to the ease of discovery and trial. Some said that their organisations explored free software or experimental features bundled with their Microsoft subscriptions and had decided to start using the products or switched from alternatives on the strength of what they discovered. The rise of Copilot adoption illustrates this mechanism (as discussed in more detail in section 3.3). In these cases, trial and integration ease, rather than active or planned evaluation, was said to drive the take up.

"We'd always look at Microsoft first. We're a Microsoft-first house."

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

"I suppose it's [Microsoft is] not such a significant cost, you know. If it was 10 times the price, then it would be a really significant cost. You would look at it more seriously. I think it's low enough that you sort of say, yeah, it's 30, 40 grand a year, but that's giving us all this and everyone goes, oh yeah, okay, I see what you're saying and we move on."

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

"Microsoft do offer substantial discounts if you lock in for a number of years. So, for example, if you were to purchase something for 3 years, then they may offer you like a 40% or 50% discount on that product."

Public sector, Very high spend

Nature of Microsoft licensing and bundles

92. Contract renewal was often the moment when organisations reviewed their licence and/or bundle needs rather than whether to use Microsoft or not.
93. Microsoft's range of licences created a variety of choices and trade-offs for organisations based on the differing software and price options offered.
94. They typically determined what features to bundle together, whether to purchase a mix of licence types for different types of worker (e.g. office and frontline staff) or standardise on a single offering, and how many licences to procure. They often also considered how much flexibility to build in, whether through multi-year commitments, annual agreements, or pay-as-you-go arrangements for all or part of their estate.
95. While the breadth of choice in Microsoft licences and/or bundles was considered to allow some flexibility, it could be frustrating for some in practice.
96. Many stated that security requirements, for instance, meant their organisations chose to upgrade to higher-tier licences (such as E5) even when they had no need for the other feature upgrades that tier provides (e.g. Power BI, Viva). Similarly, mid-contract changes to Microsoft's licensing model, such as the introduction of paid Copilot features that were initially free, could force people to review earlier purchasing decisions.

97. The sheer complexity of managing multiple licence types across an organisation could sometimes push teams toward standardisation, upgrading everyone to the same tier to mitigate how to manage factors like security risks across the organisation. The fact that not all users in some organisations were on Defender, for example, could create extra work to manage the exceptions, and create pressure to adopt a uniform approach.
98. Another annoyance a few mentioned was the inability to reduce licence numbers mid-contract (on the annual or multi-year contracts), which locked organisations into their initial commitments regardless of changing needs.
99. Some also mentioned that Microsoft is actively pushing adoption of Copilot and Azure. This manifested both in the licensing model, for example, where some features of Copilot have gradually shifted from a free to paid licensing model, and within the Microsoft product ecosystem itself, where Copilot integration and SharePoint use have become defaults and/or more prominent in the user interface. These moves felt to some less like feature evolution and more like pressure to adopt and pay for emerging services.

“So, each year when that [contract] comes up for renewal, I will try to do some kind of analytics on what we paid for, are we using it, right? So is there any way that we can rationalise our licensing and bring the cost down.”

IT, High spend

“When we were reviewing, we moved away from the E3 and E5 licences down to Business Premium, we lost the Power BI licence, but that's fine because we didn't need that licence anymore. We could still add it on as a separate if we needed to, but rather than stick with our E3s and E5s, the E5s which had the Power BI licence in, we knew because we were moving away, let's change it and look at a different Microsoft [licence type].”

Healthcare & life sciences, High spend

“Microsoft 365 Business Premium is the standard SKU that we've got for most staff. We've got a couple of business standard licences for freelancers that don't do very much with the systems.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

3.1.2. Role of resellers and third-party IT support in purchase decisions

Intermediaries often played a key role in many participants' decision-making – they could offer discounts and add-on support and could influence choice of licence or bundle and of individual products. One downside to using intermediaries some mentioned is they can act as a filter on understanding and access to Microsoft services.

100. A minority of participants bought business software direct from Microsoft. Most participants bought Microsoft licences and bundles from either a reseller or via a third-party IT firm that they used for support. A few mentioned a mixed channel approach.

Resellers

101. The most common route to purchase Microsoft licences mentioned in our sample was through resellers.
102. **Negotiation process:** Typically, participants would identify organisation IT needs, then translate these into a licensing approach, checking what was available on Microsoft before looking beyond. Resellers were usually engaged at this point to obtain quotes and confirm the best licensing approach.
103. Some participants said they have an ongoing relationship with a trusted reseller, while others shop around, speaking to four or five resellers to compare deals and secure the best terms. Where licence price differences between resellers were small, add-ons such as availability of 24/7 support could determine choice.
104. **Benefits:** The primary incentive for using resellers was financial. Reseller rates were often stated to be lower than Microsoft's recommended retail price. Large resellers, such as Bytes or Insight UK, were said to offer competitive discounts, which could reportedly be significant.
105. Beyond price, resellers provided a range of practical benefits. They could help organisations navigate the complexity of different licence types, provide help with Microsoft account management and consolidated billing, and share proactive updates, such as briefings on Microsoft's product roadmap. They regularly offered first-tier IT support and advice and an escalation path for any help needed from Microsoft. Direct access to Microsoft support could reportedly be difficult for some smaller firms who said it can be hard to engage Microsoft themselves (they perceived that Microsoft prioritised larger, enterprise firms); resellers could help bridge this gap and make support more accessible.
106. **Drawbacks:** There were some acknowledged drawbacks to buying via a reseller. They could be seen as profit-driven, wanting to upsell both the length, type and number of licences that organisations purchase. A few said they can feel like a barrier to understanding or accessing new services from Microsoft. So, while resellers were valued, participants still needed to take time to ensure they were optimising their organisation's spend.

"I'd always kind of had the assumption that Microsoft prices offered by Microsoft resellers, Computer Centre, Bytes, Softcat, were all the same, and they're not. So, we are squeezing our reseller at the moment, because people want our business."

Retail, consumer & hospitality, High spend

Third-party IT consultants and support firms

107. A few participants said that their organisations purchased Microsoft licences through third-party IT consultants or support firms, sometimes referred to as MSPs or Managed Service Providers. These arrangements could be similar to those with resellers but were typically driven by the need for external expert support and advice rather than the desire to access software price reductions.
108. **Negotiation process:** Participants typically set their own IT requirements, even when software purchasing itself is outsourced, but for some the third-party would translate this into licence or bundle requirements and then the participant picked among the packages offered.
109. **Benefits:** Third-party IT consultants typically enabled organisations to outsource management and billing, reducing the operational burden and could help with projects to set up or transition to new software. Similar to resellers, they also provided first-tier support and an escalation route to access direct input from Microsoft on more advanced queries.
110. Some participants used these third parties for tailored advice on software decisions, drawing on trusted relationships to guide organisations on Microsoft licensing bundles, individual product choices within Microsoft's ecosystem, and broader software decisions involving third-party providers.
111. **Drawbacks:** Discounts on Microsoft licences and bundles were not guaranteed, and there could be additional service costs on top of licensing fees. Organisations typically valued the arrangement for the convenience and access to trusted advice rather than cost savings.

"Any recommendations they (IT third-party) would make, we would probably trust, because it's their expertise. So, we trust what they're saying is right based on their knowledge of the industry. And then we would implement them as long as they're right for our teams. Obviously, if there are issues after that, then we would follow that through with them. But on the whole, we normally take what they advise and then there'll be different packages they might offer us. And then we would just pick the one that's best for us. And also, we'd pick the price appropriately as well."

Other, Mid spend

Direct from Microsoft

112. Some organisations purchased Microsoft licences directly from Microsoft rather than through intermediaries. The main incentive for doing so was ease of access and availability of volume discounts particularly for larger buyers who commit to bundled offerings on multi-year contracts.
113. **Negotiation process:** Once participants had established IT requirements (typically annually or every three years for core Microsoft software used by the organisation), then there was an internal comparison of licence tiers and bundles against buying separate add-ons. A few looked at alternatives to individual Microsoft products. There was little direct negotiation with Microsoft. It was more a choice around contract length, number and type of licence to optimise value and cost.
114. **Benefits:** Direct purchase was typically seen to offer convenience. Some participants said they could manage licences through easy self-serve tools, for example, that enabled them to quickly add new licences or alter monthly billing arrangements. Microsoft's support desk was also described by a few as responsive and effective.
115. **Drawbacks:** Direct purchase had less appeal for some participants in smaller organisations, as they felt their ability to negotiate with Microsoft was limited. Smaller buyers often found that reseller rates were cheaper than those that Microsoft offered directly. Larger firms could access volume discounts directly.

"We found that [via the reseller] we weren't getting access to all of the products, we weren't getting access to the latest things very quickly. And that it was particularly difficult to cancel contracts. They were pushing us into year commitments very quickly to get the economies of scale, whereas we generally want more agility than that to be able to swap products, to take the new shiny things when they come on, and found that we were paying for an awful lot of dead licences. So, if you've committed to a year's deal on Microsoft, then of course you can't cancel it until the end of the year, but that's precisely what you're signing up to. Resellers make it just make it a bit harder. So, they were very good if I wanted to add a licence on, I just press one button, tick, done. As soon as I wanted to take it down, I had to send an email to somebody and get them to reduce it. That's just instant with Microsoft. I could just press the down button. It says, OK, you've got that licence until the 24th of the month and then we won't bill you and that's it."

Retail, consumer, hospitality, Mid spend

Flexible channel approach

116. Some mentioned comparing reseller prices and switching resellers to optimise cost and level of support. A few also mentioned a mixed channel approach, with some products bought direct and others via a reseller for similar reasons.

“Azure is all directly with Microsoft. And all the Office stuff, subscriptions to, you know, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc., plus Visio and Power BI, goes through the reseller. [...] We changed about 2 years ago to a reseller. Which was quite interesting really because the reseller was able to leverage a discount from Microsoft that we weren't able to leverage ourselves directly with Microsoft, which is quite a strange thing when we'd say, well, actually we were fine with the relationship. I think it was around 10%. So, it was a fairly straightforward model, which is we spoke to the reseller who we know reasonably well and said, look, you take 5% and we'll take 5% and everybody is better off. And that's what we did.”

IT, High spend

3.1.3. Main benefits and drawbacks of Microsoft business software estate

The main value participants noted in using Microsoft was that it was one integrated software estate. Other benefits included its familiarity, cost effectiveness from bundling of products rather than buying separately, and general quality. Even though they recognised the many benefits, the key concern about Microsoft was a sense of being “locked in”. There were also frustrations around rising prices, cloud costs, some product weaknesses and the nature of licensing.

Benefits

117. The most common benefits of Microsoft mentioned were:

118. **Integration (main benefit):** Integration was the key benefit that underpinned and reinforced many other factors. Microsoft was valued by nearly all participants primarily as an end-to-end software estate where identity, security, device management, productivity, PC operating system, server operating system and cloud services were integrated (the latter being outside the products of interest in this research but mentioned as part of the ecosystem by many participants). Participants said that this reduced friction and the level of day-to-day administration needed by IT and enabled software estate management to happen in one place. There were commonly interoperability benefits as well, with some third-party apps requiring or working more effectively on Microsoft (e.g. accounting and ERP systems, or software central to certain sectors or roles, such as Autodesk in architecture and construction and Bloomberg in finance).
119. **User familiarity:** Microsoft was repeatedly described as the default business skillset. Staff, new hires, and external collaborators already knew Windows/Office/Teams, which reduced the need for training and helped prevent compatibility issues when working with others.
120. **Value for money:** Microsoft was seen as relatively good value for money for what was offered. Bundles were seen as more cost-effective than buying and managing separate licences. Some of the add-on products included in the

licensing and bundles could be seen by organisations as being already paid for and, therefore almost 'free', for example, Teams and Copilot Chat. Some could also access discounts (e.g. for buying at volume, discounts on list prices from resellers or significant charity price reductions).

121. **Security:** Some cited security as one of the main benefits of using Microsoft. Participants cited security benefits coming from consolidated identity (Entra/AD), device management (Intune), endpoint/email protection (Defender), and central monitoring (e.g. Sentinel). They also placed value on having one place to set policy, enforce conditional access, and respond to incidents. Many also framed Microsoft as a safer place to run AI (Copilot) because data stays in the tenant.
122. **Quality:** Microsoft was frequently described as reliable and fit-for-purpose. Some products were seen by many as best-in-class (Office e.g. Excel modelling capabilities), others were seen as "good enough" across a wide set of needs (e.g. Copilot), with Teams and Defender seen as solid and improving over time.
123. **Cloud:** Another key benefit of Microsoft mentioned was its facilitation of remote working and access from anywhere through Teams, SharePoint, OneDrive and Exchange Online, bringing easy collaboration internally but also externally with partners and clients.
124. Other benefits mentioned by some included:
125. **Support:** The reportedly broad use of Microsoft in business meant that many found support and advice to be readily available from resellers and specialist providers who could help with procurement, renewals, licensing complexity, and escalation into Microsoft.
126. **IT resource:** Microsoft was seen by some participants as easier to staff and operate because IT skills (e.g. Windows, Office, Azure, SQL) were widely available. This made it efficient to find IT staff to manage day-to-day IT workloads and staff with these skills could be more affordable than those with more niche or specialist skills.
127. **Choice:** Some participants recognised Microsoft offered many kinds of licence, bundles and add-ons at a range of price points. These could enable trials (e.g. testing Copilot by adding a few licences) and role-based licensing (e.g. more basic licences for frontline staff).
128. **Compliance:** Some participants said use of Microsoft made it easy to ensure compliance with GDPR, sector regulations or frameworks (e.g. NHS, public-sector procurement). It could also satisfy audit or customer requirements.
129. **Trust:** Some felt Microsoft's ubiquity and longevity brought a sense of trust and a perception of low risk. This could include a confidence that Microsoft had the resources to keep products improving and respond to any issues.

130. **AI:** Some mentioned that the Microsoft software estate and availability of Copilot within this helped provide a safe environment to trial AI use. It enabled participants to test Copilot with a limited number of users, for productivity tasks such as meeting summaries, drafting, search/knowledge retrieval, and also any early agentic experimentation.

"It's the integration with Teams, it's the integration with Outlook, it's the integration with Copilot that we now have. It's that network, it's that ecosystem that gives it the value. It's the overall offering that makes the experience slicker."

Healthcare & life sciences, Very high spend

"You're managing your security within the same portal that you're using for managing users, managing devices."

Public sector, Very high spend

"The biggest benefit of going for the paid-for Copilot is obviously the integration with your own data. You can use it to search emails, create emails, search SharePoint sites that you've got access to, you know, upload your documents into it easily, create new documents from it."

Other, High spend

Drawbacks

131. The most common drawbacks of Microsoft mentioned were:
132. **Lock-in (top issue):** Microsoft was seen as offering many benefits but there was also a sense of dependency. The aspects that were valued, such as the familiarity, integration and interoperability with other third-party apps could make alternatives feel unrealistic even when technically possible. This was exacerbated by the perception that switching could bring cost, disruption, retraining, and risk that could outweigh the benefit of any modest savings, so organisations could feel stuck.
133. **Price rises:** Many participants reported price increases year-on-year (often 5-10%+, sometimes 10-20% or higher), plus a few cite significant uplifts (~20-30%). These could make budgeting difficult and feel unfair when negotiation or exit felt challenging. Several noted Microsoft also raised effective costs via changes in how products or features were packaged. This could be a shift of previously optional capabilities into core tiers, pushing customers up tiers, or moving from included to paid use.

134. **Cloud costs:** Azure and associated cloud services were characterised by many as expensive, and sometimes compared unfavourably to on-premise servers or AWS. A common pain point was usage-based pricing (e.g. for compute, storage or reservations) which could lead to unexpected spend.
135. **Quality:** Some Microsoft tools could be seen as "good enough" but not best-in-class, with general complaints about clunky UX or performance (e.g. in Teams, SharePoint, Outlook, OneDrive and Power Platform), and gaps in capability versus specialists. Several cited reliability or performance issues (crashes, slowdowns, missing features in new Outlook, SharePoint limitations for large files) and viewed security products as weaker than dedicated vendors despite improvement.
136. **Updates:** Another common frustration was the forced or frequent updates and UI changes (across Windows, 365 admin portals, Teams/Outlook, security tools). Microsoft changes or moving of features could break workflows, create user confusion, and generate support burden for IT.
137. **Licence rigidity:** Some participants were frustrated by licensing and bundles that forced purchase of unused apps and required upgrades to unlock specific features. Some described a sense of being pushed into new agreements or add-ons (e.g. to access Fabric, Teams Phone). It could also be hard to reduce the number of licences making cost control difficult when headcount or needs change. Licencing flexibility could be seen as one-way, which is up.
138. Other drawbacks mentioned by some included:
139. **Licence complexity:** Licencing was described by some as "complicated", frequently changing, and hard to compare or forecast. This could take time to navigate and could create administrative burden (e.g. tracking renewals across tenants) and could drive reliance on specialists or resellers to interpret the best packages and deals.
140. **Add-on security:** Some participants said "good enough" security often required higher tiers (Business Premium/E5/A5) or add-ins (Entra P2, Purview, ATP) and/or third-party tools to cover gaps (e.g. email security, domain name security). As such, full security was not seen to be provided as standard.
141. **AI:** Copilot was found underwhelming by many compared with ChatGPT and Claude, especially for coding or more challenging prompts. Adoption and trial were still common given the integration benefits, but there could be some dissatisfaction with output quality. Cost was another issue raised. Copilot was seen as expensive relative to the competition in terms of per-user fees and unpredictable where there was use-based billing. There was also some product confusion due to changing product names and tiering.
142. **Lack of Microsoft support:** Direct access to Microsoft was reportedly limited. Some smaller organisations said getting timely help was difficult, so many relied on resellers, managed service providers and partners for support and any escalation.

"It's a pro and a con. So, the biggest pro is everything is connected together. So, Excel, Dynamics, Teams, Outlook, SharePoint, it's all one thing. It's dead easy to get one thing from point A to point B. The difficulty with it all being Microsoft is if Microsoft say we're going to put our prices up by X%, then we just have to take it on the chin and there's not a lot we can do."

Business & professional services, Mid spend

"Microsoft have been upping the cost of pretty much everything for 3 or 4 years now, quite steep increases, and it's making us less flexible and more restricted. Let me give you an example, which is we moved to Office 365, there was a fairly stable price structure, and we paid per month for our licences and we could flex up and down. So, when we sold a company, we would down by the 50 people that left and they would, increase in the other company. It was fluid, easy to predict. And then one February they said we're updating our pricing; you need to lock in for 12 months to maintain your price point. So, begrudgingly we locked in for 12 months. We still were able to pay monthly, but we had an annual commitment and if we thought we were going to sell the company in that time, we would say, put 500 licences on the annual commit and 100 licences on the month. So, pay a little bit more for those ones but we knew we were going to dispose of them."

Healthcare & life sciences, Very high spend

3.1.4. Barriers to switching away from Microsoft business software ecosystem

Participants cited network, user, operational and cost reasons not to switch away from Microsoft, which often compounded to make them reluctant to choose alternatives even if these could work in principle or were perceived or known to be better or cheaper.

143. Barriers and challenges to switching away from Microsoft were explored with participants during the interviews.
144. A range of interlocking reasons were mentioned by participants that related to network, user, operational and cost factors. An overview of these is set out below.

Network

145. Many participants said that the bulk of their organisations' clients, partners and suppliers used Microsoft. Common interactions, for example, were to share Word, Excel or PowerPoint documents and meet via Teams, and other types of collaboration could include receiving Excel-based formal government documents, tracking changes and comments in Word documents, and handling documents with Microsoft encryption or sensitivity labels. Most felt that switching

to a non-Microsoft software estate would introduce friction or may isolate the organisation even when technically feasible.

146. Some buyers said they lack a clear picture of what a competing end-to-end ecosystem would even be beyond Google. Google was mentioned by some as being easy to use and potentially cheaper than Microsoft, but with poorer functionality in some key aspects (e.g. spreadsheets) and less familiarity for staff, and this limited meaningful consideration of a move.
147. Alongside this, many organisations described dependencies driven by third-party business software core to their operations. Typical software included ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), finance packages, CAD (Computer Aided Design), sector specific software (e.g. Autodesk Revit, factory systems, police/council systems) that require Windows desktops or servers and/or Microsoft SQL Server to remain supported. So, switching the Microsoft layer would first mean replacing or revalidating business-critical applications.
148. Some participants mentioned that the surrounding services market used and sold Microsoft. MSPs, consultants and resellers were known by participants to have supply arrangements with Microsoft and provider shortlists sent to their organisation often included Microsoft offerings. Some reported that these networks and advisors had not raised a need to switch nor actively presented alternatives.

