

“The FUJITSU Digital Transformation Center has a well-oiled process to draw out our joint expertise towards a common goal. BuddyConnect is a great example of a wellbeing focused project we wanted to accelerate our partnership.”

Jonny Crawley
Strategic Partnership Manager
Nottingham Trent University



Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and Fujitsu have a Strategic Relationship Agreement to facilitate the co-creation of innovative solutions and thought leadership.

At a glance

Country: United Kingdom
Industry: Education
Founded: 1843
Website: ntu.ac.uk

Challenge

Nottingham Trent University wants to enhance its curriculum and research, attract students and ensure they graduate with the skills required to be successful in modern employment, whilst also making a positive societal impact. To do so, NTU has signed a Strategic Relationship Agreement (SRA) with Fujitsu, making it its tier-one technology partner.

Solution

The SRA enables NTU and Fujitsu to collaborate and co-create across a wide range of projects, including smart cities, workplace wellbeing and digital campuses. The first partnership project is BuddyConnect – an application providing guidance and support for adult employees with autism.

Benefit

- NTU and Fujitsu draw on each other's complementary expertise to tackle real world challenges, drive positive change and develop new ideas
- BuddyConnect assists people on the autism spectrum linked to wider mental wellbeing in the workplace
- NTU gains access to disruptive technology to enhance teaching and research
- Together, NTU and Fujitsu enable wellbeing and increased productivity through innovation

Customer

Nottingham Trent University is a public research university with its roots dating back to 1843, and with the establishment of the Nottingham Government School of Design, which still exists within the university today. It was named University of the Year in 2018 and is the 13th largest university in the UK with 29,370 students split over four different campuses. Through its estate, resources, talent and expertise, it helps bring businesses to life and shows companies how to innovate and grow, adding vital economic, cultural and social value on a local and international scale.

Products and Services

- BuddyConnect
- FUJITSU Digital Transformation Center

Forging a strategic alliance

NTU is committed to partnering with leading organisations to effect change for the better. It believes that businesses and universities have much to teach each other and can harness their individual strengths to make a positive impact. It has partnered with Fujitsu in a Strategic Relationship Agreement, which will explore collaboration projects, including those centred around improving the wellbeing and safety of customers, employees and students.

"Fujitsu is a great partner because it cuts across multiple sectors, industries and technologies. It has a strong focus on 'co-creation', which mirrors NTU's approach to problem-solving," explains Jonny Crawley, Strategic Partnership Manager, NTU. "We can learn from the business challenges faced by Fujitsu, its customers and supply chain, and use these lessons to inform our curriculum and research, a vital part of the university's ambition."

The partnership will focus on three areas: identifying innovative R&D opportunities; collaborating on business planning; and developing skills and employability. In order to take a tangible first step working together, the two organisations held a workshop to tease out commonalities, which produced a number of appealing projects.

"It is easy to become paralysed by choice at this early stage, so we wanted to begin with a smaller scale, more specific application related to wellbeing," adds Crawley. "Fujitsu is focused on human-centric technology that makes life easier and people happier, so when it introduced us to an early version of its workplace mobile app, BuddyConnect, it seemed to be the ideal starting point for our collaboration."

Andy Seferta, Head of Ecosystem and Analyst Engagement, Fujitsu states, "Our Ecosystem approach recognises the outcomes, combined value and positive benefits we can bring to the society by working with partners, academia and customers. I am already excited by the strategic collaboration, mutual strengths, matching cultures and wider potential of our relationship that will benefit a wide range of people, including customers, employees and students."

Workplace support in an intuitive app

BuddyConnect is focused on helping employees plan and manage the anxiety challenges autism may present in the workplace. As apps built specifically for tackling autism in the workplace are rare, BuddyConnect puts in place an effective support and guidance infrastructure through easy-to-access information, and by connecting those with autism with additional support.



"Fujitsu had developed a 'minimum viable product' with BuddyConnect so we immediately wanted to see where NTU could add value," continues Crawley. "The Human Experience Design process in the FUJITSU Digital Transformation Center (DTC), helped bring to life our opportunity to improve people's wellbeing. We looked at infusing our social science expertise to assess user behaviour, adding gamification elements as well as monitoring eye-gaze and posture. The next step is to collaborate to build analytics on top using machine learning. It demonstrates how our skill-sets can complement each other."

The result is an intuitive app that helps support mental health and autism in the workplace. Key to BuddyConnect is a colour-coded wellbeing tracker, allowing users to record how they're feeling: green for great, amber for not-so-great and red for when users feel overwhelmed. Each option triggers an action depending on the situation, from a quick chat with a designated buddy over the app's instant messenger service, to putting in a call to a dedicated Employee Support Line.

Future functionality includes a day planner to keep track of users' to-do list and deadlines, and an interactive campus map showing where essential facilities are.

Co-creation in action

With a roadmap in place to make the app more feature-rich and intelligent, NTU and Fujitsu are ready to trial it with neuro-diverse users. In total, 1,100 people are taking part, providing a wealth of feedback to further finetune the app's functionality.

"The DTC has a well-oiled process to draw out our joint expertise towards a common goal. BuddyConnect is a great example of that," says Crawley. "It is exactly the type of wellbeing focused project we wanted to accelerate our partnership."

However, BuddyConnect is merely the first step in NTU's digital transformation journey, including retail analysis with a major UK supermarket and a suicide prevention initiative.

"The value of Fujitsu comes from its expertise and human-centric approach, but also its sheer size. With 14,000 UK and Ireland employees, it gives us the breadth of knowledge and experience in a one-stop-shop, which is proving a hit with students," concludes Crawley. "Fujitsu helps keep us fresh, attract new students and gives students vital exposure to real-life industry experiences, while we can give Fujitsu access to global challenges at the forefront of higher education."

FUJITSU

Contact a representative at: AskFujitsu@uk.fujitsu.com

Phone: +44 (0)1235 797711

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