

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Birmingham City University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>Title of case study: Improving strategic design management competence in small and medium sized companies through action and case-study research.</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD) has researched the extent and effectiveness of design management in companies for over 15 years. The research has combined an academic analysis with a practice based approach where findings have been implemented through a succession of industry-facing, large-scale, externally funded projects.</p> <p>Through this sustained activity, design tools, methods and support strategies have been developed, delivered, tested and disseminated internationally. Additionally, the experiences are fed back into the continuing research that underpins the practical activity.</p> <p>Since 2008, BIAD’s business-facing projects have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assisted over 300 companies (compared with 70+ in 2003-2008); • established 21 new businesses; • built a network of 400 companies; • secured over £3m of grant funding; and • been instrumental in shifting company culture from cost-driven to value-added.
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Through the Centre for Design and Creative Industries and its predecessor the Birmingham Centre for Design Research, BIAD has an established record of researching how successful companies incorporate design in their business strategy. Research publications have drawn on the experience of working with industry partners. In turn, the resulting perspectives and models have guided interventions with companies through a series of large-scale, externally funded projects.</p> <p>This succession of projects has been a bridge between academic publication and action research in the form of active intervention in the design activities of SMEs. These projects include: Centre for Product Design Information (1999-2001) [Academic lead Prof. Roger Newport]; Design Knowledge Network (2001-2008) [Academic lead Prof. Jack Ingram]; Interiors and Lifestyle Futures (2009-present) [Academic consultant Prof. Richard Snell]. The total value of these projects exceeds £6.5m, involving over 500 businesses and peaking at 11 project staff. As manager of these projects, Kathryn Burns [see REF2014 outputs Burns] has provided a continuity of research focus and development of expertise.</p> <p>A central aim of the business-facing projects has been to place design at the heart of the business strategies through which a company vision may be achieved. For SMEs, strategic concerns are often perceived as less urgent than the immediate problems of economic survival: the business-facing projects have assisted with short-term design problems in order to introduce companies to the longer-term strategic issues that determine business vision and company culture.</p> <p>The focus of research has widened from a concern with achieving economic benefits, to efficiencies in design process and product development, an examination of the meaning of ‘value-added’ and the benefits of design for internal changes in company culture.</p> <p>Examples of the principal threads in the evolution of this underpinning research are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the role of design research in informing new product development (Jerrard et al., 1999);

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- case studies of design management in action (Jerrard et al., 2002) using audits and structured interviews to compare the use and management of design in different organisations and its integration with other company departments;
- synergies between design theory and sociological theories of consumption (part of the ESRC/AHRC Cultures of Consumption programme, in conjunction with Lancaster University and University of Durham) (Ingram et al, 2007; Shove et al, 2007)
- the development of design competences in organisations and design knowledge transfer (Burns, 2006; Burns and Ingram, 2008)

Retired research staff are Professor Jack Ingram (MA Course Director) employed 1 April 1998 to 3 October 2008, Professor Robert Jerrard (Principal Lecturer) employed 1 May 1980 to 6 May 2008 and Professor Roger Newport (Deputy Head of Fashion, Textiles and Three-dimensional Design Department) employed 1 January 1987 to 30 September 2002.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Jerrard, R., Trueman, M. and Newport, R., eds. (1999) *Managing new product innovation*. London: Taylor & Francis. [Returned in RAE2001]

Jerrard, R., Ingram, J. and Hands, D. (2002) *Design management case studies*. London: Routledge [Returned in RAE2008]

Ingram, J., Shove, E. and Watson, M. (2007) Products and Practices: Selected Concepts from Science and Technology Studies and from Social Theories of Consumption and Practice. *Design Issues*, 23(2), pp. 3-16 [Returned in RAE2008]

Shove, E., Watson, M., Hand, M. and Ingram, J. (2007) *The design of everyday life* London: Berg [Returned in RAE2008]

Burns, K. (2006) Clusters: A Possible Alternative to KTPs for Improving Design Knowledge, *The Design Journal*, 9(3), pp. 23-33 [Returned in RAE2008]

Burns, K and J Ingram (2008) Towards a predictive model of organisational potential for applying design, International DMI Education conference *Design Thinking: new challenges for designers, managers and organisations*, ESSEC Business School, Cergy-Pointoise, France, 14-15 April 2008 Available at <http://www.dmi.org/dmi/html/conference/academic08/papers/> [Accessed 16 November 2013] [Returned in REF2014]

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The underlying research into the benefits of design for manufacturing industry has been augmented by the action research components of the provision of business support to SMEs in the West Midlands. The work has been funded through agencies charged with stimulating economic growth, particularly the former regional development agency Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Research findings and lessons learned have been combined with the priorities of the funding streams relating to supporting business growth to develop and deliver projects that help companies to change processes as well as developing new markets and products.

The region and project client base is extensive in terms of geographical spread, array of products and services as well as a variety of markets. The SMEs assisted include individual start-ups, designer-makers through to larger manufacturers employing 150 people or more. Sectors include a range of consumer products such as: furniture, furnishings, textiles, carpets, glass, ceramics, lighting, jewellery and silverware, fashion, clothing and accessories, leather goods, giftware and artworks. For all, design and marketing were seen as key in adding value, as a counter to conventional business wisdom which concentrated in price cutting for competitiveness.