“When I make a SharePoint area and share it with a client, then I know that that client's now got the relevant permissions across Excel and PowerPoint and all these other things. All of our clients use the same tools. A lot of our business on our technical side is with public sector and colleges, and large organisations, just different organisations. But a company that's maybe got 5 offices across 3 countries, yeah, they're all going to have Microsoft.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

“Our ERP provider requires a Microsoft Windows Server. That's a similar story across other things as well.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

User resistance

149. Many cited user resistance as a key barrier to switching away from Microsoft.
150. Staff were described as familiar with Microsoft interfaces and workflows, especially Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and Teams, and participants expected pushback, productivity issues and retraining costs if they moved to alternative equivalents. There was often little reported appetite among staff for

major change and some cases where staff had already complained about relatively small user UI shifts (e.g. from desktop to web Office).

151. Along with end-users, IT-side capacity and skills could act as a barrier. Some IT staff described being more comfortable and/or certified in Microsoft, with non-Microsoft administration seen as a learning curve the organisation did not have time for. Organisations were said to have lean IT teams and most pushed for incremental efficiency rather than major change (unless the rationale for doing otherwise was clear).
152. Finally, boards and leadership were sometimes described as risk-averse and reluctant to accept upheaval without a clear return on investment, and in some cases parent-company standardisation on Microsoft made switching effectively off the table regardless of local preferences.

"It's the appetite for change too. A lot of people don't like change. If something is working, don't change it."

Business & professional services, High spend

"We've already got 12,000 users using Microsoft Office. Retraining 12,000 users in something different – you would be an island, and you'd have to train them in how to manage incompatible file access – the cost that you would save by being able to purchase cheaper software than Microsoft is far outweighed by the cost of change to the business and the disruption and inefficiency within the business that that software would deliver."

Healthcare & life sciences, Very high spend

Operational

153. Many mentioned operational barriers to switching away from Microsoft, mainly related to how intertwined Microsoft services were with each other. The ecosystem enabled effective management and control of identity, access, devices, security and collaboration in one place. Separating one Microsoft component was seen to add administrative time (e.g. extra logins, duplicated provisioning and governance, reworking permissions etc) and introducing an external AI or security tool was often mentioned as likely to bring data-protection or governance problems.
154. The potential issues and risks of transitioning to new software were also a concern for many. Migrations were portrayed as high-consequence projects with potential downtime for the organisation and customers (e.g. stoppage of 24/7 production), unexpected compatibility issues, and data-transfer challenges or risk of data loss (e.g. historic emails/ documents). A few participants felt some elements of the ecosystem could more readily be swapped, for example, using

alternative AI tools like Claude instead of Copilot, but still cited integration work and operational risk as blockers.

155. Other aspects of the software estate that discouraged switching were the ease of activating Microsoft-native features already available in existing licences (e.g. Defender, Copilot, Power Platform, Teams) and the quality of many Microsoft products being “good enough”. This increased inertia, especially when Microsoft options were already embedded and pre-approved in internal security and compliance processes.

“You keep it (Microsoft) because you don't want to have to manage 3 or 4 different softwares. We don't want to manage multiple vendors because that would mean all of my time would end up being taken away from doing actual work to having to manage all of these different accounts and account managers and so on. So, it's easy to just bolt it all together. It was a conscious decision made between me, our tech director, and our MD that we wanted to try and keep as much stuff within the Microsoft ecosystem as we could.”

IT, Low spend

“We used to use phishing simulations and phishing training for end users. We used to use Proofpoint for that and we recently dropped them because Microsoft has included Microsoft Attack simulations in our bundle. They're nowhere near as good. It's generally a worse product, but because it saves a couple of grand, we do it. The theme is you don't pick the best product; you pick stuff because it's already there.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

Cost

156. Cost barriers were mentioned by most participants and related to both the one-off cost of transition as well as the ongoing costs of using the product. This could sometimes also be coloured by the view that many Microsoft products included in licences and bundles could be seen as already-paid-for or offering good value.
157. Even where an alternative product was cheaper, most portrayed switching as consuming significant internal time, external consultancy or professional services and training effort, and could require running both environments in parallel (duplicated subscriptions/ licences) to avoid service interruption during migration. For larger or more integrated organisations, participants attached sizeable estimates, from “tens of thousands” up to six-figure programmes, and in one case around “half a million” for migration and retraining. Even without hard numbers, the expected “shadow costs” (administrative overhead,

governance work, rollout support and paused roadmaps) were treated as likely to wipe out any modest savings on product costs.

158. Some participants stated that Microsoft licensing and bundling also affected perceptions of cost and value for money. When Teams, Defender, Intune, security and compliance tooling are included in an E3, E5 or Business Premium licence, buying an external alternative could be framed as paying twice unless the organisation could also step down a Microsoft tier, and timing of annual or multi-year contract commitments could mean this felt constrained. In some segments (notably charities and some public-sector frameworks), discounted pricing or multi-year deals made Microsoft commercially hard to walk away from for many even if there were some product frustrations.

“If we already pay for something, we might as well use it. The entire decision behind moving over to like Defender for Endpoint is because we already pay for it. Why would you pay for a second product?”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

“It would have to be for a massive amount of money saved. Okay, so unless Microsoft's fees went through the roof – they wouldn't do it, it would be an ethical question – I think that's the only way it could happen.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

3.1.5. Microsoft business software ecosystem and the impact on individual product choice

In summary, for nearly all participants in our sample, the main value of Microsoft was that it offers one integrated, effective ecosystem. This strongly influenced decision-making including at product level.

159. The impact of this was that:

- **Most planned to stay with Microsoft.** Only a few would currently consider or were exploring switching away to a whole different business software ecosystem such as Google.
- **Most participants added-on some non-Microsoft products alongside the Microsoft ecosystem**, where they saw a specific use-case or benefit, for example:
 - Using Slack in addition to Teams as it was deemed easier for certain use cases e.g. internal communications or project management
 - Using Claude in the IT team in addition to Copilot as it was seen as better for coding

- Using MacOS for creative teams, as it was said to be better for design work, but other staff used Windows
- Adding extra security layers (e.g. McAfee antivirus) alongside Defender as they felt the Microsoft equivalent was weaker
- **Fewer chose non-Microsoft products instead of Microsoft**, and only when there was a very strong rationale, such as a major functional or cost benefit, for example:
 - Only using MacOS as it was viewed as a more secure PC operating system than Windows
 - Using Claude or ChatGPT instead of Copilot as they were seen as cheaper and/or more effective than Copilot e.g. for complex queries, coding or visual design
 - Some in the financial sector said they required the highest level of security and used what they saw as best-in-class software, such as Sophos or CrowdStrike, instead of Defender irrespective of whether the product, integration or support costs were seen as higher or not

160. Choices by product are covered in detail in sections 3.2- 3.8.

3.2. Productivity software: Office products (excluding AI)

3.2.1. Overview

Office applications were reported as an entrenched default choice for our participants that drove user licensing. Office products were often recognised as good quality, reliable and familiar, with Excel typically seen as best-in-class. Teams and Power BI were also widely used as they were typically said to bring the benefit of being integrated and bundled into licences.

161. For our sample, Office applications were seen as the “backbone” of their organisations’ operations, with Outlook, Excel, Word, PowerPoint being key. For nearly all, the decision on whether to buy these tools was not really a choice, it was something their organisations had used for many years, and the expectation was they would continue to do so. These were not tools that were routinely evaluated.
162. The key benefits reported for this software were its ubiquity, familiarity, quality and accessibility. These tools were commonly used and understood by staff and partners outside the organisation and generally worked well, or well enough, that there was no reason to switch away.
163. Teams, plus for many also Power BI, were typically used because they had the value of being integrated with the rest of the Office suite, even if the products themselves were sometimes seen as sufficient rather than best-in-class.

164. Other productivity apps showed varied adoption. Tools like Project, Loop or Whiteboard, were not commonly used, as they were not needed or other tools were used instead.
165. Competitor products to Microsoft's productivity software were preferred by some end-users for certain workloads or were said to be cheaper and easier to use but tended to be used as well as Microsoft rather than as a total replacement. Google Workspace was cited as the main alternative used by a large minority alongside Office, with a few using Apple iWork suite (typically used by creative teams, but with most MacOS users choosing Office rather than Apple iWork). Zoom and Slack were stated to be used by a large minority in addition to Teams.

"Basically, bulletproof [productivity] software products at this point that are so ubiquitous and everybody knows how to use them. And, you know, that you can exchange documents across companies and everything just works. The basic product is good."

Third sector, High spend

3.2.2. Products and purchasing

Microsoft Office was seen to be key to user licensing. It was a default for all in our sample and drove purchase, often recognised as good quality, reliable and familiar, with Excel typically seen as best-in-class.

Microsoft products and main use cases

166. All in our sample used Office tools, with Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint most commonly identified as essential within the suite for everyday business tasks such as emailing, producing and collaborating on documents. Excel was seen as best-in-class software, and others were seen as invaluable as they were so ubiquitous and familiar.
167. All also used Teams. Teams was mainly used for meetings, sometimes for project working and messaging. It was seen to have improved in recent years and as having the benefit of being integrated with Office and other productivity tools in the suite.
168. SharePoint and OneDrive were also mentioned by some as required for storing, sharing and collaborating on documents.
169. Other productivity tools included in licences were used by a minority (e.g. Project, Loop, Whiteboard, Viva, Forms, Visio and Stream/Clipchamp) and, for most, played a less prominent role in driving the decision to choose Microsoft.

Microsoft purchasing process

170. Licences were commonly bought via intermediaries, such as resellers and MSPs, but a minority bought direct from Microsoft.

171. Tools such as Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Teams were said to be very rarely evaluated or compared with competitor tools; they were mostly used as default. The main decision point typically came at annual or three-yearly contract renewal, when the number and nature of licences was reviewed. Some mention paying a little more to have monthly contracts, so they could have the flexibility to easily add or reduce licences if circumstances changed (e.g. headcount is reduced), sometimes having a few of these shorter-term arrangements alongside a core of longer-term licences at a lower price point.
172. Teams was bought by all our sample even though some were aware that packages were available without Teams. Teams was typically adopted during Covid lockdown as the fastest path to enabling video meetings for those already using the Microsoft ecosystem and use had continued since. For some, the need for add-ons (e.g. Teams Rooms, Teams Phone) triggered separate evaluation of Microsoft licences and alternatives.
173. Some said they used or considered competitor productivity tools but, in our sample, always used these for certain roles or specific use cases alongside Microsoft (e.g. using Slack for some project management purposes and Teams for meetings, or using Google Workspace or Zoom for certain clients that preferred these platforms).

“We’ve got Teams in-house, both for internal, external, video conferencing and messaging and Teams channels that basically create SharePoint sites for you and all that. I think that has definitely improved our collaboration integration as an organisation over the last, what, 5 years from what we had before [...] it integrates into Excel and Word and SharePoint and everything [...] Microsoft do lock you in because, whilst other products do integrate quite well with some of their core products, they don’t do it quite as seamlessly as, as Microsoft does.”

Public sector, Very high spend

3.2.3. Benefits and drawbacks

The main benefits cited of the Microsoft productivity software, in addition to the integration benefits core to the whole ecosystem, were its ubiquity, familiarity, quality and accessibility. Drawbacks noted included some frustrations with frequent changes, the user interface and licensing costs and constraints.

Benefits

174. The most common benefits of Microsoft productivity software mentioned were:
175. **Integration & security:** Integration of products such as Office, Teams, SharePoint and Copilot alongside the benefit of SSO (single sign-on) were valued by most participants as they brought ease of access and use to staff across their organisations. Participants also commonly saw integrations

between Microsoft productivity software and security features as helping to reduce risks, friction and the level of day-to-day administration needed by IT.

- Familiarity & ubiquity:** Microsoft was repeatedly described as the default business skillset. Staff, new hires, and external collaborators were familiar with Office and Teams, which meant minimal training is needed and fewer compatibility issues when working with others. Many participants said that the bulk of their organisations' clients, partners and suppliers used Microsoft. Common interactions, for example, were to share Word/Excel/PowerPoint documents and meet via Teams, and other types of collaboration could include receiving Excel-based formal government documents, tracking changes and comments in Word documents, and handling documents with Microsoft encryption/sensitivity labels.
176. **Quality:** Office was frequently described as reliable and fit-for-purpose. Excel was seen by many as best-in-class (e.g. modelling capabilities), others were seen as "good" or "good enough" across a wide set of needs. Teams was commonly seen as improving over time to rival competitors like Zoom with improvements in e.g. sound quality and filtering out of background noise and the addition of breakout rooms.
177. **Access from anywhere:** Teams, SharePoint, OneDrive and Exchange Online, were mentioned as invaluable in enabling remote working with access from anywhere via the cloud and bringing easy collaboration, internally and with external partners and clients. Some also welcomed the generous cloud storage and automatic sync or back up to keep information available and up to date.
178. **"Free Teams":** Teams was often perceived as "free" or low-cost, as it is typically bought within a licence by our sample of participants. Note, other Microsoft applications could also be seen in a similar way (e.g. a few referred to other software as "free" or "already included" such as Copilot Chat, Defender and SharePoint/OneDrive and associated storage allowances).

"It [Office] works. It's kind of what the world runs on."

Retail, consumer & hospitality, High spend

"The rest of the world uses Microsoft Office, our customers use Microsoft Office, our partners use Microsoft Office. I know that there is cross-compatibility and you can use free office product that kind of behaves a bit like Microsoft Office and can open its file, but at the end of the day, staff know how to use Word, Excel, etc., i.e., the Office package. Everybody does. It is a standard whether you like it or not, right?"

IT, High spend

“Just the fact that they know how to use it. Like, if I send someone over a Word document with track changes on, they know what that means and they know what a comment is and how to use it. There's inherently less friction and less time spent training people up.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

“Why use Zoom when we can use Teams and basically your calendar is fully integrated. It's just, you know, it's all the same thing. You've got your availability through the same platform. You know, it's just the integration was there.”

Business & professional services, Low spend

Drawbacks

179. The most common drawbacks of Microsoft productivity tools mentioned were:
180. **Quality:** Some described clunky UX or performance (e.g. in Teams, SharePoint, Outlook, OneDrive and Power Platform), and gaps in capability versus specialists. Several cited reliability or performance issues (crashes, slowdowns, missing features in new Outlook, SharePoint limitations for large files).
181. **Updates:** Another common irritation reported was the forced or frequent updates and UI changes e.g. changing or moving features in Teams and Outlook. These could break workflows, create user confusion, and generate support burden for IT.
182. **Licencing:** Some participants were frustrated by the general cost, complexity, and constant change within Microsoft licensing. Some said they felt they compelled to purchase unused apps within their licences (e.g. Loop, Viva), required upgrades to unlock specific features (e.g. to access Teams Phone or Power BI) or were pushed towards using some new features (e.g. Copilot, Fabric). A few admitted this could be a feature of software licencing in general, not just Microsoft licencing.
183. **Pricing:** Some felt the cost of accessing some Microsoft productivity software was high while the UI and capabilities were not necessarily seen as good or best-in-class (e.g. Power BI, Fabric).
184. **Lock-in:** There were few perceived alternatives to Office given it was considered to have many benefits and there were few alternatives seen to offer the equivalent. This made Office the main driver of a sense of lock-in. Teams was often perceived as “free” as it was typically bought within a licence. This was an advantage, but users also admitted it could feel like “entrapment” that made them reluctant to pay “extra” for an alternative. Some were aware that Teams was no longer in all licences and could be bought separately, but a few perceived this negatively (as an actual increase in cost or need to “licence people twice”).

"There are things in there which you're paying for that you're not going to use, like Loop, Whiteboard and Viva, which is like their internal social network kind of thing. There's things like that in there that we just don't use. You're paying for features that you're never going to use."

Business & professional services, High spend

"We're on what's called Microsoft 365 Standard Edition just now. But for the full capabilities of Defender, we have to move to 365 Business Premium. And that gives us a lot more additional security things [...] core security functionality should be part of the basic product, not an add-on."

IT, Mid spend

"We pay extra for Teams Rooms, we've got some Teams Phone plans to keep it all within one platform and one billing process. [...] I think a lot of it is that sometimes you don't discover that these things are additional until you need them."

IT, Low spend

"Microsoft Teams was included. There was a period, I think it might have been last year or the year before, where Microsoft started to move Microsoft Teams outside of the E5 licence. So, we would then have to licence people twice. [...] it feels a bit unfair where Microsoft have given it for free, got everyone in the world on it, and then gone, now you've got to pay for it. [...] very difficult to know exactly what's included with the E5 one and what isn't because it has changed over time."

Banking, insurance & finance, High spend

"That [Power BI] is now becoming very expensive. So not only do you have to pay for a licence for the individual building the report, but you now also have to pay for a licence for someone who wants to view and interact with it, whereas historically that wasn't the case."

Business & professional services, High spend

"We didn't have any choice. So, Microsoft pulled support for Power BI, and everybody has to take a Fabric agreement, even if within that agreement you only took Power BI."

Healthcare & life sciences, Very high spend

3.2.4. Barriers and drivers to switching away from Microsoft

The main barriers mentioned to switching away from Microsoft would be the loss of core, reliable software and loss of integration benefits.

- 185. Most saw no rationale that made it worthwhile switching away from Office and losing its familiarity, file formats and features, so few realistically considered this.
- 186. For Teams and other productivity tools, the main barrier cited would be the loss of integration. Drivers to use alternatives typically related to other software being preferred and bought for certain use cases rather than to replace Microsoft outright (e.g. using Slack for some project management purposes or using Google Workspace or Zoom for certain clients that preferred these platforms).

Barriers

- 187. As with all aspects of Microsoft, integration was said to be one of the main benefits of the ecosystem and, as such, was one of the main hindrances to switching away from the productivity suite. Most valued integration, within the productivity suite, with the tools to manage security and with the wider Microsoft software estate, and did not want to lose these benefits.
- 188. Alongside this, our participants anticipated (or in a few cases had experienced) general end-user resistance to moving away from Office. They felt there would be a loss of familiarity with how to use the software which would mean training and support through transition. Some said it would be hard, if not impossible, to replace certain important software features e.g. they saw no substitutes for Excel's macro/modelling capabilities and would find it hard to replace Word's review functions, like tracking changes and adding comments, which were a common language across organisations when collaborating on documents.
- 189. As already mentioned, Teams was often perceived as not only secure within the tenant but also as "free" or low-cost within the licence, so choosing a competitor instead could be seen as adding both risk and cost. The main loss was seen to be the integrated video-conferencing benefits, as these were so widely used internally and externally for meetings, rather than the project management channels and collaboration aspects which could be seen as more "clunky".

"The upheaval of changing 400 users that use Microsoft – all our files are in Microsoft, you know, we, everyone uses Teams, everyone uses Word, Outlook, Excel. It was just a non-starter. We were never going to swap to Google or whatever. Didn't even research it, wouldn't entertain it. I might save myself, you know, 50 grand a year, but that upheaval, we're just not going to do it."

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

“The problem with [losing] the Office suite is retraining 125 staff into using a product. They've all used Excel, Word, and PowerPoint, you know, and to find alternatives would just be an absolute... in terms of productivity, it would take a nosedive.”

IT, Mid spend

“It's part of that sort of entrapment, dare I say, if you've got Teams there as a free good as part of your 365 licensing, you just use it. Why would you pay somebody else extra for something you're already paying for with Microsoft?”

Business & professional services, Low spend

Drivers to switch away from Microsoft

190. Many participants in our sample said they used other productivity software, but it was typically for certain use cases. The drive to do this was commonly connected to needs within certain types of role (e.g. designers preferring Apple software) or within certain sectors (e.g. collaborating via Autodesk as it is a core project software for some in the architecture and construction industry).
191. In a few cases, use of alternative tools was also simply related to the individual preferences of end-users or IT staff.
192. Where Microsoft productivity software was not seen as best-in-class, or there were some frustrations with the effectiveness, UI or features, then some participants used alternatives. Specific benefits and drawbacks of competitors are shown in the next section.

“The people who are the thinkers and the people who come up with your creative ideas, the people who come up with the words and the advertising and the designs, they all prefer to use a Mac. It's a bit like when you go in and you ask for a Coke and they say, is Pepsi okay?”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

“Because we are in media, we are very powerful in media usage. So, MacBook, some Mac suites and softwares are heavily – I emphasize – heavily used.”

Third sector, High spend

3.2.5. Benefits and drawbacks of competitors

Competitor products to Microsoft's productivity software were preferred by some participants for certain use cases or said to be cheaper and easier to use but tended to be used alongside Microsoft rather than as a replacement.

193. Some participants said they saw Google Workspace and Apple iWork suite as the main alternatives to Office, and Slack and Zoom for Teams. A minority used each of these in addition to using Microsoft productivity software as they were deemed better for certain use cases, but very few were seriously considering replacing use of Microsoft.
194. A few used competitors instead of some Microsoft productivity tools where they saw benefits e.g. Salesforce instead of Business Central as it was seen as effective and integrated well with Microsoft and other software, or Canva for whiteboards as it was viewed as better for design and collaboration.
195. The benefits and drawbacks of these main competitors and others commonly mentioned are summarised below, with those mentioned most often at the top of the table for each type of productivity tool.

Competitors: Office	Benefits	Drawbacks
Google Workspace	Part of a whole ecosystem (main alternative to Office but minority use). Some said it was cheaper than Microsoft. Better at syncing Easier/cleaner UI.	Google sheets less effective than Excel. Would need to train staff.
Apple iWork suite	Part of a whole ecosystem (an alternative to Office but minority use). Familiar and widely used in creative industries. Ecosystem perceived as a given/best in class for creative work.	Ecosystem too expensive Ecosystem too "closed" – fewer integrations with other software. File conversion issues (many Mac users in our sample use Office).
Project management e.g. Smartsheet, Monday, Asana, Trello	Easier/ smoother e.g. a few said Asana was better for task/ deadline assignment.	

Competitors: Office	Benefits	Drawbacks
A few others e.g. Adobe, Docusign, Proton, Notion	Best for a particular use case e.g. Adobe for PDFs, Docusign for document signing, Proton for collaboration, Notion for notes and collaboration. No/weaker Microsoft alternative.	
Open software e.g. LibreOffice/ OpenOffice	Considered by some rather than actually used.	LibreOffice – a few who considered mentioned it was less familiar, more cumbersome, less versatile, and had cross-compatibility issues with other software. Open source in general – Concerns on security vs Office.

I've looked into OpenOffice and things like that, just to see how compatible the files were. [...] you have to heavily modify the files to then work with your radio software. [...] the extra time that you're going to spend working on that doesn't outweigh the cost of just buying your subscriptions and staying with Microsoft in the first place."

Telecoms, media & entertainment (Radio), Low spend

"There were a number of people interested in us using Apple's own software, so Pages, Numbers and Keynote, I think is their presentation software. But that has problems for us, because we sometimes would be going to a place to pitch and we'd get a keynote presentation that you would make and it'd look great, and then you turn up, and if you have any sort of issues the person in the room says, just email me your PowerPoint, I'll display it, you know what I mean, like if you have trouble connecting to projectors or anything else. You shouldn't have to tell them, oh, I'm really sorry, it's a Keynote file. So, you end up with additional friction, you know, you might look like an idiot for a £100,000 job just because you chose Keynote rather than PowerPoint."

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

Competitors: Teams	Benefits	Drawbacks
Zoom	Seen by some as useful for video meetings. Better UX/UI and features for online meetings, webinars e.g. annotation, breakout rooms. Used by some suppliers/ clients.	Added expense on top of Microsoft ecosystem. Seen as less secure than Teams e.g. Zoom “traffic passing via China” in the past. A few mentioned poor integration with Outlook/ Office.
Slack	Seen by some as useful for chat/ project management. Easier for internal communications/ chat, managing projects. Easier integration with developer tools/ ticket systems. Used by some suppliers/ clients.	Added expense and training on top of Microsoft ecosystem. A few mentioned poor integration with Outlook/ Office. Seen as less secure than Teams e.g. “cannot do legal holds and compliance searches”.
Google Meet	Some mentioned better UX/ UI and features e.g. easy link sharing. Seen by some as cheaper than Microsoft. Used by a few suppliers/ clients.	Added expense on top of Microsoft ecosystem. Seen as less secure than Teams. A few mentioned poor integration with Outlook/ Office.
Webex/Cisco	Sufficient (often legacy system e.g. fits with phone system). Used by a few suppliers/ clients.	Poorer sound than Microsoft.
WhatsApp	Used by a few as it was free, easy, informal.	No IT control/ no record retention.
Telephony e.g. Wildix, 3CX, Bria, GoToConnect, RingCentral, 8x8 etc	Used by a few for telephony.	

“Teams is free. Slack is not, because I'm having to pay Slack for that functionality, whereas Teams, everything Microsoft is just included in my single bundle.”

Business & professional services, Mid spend

“We did have Zoom for a little bit during COVID but then we got rid of it because it was just a pain to update and patch, and Teams had an inbuilt version that everyone kind of got on board with. And there's the Cisco platform as well, which sometimes we use. Primarily we are a Teams house. Obviously we have meetings and sometimes other investors or banks will use random Cisco platforms or Zoom platforms. So, we will accommodate them.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, High spend

“There are a couple of instances of using things like Slack, if a vendor set up a meeting, they may use Zoom and we'll participate through that. But generally, if we're doing something ourselves, it's Teams. We have some Teams Premium licensing so that people can get the AI notetaking without having to have the full M365 Copilot licence. And the Slack situation is purely dictated by one salesperson using it for a particular customer because that's what they do, and one of the web team using it to bond with an external consultant firm who assist with very big changes to the website and lead code development. [...] Where it's particularly difficult, if you create a team in Teams and you have channels, you then have to choose one of 2 formats of the channel. Is it threads or posts? It doesn't work like a chat. But if I add 3 people in Teams without creating a team, it's a chat, but then you don't get the same level of intelligence and collaboration around it. Teams is very much this or that way. Slack is more unstructured, but people who've used it prefer it that way.”

IT, High spend

So, day to day everyone uses Teams. However, because they're recruitment businesses and they're doing remote interviews for clients, some people do use Zoom and Google Meet actually, and Webex too, but that is only as a standalone just because it's a client requirement.

Business & professional services, High spend

Competitors: Other	Benefits	Drawbacks
Power BI/Fabric alternatives e.g. Snowflake, Tableau, Qlik, Databricks, Google Looker Studio, Zoho analytics etc	(One or two participants considered/ used/ used each). Cheapness, familiarity.	Need for extra controls/ logins/ security as they're outside the Microsoft ecosystem.
Dynamics 365/ Business Central alternatives e.g. many alternatives used including Salesforce, HubSpot, Zoho, Oracle NetSuite, SAP etc	(A few participants used each). Salesforce seen to integrate well e.g. with Microsoft (it accepts Entra), Adobe. Zoho seen as cheaper (mentions of up to a tenth of the price of Microsoft), HubSpot said to be cheaper. Oracle sometimes also seen as cheaper.	Salesforce, Oracle and SAP can be seen as expensive. Hard to find NetSuite engineers.
Other specialist alternatives e.g. Miro, Canva and many others	(A few participants used each). Miro seen to have good whiteboards/ ideation. Canva seen as intuitive/ accessible/ good for design collaboration.	

"Dynamics is quite an expensive piece of software to use, really. It would obviously more seamlessly link with Outlook and people's contacts and emails, etc. HubSpot can link into it, but I think it's probably a little bit more clunky. But I mean, it was just a cost factor."

Banking, insurance & financial services, Mid spend

3.3. Productivity software: AI Assistants

3.3.1. Overview of current and future use of AI Assistants

Use of AI assistants was reported to be evolving and likely to expand, and the providers used and nature of use was not set. However, most said Copilot had the benefits of being easy to access and secure within the Microsoft tenant and so it was being used or explored in addition to competitors like Claude, ChatGPT and many others.

Current use

- 196. Most participants said they were using AI to help with administrative tasks, such as drafting or summarising text, plus IT teams were using it for coding.
- 197. Copilot Chat, the free version of Copilot, was commonly used by our sample, as it was felt to be easy to access within the UI for those already using the Microsoft ecosystem. Some were using paid versions, often buying a few licences and running pilots. Alongside this, many were also testing alternatives, including Claude, ChatGPT and a very wide range of other AI assistants for specific workloads.
- 198. Copilot was seen to have the benefits of being integrated and secure but was often described as “good” or “good enough” rather than leading, and the paid business version was also deemed expensive by many.

Anticipated future use

- 199. Most said they anticipated growth in their organisation’s use of AI in a staged and selective way. They predicted AI would be used for automating more tasks over time (e.g. customer-service, data warehouse queries via natural language, etc.) but would continue with pilots before scaling up as they remained uncertain of its value and had some concerns around security and cost.
- 200. Many planned to continue using Copilot for more tasks because of its Microsoft integration and security benefits, but also to continue using or testing other AI assistants where they proved more effective or fit specialist needs e.g. for coding, advanced reasoning, image generation etc.
- 201. A minority felt that the integration of Copilot would add to their sense of being “embedded” with Microsoft, but conversely a similar proportion felt that the evolution of other AI tools could reduce their reliance on the Microsoft ecosystem. A few also saw AI as a potential “disruptor” for software in general, for example, with AI agents creating a layer on top of underlying functions of other software, leading to a lower degree of software lock in.

"I think other AI solutions, particularly in the software development realm, are an awful lot stronger than Copilot's offerings. In terms of the compliance and security point of view, and the company-level control, Copilot is generally the better choice. So, we do have a kind of a fork in the road there, in that the IT team are using OpenAI and Anthropic solutions, whereas the general user base is using Microsoft Copilot."

Business & professional services, High spend

"Microsoft are making the connections and adapting, especially with Copilot, a lot easier. So that's why people are having the conversations as why should we not stay with Microsoft?"

Banking, insurance & financial services, Very high spend

"Just based off the last 12 months really, we feel like we don't have to always use Microsoft for everything. There are other options out there. So, since we've used Anthropic's service, we found there's been benefits to it. There is still a need to use Microsoft, but it has kind of opened our eyes saying, well, we don't have to put everything into one system. There are other ones out there. And the pricing as well can be competitive. So, as time goes on, I think we probably will start to see less and less use within some of the areas of Microsoft. The operational side of the business will probably still require to only use Microsoft at the moment because of how it's set up. But, that might change, you know, in a few years' time, that could be completely different."

Other, Mid spend

"So, I can imagine that very quickly you could have the button in any software that would be running certain operations externally. So, you can send a message or schedule appointments inside the group using Exchange features, but you aren't necessarily required to use Microsoft Office for that. [...] Recently, we migrated users from one application interface to another, and using AI agents, we created the old look of interface in the new application. So, there was no change for the user, but everything in the background was changed. So, they provide the data in the same way as they used to do. They just did that in a different window. So yeah, that's possible and it's seamless for transition."

Banking, insurance & financial services, Very high spend

"I think it [AI] will change a lot of our software decision-making. It is already changing some of the decision-making that we're making. Like, we have considered making very large software purchase and we have decided to hold off because we think that what everything's going to look like in 2 years' time is probably going to be very different."

Banking, insurance & financial services, Very high spend

3.3.2. Products and purchasing

Many participants were using the free version of Copilot; some were paying for premium licences mainly for testing purposes.

Microsoft products and main use cases

- 202. Copilot free and paid versions were regularly used within organisations for everyday tasks. The benefits were often still being explored and there were a range of examples cited of successful use cases and productivity gains. These included Copilot helping with writing emails or reports, reviewing documents, transcribing meetings and note-taking, or more advanced tasks like automating complex analysis.
- 203. Many were also testing alternatives, including paid-for business versions of AI assistants not just free versions, especially for coding, creative and visual work, or sector-specific tasks.

Microsoft purchasing process

- 204. Copilot was reportedly sometimes bought as part of bundles for day-to-day help with basic tasks, and sometimes as a self-service add-on of a few paid licences for trial purposes to explore and develop use cases for AI.
- 205. In a few cases, Copilot licensing was being included by Microsoft for a low price or for free as a sweetener at licence renewal.

"So, across the organisation, the version of Copilot embedded into Office 365 anybody can use. There are probably about 15 or 20 that have the premium. I do because it is great for doing things like transcribing meetings and writing end of project reports."

Public sector, Very high spend

"It was framed as we've got a new offer. We can offer a discount on Copilot too, so you can investigate the applicability to your business. I can't remember how long it was for, but maybe 3 or 6 months or something. I think we paid about 20% less for that period of time."

Business & professional services, High spend

3.3.3. Benefits and drawbacks

The main benefits of Copilot were seen to be its easy access, integration and security within the Microsoft ecosystem. It could be effective at saving time on everyday business tasks for many, but was not seen as best-in-class for AI assistants and some said licensing could be complex and expensive.

Benefits

206. **Integration & security:** Many participants were concerned about security and data loss when staff used AI assistants and the risks of LLMs (large language models) learning from confidential business information. The integration of Copilot within the Microsoft ecosystem was seen to reduce this risk as it was considered to be within the tenant. Integration was also said to make it easy to use with other Microsoft software, such as using it for notetaking in Teams, for crafting emails in Outlook, summarising text in Word or information in Excel.
207. **Productivity gains:** Those who were using Copilot could often point to examples of it saving time on everyday tasks such as those listed above, sometimes saving a considerable amount of time.
208. **"Free":** Access to Copilot was considered "free" by some and a few mentioned that the paid version was offered at low initial cost within some licences making it easy to test AI in a safe environment without the need to buy extra non-Microsoft services.

"The problem with AI now is data going out of the business as well as data coming in, like it can be easily extracted. We've blocked ChatGPT from everywhere and are kind of pushing towards Copilot because it complies with all our compliance rules and we have security requirements in there that we can say you can't export this commercially sensitive data etc."

Retail, consumer & hospitality, High spend

"I do an AI report every month. It takes my proxy server and every web request (every computer, every laptop goes through our proxy), and it records what people are accessing. I can export AI categories from that on a monthly basis. That report used to take me 6, 7 hours to write, because I would manually have to extract information and feed that into Excel, but with Copilot I can now get it in 12 minutes. So, the AI is rubbish, but it's got its advantages. But again, if I was to kit everyone out with Copilot licences, then that's £2,500 a month just on Copilot licences."

IT, Mid spend

"[We're using Copilot for] helping with documents, either writing them, reviewing them, comparing them, helping to write emails, and even asking it to summarise things. I think they're using it in meetings as well. Either way, there's meetings or what's it called? Facilitator. There's a facilitator app you can add into a meeting when you've got Copilot and transcription turned on, and it'll actually go through and start picking out bullet points and summarising what's been said and all sorts. It's actually quite good."

Public sector, High spend

Drawbacks

209. **Quality doubts:** There were quite variable views on the effectiveness of Copilot for some tasks. For some, the benefits were as yet unclear, as they did not feel it was as helpful for coding as Claude, or useful for creative and visual design (a few said it was weak even for design for PowerPoint, a native Microsoft application).
210. **Cost:** A common complaint was that Copilot was expensive, perceived by many as a high cost per licence for a sometimes unclear return on investment, plus a few cited hard-to-predict cost-per-use fees for some higher tier licences with greater capabilities. This came with a related fear that cost would continue to rise over time, leading to caution with the number of licences being bought among some.
211. **Changing or complex licensing:** Some reported frustrations trying to keep up with the changing Copilot product offer and name coupled with the issue of cost mentioned above, with quick escalation over time and/ or across licences, from "free" to a fee per month to additional fees per use.
212. **Pressure to use:** A few mentioned that there was a sense of pressure from Microsoft to use Copilot. This came from a combination of the user experience and the licensing. The option to use Copilot could feel like a constant steer when using software within the Microsoft ecosystem and also from the licencing approach, where Copilot was reportedly pushed through sales and marketing.

“Copilot does a really good job of integration with the rest of Office software and things like that. But if you ask it a difficult question, it doesn't answer it as well as ChatGPT does.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, Very high spend

“Base Copilot, which is what we're using, is a flat fee per user per month. But the next one up, which will do more automation, I understand has tokens. So, the commercial model is pretty ugly if you ask me, as you can very easily have no control over spend.”

Business & professional services, High spend

“Every laptop comes bundled with Copilot. You run it up and you open it, the OS goes, oh, I've got Copilot. The Copilot sits in the bottom corner. The keyboards have got Copilot buttons. There isn't really an opportunity for you to say no to Copilot.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

3.3.4. Barriers and drivers to switching away from Microsoft

The main barrier to switching from Copilot to alternatives was that competitors did not have the integration and security benefits from being within the Microsoft ecosystem. Nevertheless, many were still drawn to alternatives as they perceived them as less expensive and more effective, especially Claude and ChatGPT.

Barriers

213. As mentioned, many participants said their organisations were experimenting with Copilot and multiple other AI assistants and were keen to keep exploring how to make best use of emerging capabilities. However, AI security remained a big concern.
214. Many of our participants said they used Copilot within their organisation as integration within the tenant made it easier to monitor and set guardrails on the use of AI and to maintain security. Switching away from Copilot could increase IT workload and security risks. Some were blocking use of AI products other than Copilot to help reduce risk and prevent data loss.
215. Data sovereignty was also a barrier to using Claude and ChatGPT for a few. Some of these participants' partners or clients mandated that data had to be stored in the EU, and these AI competitors reportedly stored data in the US.
216. Copilot was also easy to access within multiple Microsoft applications, such as Outlook and Teams, and was seen as helpful for speeding up basic productivity

tasks, if not always best-in-class for more advanced use. It was also easily available for free or low initial cost with Microsoft licences. Participants said this ready access could lead to a lack of need or interest in trying alternatives.

“If we already pay for something, we might as well use it. So, this was the entire decision behind moving over to Defender for Endpoint because we already pay for it. Why would you pay for a second product? The reason why we use Teams is because it's bundled. You wouldn't pay for Slack or something like that when you have Teams. You wouldn't pay for ChatGPT or Claude or something like that because you've already got Copilot. It's already bundled. It impacts our decisions a lot, and it seems wasteful if we don't stick to this, the products inside the bundle.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

“It [Copilot] is integrated with our Office 365 suite. We are a Microsoft house. It was the additional security, the encryption. It links direct to our documents and our meetings, etc., without it going outside of our estate.”

Business & professional services, High spend

“With Microsoft Copilot, I have control to say: if anything put into Copilot has personal identifiable information in or bank details in or whatever rules I state, stop it. If that was a third-party tool – ChatGPT, Claude – me and my team would have to manage that within each platform. By having everything in one layer, it allows us to set our rules, our governance, our regulatory reasons once.”

Banking, insurance & finance, High spend

Drivers to switch away from Microsoft

217. The main reason that participants used alternatives to Copilot was that they were seen as more capable for less cost or were tailored to specific use cases or industries.
218. Premium versions of Claude and ChatGPT were noted by some to be around £10 cheaper per user and to be more effective at tasks like coding and answering complex queries. There was also a view expressed by some current users of Copilot that, if capabilities did not improve, then they would move to using these more effective alternatives. For these participants, the loss of some integration benefits with Copilot and increase in the time needed to manage separate software and security could be outweighed by the benefits of better AI.
219. A wide variety of other AI assistants were reportedly used to meet diverse needs. Some were used as they were designed for certain specialist use cases (e.g. CoCounsel AI that was integrated with core legal software), others were being tested to see if they were workable or added value.

“So, my position is Copilot is just not as good as ChatGPT and therefore will not use it. We're not paying for something that's not as good as the other thing and doesn't give me any real benefit.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

“Copilot, we do have a basic version. But I don't find it to be particularly good. I gather that there is another paid-for version that is not included in our Microsoft. We would have to pay for that. I'd say 80% would be ChatGPT, 20% Claude. We have tried other ones, but they're the ones that we are using weekly, daily.”

Business & professional services, Mid spend

“Copilot does a really good job of integration with the rest of Office software and things like that. But if you ask it a difficult question, it doesn't answer it as well as ChatGPT does.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, Very high spend

3.3.5. Benefits and drawbacks of competitors

Claude and ChatGPT were seen as more advanced than Copilot, particularly for coding, and better value for money, but there were some concerns around security and data sovereignty.

220. The benefits and drawbacks of these main competitors and others commonly mentioned are summarised below, with those mentioned most often at the top.

Competitors: Copilot	Benefits	Drawbacks
Claude	Common trial/ use of free and business versions. Often perceived as best for coding, also good for writing/ editing text. Seen to integrate well with Office (e.g. spreadsheet creation in Excel) and non-Microsoft applications (Gmail, Slack, Zoom). Cheaper than Copilot.	Data protection concerns/ risks commonly cited – lack of trust, fears of data 'leakage', data sovereignty concerns (cannot prevent data transfer to US), guardrails needed. Blocked in a few firms to prevent data loss.

ChatGPT	Common trial/ use of free and business versions. Seen as better than Copilot for search, writing/ editing text, coding. Cheaper than Copilot.	Similar data concerns as above. Not integrated into Microsoft ecosystem so need manual upload. Blocked in a few firms to prevent data loss.
Gemini	Rarely used/ mentioned but a few said it was good for basic tasks.	Similar data concerns as above.
Bespoke (a few mentions)	A few were developing their own bespoke systems to fit their business needs. Secure (no LLM training).	
Multiple other specialist AI tools mentioned: e.g. Codex, Perplexity, Gamma, Canva AI, CoCounsel AI legal tool, and many others	Often mentioned by only one or two participants Often task/ sector specific e.g. coding, design Sometimes integrated into specific third-party software e.g. CoCounsel integrated into legal software	

“Copilot for GitHub was great about a year ago. It was brilliant and everyone wanted it. And then Anthropic released Claude Code and everyone went, oh, Copilot’s useless for this now. We need to go on to Claude Code. Claude Code is much better for coding than Copilot.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

“Claude can integrate with your Outlook, Microsoft Word, PowerPoint. SharePoint, Teams, etc. So, it’s got that integration. It was very much an easy switch overnight that we came to an executive decision on when Microsoft decided to up their prices and we just said it was too much.”