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Experience of these collaborations points to a progression of design competencies. This starts from zero innovators, where there is no use of design and the company manufactures to customer designs through low and medium innovators to high innovators where design is an integral part of the company's strategy (Burns and Ingram, 2008).

The business support services developed through the projects to develop the necessary competencies to move through this progression include:

- websites of design information;
- individual reports tailored to company needs and covering topics such as marketing; competitor analysis; trends evaluation; and design process;
- exhibitions promoting the design credentials of the region;
- workshops to help companies realise strengths and weaknesses and build networks for growth; and
- the creation and support of collaborative groups of companies.

The quantitative measures of impact include funding awarded over a sustained period, businesses assisted and jobs and sales created. For example, Design Knowledge Network (total value £2.6m over five years) was part-funded by AWM and ERDF. Between 2003 and 2008, the network assisted over 70 companies through 180 business assists, generating £2.5m of sales and nearly 70 jobs. [Ref 1, Ref 2]

In 2009 further funding totalling over £3m from AWM and ERDF was secured. Building on previous achievements and experience, Interiors & Lifestyle Futures helped businesses in the West Midlands to find new high-value markets and create profitable and collaborative partnerships with other businesses. To date Interiors & Lifestyle Futures has worked intensively with over 300 companies, created 21 new businesses and built a network of over 400 companies. [Ref 3, Ref 4, Ref 5]

As well as these hard measures of impact, the projects have also achieved a significant number of softer outcomes where impact is evidenced through a shift in business focus and behaviour.

Glassdomain has benefitted from a long-term strategic partnership with BIAD. Originally a glass and glazing business, the company took part in a Knowledge Transfer Partnership from 2003 to 2006. It used BIAD's design expertise to diversify and form a breakaway company. Further support has included membership of Furniture West Midlands (a network for the region's furniture companies facilitated by Kathryn Burns from 2003 to 2007) as well as support through the Interiors & Lifestyle Futures project. Now Glassdomain's activities centre on a showroom appropriate for its target market of architects and specifiers and it has won a number of national design awards. Projects include fitting out of prestige locations for design-aware clients, including corporate suites in Wembley Stadium, television companies and hotels. (www.glassdomain.co.uk) [Ref 6]

As well as help targeting individual businesses, Interiors & Lifestyle Futures has assisted clusters of companies. Of particular note is its work with many businesses within the region's glass industry. This encompasses consultancy and practical assistance with collaborative activities. For example, in 2010, 'Bring on the New' involved West Midlands' glass artists working with other makers, both from the UK and abroad, to create original pieces and learn from each other.

In 2012, Interiors & Lifestyle Futures joined the selection committee for 'Back to the Future' exhibition where 23 glass artists and makers created new work to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the region's glass industry. This attracted 7104 visitors and made sales of £4,900. [Ref 7 and Ref 8]

Finally, many of the companies helped by Interiors & Lifestyle Futures took part in the week long 2012 Birmingham Made Me expo. This major exhibition and series of events celebrated Midlands design innovation and manufacturing. Interiors & Lifestyle Futures companies showcased their work in a dedicated space in the Mailbox, a high-end Birmingham retail complex, which also houses the region's BBC studios. [Ref 9]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ref 1: *Centre for High Value-added Products (CHVAP) [WMR/B8000/155] Final project report: 31 March 2009*, prepared for Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) the then administrators of the European Regional Development Fund. Please note that The Centre for High Value-added Products was the official name for Design Knowledge Network. The report confirms project activities, funding and outputs. Copy held at Birmingham City University for inspection by reviewers if required.

Ref 2: Project Officer, European Contract and Delivery Team, Government Office for the West Midlands – Identifier 1

Ref 3: *Evaluation of the 'New Pathways' Project* report by PCN Regeneration, October 2012. New Pathways was one of the elements of the Interiors & Lifestyle Futures project, led by the Ceramics Industry Forum with BIAD as a major partner. The report presents the successes and shortcomings of the project. Copy held at Birmingham City University for inspection by reviewers if required.

Ref 4: *Evaluation of the Interiors and Lifestyle Futures Venture programme* by PCN Regeneration, September 2012 covers the start-up aspects of the Interiors & Lifestyle Futures programme, delivered by BIAD. Copy held at Birmingham City University for inspection by reviewers if required.

Ref 5: *Identifying opportunities for business growth*, Interiors & Lifestyle Futures, June 2012 Booklet describing project activities and successes. Copy held at Birmingham City University for inspection by reviewers if required.

Ref 6: Confirmation from Managing Director, Glassdomain – Identifier 2

Ref 7: Confirmation from Co-director, Glass Collaborations – Identifier 3

Ref 8: *Back to the Future*, Broadfield House Glass Museum, ISBN 978-0-900911-63-7, 2012 Exhibition catalogue with copy held at Birmingham City University for inspection by reviewers if required.

Ref 9: *Birmingham Made Me Design Expo*, Interiors & Lifestyle Futures, June 2012 Exhibition catalogue. Copy held at Birmingham City University for inspection by reviewers if required.