Business & professionals services, Very high spend

“Operationally, day-to-day administrative tasks, is probably the biggest thing. So, us being in recruitment, we advertise roles. We would previously have spent ages deciphering a client's job spec, working out how we best advertise it to attract candidates. You know, now you can do that in seconds with AI. So that would be one example. Helping people prepare for interviews. Searching for candidates on databases. We try and use it in everything we can to be more efficient.”

Business & professionals services, Mid spend

3.4. PC operating systems

3.4.1. Overview

Similar to Microsoft productivity software, Microsoft Windows was said to be a given by most of our participants. A few predominantly used MacOS but also had a limited number of Windows licences, typically for IT use. The main drivers for choosing Windows were that it was within the Microsoft ecosystem, but also fitted with third party applications and hardware that required this operating system.

221. Microsoft Windows was a “default” choice for most participants for their organisations. It was often a longstanding part of their Microsoft ecosystem, and seen as effective, so the expectation was that they would continue to use Microsoft Windows and it was not routinely evaluated against alternative competitor software.
222. The key benefits described for this software were that most staff have experienced using it before and it was integrated with the rest of the Microsoft software estate. It was also essential for a wide range of critical business applications that were Windows-first or Windows-only, for example, accountancy and ERP software and commonly required industry platforms like Bloomberg and Autodesk.
223. Choosing Windows was typically influenced by or related to hardware choice. Some said Windows PCs were cheaper than common alternatives like Macs as well as being familiar for staff. A few in our sample, for example in some creative organisations and functions, chose to use MacOS for staff alongside Office, but still used Windows for staff in other roles such as IT.
224. A large minority of participants said their organisations used MacOS alongside Windows. MacOS was typically favoured by those involved in creative work (e.g. design) and development work (e.g. iPhone/ iPad app development). It could also be preferred by a few who felt the Microsoft ecosystem was more prone to cyberattack or was less secure. In these cases, in our sample, there were also select Windows licences bought for IT staff (to use to manage Microsoft software) or for other staff roles.

225. ChromeOS and Linux (with various distributions) were only used by a few in our sample in addition to Windows e.g. for web workloads or IT tasks such as penetration testing.

“Windows feels like the default setting. Just also thinking outside of our company as well. IT teams who look after hardware basically say these are the 4 or 5 laptops that we are going to support and you will have one of these. And I understand why they do it because you've got to know what you're providing support to. You can't just be like, just pick any laptop that you want and then kind of guess. So, I do sort of feel like Windows is kind of the default.”

Business & professional services, Very high spend

“Like everyone, I've used Windows my entire life at this point, so I'm very used to the Microsoft ecosystem and the operating system and all of its little kinks and bugs and everything that goes with it.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

3.4.2. Products and purchasing

Microsoft's operating system was often a core part of user licensing alongside productivity software. It was a default for many.

Microsoft products and main use cases

226. All our participants said they used Windows 10 and 11 as the main operating system for their productivity software, for all or most of their staff.

Microsoft purchasing process

227. Windows was commonly bought as part of a Microsoft licence (typically Business Premium, E3 or E5 in our sample), mostly via intermediaries, such as resellers and MSPs, but a minority bought direct from Microsoft.
228. The basic operating system software was also typically pre-installed within PC devices, meaning choice of software and hardware were interlinked. A few mentioned that upgrades to software could require hardware upgrades e.g. Windows 11 requiring a particular type of drive (TPM) meaning that devices needed upgrading or replacing. A few also said that moving to cloud meant the link between hardware and software was weakening, for example, as it was relatively easy to log in via the Microsoft application in the cloud from a Mac device.

"It [Microsoft] is kind of the default."

Business & professional services, Low spend

"Clearly, they [Microsoft] have got the biggest market share. Therefore, there's the most software produced to work on it."

Other, High spend

"Everyone is on Windows 11 Pro apart from our marketing department who are all on Mac. That is a personal preference from the marketing director from a design perspective."

Business & professional services, High spend

3.4.3. Benefits and drawbacks

The main benefits of Windows, alongside the integration benefits core to the whole Microsoft ecosystem, were its familiarity, reliability and compatibility with other third-party software. Drawbacks cited included some frustrations with frequent software updates, a sense of dependency and a few reports of security concerns.

Benefits

229. The most common benefits of Microsoft PC operating system mentioned were:

230. **Integration & security:** Integration of products such as Office, Teams, SharePoint and Copilot alongside the benefit of SSO (single sign-on) were valued by most participants as they brought ease of access and use to staff across their organisations. Participants also saw integrations between Microsoft Windows and security features such as Defender and Intune as helping with central management, reducing risks and the level of day-to-day administration needed by IT.
231. **Familiarity:** Microsoft was repeatedly described as the default business skillset. Staff, and new hires were familiar with how Windows works, which meant minimal training was needed.
232. **Third-party software compatibility:** There was a high chance that third-party software would run on Microsoft. Some common third-party software would only run on Microsoft Windows e.g. many accounting and ERP systems, or software central to certain sectors or roles, such as Autodesk in architecture and construction and Bloomberg in finance.
233. **Reliability:** Typically, Windows was said to "just work".

234. **Cost:** A few cited that PCs tended to be cheaper than Macs, making Windows more cost-effective.

“Everybody knows it, and it works ultimately with Teams, with the productivity suite, and with our specialist software that we’ve got in terms of our ERP and our dealer management system. So yeah, it’s just a must-have, really.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

“The other thing is third-party application compatibility. So, say, you know, accounts wanted software that does X or Y, the chances are that it’s going to be Windows first.”

Business & professional services, High spend

“The Bloomberg terminal requires Windows. There’s no way to run it elsewhere.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, High Spend

Drawbacks

235. There were few specific drawbacks of Microsoft Windows mentioned:
236. **Lock-in:** Similar to the Microsoft productivity suite, there were few perceived alternatives to Microsoft Windows. Its broad use, integration with the rest of the ecosystem and other third-party software were strong benefits but also could feel like dependency.
237. **Updates:** Another common irritation was the forced or frequent updates and UI changes. These could break workflows and needed regular fixes by IT.
238. **Security:** Some felt there were too many “backdoors” into the Microsoft software estate and that security risks remained in spite of improvements in products like Defender in recent years. The sheer number of PC users in itself was also seen to make Microsoft an attractive target for cyberattacks.
239. **Forced hardware upgrade:** A few mentioned that Windows 11 required hardware drive replacement (to include a TPM or Trusted Platform Module) or device upgrade, which cost time and money.

“I’m very happy with Windows. The thing that people [staff] complain about with Microsoft is always it’s running slow, or there’s all these updates and I keep having to reboot my machine for updates.”

Other, High spend

“Windows updates are a constant. We have Windows updates, mandatory updates every month, right? And they generally will cause a problem or two with different things. So, if you imagine that's with their own software, let alone going to outside software. So yeah, I genuinely don't see any alternative but living in the world of Microsoft certainly for our desktop systems.”

Public sector, High spend

“Because they are the biggest in the world, everyone is looking to break into them and trying to find weaknesses.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, High spend

“So, Windows 11 requires a TPM (Trusted Platform Module) which is a hardware functionality. So, some of our older devices didn't actually have the TPMs installed. We could not get the TPMs because every company under the sun was buying them up. So, we ended up with new laptops that came with Windows 11 ultimately. With the current cost of hardware, as we look to more add more memory to new endpoint devices, the costs are significant in comparison to 3, 4, 5 years ago.”

Business & professional services, High spend

3.4.4. Barriers and drivers to switching away from Microsoft

The main barriers mentioned to switching away from Microsoft Windows were the loss of core, reliable software and loss of integration benefits.

240. Most saw no rationale that made it worthwhile switching away from Windows. It would mean losing an operating system that was familiar and was relied upon by staff, directly to use the Microsoft productivity suite, and indirectly as their only way to use third party software systems that relied on it.
241. A few in our sample chose to use MacOS or ChromeOS, but this tended to be driven by specific sector needs or roles.

Barriers

242. As with all aspects of Microsoft, integration was one of the main benefits of Windows that brought ease of management, ease of use and security, and the cost and upheaval of losing this was a big barrier to switching.
243. Our participants anticipated (or in a few cases had experienced) general end-user resistance to moving away from Windows. There would be a loss of familiarity and a need for training and support on any new software.
244. It would also mean switching out other third-party systems that relied on Windows. Effectively, many participants felt they had to keep using Windows

unless they were to change how their third-party software operated or it was replaced.

“Some of the software that we use in the business doesn't work on an Apple operating system. So, you're tied to using a Windows-based machine.”

Other, High spend

Drivers to switch away from Microsoft

245. Some participants' organisations in our sample use other operating systems.

The rationale for this was commonly connected to needs within certain types of role or industry (e.g. creative workers preferring MacOS), because of individual preference or a desire for extra security.

“I think especially within the PR and the ad agency sector, there's very much a Mac is the one to have, not just for the design element but also the optics. [...] People felt that you don't really work in PR, media and ad agencies unless you've got a Mac.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, High spend

“We'll never go back to physical Windows devices – the vulnerabilities, the manual effort. The problem is with us being remote working, being in so many time zones, you're never going to get the vulnerabilities. And when they were just out of control, I felt my job was a daily thing just doing vulnerabilities. So, we made a decision [to use Macs]. The way we manage them in Kandji is a lot, they're more gradual, the updates, like once a month. So, we do have certain developers who need to use Windows because of .NET. So, what we do is when that is the case, we don't run up a Cloud PC. What we run up is something, another piece of software called Parallels. And what that does, it creates your Mac into a Windows virtual machine. It's a really good bit of software.”

Banking, Insurance & financial services, Very high spend

3.4.5. Benefits and drawbacks of competitors

MacOS and ChromeOS were seen as the main competitors to Windows. These were chosen by a few of our participants' organisations as they were seen as better for certain use cases, more secure or more cost effective, but all still had some staff who were using Windows.

246. The benefits and drawbacks of these main competitors and others commonly mentioned are summarised below, with those mentioned most often at the top.

Competitors: Windows	Benefits	Drawbacks
MacOS/ Mac	Some end-users used MacOS as it was better for creative work e.g. building iPhone/iPad apps, marketing/design work (graphics, video, photos, music). It was also perceived as a given/best-in-class for creative work. A few staff used because of personal preference/ familiarity. Some decision-makers see MacOS as more secure than Microsoft (fewer cyberattacks/ vulnerabilities).	Hardware could be seen as too expensive. Some felt MacOS was more “closed” – other software less likely to be compatible. File conversion issues (many MacOS end-users in our sample use Office for this reason). Intune not seen as good at managing Macs (need extra management time/ to get alternative software).
ChromeOS/ Chromebook	A few used ChromeOS as it was low cost, and easy to use and manage. Used for e.g. web workloads, high volume, cheaper, basic hardware for staff who worked in the field.	Lack of familiarity for end-users e.g. during a trial, some found it hard to adjust to user differences vs Microsoft. Perceived lack of/ lower compatibility with third-party applications e.g. accounting software.
Other e.g. Linux & various distributions e.g. Kali Linux, Ubuntu	A few used Linux as it was low cost and/ or also strong for IT/ development work e.g. security/ penetration testing.	Training, extra skills required. Harder to find skilled staff/ more expensive to hire.

“[We use] Windows 11. Yeah, and then we have a design team who are on Mac and MacOS.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, High spend

“Developers love Macs because it's easier to work in their VM environments. [...] underlying it's a Linux environment.”

Business & professional services, Very high spend

Chromebook trial: “The shortcuts and the keys are different to the way that you use them on a Microsoft keyboard. So, we had complaints from users to say, look, I've done this all my life. Now why have I got keyboards that don't like Ctrl+C?”

Public sector, Very high spend

3.5. Security software

3.5.1. Overview

Across all interviews, decisions around different types of security software came down to a combination of risk, convenience and cost. In general, it was felt that Microsoft's offer in this space had improved in recent years, meaning the risk of choosing Microsoft was lower than it used to be and the convenience of sticking with Microsoft's offer was therefore more attractive.

247. Conversations around security software revealed tensions in business decision making. Choosing a Microsoft product often meant taking a cheaper route, as the product was already included in their bundle. For the same reason (being integrated into a bundle), choosing Microsoft also meant opting for simplicity and convenience. However, for many organisations who chose Microsoft, this meant they knew they were not always choosing what they thought was the best product in that category. For example, some organisations mentioned they felt there were better alternatives to Microsoft in endpoint security and email monitoring software, yet those organisations still chose to stick with the Microsoft solution.
248. To some extent, these tensions were mitigated by a general theme that Microsoft's offer in the security software category had improved in recent years and this meant the trade-off for many organisations felt less risky than it might have done in the past. In particular, Defender, was seen as having made great improvements recently and its inclusion in E5, E3 or Business Premium licences meant that for many organisations they were now less inclined to look further or pay more for third party providers.
249. That said, security was acknowledged to be an extremely fast-moving area, and even with Microsoft products making improvements, there was still scope for many third-party providers to compete with Microsoft's offer, and many organisations used third-party products alongside Microsoft's products.

“We use a Microsoft product to tell us how secure we are, and then we test that using other people's security software”

Business & professional services, Mid spend

3.5.2. Products and purchasing

Security products mentioned in the research covered a wide range, with the most common being antivirus software (AV) or endpoint protection (software that protects computers and devices from cyber threats). Allied to endpoint protection was discussion around multiple device management tools, such as Microsoft's Intune. The next most commonly mentioned products were email security and Identity and Access Management (IAM) software. The main other area under discussion was firewalls and network security. In addition, there were lower levels of mentions of products such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), cloud security etc. Across all products, some participants also discussed the platforms available to them to collect and analyse logs arising from deployment of these products.

Endpoint protection, device management and Antivirus software

250. Most participants were using Microsoft Defender as they said it was included in their licence bundle. For some, this was a passive choice – they had chosen their licensing bundle for a number of reasons, one of which was the inclusion of Defender. For others, it was a more active choice – making the decision to trade up to a higher tier because of the enhanced security this provided. Many participants who talked about Defender mentioned that it had greatly improved in its effectiveness recently and this meant that the convenience and cost efficiency that came with choosing Defender, enhanced its attractiveness.
251. However, for a minority of participants, there were compelling reasons for choosing third party antivirus (AV) or endpoint security software providers. For these organisations, they felt that the superior capabilities of the non-Microsoft offering outweighed the convenience of solely using Microsoft Defender. In a very small number of cases, companies felt that Microsoft products were the most likely to be the target of malicious actors and so it made more sense to deploy a non-Microsoft solution to guard the Microsoft ecosystem.
252. Organisations who tended to use non-Microsoft endpoint security products skewed towards the larger end in the overall sample and use was not so prevalent in smaller organisations. These organisations were advocates for “layered defence” hence employing an additional layer to Microsoft's Defender. They also valued the outsourced security operations centre (SOC) that came with these products, which was not offered by Defender. There was no specific sector where this behaviour was more prevalent. It is important to note that “layered defence” could mean two different things. For some (the majority where third-party endpoint products were being used), it meant an additional solution

on top of Defender. For the rest, it meant not using Defender at all, but a different product for their endpoint security. However, these organisations were using Microsoft for all other security products and they said this was a “layered” approach as it did not rely on one provider entirely.

253. Overall, of those who specifically talked about their endpoint security solution (the majority of the sample), some deployed Defender with no third party solution, some used a third party solution with Defender and a smaller minority said they only used a third party solution for endpoint security.
254. Of all Microsoft’s security products, Intune was seen as having improved the most over the last few years. It was seen as integrating very well with Defender and giving organisations a “single pane of glass” through which they could manage all devices in their organisation. There was very little reference to any competitors either being used or being considered as alternatives to Intune for mobile device management. This aligned with the widely held view that it was the best in the market for this specific security task. The only occasions where competitors to Intune were mentioned, were in relation to Mac usage. Here, Jamf and Kandji were mentioned as better for Mac management than Intune.

“Well, if you look at Microsoft, it's automatically deployed as soon as somebody logs into one of our laptops... Whereas to set all that up with [alternative product] and to manage the licensing for [alternative product] where you needed a different key on each laptop was just a headache. So, by moving it to a model where all the licensing was controlled centrally was... it made it a lot easier.”

Business & Professional Services, High spend

“So primarily for EDR, we're actually using Sophos rather than Defender. So, our XDR EDR solution on the endpoints is all Sophos. That's because they sell what's called an MDR service that sits alongside that. So, Sophos provide us with a 24/7 security operations centre that monitors our systems for us. So, if a breach occurs at 1 in the morning, Sophos deal with it.”¹

Business & Professional Services, Very high spend

“if you go back 10, 15 years ago, Microsoft didn't do mobile device management. Then Intune was born and it's gone from a newcomer to probably the strongest product on the market now for mobile device management.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Very high spend

¹ EDR is Endpoint Detection and Response; XDR is Extended Detection and Response; MDR is Managed Detection and Response.

Identity and Access Management (IAM) software

255. Microsoft's offer in the IAM category seemed to be particularly prevalent across participants in our sample. Many of these participants talked about using Entra ID and Azure AD. These products (especially Entra ID) were seen to seamlessly integrate with their Microsoft software estate and had again improved a lot in recent years. It was also seen as integrating really well with third-party apps, allowing single sign-on (SSO) into those apps alongside Microsoft productivity apps. Using Entra ID made the migration to Azure much easier and once migrated into Azure, the continued use of Entra ID was seen as the obvious course of action as it was so integrated into all layers of their Microsoft software estate by that point.
256. The risk of adopting a third-party IAM solution was seen as high, given the huge importance attached to knowing that only authorised people were able to access your network. This therefore meant that in order to choose a non-Microsoft solution here, there would have to be an extremely compelling reason, which very few companies felt there was. This reliance on Entra ID had been further solidified as more companies moved their workloads onto the cloud, and specifically onto Azure. A strong theme emerging from the interviews was that third party IAM solutions did not integrate as well with Azure compared to Entra ID. This, allied to Entra ID's improved performance meant that participants struggled to articulate a business case for considering a non-Microsoft solution for their IAM software. Overall, no participant advocated a third-party solution as preferable to Entra ID, and the few who had tried alternatives (e.g. Okta, PingID or Duo) were either reverting to Microsoft or had rejected the alternative.

"If you want to have cloud-native identity provider services that integrate nicely with your operating system and your office suite, your productivity suite, as of today, the only way to do that is Azure. So, there are other identity providers out there, but none of them integrates with Windows. For example, if you need to log on to your Windows machine, you have to have a Windows account, Microsoft account."

Banking, insurance & financial services, High spend

Email security

257. Email security software was an area where non-Microsoft solutions were used quite extensively, either on top of the Microsoft solution included in their bundle, or instead of Microsoft's offer.
258. The reasons for choice of which email security software used came down to an evaluation of the risk, reward and convenience of adopting Microsoft's solution versus a non-Microsoft solution. Organisations that used Microsoft's Defender for Office or Exchange Online Protection tended to do so because they saw this as a cheaper solution (as it was already included in their licensing costs). It was

also seen as a solution which was easier to administer and integrate with the rest of the Microsoft ecosystem. The convenience point is important here as email security and phishing scams were areas where vigilance and constant scanning was said to be very important. Due to the fact that all organisation's IT teams have limited bandwidth, some participants pointed out that they chose a "good enough" integrated Microsoft solution for email security because this was easier and more convenient to monitor than a third-party solution.

259. However, other organisations took the view that the Microsoft solution for email security was not the best available and that because this area was felt to be so important and a potential weakness for all organisations in terms of IT security, they preferred to adopt a non-Microsoft solution even though this incurred additional cost. Mimecast was the most commonly mentioned alternative with others such as Barracuda, Egress, Darktrace and Check Point also being mentioned. These organisations also tended to take the view that they would always need to deploy two layers of security for email scanning as phishing scams were constantly becoming more sophisticated and to rely on one provider to keep up with the evolving threats would be negligent on their part.

"If I look at the options that I have sitting within Mimecast against what I have in Defender for Office, the list is substantially longer. They are deploying something at the moment called CyberGraph, which is automatically detecting business email compromise for us, which is phenomenal."

Business & professional services, Very high spend

Firewalls and network security

260. Specific firewall solutions were only mentioned by a relatively small number of participants, but where they were the solutions mentioned tended to be non-Microsoft. Some participants took the view that Microsoft was fundamentally not in the business of providing firewalls.
261. Where firewall solutions were mentioned, it was clear a number of third party providers were being used such as Sonic Wall, Fortinet, Palo Alto, Barracuda and Check Point. The reasons behind this tended to be around a need to "defend in depth" so that a non-Microsoft product was seen as better at guarding the perimeter of the Microsoft ecosystem. Some organisations were still operating some or all of their software estate on-premise and participants reported this necessitated a non-Microsoft solution for their organisations.

Security Monitoring

262. The final widely mentioned area, where it was clear that participants did see alternatives to Microsoft was security monitoring. A Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) solution was a key part of the IT team's approach to cyber security. Microsoft's solution – Sentinel – was adopted by many

- participants, but by no means all. Others were evaluating Sentinel while using another solution, before deciding whether to adopt the Microsoft offer or not.
263. The role of the SIEM was reportedly to ingest data from multiple sources across the IT real estate and present that back to the IT team in as useful and actionable a way as possible. This crucially important layer of information management was said to be serviced by a number of non-Microsoft software providers. The participants in this study were using solutions from providers such as Splunk, Rapid7, Darktrace as well as externally provided managed services. The reasons for using a non-Microsoft solution tended to be due to both cost and effectiveness. Microsoft Sentinel was seen as expensive and also not as effective as some of the competitor offerings.
264. Where Microsoft Sentinel was being used it tended to be either because the skillset of the IT team was so Microsoft dominant that to work with non-Microsoft tools was seen as inefficient, or because it was seen to work seamlessly with Defender, Intune and Entra ID, which was enough for some people.

“We did have a managed service for our security operations centre that was running off the back of Sentinel. But what we found was the outputs were not great. They weren’t spotting things that we should have known about, and they were pointing out things that we probably didn’t care about.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Very high spend

3.5.3. Microsoft benefits and drawbacks

The key benefits of using Microsoft’s security software solution (across all security software categories) were cost and ease of integration. Microsoft’s solutions were seen as always integrating seamlessly with the rest of the ecosystem and this translated into an easier IT estate to manage from a cyber security point of view. In the case of Microsoft Defender in particular, this solution was seen as having closed the gap to the competition considerably in recent years, meaning that a further benefit was cost (if already included in the licence) and peace of mind. However, Microsoft Defender was also recognised as not best in class, especially at the basic level and so some organisations either looked for alternatives or felt they needed to trade up to a higher tier of Microsoft licence in order to gain access to the level of Defender they were comfortable with. In other areas (email security, firewall, SIEM) it was felt that the non-Microsoft solutions were sufficiently better to warrant choosing them over (or in addition to) the Microsoft solution

Benefits

265. The most common benefits of Microsoft security products mentioned were:
266. **Cost:** Microsoft security products were included in licences so for some participants “there is no point paying twice” for a third party solution. This view

was expressed across multiple security product areas, not simply endpoint solutions. For some, it was the key reason behind choosing E5 licences as all Microsoft security products were available within this tier.

267. **Integration & consolidation:** Integration here was spoken about in terms of Microsoft Defender integrating seamlessly with other products such as Entra ID, Intune, Office etc, or it could be spoken about all Microsoft's security products integrating into one portal. Again, this latter point was mentioned in connection with E5 licences.
268. **Operational simplicity:** Staying with Microsoft's security solutions made security management and policy centralisation easier for some organisations. The ability to stay on top of the threats identified by security software was a key factor for many, and using only Microsoft was seen by some as an easier, and therefore more effective way to do this.
269. **Capability and Effectiveness:** While in many of the sub-categories of security software, participants felt there were specialist providers who were best in class, Microsoft's solution was often seen as "good enough" and in particular seen as having improved recently. The sense of Microsoft's solutions having improved applied strongly to Defender and Entra ID, such that choosing a non-Microsoft solution for either endpoint or IAM was viewed as not worth the extra effort to manage.
270. Other benefits of using Microsoft security solutions included the increased ease of passing compliance questionnaires and audits due to clients viewing the Microsoft ecosystem as a secure environment in itself. So, for example, using Intune for device management might provide external clients with a level of reassurance that third party providers would not (due to question marks over integration with Microsoft).

"I actually upgraded our licences to Business Premium so that we could get Microsoft Defender, and it saved a few grand a year in the process. It gave us a better product at a lower price point by taking that as part of the bundle."

Business & professional services, Mid spend

"With the Microsoft antivirus because everything just natively feeds into Microsoft Sentinel, Microsoft Defender, all of the Microsoft dashboards. You're kind of seeing everything through a single pane of glass rather than having to log into various different websites to check on the latest security alerts."

Telecoms, media & entertainment, High spend

Drawbacks

271. The most common drawbacks of Microsoft security solutions mentioned were:

272. **Cost and upgrades:** For two of Microsoft's commonly mentioned security products – Defender and Intune – some organisations felt they were compelled to opt for a higher licensing tier in order to access the level of security they were comfortable with. This meant organisations feeling they had to opt for either Business Premium (over Standard) or E5 (over E3) which they would otherwise not have wanted to do. However, Sentinel was simply described as expensive by a few in our sample.
273. **Capability gaps:** While Defender's recent improvement was widely acknowledged, there was still a sense that other endpoint solutions were more effective. Sophos, Darktrace and CrowdStrike were mentioned as best in class by some participants. These capability gaps were seen as wider in other areas, particularly email security, SIEM (Sentinel) and Microsoft Purview were seen as quite far behind the competition. It should be noted that experience of Purview was quite limited within the sample of organisations spoken to.
274. **Concentration risk:** Some organisations viewed dependence solely on Microsoft for security solutions as a potentially risky strategy. This was for a number of reasons. There was some concern that sole dependence on Microsoft's security ecosystem was a point of failure if Microsoft's security portals went down. For some there was also a more philosophical view that Microsoft products were not best placed to monitor the Microsoft ecosystem (other organisations took the opposite view to this). There was a sense that Microsoft's ubiquity made it a prime target for attack and so third party products would be better at identifying these threats. Finally, some organisations took a policy decision to deploy two lines of defence, particularly around emails and AV software.
275. **Interoperability issues:** Where decisions were taken to deploy non-Microsoft solutions, some organisations expressed frustration at Microsoft security products not always integrating smoothly. For example, a small number of participants reported Defender not interoperating with Linux servers. Organisations who used Macs reported integration problems with Intune (after an update to the Apple products) and also that Defender would not run on MacBooks.

"The whole sole reason of using XSIAM is because we then ingest all our firewall logs to XSIAM. If the same logs were ingested into Sentinel, it would cost us millions of pounds, which is not a smart or feasible solution."

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Very high spend

“If Microsoft create the operating system and create the virus checker, there's a bit of a conflict of interest. Whereas if you have a different business doing your virus checking and security, then there's a nice air gap between the checker and the person who you're checking against.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, High spend

“Sophos includes an MDR service with a 24/7 security operations centre... if a breach occurs at 1 in the morning, Sophos deal with it. With Defender we would need another third party to analyse Defender's responses.”

Business & professional services, Very high spend

“Defender gives you alerting, but it doesn't really explain where it's coming from or what other correlated events could be related, whereas Darktrace is much better at that.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, High spend

“Microsoft sort of provide that [Defender], but more of an AI-driven rather than a person-driven system, and I don't think it works as well [as CrowdStrike's human-led approach].”

Healthcare & life sciences, High spend

3.5.4. Barriers and drivers to switching away from Microsoft

The barriers expressed by participants for not switching away from Microsoft closely followed the benefits participants associated with choosing Microsoft security products. These tended to fall into commercial and integration benefits. Linked to the second point was a feeling that switching away from Microsoft could introduce a level of risk which organisations did not feel was justified. The strongest drivers for switching were felt to be around specific pain points. These could be described in terms of cost, or a capability gap attributable to a specific Microsoft solution, but were not expressed in terms of moving away from the whole Microsoft security ecosystem. Due to this perceived level of risk in switching away from Microsoft for what was sometimes perceived to be minimal benefit, very few organisations were actively looking to switch away from Microsoft even if there was quite widespread acknowledgement of viable alternatives in the security software category.

Barriers

276. **Commercial:** The inclusion of many Microsoft security software products in different bundles meant it would be commercially very hard for organisations to

justify the addition of a third-party solution unless the risks of not doing so outweighed the benefits. This applied to Defender, Entra ID, Intune and Purview especially.

277. **Integration:** The “joined up” nature of Microsoft’s security ecosystem meant that to consider unpicking it would be seen as an unnecessary use of internal resources. This meant that any third party solution was generally (though not always) deployed in addition to the Microsoft solution (if at all). Deciding to do this, then became a commercial cost/benefit decision rather than one of necessity, as there was always the Microsoft solution as an option due to it being included in most bundles.
278. **Coupling of Windows with Entra ID:** Participants reported that the way in which Entra ID now works with Microsoft Active Directory and Windows OS meant that for some the idea of choosing another IAM was viewed as very hard to imagine or justify. These participants tended to be those with very high Microsoft spend levels and more complex estates overall. The improvements in Entra ID meant that the benefit of considering another solution were reduced, whereas the risk of adopting a third party solution due to less seamless integration, meant that Entra ID was now seen as the only option for many participants.
279. **Internal skills base:** The familiarity that organisations based on the Microsoft ecosystem have built up has become self-fulfilling for some. Participants spoke about it being harder for their IT teams to deal with non-Microsoft security products, when they were so familiar with the Microsoft security ecosystem and the outputs it produced. While additional training was an option, some organisations could not see there was sufficient additional benefit in doing this.
280. Other barriers included more direct barriers such as being locked into contracts for tiers which effectively prevented them from looking for alternatives until such time as these contracts were up for renewal. A few organisations mentioned concerns around audits and compliance if they were to deploy non-Microsoft solutions and so were not actively considering those.

“Sometimes having a tool there and a tool there and a tool there, the good thing about Microsoft is it's in the same stack and it is all together. You know, when you want to report on third-party tools, it can be a bit of a challenge.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, Very high spend

“Defender is a bit of a problem moving away from because it's part of the agreement, the [public sector] Microsoft agreement I mentioned earlier. Basically, we have to sign up to that agreement, we have to use ATP [Advanced Threat Protection]. The Defender ATP product.”

Public sector, High spend

“So, when you move to a different set of things, it's just people are either hesitant towards the change or it gets difficult for – because the time consumed during the change, we're better off staying in the same product.”

Healthcare & life sciences, Low spend

Drivers

281. As mentioned, drivers for switching to a non-Microsoft product were often product specific. They were also not generally leading to full switching behaviour but, if any action at all was taken based on these drivers it was to consider and possibly purchase an additional solution:
282. **Cost:** Microsoft Sentinel, in particular, was felt to be an expensive solution by a small number of participants. Comparisons were made with Splunk and Rapid7, with both seen as considerably cheaper.
283. **Capability gaps:** Microsoft's email security solution as part of Defender (Defender for Office) was seen as inferior by some and led to the use of competitor products such as Mimecast or Check Point. For a very small number, Defender's use of AI was seen as inferior to using human-led screening processes as adopted by CrowdStrike. Again, Microsoft Sentinel was seen as inferior to the competition by some, especially when linked to the cost for Sentinel.
284. **Independence and defence in depth:** For some organisations, the driver to adopting non-Microsoft solutions came from a belief that they needed a third party product to protect their Microsoft ecosystem. Even then, this was done on a product by product basis, not at the level of an entire non-Microsoft ecosystem to replace Microsoft's security ecosystem. Other organisations simply felt that when it came to email security or AV screening, two layers were better than one, leading to the purchase of a third-party solution.

“Automox won on pricing and, you know, the solutions were almost neck and neck, but the price won it there. It was 7 grand a year to use Automox.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

“We tend to scan with third-party products and use third parties to help us look for vulnerabilities because then we're not using Microsoft to check Microsoft.”

Public Sector, Very high spend

3.5.5. Benefits and drawbacks of competitors

The benefits of using competitor products map very closely to the drivers for potentially switching away from the Microsoft solution, in that they tend to be very product area specific. The drawbacks of using competitor products, by contrast, were more about the lack of an obvious benefit in moving away from the Microsoft offer. These can be seen in the summary table below for some of the key competitor products mentioned by participants.

Competitors:	Benefits	Drawbacks
Sophos	Superior capability and robustness out of the box. 24/7 managed service. Cost (occasionally).	More expensive than Defender on servers. Insufficient for “enterprise” size business.
CrowdStrike	24/7 human-led monitoring. More tools than Microsoft. Robust – used by governments.	Costlier than Microsoft. Needs separate software estate, whereas Defender was integrated. High profile security incident.
McAfee	Historically good for AV. Only used now for on-premise.	Resource heavy – slows machines down. Not suitable for cloud.
Norton	Offers extras like VPN and password manager.	Resource heavy – slows machines down. No better than Microsoft.
Mimecast	Email security better than O365. Superior to Defender for Office. CyberGraph feature market leading.	Can be harder to manage than Defender. Extra cost.

Darktrace	AI-based behavioural monitoring better than E5 solution. Detects suspicious activity beyond viruses.	Defender seen to be catching up with it. Harder to justify additional cost.
Barracuda	Powerful at a good price point.	Similar functionality offered by Defender these days. Overzealous filtering.
Splunk	Good functionality.	No drawbacks mentioned.

"It's [Darktrace] kind of more AI-based on user behaviour... if I logged onto my machine this evening at 10 o'clock and decided I wanted to delete loads of data off SharePoint, it would clearly... go, well, it's very unusual for him to be working at that time... Why is he deleting this data? And it would immediately then just cut my account."

Other Sector, High spend

"They basically brought in CrowdStrike from the higher tier plan and said they would add it on for, I think it was like £2 add-on per seat sort of thing. And at that point we thought, well, we might as well."

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

3.6. Server operating systems

3.6.1. Overview

Most organisations described Windows Server-heavy estates spanning on-prem and hybrid setups. Alongside these organisations a substantial minority described themselves as "cloud first", occasionally operating across more than one cloud provider – these organisations were more likely than others to also be using Linux servers as well as Windows Server. A small minority in the sample had outsourced server OS management meaning their operating system was essentially invisible to them.

285. Across all organisations spoken to, software estate setups covered everything from fully on-prem, through hybrid estates (mixing on-prem with Azure or very occasionally other clouds), cloud first, cloud only all the way to infrastructure as a service (IaaS), or platform as a service (PaaS) models where the server was either invisible or seen as irrelevant to the way the software estate was set up.

286. Windows Server was still generally seen as the default for core business services, and this view could be found across on-prem, hybrid and fully cloud organisations. Reasons behind using Windows Server tended to fall into technical or skills-based. Cost (or bundling) was less likely to be mentioned as a factor here.
287. Various applications were described as requiring to be run on Windows Server or easier to run on Windows Server. Organisations using Active Directory and/or Entra ID described running Windows Server as a necessary part of ensuring these important workloads were integrated into their ecosystem. Alongside the above, the skillset of IT teams and developers played a big role in server OS choice. Where the team was heavily (or entirely) Microsoft trained and comfortable, it drove organisations to stick with Windows in order to make management of their IT estate as efficient and effective as possible.
288. Linux servers were more likely to be found in cloud only or hybrid organisations. Linux virtual machines (VMs) were often deployed for web hosting/website workloads. They were also used for security (and other forms of) monitoring or specific workloads around telephony or queue management. A common thread here was a tendency for Linux deployment to be “Microsoft adjacent”, meaning it could talk to the Microsoft ecosystem, but was serving a workload that did not need to be fully integrated into that ecosystem (in the way that Entra ID or Active Directory does). Another common thread here was that Linux tended to be used where an organisation employed developers and the developer team preferred working in a Linux environment. Where this was the case, organisations were often working with containers, deploying them to Kubernetes which ran workloads across a Linux-based ecosystem.

“For me, operating system on a laptop like we’re both using, end-user device, or operating system on a server, it was already Microsoft. Why would I go anywhere else? And at the same time, there’s an element of skill set here. Less people know how to do Linux or Red Hat or whatever. So, Microsoft, just the obvious.”

Business & professional services, Very high spend

“The general RAM usage running that Linux server when it’s got no requests sits at 40, 50 meg... the OS running on the Windows, it’s running 2, 3 gig just to sit there doing nothing... we get more out of our hardware using the web servers on Linux.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

3.6.2. Products and purchasing

Across all organisations interviewed, Windows Server was mentioned by the majority of participants, with Linux commonly present as secondary OS. A small number of organisations were using Unix, Oracle and IBM platforms, mainly for very specific legacy reasons. Outside of those listed, a small number of organisations reported an environment based on PaaS, which was essentially serverless.

Windows Server main use cases

- 289. Windows Server was being used for a wide range of use cases across all organisations, but by far the most common workload mentioned was as the server OS underpinning an organisation's database management system, which was based on SQL Server. While it was occasionally acknowledged that you could run SQL Servers on Linux, nearly all organisations interviewed were running them on Windows as this was felt to be the most natural fit.
- 290. The next most common use case for Windows Server was for identity and software estate management. The interplay between Entra ID, Active Directory and Azure meant that for many organisations Windows Server was felt to be the only realistic choice. Identity management was said to be so crucial to the way IT teams manage their organisation's software estate, that to run this on Linux (for example) was seen to create risk and a potential point of failure in an area where this would be seen as business critical.
- 291. This same interplay underpinned many organisations' decision to go with Azure when they migrated fully or partially to the cloud. It followed that when this migration happened, Windows was the default choice to ensure smooth migration and ongoing management.
- 292. Some participants reported their specific software packages requiring Windows, although this was more commonly mentioned as a factor linked to RDBMS choice.
- 293. In addition to the above, there were fewer mentions of use cases such as security management, remote desktop management, legacy on-prem servers (including back up servers) and occasionally web hosting, though Linux was much more common here.

Microsoft purchasing process

- 294. For the majority of organisations using Windows Server, its use was either explicitly or implicitly never questioned within the organisation. In many cases, the decision to go with Windows predated the participant by several years and it was simply the default, status quo operating system which was never questioned within the organisation.

295. Linux was the only serious alternative, but this was not seriously considered as a wholesale replacement for Windows servers, instead being deployed by some for specific workloads, where it was considered more advantageous than Windows to do so.
296. Occasionally, IT consultancies or resellers were seen as having influence here in that they had influenced the original decision to go with Windows, but this was not a decision that was being re-evaluated every year.
297. The only key point where server choice was looked at tended to be around migration to the cloud – either fully or partially. Many of the organisations interviewed had chosen to migrate to Azure and again for reasons of integration (see below) and particularly ease of migration, Windows Server was chosen (or more accurately retained) at this point.

“I don’t think we ever discussed not using Microsoft Server. I think it was just the given. We’re going to use Microsoft Server. It’s going to be the one. The 4 bits of software I need to run all run happily on Windows.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

“Within the OSs themselves, we need Active Directory, which is a Microsoft product for the synchronisation to the cloud. [...] the only other servers that we’re left with outside of the ERP ones, which we were forced to go this way, would be our file store and a sort of an app server... Again, Windows is all they support, so if all the software you need to run needs to run on Windows, that’s what we need to run.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

“For me, operating system on a laptop like we’re both using, end-user device, or operating system on a server, it was already Microsoft. Why would I go anywhere else? And at the same time, there’s an element of skill set here. Less people know how to do Linux or Red Hat or whatever. So, Microsoft, just the obvious.”

Business & professional services, Very high spend

3.6.3. Windows Server benefits and drawbacks

The main “benefit” cited by organisations was really phrased more as a necessity. Even where organisations acknowledged a theoretical alternative, Windows Server was so embedded in their software estate, that to entertain the alternative(s) was close to unthinkable for those organisations. Other benefits tended to be around compatibility and fit with the Microsoft ecosystem as well as matching the skillset of their IT teams in particular. Overall, the sense was one of a default choice rather than an active one. This tied in to the key drawbacks mentioned, which tended to centre on a feeling of being locked in to Windows Server and the cost of Windows Server compared, in particular, to Linux. Neither sentiment was generally expressed very strongly, and it should be noted that the majority of the sample could not think of any drawbacks linked to using Windows Server

Benefits

298. The most common benefits of Windows Server mentioned were:

299. **Integration:** Windows Server was seen as a default choice by many because it aligned so well with the rest of the Microsoft software estate. Whether that meant Office, SQL servers or Active Directory and IAM strength – Windows Server’s ability to seamlessly integrate with all these aspects of the ecosystem was often cited as its key benefit.
300. **Compatibility:** Sitting alongside integration was the compatibility of Windows Server with other applications (ERP, dealer management, logistics, warehouse apps, access control etc), where the software vendor stipulated Windows Server in order to run their software. Taken together, these two benefits alone added up to a powerful reason as to why so many organisations saw Windows Server as a default and not really something they could contemplate switching away from.
301. **Skills and familiarity:** Interaction with Windows Server was only really something that IT teams and developer teams were concerned with. Given the reliance by many organisations on Microsoft’s ecosystem overall, it followed that many of the IT teams’ skillsets were purely Microsoft based. This meant that to contemplate alternatives to Windows was not just a cost investment, it would also need to be an investment in training and time for the organisation, which was not always easy to justify.
302. **Ease of management:** Windows Server was described as being easier to manage than Linux, at least on a day-to-day basis. This was almost certainly linked to the skills point above but was phrased in terms of usability rather than familiarity.
303. **Azure migration and integration:** Linked to the first point around integration, but specific to those organisations that had migrated to Azure, was the strongly held view that sticking with Windows Server made the migration process and ongoing management of the IT estate easier than switching to an alternative

at the point of migration. This was particularly mentioned in relation to Active Directory and IAM and the risk of either of these workloads not migrating seamlessly was a concern for organisations.

304. **Security:** Again, more relevant to those organisations in the cloud (either wholly or partially), was the view that it was easier to roll out patches to Windows Servers in one go, whereas running alternative or additional non-Microsoft servers would add a layer of complexity to being able to maintain a secure environment. As before, this idea of introducing risk where the benefit wasn't clear or sufficient was phrased as a benefit of sticking with Windows Server.
305. There were a small number of mentions of cost benefits, although in general cost conversations in relation to server OSs were linked to adding workloads or compute into their cloud usage, which for many organisations was always incurring additional costs. So, when Windows Server was mentioned favourably it was in very specific cases where the alternative was more expensive. This was relatively unusual.

"Microsoft Server we use on-prem because it's the de facto leader in what we do... everybody looks at Microsoft and goes; we offer an application that sits on it... But most of it out of the box works with Windows Server."

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

"They were very clever at covering a broad-spectrum email, office, server, and database platforms... which work together to give you almost a single ecosystem that you could manage... You moved to something else and you then needed these specialist skills which are incredibly difficult to get and incredibly expensive to pay for."

Healthcare & life sciences, Very high spend

Windows Server drawbacks

306. The most common drawbacks of using Windows Server mentioned were:
307. **Cost:** The most often cited drawback linked to using Windows Server was the cost, either in absolute terms or relative to Linux. These examples could apply to organisations still running on-prem servers but were more widely expressed where organisations had migrated to the cloud. In both cases, the cost of Windows Server licences was mentioned. For on-prem organisations, the cost of adding another server would have to include the cost of adding an additional Windows Server licence, which meant organisations had to limit the number of additional servers. In the cloud, adding new workloads would incur additional compute costs, but if running Windows Server, would also incur a licence

cost. This was in contrast to Linux, where you would only have to pay for the compute.

308. **Cloud costs:** Clearly linked to the above but specifically mentioned in relation to what Microsoft charges for Azure use (rather than Windows Server licences in Azure), the feeling of being locked into using Windows servers when migrating to Azure and the subsequent level of spend on Azure cloud computing was framed by some as a drawback of feeling tied in to Windows Server during the migration process.
309. **Lock-in:** Organisations described their dependency on Windows Server as being very hard to unwind. This was linked to multiple examples around migration, IAM, applications etc and for most it was simply seen as the default for this reason. But for a few, they saw this concentration of reliance on Microsoft as a potential risk. Where this view was held it tended not to be only in relation to Windows servers, but more about the Microsoft ecosystem as a whole and linked to potential price rises rather than today's costs.
310. Other drawbacks were only mentioned in very small numbers and related to the flipside of some of the benefits. So, occasionally, security patches could cause technical issues with Windows. For some, the licensing was complex to understand, but this was only mentioned by a small number of participants.

"You now have to buy a minimum of 16 cores even if you've only got a 4-core processor. So, all this nonsense and all this carry-on, – this Microsoft licensing, you need a qualification to understand it sometimes."

IT, Mid spend

"And it's almost a golden cage with Microsoft because it's very, very good and convenient. As soon as you move away from that, that convenience evaporates. And that makes the decision to move away from it much more difficult than it potentially otherwise would be."

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

3.6.4. Barriers and drivers to switching away from Windows Server

The barriers to switching away from Windows Server closely followed what many saw as the benefits of using Windows Server, but some saw as a drawback. That is to say that for many organisations, the seamless integration of Windows Server with the Microsoft software estate, including Azure, as well as other software packages reliance on it, was seen as a benefit, but also a barrier to switching to another server OS. Other barriers also linked to earlier benefits and drawbacks included a need to retrain and a perceived additional time and effort (and therefore cost) needed. Essentially, the lack of a business case for switching away was in itself a barrier. There was almost no desire and therefore talk of drivers to switch away from Windows Server. Many organisations spoke of why and where they use Linux servers *in addition* to Windows Server, but not instead of. The only conversations related to this topic were around serverless environments, adopted by very few, but on the radar of more organisations as a possible future scenario.

Barriers

311. **Integration:** The seamless integration of Windows Server with the Microsoft software estate was a key benefit for many organisations of using Windows Server, but it was also a reason why organisations perceived a barrier to switching or even considering switching. Allied to this was the requirement of some applications and SQL Server to run on Windows Server and the combination of these two things became a huge barrier to switching away from Windows Server.
312. **Lack of alternative skills:** Many organisations realised that if they were to switch to a non-Microsoft (most likely Linux) alternative, it would require a retraining and upskilling exercise among their IT team. This was not something most organisations were willing to contemplate for what was perceived to be very little or no upside, given the integration point made earlier.
313. **Time and effort:** All of the above can be boiled down to extra time and effort (and therefore cost) that an organisation would need to factor in if it was to consider switching to a non-Microsoft server OS. When the perceived business benefit in doing so was seen as negligible then this became a barrier in the minds of IT decision makers.
314. **Cloud-related:** The cost of migrating an Azure/Windows software estate to an Azure/Linux software estate was seen as prohibitive, given the amount of downtime during what would be a technically complex migration. Allied to that, any migration exercise like this risked connections breaking for what was again perceived to be minimal or no business benefit.

“Our ERP provider requires a Microsoft Windows Server. And that’s a similar story across other things as well.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

“It’s complicated. It’s high consequence if you get it wrong. There’s large amounts of data. You can’t do it [migration] in a button press.”

Business & professional services, Mid spend

Drivers of non-Windows deployment

315. As mentioned above, there was almost no desire to contemplate switching away wholesale from Windows servers. Therefore, the conversation was more around why some organisations deployed alternatives to Windows in specific circumstances. These can be summarised below:
316. **Workload specific:** Linux was seen as the best choice for specific workloads such as web hosting, web development, monitoring and certain niche applications. This choice was then often driven by developer teams who were comfortable in a Linux environment (as well as a Windows environment).
317. **Cost:** Secondary to the above, cost became a factor if an organisation was considering adding workloads where Linux was already a technically better solution. This was because adding Linux virtual machines did not incur any additional licensing costs, only additional compute costs. So, where a workload was compute heavy, then Linux was more likely to be considered as, in a cloud environment, it would incur lower compute costs than Windows
318. **Stability:** Linux servers were seen as ‘always on’. They did not need to be rebooted in order to install a security patch, which Windows servers did. This also added to a perception of Linux servers as more stable than Windows for some workloads
319. **IaaS/PaaS benefits:** The key benefit of moving to a fully managed IaaS or PaaS solution was mainly being able to outsource server management from the organisation. Very few organisations in our sample had done this, but some had moved aspects of their workloads into this type of environment (e.g. email and file storage).

“Because it's more developer-friendly. It's more like it's easier to automate release pipelines and the software development workflow integrates nicely and always better with Linux. It's free and again it has a massive community. So, if you had an issue, it's probably very well documented out there and other people can basically chip in and help on online communities. And it's very stable. We have servers that have been up and running for several years that just wouldn't be possible with Windows Server.”

Banking, insurance & financial services, High spend

“ We've got 14 staff so to actually have physical servers just doesn't make any sense at all. So, for file storage we use SharePoint, and then all of our databases are serverless Azure.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

3.6.5. Benefits and drawbacks of Linux

The only meaningful competitor to Windows Server mentioned by participants was Linux. This report therefore focuses on Linux users' views of Linux servers, both positive and negative. Cost and workload specific benefits were the most consistently mentioned, with skills being cited as the biggest drawback

Benefits	Drawbacks
Cost – Linux does not incur licensing costs, unlike Windows Server.	Lack of in-house skills meaning retraining needed.
Strong fit with web hosting and other monitoring/niche workloads.	Not supported by some software vendors, who require Windows servers.
Lighter in terms of its use of compute resource.	Extra management burden for the IT team if running servers from multiple environments.
Faster than Windows (particularly when running on Ubuntu).	Security concerns relating to open source. Some companies said they wouldn't consider on principle.
Well supported across its open source community.	Concerns about support being community-based, rather than more formalised.

More flexible and customisable than Windows Server.	Does not integrate well with Microsoft software estate.
Fits very well in a cloud native environment. Suits developers who work with containers/ Kubernetes.	
Seen as less likely to be attacked than a Microsoft platform.	

“Reliability. Windows Server upgrades are always scary, very scary for us. And obviously the licensing cost on-prem, it was prohibitive to kind of keep adding Windows Servers, whereas once we had Windows Server underneath, it was free to add Linux virtual machines.”

Business & professional services, High spend

“We are already using Linux mostly for sort of Docker container hosting. We have a couple of different websites and other systems that run within Docker containers on the Linux.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, Mid spend

“Some of our apps would not work on Linux natively... The problem is the support and the risk that they may not work on there, which could put our business at risk.”

Public sector, Very high spend

“Linux is much more difficult to hire people who can administer it... they're that much more expensive, they're that much harder to find.”

Healthcare & life sciences, Very high spend

3.6.6. Switching from on-premises to cloud and its impact on choosing Microsoft

Around half of the organisations interviewed had migrated either some or all of their IT software estate into the cloud, and specifically onto Azure. The key reason for this was integration. They were already a Microsoft house and therefore Azure was the natural or lowest friction choice.

320. The pre-existing reliance on the Microsoft ecosystem was certainly a big factor in influencing organisational choice to migrate their software estate onto Azure,

as opposed to any other cloud provider. Azure's compatibility with Windows, M365, SQL servers, .NET code were all cited as reasons why choosing Azure was the lowest friction choice. In particular, Active Directory and Entra ID were singled out as the area where this lack of friction was exceptionally important, and so this had at least partly driven choice. Organisations also placed considerable importance on a smooth migration and ease of ongoing management. Moving onto Azure was seen as a more reliable way of ensuring both of these things. The skillset of many IT teams coming from a Microsoft background also meant that choosing Azure would be placing less of a burden on the IT teams as training and development would be relatively straightforward compared to migration onto a non-Microsoft provider's platform.

321. Other reasons were more related to moving to the cloud generally (security, reliability etc) and were not specific to Azure.
322. Some organisations did look at other providers, with AWS being most often cited, but only a minority carried out some sort of formal tendering process. For many, the path of least resistance made sound business sense. It was also true that Azure's seamless integration with Active Directory/Entra ID played a big role for some in marking down the competition as the risk and huge amount of time needed to migrate an IAM out of the Microsoft ecosystem onto another cloud provider, while technically possible, was seen as unpalatable by everyone who referenced it. This was before organisations looked at and also discounted the cost of retraining staff as unnecessary. There was some small recognition that were the migration happening today, AWS in particular had improved its migration process, but for most this decision had happened a few years ago when the gap between Azure and AWS, for a Microsoft reliant organisation, was relatively large.

"If you want to have cloud-native identity provider services that integrate nicely with your operating system and your office suite, your productivity suite. As of today, the only way to do that is Azure."

Banking, insurance & financial services, High spend

"I think it's familiarity, skills and a desire for national commonality, almost consistency. Which we're all kind of trying to do things the same way a little bit as well. It's a path of least resistance, actually."

Public Sector, Very high spend

"Nothing pays for the disruption and the risk of the migration. So why would I do it?"

Public Sector, Very high spend

3.7. RDBMS

3.7.1. Overview

By far the most common Relational Database Management Systems (RDBMS) mentioned by participants was Microsoft SQL Server. This was mentioned by a large majority of the sample. Across all RDBMS solutions mentioned, the key factor driving choice was almost always compatibility with the specific application that was running on the server in question. There were also other factors at play, such as technical skills and cost, but compatibility was the key consideration.

323. RDBMS choice was driven almost entirely by the requirements of the application that was being run linked to the need to integrate that application with the rest of the Microsoft ecosystem. The prevalence of third-party applications that run on SQL Server and the ease of integration of SQL Server with the rest of the Microsoft software estate contributed to the prevalence of Microsoft's SQL Server across the organisations interviewed.
324. In addition, as was the case with server operating systems, the technical skills of the IT teams also meant that there was a strong leaning towards SQL Server. As was also the case with Azure usage affecting the prevalence of Windows OS, the seamless integration of SQL Server with applications hosted on Azure was also an attractive feature.

3.7.2. Products and purchasing

The overriding theme when discussing database platforms was that the underlying RDBMS was typically determined by the requirements of the application that was being run. SQL Server accounted for the majority of responses among participants, but overall the view was that this was less about the organisation choosing SQL in order to fit in with the rest of the Microsoft software estate, but that the software provider specified this. It is then true that the benefit of integration was mentioned, but in this case mentioned in a secondary capacity.

Microsoft products and purchasing process

325. The Microsoft product for RDBMS is SQL Server. The decision to use SQL Server was largely vendor driven, although once in place organisations do report it would be hard to move away from SQL Server and that this may give them pause for thought if they were looking to change a particular software package.
326. For those who mentioned RDBMS use, most only used SQL Server with no other third party solution, some mainly used SQL with third party solutions for some workloads and a few said they only used a third party solution.

3.7.3. Benefits and drawbacks

Benefits of SQL Server tended to be around compatibility and integration. Following on from this, the same skillset that underpinned the rest of the Microsoft software estate was also useful here. The main drawback mentioned was cost. SQL licences were described as expensive by some organisations and the feeling of their choice being dictated by software providers added to the scrutiny SQL licences were put under.

Benefits

327. The most common benefits of Microsoft SQL Server mentioned were:
328. **Compatibility with third-party applications:** Certain software packages or applications required SQL Server in order to run, so the choice of which RDBMS to use was driven by application choice, not the other way around. In that sense, organisations did not always feel they had “chosen” the database their application was running on.
329. **Integration:** Where SQL Server was deployed, many participants were impressed by how it integrated with Microsoft development and analytics tools. Participants described how using SQL Server enabled the creation of Power BI dashboards from third-party applications.
330. **Skills and familiarity:** When it came to the skills of some IT teams, responses were very similar to those expressed in relation to Windows Server. The familiarity of these teams with Microsoft products and in particular how they integrated in Azure, was a big driver of comfort with SQL Server and meant many organisations were disinclined to look elsewhere even if they hadn’t actively chosen SQL Server in the first place.
331. **Operational simplicity:** This was most often mentioned in conjunction with managed or cloud hosted SQL Server, where participants felt their deployment in Azure reduced the need to build, maintain and manage the environment as much as it otherwise would. It was seen as efficient and labour-saving purely because of its seamless integration with Azure

“For the last 5 years, the last 3 years, 4 years since we got this all consolidated, it's happened, it's passed without incident. It's just been a non-event for us.”

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Low spend

"We have a database and allowing people to read and write from that database, super easy. You literally just log in with your like work account and you either have access or you don't have access."

Business & professional services, Very high spend

"I can't remember what type of database they [the software provider] use in their ERP, but even they said it's not easy to integrate. They said you can't integrate Power BI to it, but we can sell you this solution where it mirrors the data to SQL. So, with that, we were kind of like tied to the fact that it has to be an SQL Server."

Manufacturing, utilities and primary industry, High spend

Drawbacks

332. The most common drawbacks of Microsoft SQL Server mentioned were:

333. **Cost:** The cost of SQL in Azure drew criticism from many of those organisations who were using this service. The feeling was that this was an expensive service to run in the cloud. Participants described the cost of running SQL Servers as "exponential" and "expensive to run in the cloud". The sense was that every time an SQL Server was added, additional licensing costs were incurred and that these were substantial additional costs each time.
334. **Lock-in:** Here the description of feeling locked into SQL Servers was not directed at Microsoft, but towards the vendors of the third party software which stipulated that it had to be run on SQL Server. The suggestion was that vendors would not provide support for their software unless it was run on SQL Server. This, allied to the high costs mentioned above, led to a feeling of being locked in to SQL among a few organisations.
335. **Migration would be difficult:** Moving away from SQL Server would be difficult as code would need to be rewritten. One business spoke of the difficulty in downgrading from Enterprise to Standard SQL Server licences as this would necessitate wider changes to the software estate which would in themselves add risk to a situation which was currently working.
336. **Paying for unused features:** Linked to the above, was the idea the Enterprise level SQL Server licences offered features that an organisation was not using. Similarly, where organisations were running small applications requiring SQL Server licences, the cost of these licences could feel like overkill relative to the value of that piece of software.

"It's just the fact that you want more processing power, you have to pay the enterprise licence."

Healthcare & life sciences, High spend

"You're talking about downtime [to migrate from SQL Enterprise to Standard] it's almost like, right, we've got to stop taking, you know, £100 a day to save £1 a day."

Healthcare & life sciences, High spend

3.7.4. Barriers and drivers to switching away from Microsoft

The main barrier to switching away from Microsoft SQL Server was vendor lock in. Essentially organisations did not feel they had much choice in this area, unless they were to change a particular third party software application. Once SQL Servers were in place, then ecosystem integration became another factor which had to be considered if looking to move to an application which could run on a non-SQL Server. The main driver pushing organisations to want to switch away from SQL Server was cost. SQL licences were seen as expensive and each new application requiring SQL Servers meant additional licensing costs.

Barriers

Vendor dependency: Third party applications required SQL Servers with some saying they will not support their product if organisations run them on another RDBMS.

337. **Ecosystem dependency:** SQL Servers integrate seamlessly with .NET, Power BI, Azure, Sharepoint etc, so once in place it then becomes hard to reverse out of the software estate or even to downgrade to a lower tier of SQL licensing.

338. **Skills and retraining need:** Linked to the point above, developers familiar with a .NET environment would need additional training if non-SQL Servers were deployed. This would be additional cost and time for the organisation.

339. **Inertia:** Many SQL Servers had been deployed for some time and with little or no business case to consider alternatives, there was no impetus within the organisation to review this part of the software estate

"We don't get a choice because we buy a product, a third-party software product, and that third-party software product runs on Microsoft SQL."

Business & professional services, High spend

“Everyone knows it. It’s unbelievable. If I speak to any of them, they all know SQL ... If I suddenly bring in a new fandangled thing, they will sigh and they will huff because they’ve got to learn a new click.”

Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry, High spend

Drivers

- 340. **Cost:** SQL Enterprise licences and Azure SQL both came in for criticism as being too expensive. For some organisations, this was a line item in their Microsoft costs that they were actively looking to reduce.
- 341. **Software need:** If the organisation was looking to replace a particular third party application, then this could lead to a drive to replace the underlying SQL Server with an alternative.
- 342. **Better fit with Linux:** Other solutions were seen to fit better with Linux servers, so if an organisation wanted to add an additional workload with a Linux server, then this could drive choice towards one of the open source RDBMS solutions.
- 343. **Better fit with non-Azure cloud:** Similar to above, if an organisation had exposure to or was considering moving workloads to a cloud provider other than Azure, then this was also a moment to consider non-SQL Server solutions.

“We used to use SQL Server. But the licensing costs for SQL Server again were getting a bit on the high side for us.”

Business & professional services, Mid spend

“We use Microsoft SQL Server. Which has quite a hefty licence fee that appears as a separate line item now on ‘what I spend with Microsoft’ report. We will be moving off of that in 2027, so we’ll be using MySQL instead of Microsoft SQL Server.”

IT, High spend

3.7.5. Benefits and drawbacks of competitors

The benefits of non-Microsoft RDBMS products tended to be situational, whether that was due to vendor requirements or specific workloads that an organisation was running (on Linux for example). Drawbacks were less frequently mentioned, other than the lock-in drawback which was a common theme across all RDBMS discussions.

- 344. There were a number of competitor products mentioned when it came to RDBMS solutions. One of these (Oracle Database) was offered by a competitor

company, whereas others were described by the participants as mainly open source solutions.

Competitors: SQL Server	Benefits	Drawbacks
Oracle Database	Said to work well with software that required it (though it was the software choice which drove Oracle selection). Cheaper than SQL Server. Faster than SQL Server. Direct support from Oracle. Trusted provider.	Similar lock-in comments as SQL Server. Comes from choice being driven by vendors. Could be seen as expensive due to above (though could be software costs driving this). Hard to find skills that match. Software vendors seen as moving away from Oracle towards SQL Server. Effort to migrate from SQL Server to Oracle.
PostgreSQL	As an open source product, it was cited as free, no licensing cost. Can run on any Windows virtual machine. Better for high-volume transactional workloads. Can integrate with Entra ID.	Migration seen to require a lot of effort. Not as good for very large enterprise scale organisations with complex rather than basic needs. Skills scarcity. Said to feel exploratory, not a core solution.
MySQL	Familiarity among the developer community. Cost – much cheaper as an open source product. Very flexible when deployed on a Linux server.	Too many applications require SQL server. Tools not as simple as .NET (MS version).
Snowflake	Cheaper than Microsoft. Good interoperability with Microsoft.	Not technically an RDBMS, although was spoken about in same discussions.

Competitors: SQL Server	Benefits	Drawbacks
	Trusted provider, offering a managed service as a data platform.	Fabric was seen as Microsoft's competitor for Snowflake, and integrated seamlessly on Azure.

"We can get higher performance out of Oracle and it's cheaper. 2 reasons, they're really basic."

Business & professional services, High spend

"PostgreSQL is a full open source database we use that runs cross-platform, so it'll run on any platform."

Business & professional services, High spend

"Oracle have got a very, very strange view of the world. They still want to charge Oracle prices, which they always have done. I don't get the business model. Every time you talk to me about Oracle, it's costly and it's complex, and why would you go to Oracle?"

Healthcare & life sciences, High spend

3.7.6. Data lakes and other data platforms

Although not specifically within the original scope of the interviews, it was clear when discussing RDBMS solutions, that a number of organisations were either looking at or had recently committed to data platform solutions or data lake products which drew together data stored in SQL Server (for example), reported in Power BI and integrated on Azure, but this would now be all brought together into one platform, which was very often Microsoft Fabric.

A substantial minority of organisations were either looking at or had just bought into Microsoft Fabric, with a much smaller number having opted to go with Snowflake as their preferred solution here. As mentions of Snowflake were at a low level, definitive conclusions are not possible to reach, but the sense from the small number of users was that it integrated well with the Microsoft ecosystem and was able to pull all the data it needed to be effective.

3.8. Final thoughts from participants on quality, choice and suggested improvements in the market

3.8.1. Attitudes to quality of Microsoft ecosystem

Overall attitudes to the Microsoft ecosystem were broadly positive, though sometimes expressed quite passively in the sense that the ecosystem did not feel like something organisations have always chosen – it was simply what they did and have always done. Positive sentiment was framed as Microsoft being “something that works” or “it meets our needs”. Sometimes Microsoft was acknowledged as not best in class in a particular product area, but it was still the favoured choice due to integration and skillset plus inertia. Criticism was strongest in specific product areas such as Copilot or certain security products

345. Praise for Microsoft’s ecosystem can be distilled into three key areas:
346. **Integration and consolidation:** The simple fact of being a “Microsoft house” working across a single platform covering multiple product areas was in itself seen as Microsoft’s greatest strength and a source of praise. Some participants credited Microsoft with simplifying billing and admin (though both could still be improved further) as well as making identity and device management (two business critical areas for IT teams to get right) relatively straightforward. Some could link this to reduced workloads in security monitoring and compliance activity.
347. **Dependability of core tools:** Core Office and collaboration tools were praised by many for their dependability and familiarity for the end user. This, in turn, was a positive for IT teams as it reduced their time spent troubleshooting. This familiarity also aided collaboration, both within an organisation and across organisations – something that was increasingly seen as important.
348. **Improvements in security tools:** As referenced earlier, Microsoft’s security ecosystem was described by many as having improved substantially in recent years. These improvements, allied to integration and familiarity meant that more and more of Microsoft’s security products were said to have reached a “good enough” threshold for more and more organisations. However, this view was not universal, and where it was held many organisations still took the view that “layering” of security was increasingly necessary with third party products needed on top of Microsoft’s to reduce risk.
349. Criticism was, on balance, expressed less strongly than praise and where it was mentioned was linked to more specific use cases than the broader themes which underpinned praise. There were four specific areas that attracted criticism:
350. **Update disruption:** Heavy exposure to a variety of Microsoft’s products reportedly meant wide exposure to software updates across the entire software estate. While these were acknowledged as a fact of life, some participants felt

Microsoft could be better at communicating these in advance. It was felt that these were the major cause of additional or unexpected workloads in IT teams as well as one of the major causes of complaints from end users.

351. **Uneven reliability levels:** While reliability overall was said by many to be good, any product not working 100% of the time caused headaches for organisations. Updates were often the cause of this, but Azure also came in for some criticism for being overly complicated. Specific comments around productivity products such as “New Outlook” or “Teams” reflected end user frustrations bouncing back onto the IT team.
352. **Copilot criticisms:** The value of Copilot relative to its quality (compared to the competition) was a source of debate for many participants. For more sophisticated users it was seen as inferior to ChatGPT or Claude, while others questioned the value of paying for the Premium version of Copilot. For many, Copilot met the “good enough” threshold where its integration into the ecosystem meant it was a valued product. However, this view was not universally held.
353. **Inconsistent support:** Many organisations obtained their Microsoft support from resellers or Microsoft partners, and this was praised. However, those organisations seeking direct support from Microsoft had more mixed views. Some praised Microsoft, but others said it was difficult to know how to escalate issues or that their organisation was “too small” for Microsoft to give them the support they needed.

“They have messed up security updates. That's one thing we have to be really careful of when they do patch – you call it Patch Tuesday, whatever – but when they do the monthly release, and you'll find that something will break.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, High spend

“Even if you've got an issue, sometimes getting hold of someone at Microsoft is like trying to get a meeting with the Pope.”

Business & professional services, Mid spend

“It absolutely cripples the computer whilst you're on a meeting. And quite often, you've got really, really poor quality video. And we're a tech company. When you're on a sales pitch with a client and your video feed is not smooth, it's a really poor look.”

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

3.8.2. Changes participants would like to see

The prevailing view across the participants interviewed was that the Microsoft ecosystem was “good enough” and its integration and collaboration benefits were so important to their organisations that there was some hesitation at the idea of any interventions into the market in case this disrupted their ability to operate efficiently. However, organisations were able to make some suggestions for changes they would like to see

354. The key areas where participants would like to see change are set out below:
355. **Pricing transparency:** Some participants wanted clearer, more stable licensing structures and clearer explanations of what was and was not included in different tiers. Specific mentions were made around clearer upfront pricing for AI or Azure usage – both areas where higher usage could lead to unexpected bills which organisations did not like. Some of these views were directed at resellers rather than Microsoft. Overall, predictability in pricing was valued over scale of absolute price rises. These were expected and while organisations acknowledged a theoretical risk that Microsoft could raise prices sharply, very few had experienced this.
356. **Unbundling:** A minority of participants raised the idea of only paying for the applications or elements of licences that they actually used. Some did ask for Copilot to be unbundled so that their licence cost could be reduced and they could pay for another AI solution. However, most organisations valued integration, convenience and simplicity over this idea.
357. **Easier switching and/or migration:** As was seen earlier in relation to server operating systems and RDBMS solutions, part of the reason for organisations using Microsoft in these areas was due to historical decisions around migration and also linking workloads such as IAM to Windows Server and SQL Server. While some organisations knew it was technically possible to choose non-Microsoft solutions in these situations, they also described the idea of reversing out of the Microsoft ecosystem at this level as incredibly difficult and a risk to the organisation. This belief would need to be overturned for organisations to consider moving many of their core workloads to a non-Microsoft software estate.
358. **Interoperability issues:** Improvements in interoperability would be welcomed, though this was not widely expressed and often described as a wish that third party software providers were more compatible with Microsoft’s productivity suite than the other way around. A few organisations reported using what they saw as insecure environments like Google Drive as workarounds caused by lack of interoperability.

"If I could write the action for the CMA, it would be to unbundle Copilot from all of Microsoft's products, and to present a choice, at the point of installation, for users and enterprises."

IT, High spend

"I guess maybe this is something that could also be regulated is the ease of transfer from one thing to another, right? So, if we could say that we're in our Azure subscription, but you can relatively easily move that to AWS."

Telecoms, media & entertainment, Very high spend

"We're getting that crystal ball out and trying to predict what it's going to be rather than having some kind of ability to discuss it with an account manager and be like, look, we're doing our budgets, can you advise if there's going to be any changes this year?."

Retail, consumer & hospitality, Mid spend

4. Appendix: Fieldwork materials

4.1. Recruitment screener

Screener

INTRODUCTION

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is _____, and I work for STRAT7 Audiences. We have been commissioned by STRAT7 Jigsaw to organise some research on behalf of their client, the Competition and Markets Authority (the CMA). The CMA is the UK's principal competition and consumer protection body responsible for promoting competitive markets and tackling unfair behaviour.

We are recruiting IT decision-makers to take part in an important research project which aims to understand Microsoft customers' decision-making on their choice of business software including productivity software, PC and Server operating systems, relational database management systems, and security software.

The study is not a solicitation for business now or later. Neither you nor your company will be identifiable in the findings of the research shared with the CMA.

I'd like to ask you some questions to determine if you qualify for this particular study. The answers that you give to me today will be shared with STRAT7 Jigsaw.

The research activity and this interview will be conducted in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, and the information you provide will be treated in accordance with data protection law. You have the right to withdraw your consent to our processing the information you provide or object to our processing of your information.

This interview is just to establish eligibility for the research project and will take around 5 minutes.

If you are eligible, you may be invited to attend an online interview which will last approximately 1 hour. You will be provided with a list of the topics to be covered in the interview ahead of time. Most of the questions will relate to your experience as a decision-maker regarding your organisation's purchase and use of IT services, but some may draw on your wider expertise and knowledge.

You will receive a £X incentive for participating in the interview. This payment will be paid via BACs by STRAT7 Audiences if you qualify and attend the interview.

Q1 Are you interested in proceeding further?

Yes	CONTINUE
No	THANK & CLOSE

Q2 What business sector do you work in?

DO NOT READ OUT

Business		
Business and professional services	1	CODES 1 TO 7 – RECRUIT MIN 5 PER BUSINESS SECTOR
IT	2	
Retail, consumer & hospitality	3	
Telecoms, media & entertainment	4	
Banking, insurance & financial services	5	
Manufacturing, utilities & primary industry	6	
Healthcare and life sciences	7	
Education	8	CLOSE
Other – please write in	9	AIM TO RECRUIT MINIMUM 2
Public and third-sector		
Public sector – Education	10	CLOSE
Public sector – Other e.g. Government	11	AIM TO RECRUIT MINIMUM 5
Third sector – Charity/ not-for profit	12	AIM TO RECRUIT MINIMUM 2
Other (write in)		

RECRUIT MINIMUM 5 PER BUSINESS SECTOR (CODE 1-7),**RECRUIT MINIMUM 2 BUSINESS SECTION = OTHER (CODE 9)****RECRUIT MINIMUM 5 PUBLIC SECTOR (NON-EDUCATION) (CODE 10)****RECRUIT MINIMUM 2 THIRD SECTOR (CODE 1-7)****EXCLUDE EDUCATION, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE SECTOR**

Q3 Which, if any, of these Microsoft systems does your company currently use?

By use we mean if you deploy them for business use via cloud or on-premise, and access them by web, mobile or desktop versions of the software.

MULTICODE

PC Operating System – Microsoft Windows 10 or any subsequent versions	1
Productivity software suite – Microsoft Office 365 (e.g. Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, SharePoint, OneNote etc) and services and functionalities that enable the functioning of this software (Graph API, Microsoft 365 admin centre)	2
Collaboration software – Teams For real-time collaboration and communication, meetings, file and app sharing in one place.	3
AI assistant – Copilot Including features and functionalities that can be used with Microsoft Office 365 (e.g., Copilot features within Outlook, Excel, Word and OneNote), and/or AI assistant features and functionalities accessed in the Microsoft 365 Copilot App.	4
Security software – Intune, Defender, Entra ID and Active Directory-related software and services	5
Server operating system – Windows Server	6
Relational Database Management System – SQL server	7
Other – please write in	8

MUST USE AT LEAST ONE MICROSOFT (MS) PRODUCT TO CONTINUE

IF USE COPILOT (CODE 3), MUST ALSO USE AT LEAST 1 OTHER MS PRODUCT

PLEASE INCLUDE A MIX OF TEAMS AND NON-TEAMS USERS

PRODUCT QUOTAS – RECRUIT MINIMUM 10 PER PRODUCT CODES 4-7 (THE PRIORITY TYPES OF SOFTWARE PURCHASE TO EXPLORE FOR CMA) – AIM IS AS MANY AS POSSIBLE WHO USE MORE PRODUCTS THAN JUST OFFICE 365

Q4 And which, if any, of these types of software do you use any other providers for, instead of or in addition to Microsoft e.g. Apple, Google, Linux or others?

By use we mean all kinds of deployment for business use, via cloud or on-premise, and access by web, mobile or desktop versions of the software.

MULTICODE

PC Operating System A personal computer (PC) operating system or equivalent, which acts as an intermediary between hardware and software on the computer, enabling software applications (referred to as applications or apps) and services to run on a PC	1
Productivity software Software that enables users to work and collaborate, including to create, record, communicate and manage information	2
AI assistants Software that uses artificial intelligence to help people by carrying out tasks, understanding what users say, and responding in a natural, conversational way across different devices	3
Security software Software that secures operating systems, as well as the applications and data running on those systems, through mechanisms including authentication and authorisation of access for individuals and devices, enforcement of endpoint management policies and detection and prevention of threats	4
Server operating system A server operating system software or equivalent, which acts as an intermediary between hardware and software on a server, enabling software applications and services to run on a server	5
Relational Database Management System A relational database management system that manages and stores data in separate tables and defines relationships between those tables	6
Other – please write in	7

**RECRUIT MINIMUM 5 NON-MICROSOFT USERS PER PRODUCT CODES 3-6
(THE PRIORITY TYPES OF SOFTWARE PURCHASE TO EXPLORE FOR CMA)**

Q5 For each of these types of business software, which of these applies to your organisation?

ASK CONSIDERATION FOR EACH PRODUCT AT Q4 CODE 1-6

CONSIDERATION SCALE – SINGLE CODE

We switched/ started using a new software provider in the last 2 years	1	CONTINUE
We considered switching/ using a new software provider but decided against it in the last 2 years	2	CONTINUE
We are currently considering and researching adding/ switching software provider	3	CONTINUE
We are likely to add/ review software provider in the next 1-2 years	4	CONTINUE
We are not likely to add/ review provider in the next 1-2 years	5	CONTINUE
We don't use that type of software	6	CONTINUE
Don't know	7	CONTINUE

AIM FOR MINIMUM 2 ADDED/SWITCHED PROVIDER OR CONSIDERED THIS (CODE 1-3) PER PRODUCT CODES 3-6 (THE PRIORITY TYPES OF SOFTWARE PURCHASE TO EXPLORE FOR CMA)

Q6 Which of the following best describes your responsibilities with regards to decision making in your organisation about choice of any of the following business software: productivity software, PC and server operating systems, relational database management systems, and security software?

SINGLE CODE

I am solely/ jointly responsible for decision-making for business software for my organisation (e.g. suppliers to use, purchase decisions etc)	1	CONTINUE
I influence the decision-making process for business software for my organisation (e.g. suppliers to use, purchase decisions etc) – but do not have the final say	2	

I have the final sole/joint say for business software for my organisation but do <u>not</u> take an active role in the decision-making process	3	ASK FOR REFERRAL TO DECISION-MAKER(S) THEN CLOSE
I have minimal involvement in decision-making for business software for my organisation	4	
I have no involvement in decision-making for business software for my organisation	5	

ALL TO CODE 1 OR 2 ONLY

IF CODE 3-5, SEEK REFERRAL TO THE DECISION MAKER(S) THEN CLOSE

Q7 Please could you tell me what your job title is?

Write In _____

Q8 Which of the following best describes your role?

Senior management e.g. MD, CEO, Board Director	1	CHECK WITH JIGSAW IF ANY UNCERTAINTY ABOUT DECISION MAKING ROLE, THEN CONTINUE
Commercial/ Sales/ Marketing	2	
Financial	3	
Operations/ logistics	4	
Purchasing/ procurement	5	
Production/ manufacturing	6	
IT	7	CONTINUE
Other – please write in	8	CHECK WITH JIGSAW IF ANY UNCERTAINTY ABOUT DECISION MAKING ROLE, THEN CONTINUE

Q9 Which of these best describes your organisation?

Headquarters in the UK	1	CONTINUE
Offices in the UK, but headquarters are in another country	2	CONTINUE
Don't know	3	CLOSE

Q10 Do you have a degree of autonomy in terms of buying business software for your organisation's use in the UK?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No – please explain any limitations/ restrictions	2	CHECK WITH JIGSAW
Don't know		CLOSE

Q11 How many end-users are there in your organisation that use any of the following Microsoft business software: productivity software, PC and server operating systems, relational database management systems, and security software?

Please provide your best estimate based on the number of people in your organisation.

SINGLE CODE

Less than 10	1	CLOSE
10-49	2	CONTINUE – SMALL
50-99	3	CONTINUE – MEDIUM
100-249	4	
251-500	5	CONTINUE – LARGE
501-999	6	
Over 1000	7	

AIM FOR A SPREAD OF CODES 2-6

Q12 Which of these best describes the nature of your organisation's software contract with Microsoft?

SINGLE CODE

Purchase/ subscription to one or more Microsoft products and services that are standard or 'off the shelf', where pricing is not individually negotiated	1	CONTINUE – 'PRODUCT & SERVICE' (small-mid-sized businesses with up to 250 users can be more likely to use this approach)
An enterprise agreement that covers the use of Microsoft products for your whole organisation, with discounts negotiated based on volume, the range of products, and term commitments	2	CONTINUE – 'ENTERPRISE' (mid-large businesses with over 250 users can be more likely to use this approach)
Other (please write in)	3	CONTINUE

RECRUIT MINIMUM 30 (CODE 1)

RECRUIT MINIMUM 30 (CODE 2)

**Q13 How much do you spend per year on Microsoft business software?
Please provide your best estimate**

SINGLE CODE

Up to 7,500 GBP per year	1	CLOSE UNLESS ENTERPRISE CUSTOMER Q12 CODE 2, IN WHICH CASE CHECK WITH JIGSAW
7,500-25,000 GBP per year	2	CONTINUE – LOW SPEND
25,001-75,000 GBP per year	3	CONTINUE – MID SPEND
75,000-100,000 GBP per year	4	CONTINUE – HIGH SPEND
100,001-500,000 GBP per year	5	
500,001-1,000,000 GBP per year	6	CONTINUE – VERY HIGH
1,000,000 GBP per year	7	
Don't know/ prefer not to say	8	CONTINUE

AIM FOR LOW SPEND (CODE 2) – MINIMUM 5 AIM 10

AIM FOR MID SPEND (CODE 3) – MINIMUM 25 AIM 30

AIM FOR HIGH SPEND (CODE 4-5) – MINIMUM 25 AIM 30

AIM FOR VERY HIGH SPEND (CODE 6-7) – MINIMUM 7 AIM 10

Q14 Through which channel do you tend to purchase Microsoft business software?

MULTICODE

Direct from Microsoft	1	CONTINUE
Via a third-party reseller	2	CONTINUE
Via an IT consultant/ support organisation	3	CONTINUE
Other – please write in	4	CONTINUE

AIM FOR A SPREAD OF CODES 1-3

Q15 When did you first start to use Microsoft in your firm for any of the following business software: productivity software, PC and server operating systems, relational database management systems, and security software?

Less than 2 years ago	1	CONTINUE
2-5 years ago	2	CONTINUE
6-10 years ago	3	CONTINUE
11-20 years ago	4	CONTINUE
Over 20 years ago	5	CONTINUE

AIM FOR A SPREAD OF CODES 1-5

Q16 Which statement best describes your organisation's current use of cloud solutions?

We are experimenting or have adopted cloud for a few business functions, but critical systems remain on-premises	1	CONTINUE
--	---	----------

We operate a hybrid system, with cloud integration alongside some legacy/ on-premise systems	2	CONTINUE
Most or all core business systems and data are cloud based	3	CONTINUE

AIM FOR A SPREAD OF CODES 1-3

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATING

IF THE RESPONDENT QUALIFIES, EXPLAIN THE REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATING:

S1 We would like to interview you online via Zoom. The interview will last up to an hour. You will receive an incentive of £X as a thank you for your participation. Are you willing to take part?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK & CLOSE

CONSENT

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our market research interview. In order to help protect your privacy, I will read out some terms and conditions that we will ask you to agree to and sign when you attend the interview.

S2 This study is being undertaken on behalf of the CMA for market research purposes only by Jigsaw Research who adhere to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. The information obtained about you during this project will be used solely for the purposes of this research.

As part of this research, Jigsaw would like to make a digital recording of our interview with you for analysis purposes. Jigsaw Research will not disclose audio files/ transcripts/ interview notes gathered as part of a research exercise to the CMA. We will securely delete the recording, and any transcript of the recording, from our systems on full conclusion of the CMA's investigation.

The responses you give during the interview will be reported to the CMA in aggregate with responses from other research participants. Only anonymised quotes will be used in our presentation and report to the CMA.

The recording of the interview may also be processed (transcribed) by Jigsaw Research using CoLoop AI. If so, please note that the recording and transcript:

- Will not be available to other Jigsaw customers or any other AI model providers
- Will not be used to improve or train any large language models, products or services
- Will remain within the UK,EEA and US, and will be deleted from CoLoop AI on full conclusion of the CMA's investigation.

Are you happy to proceed on this basis?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CONTINUE

DO NOT EXCLUDE IF UNWILLING TO BE RECORDED OR TRANSCRIBED – RECRUIT IF ELIGIBLE AND FLAG AS NO RECORDING OR TRANSCRIPTION.

S3 As part of our research process, and only with your express consent on the day, a member of the CMA team may wish to observe our interview with you, but we would take efforts to protect your confidentiality in this instance.

Are you happy to proceed on this basis?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	CONTINUE

DO NOT EXCLUDE IF UNWILLING TO BE OBSERVED – RECRUIT IF ELIGIBLE AND FLAG AS NO OBSERVATION OF INTERVIEW.

S4 Personal data is data that allows a living individual to be identified, either directly or indirectly. Please note that by agreeing to participate in an interview, you consent to STRAT7 Audiences and STRAT7 Jigsaw using and storing (processing) the personal data we have collected from you during your recruitment to the research and any further personal data you share with us during your interview. STRAT7 Audiences and STRAT7 Jigsaw will use and store (process) your personal data for the purposes of this research project only.

Please note that you are also consenting to the CMA processing aggregated data from which you and your company cannot be individually identified, in the form of our report for the CMA on the findings from the research.

While the CMA's investigation is ongoing, STRAT7 Audiences, STRAT7 Jigsaw and the CMA will process your personal information securely at all times. None of STRAT7 Audiences, STRAT7 Jigsaw and the CMA will share your personal

information with any third party, except in the very unlikely event that we are required to do so by law. We will securely delete all your personal information from our systems on full conclusion of the CMA's investigation.

You have the right to access and rectify any data held on you by STRAT7 Audiences and STRAT7 Jigsaw and to withdraw consent at any time or to object/restrict any processing of your data. You can find out more about these companies and their privacy policies by using the following links:

<https://strat7.com/respondent-privacy-notice/>

If you have any questions about how your personal information will be used, you can contact STRAT7 Jigsaw on 020 7291 0810 or by emailing data.security@jigsaw-research.co.uk or dpo@strat7.com

If you have any concerns about Jigsaw's information rights practices, you can report it to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) via their website by calling 0303 123 1113.

The CMA's [Personal information charter](#) explains how the CMA treats your personal information.

Are you happy to proceed on this basis?

Yes	1	CONTINUE
No	2	THANK & CLOSE

S5 If we needed to contact you within 6 months of your interview for any follow-up questions relating to this research specifically, is this OK?

Yes	1
No	2

RESPONDENT DETAILS

Name	
Address	
Phone	
Email	
Date of depth attending	

Reconfirm Day/Date/Time of the depth with respondent

INTERVIEWER DETAILS

Name	
------	--

INTERVIEWER DECLARATION

I declare that this interview has been conducted strictly in accordance with your specifications within the MRS Code of Conduct and with a person totally unknown to me.

Signed **(INTERVIEWER)**: _____ Date

4.2. Discussion guide

Background to the research for Moderators

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has initiated a Strategic Market Status (SMS) investigation into Microsoft's position in business software. This investigation, conducted under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024, focuses on Microsoft's market power across:

- Productivity software², including
 - AI features and functionalities, including AI assistants
 - Collaboration software (e.g. Teams)
- PC operating systems³
- Server operating systems⁴
- Relational database management systems (RDBMS)⁵
- Security software⁶

The CMA are looking to assess whether Microsoft has Substantial and Entrenched Market Power and position of strategic significance in these product types, as well as the extent to which market power may be linked across product types – i.e. the potential for interdependencies within the Microsoft business software ecosystem.

These product types are of interest to the CMA whether on cloud or on-premise, and whether accessed by web, mobile or desktop versions of the software (i.e. any/all deployment and access type)

Objectives

The research has the following overarching aim: to understand what drives Microsoft UK customers' business software purchasing decisions, the alternatives to using Microsoft that are available to them and what is their ability to switch to those alternatives. Within this, the research questions we want to explore are:

- How and why did customers purchase their existing range of Microsoft business software? [key question]
- What alternatives to Microsoft's business software do customers consider to be available to them and what is the strength of these alternatives? [key question]

² Microsoft's Office 365 applications include Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams, OneDrive, OneNote, Microsoft To Do, Microsoft Publisher (PC only), Microsoft Forms, Audio Conferencing, Microsoft Access (PC only), Exchange, SharePoint, Microsoft Planner, Microsoft Loop, Delve, Sway, Microsoft Stream (now: Clipchamp), Power apps, Power Automate, Microsoft Bookings, Viva Engage, Viva Insights, Viva Learning, and Viva Connections, Microsoft 365 Copilot.

³ Windows 10/11

⁴ Windows Server

⁵ SQL Server

⁶ Microsoft Entra ID, Microsoft Intune, Microsoft Defender

- What switching barriers do customers face and consider when deciding to purchase new business software, or renew existing licences? [key question]
- What are customer intentions for future use of cloud computing, and how does the business software they use impact those intentions?
- How are customers using AI features and functionalities (including AI assistants) and how does that use interact with the business software they use?
- What is the customer experience of quality with Microsoft business software, as individual products, and in combination with their wider business software ecosystem?

MODERATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Introduction (5 minutes)

- Thank respondent for participation in the research, which is being conducted on behalf of CMA and re-iterate value of their experiences and perspective to this investigation.
- Provide background and set the context for the rest of the discussion.
- Confirm position on anonymity and recording/transcription of interviewing.
 - Note this excerpt from the screener on this point: None of STRAT7 Audiences, STRAT7 Jigsaw and the CMA will share your personal information with any third party, except in the very unlikely event that we are required to do so by law
- For pilot interviewing: confirm position on consent for observation by CMA staff.
- State that the interview will last around an hour

Explain: The intention is to understand how your business makes decisions about purchasing business software, particularly Microsoft products and services. We want to understand what drives your organisation's purchasing decisions, what alternatives you consider, and what factors affect your ability to switch between providers. We are also interested in your wider expertise and knowledge.

- Firstly, I'd like to understand a little about your company and your role. Tell me about your company. Can you briefly introduce and describe your business?
 - E.g. number of full time staff, types of products/services sold and customers they have, how long they have been trading
- Can you tell us a bit about your own role and the IT team in your business?
 - cover size and structure of the IT team, their role technical/commercial/strategic, how long they have been working in the sector etc...
- Can you give me a brief overview of how decisions are typically made about business software purchasing in your organisation?

N.B KEEP RESPONSES HIGH LEVEL AT THIS STAGE. AVOID GETTING INTO PRODUCT SPECIFIC DISCUSSIONS – THIS WILL COME LATER

- Who is typically involved in purchasing decisions?
- Is it centralised IT decision-making, or distributed across business units?
- Are there formal procurement processes, or does it depend on the product?
- What's the role of procurement/commercial teams vs. IT leadership?
- Do different people make decisions for different product types? How so?
- Are there any policies or guidelines that govern purchasing?

Current Business Software Landscape (10 mins)

Explore their rationale for choosing to buy Microsoft products at a high level before delving into the detail of each product area

- SAY: We understand from the pre-screening interview that your business uses the following Microsoft products (INSERT MICROSOFT SOFTWARE FROM SCREENER INFO) and the following non-Microsoft products (INSERT NON-MICROSOFT PRODUCTS). Is this correct?
- IF ANY NON-MICROSOFT PRODUCTS MENTIONED: Overall, why did your company choose these products from (INSERT PROVIDERS OF NON-MICROSOFT PRODUCTS)?
ENSURE ALL NON-MICROSOFT PRODUCTS COVERED.
 - What was the decision making process internally that led to these decisions?
- SAY: From now on, we're mostly going to be discussing Microsoft products used by your organisation (REMIND PARTICIPANT OF THESE IF NEEDED). Overall, why did your company choose these products from Microsoft?

Please include decisions to renew with Microsoft as well as the original purchase decision throughout

START AT THE OVERALL MICROSOFT RELATIONSHIP LEVEL, THEN ENSURE ALL MICROSOFT PRODUCTS COVERED.

- What was the decision making process internally that led to the choice to go with and renew with Microsoft?
- How much researching of different options was done in the organisation at each stage? Why was this?
- Did you purchase direct from Microsoft or via a reseller? Why did you choose this channel?
 - PROBE: Please explain any special deals you were offered
 - Was price or some other incentive used to make the deal more attractive? Please explain the specifics of how this was offered to you

- Was the purchase of different Microsoft products linked in any way? Were products bundled? Please give examples if so
- How – if at all – does the range of products available under this [bundle/agreement] influence your search for and use of alternative products or services available from providers other than Microsoft?
- What advantages are there for your business in being able to buy a range of products from Microsoft? PROBE: Anything else?
 - INTERVIEWER NOTE: ENSURE YOU ASK ABOUT BOTH TECHNICAL AND COMMERCIAL ADVANTAGES
- Are there any disadvantages to your business in the way Microsoft structure their deals or make bundles of products available to businesses like yours? Please explain

Specific Microsoft business software decision making processes (25 mins)

Specific questions around each of the product areas under discussion, around specific decision making processes and usage. Only asked for Microsoft products

Productivity Software (E.g. Microsoft 365; Outlook; Exchange; SharePoint; OneDrive etc)

- Which suite e.g. which type of business-level suite, or E-level suite etc, and major add-ons.
- What are the key reasons why your organisation uses Microsoft for your productivity software?
- How many users in your organisation are using the Microsoft productivity suite? How many licences do you pay for?
- Has your organisation ever considered alternatives to Microsoft for your productivity software? Why? Why not? Which ones?
 - PROBE: What was it about these other providers that meant you decided to stay with only using Microsoft?
 - Do you currently use any other productivity software providers?
 - IF YES: Which ones and how many users are using that providers' products?
 - Why have you decided to use a provider as well as Microsoft?

AI (Features and Functionalities including AI Assistants)

Specific questions to cover off use of Copilot features and functionalities, including AI assistants – both as part of a productivity suite and independently

- Does your organisation use or have access to any AI features and functionalities (including AI assistants)?, (IF NEEDED, PROMPT WITH CHATGPT; MS COPILOT; GOOGLE GEMINI or CLAUDE)

INTERVIEWER NOTE: FOCUS HERE ON PAID FOR AI ASSISTANTS

- IF YES: Which ones do you use and why/for what?
- IF MICROSOFT COPILOT USED (EVEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHERS):
 - How does your organisation use Microsoft Copilot?
 - How did your organisation come to choose Copilot as (one of) its AI assistant(s)?
 - Was there any linking of Copilot to any other MS products your organisation uses or was this a completely independent decision?
 - IF LINKED: Was that bundling of Copilot with other MS products something Microsoft offered or something your organisation decided upon?
 - If your organisation wanted to use another AI assistant other than Copilot, what considerations would there be internally? If this meant not using Copilot altogether, what would you need to consider?
 - What barriers to stopping the use of Copilot might there be? How might you overcome these?
- IF MICROSOFT COPILOT NOT USED:
 - Has your organisation considered using Microsoft Copilot?
 - Why has your organisation decided not to use Copilot as (one of) its AI assistant(s)?
 - How easy is it to use non-Microsoft AI assistants in conjunction with other Microsoft products? Please provide examples.

Collaborative Software

Specific section to cover off use of collaborative software such as Teams or Zoom – both as part of a productivity suite and independently

- Does your organisation use or have access to any collaborative software tools (IF NEEDED, PROMPT WITH MICROSOFT TEAMS; ZOOM; GOOGLE WORKSPACE; SLACK etc)
- IF YES: Which ones do you use and why/for what?
- IF MICROSOFT TEAMS USED (EVEN IN CONJUNCTION WITH OTHERS):
 - How does your organisation use Microsoft Teams?
 - How did your organisation come to choose Teams as (one of) its collaborative tools?
 - Was there any linking of Teams to any other MS products your organisation uses or was this a completely independent decision?
 - IF LINKED: Was that bundling of Teams with other MS products something Microsoft offered or something your organisation decided upon?

- Were you aware that Teams can now be unbundled from Microsoft's productivity suite?
 - If your organisation wanted to use another collaborative tool other than Teams, what considerations would there be internally? If this meant not using Teams altogether, what would you need to consider?
 - What barriers to stopping the use of Teams might there be? How might you overcome these?
- IF MICROSOFT TEAMS NOT USED:
 - Has your organisation considered using Microsoft Teams?
 - Why has your organisation decided not to use Teams as (one of) its collaborative tools?
 - How easy is it to use non-Microsoft collaborative tools in conjunction with other Microsoft products? Please provide examples.

PC Operating Systems (E.g. Windows 10/11 etc)

- Which PC Operating Systems are you using? Windows 10/11/something else?
- What are the key reasons why your organisation uses Microsoft for your PC Operating Systems?
- Roughly how many devices do you have running Windows PC Operating Systems? How many licences do you pay for?
- Has your organisation ever considered alternatives to Microsoft for PC operating systems? Why? Why not? Which ones?
- Did your organisation choose to use Microsoft's OS before, during or after your organisation's decision(s) about the devices this OS would operate on?
 - Please expand on the role Windows PC Operating Systems has played, or will play, in decisions around device purchase and vice versa.

Server Operating Systems (E.g. Windows Server)

- What are the key reasons why your organisation uses Microsoft for your Server operating system?
- How many server instances are running each operating system? How many licences do you pay for Windows Server?
- Has your organisation ever considered alternatives to Microsoft for Server OS products? Why? Why not? Which ones?
 - Has your organisation ever looked into open source Server OS products? Why? Why not? Which ones?
 - Would your organisation ever consider open source Server OS products? Why do you say this?
- Is your Server operating system deployed on-prem or in the cloud (or hybrid)? Why is this?

- PROBE FOR:
 - Commercial/cost reasons
 - Technical reasons
 - Internal organisational reasons
 - Anything else?
- IF ANY CLOUD: When did you move/start using to the cloud? How did you find this process?
- What effect has being a Windows Server customer had on your decision to deploy in the cloud? Please explain fully
- Which cloud provider is your Windows Server deployed with? Azure or other provider? Why did you make that choice (Azure or other)?
- IF ON-PREM: Have you considered moving Windows Server to the cloud? Why have you not done this?
- When might you move to the cloud, if at all?
- Which cloud providers would you consider if you were looking to move to the cloud? Why do you say these providers?
- To what extent is your current use of Windows Server impacting the previous answer? Please explain how.
- Thinking about your existing on-premises workloads, would you consider switching the server operating system (away from Windows) if the workload was to remain on-premises? What benefits might this bring?
 - Why might you not consider doing this?

Relational Database Management Systems – RDBMS (E.g. SQL (“sequel”) Server)

- What are the key reasons why your organisation uses Microsoft for your RDBMS?
- How many database instances are deployed for each database? How many licences do you pay for SQL Server? How do you feel about this?
- Has your organisation ever considered alternatives to Microsoft for your RDBMS? Why? Why not?
- Is your RDBMS deployed on-prem or in the cloud (or a mix)? Why is this?
 - IF CLOUD: When did you move to the cloud? How did you find this process?
 - What effect has being a SQL Server customer had on your decision to deploy in the cloud? Please explain fully
 - Which cloud provider is your RDBMS deployed with? Azure or other provider? Why did you make that choice? (Azure or other)?
 - IF ON-PREM: Have you considered moving SQL Server to the cloud? Why have you not done this?

- When might you move to the cloud, if at all?
- Which cloud providers would you consider if you were looking to move to the cloud? Why do you say these providers?
- To what extent is your current use of SQL Server impacting the previous answer? Please explain how.
- Thinking about your existing on-premises workloads, would you consider switching RDBMS provider (away from SQL Server) if the workload was to remain on-premises?
 - What benefits might this bring?
 - Why might you not consider doing this?

Security Software (E.g. Intune; Defender; Entra ID etc)

- Which MS Security Software are you using? Entra ID, Defender, Intune?
- What are the key reasons why your organisation uses Microsoft for your security software?
- Has your organisation ever considered alternatives to Microsoft for your security software? Why? Why not? Which ones? PROBE: What was it about these other providers that meant you decided to stay with only using Microsoft?
 - Do you use any other security software providers?
 - IF YES: Which ones?
 - Why have you decided to use a provider as well as Microsoft?

Decision making around specific buying/renewal/switching events (10 mins)

To anchor discussion to actual purchasing/renewal and switching events to capture real behaviour and decision drivers rather than post-rationalisation. Throughout this section, encourage participants to refer to documentation wherever possible

SWITCHING TO/RENEWING WITH MICROSOFT

- Can you think of a time in the last 2-3 years when your organisation made a decision to purchase Microsoft products?
- This could be:
 - Buying a new product
 - Renewing an existing licence agreement
 - Changing how you're using Microsoft products (necessitating a change in the contract or agreement you have with Microsoft)

PRIORITISE 'BUYING A NEW PRODUCT' IF THIS APPLIES. IF NOT, RENEWAL/CHANGE IS ACCEPTABLE

- IF YES: What was this product? (N.B THIS COULD BE COLLABORATIVE SOFTWARE OR AI ASSISTANT AS WELL AS THE PRODUCT AREAS COVERED EARLIER)
- What triggered the decision to buy this product? PROBE FULLY
- Was this product fulfilling a new business requirement, or were you switching away from another provider to Microsoft?
- Please walk me through how that decision was made internally, referring to any paperwork/emails along the way to provide examples of the different stages/thought processes internally
- How, if at all, did you research alternatives to Microsoft? What did this research tell you about the market?
 - PROBE: What did it tell you specifically about interoperability between Microsoft and non-Microsoft products?
- Were you in direct contact with Microsoft or were you dealing via a reseller? IF MICROSOFT: How were they to deal with?
- What discussions or negotiations took place around price/the deal? What incentives, if any, were offered to persuade to go with Microsoft?
- Ultimately, why did you choose to go with Microsoft? Please provide any examples from emails/other paperwork to help illustrate this final decision
 - PROBE FOR:
 - Commercial advantages
 - Technical advantages

SWITCHING AWAY FROM MICROSOFT

- Can you think of a time in the last 2-3 years when your organisation considered switching away from Microsoft to another provider for any of your Microsoft products, but ultimately decided to stay with Microsoft?
- IF YES: What was this product? (N.B THIS COULD BE COLLABORATIVE SOFTWARE OR AI ASSISTANT AS WELL AS THE PRODUCT AREAS COVERED EARLIER)
- What triggered the decision to consider switching away from Microsoft? PROBE FULLY
- What barriers did you find existed when trying to switch away from Microsoft to another provider?
 - What do you think was the cause of these barriers to switching being in place?
 - PROBE FOR:
 - Commercial barriers (e.g. pricing/offers but could be other incentives to stay)

- Technical barriers (e.g. lack of interoperability but could be others)
- Please walk me through how that decision was made internally, referring to any paperwork/emails along the way to provide examples of the different stages/thought processes internally
- How, if at all, did you research alternatives to Microsoft? What did this research tell you about the market?
 - PROBE: What did it tell you about the interoperability between Microsoft and non-Microsoft products?
- Were you in direct contact with Microsoft during this consideration period? What discussions or negotiations took place around price/the deal? What incentives, if any, were offered to persuade to stay with Microsoft? Ultimately, why did you choose to stay with Microsoft? Please provide any examples from emails/other paperwork to help illustrate this final decision
 - PROBE FOR:
 - Commercial advantages
 - Technical advantages
- IF NEVER CONSIDERED SWITCHING: If you were to consider switching any of your products away from Microsoft, which product(s) do you think your organisation would be most likely to move? Why do you say this?
- How easy or difficult do you imagine it would be to switch these products away from Microsoft? What makes you say this?
 - How might this vary by different Microsoft products?
- What barriers do you think are in place, or might be put in place that would affect how easy it might be for your organisation to switch away from Microsoft?
 - PROBE FOR:
 - Commercial barriers (e.g. pricing/offers but could be other incentives to stay)
 - Technical barriers (e.g. lack of interoperability but could be others)
 - How might this vary by different Microsoft products?

Overall Microsoft Evaluation (10 mins)

This final section will help us understand the extent to which Microsoft products are meeting the needs of the organisation and where there might be gaps

- Overall, how well do you feel all the Microsoft products used by your organisation meet the needs of the organisation for which those products are intended?
 - PROBE: Where do you feel these products fall short? Where are there gaps in your organisation's business or technical needs that aren't met by Microsoft products?

PROBE BY ASKING THE ABOVE QUESTION IN RELATION TO EACH MICROSOFT PRODUCT USED BY THE ORGANISATION

- What are your thoughts on how Microsoft's pricing in recent times? Have they remained stable/increased/decreased?
- What feedback have you had internally from users/members of your team about the Microsoft products deployed by your organisation?
 - What are the main issues raised by staff/users

PROBE BY ASKING THE ABOVE QUESTION IN RELATION TO EACH MICROSOFT PRODUCT USED BY THE ORGANISATION

- How important are these points around the quality and performance of Microsoft's products in your overall thinking as to whether to use these products in future? How do you feel about the new products being offered by Microsoft?
 - Are they offered to you at all by Microsoft?
 - What types of products are offered?
 - What is your view on these relative to similar products being offered by providers other than Microsoft?
 - What is your view generally on how innovative Microsoft are compared to other providers in all the product areas we have been discussing today?

PROBE BY ASKING THE ABOVE QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO EACH MICROSOFT PRODUCT USED BY THE ORGANISATION

- How important are these points around Microsoft and innovation in your overall thinking as to whether to use their products in future?
- Thinking of any future use of AI assistants or products/tools, how important is it that these AI products integrate with Microsoft products? Can you think of any examples where this will be particularly important?
- Given the discussion we have just had, are there any other issues or points you would like to mention about your experience of using Microsoft's products? Are there any aspects of the choices available to businesses like yours when choosing the products that we've been discussing today that you would like to see change?

Thank you and close