

Institution: Staffordshire University
Unit of Assessment: 34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: Aynsley China Research and impact via Flux Stoke-on-Trent
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>In late 2010 Professor Sanderson decided to form the Flux ceramics spin-out company at Staffordshire University in order to exploit a significant market gap he had discovered via his KTP research project for Aynsley China Ltd., Stoke-on-Trent. Flux has been able to exploit the market gap discovered in a way that Aynsley China was unwilling to pursue. Flux has produced cutting edge ceramic tableware design that has been successful in terms of both sales and recognition as a valuable contribution to contemporary tableware design. Flux won the Home and Gardens Design Award in 2012.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Sanderson has a great deal of expertise in ceramic design. He was short listed and highly commended for the Prince Philip Designer of the Year award in 1992 and was commissioned by the British Ceramic Confederation to design the Queen's gift to commemorate her Golden Jubilee in 2002 on behalf of the British ceramic industry.</p> <p>Sanderson's role within the 2006 Aynsley China KTP was officially 'Lead Academic Supervisor' but he functioned as a principal researcher with two MA Ceramic Design graduates as research assistants. Within the project proposal he set out to carry out research in order to provide a design strategy for the company. Research was carried out over 24 weeks.</p> <p>The first task was to conduct a feasibility study, identifying strengths and weaknesses within existing design procedures at Aynsley. One objective was to obtain a detailed overview as to how the company valued design. A second objective was to engage in market research examining competing brands. Questions were posed: Did the brand identity of the company truly reflect Aynsley's position within the marketplace? Were their existing product ranges perceived as being in unison with what the company stood for? These questions led to a thorough and extensive design audit. The result of the audit was that Aynsley China lacked sufficient appreciation of the value of design within the company and that a more design-led culture needed to be encouraged and facilitated.</p> <p>To engender an appreciation of the value of design and to research market trends Sanderson organised visits to international design trade fairs with the Aynsley associates. He focused on key global brands to be studied as direct or potential new competitors of Aynsley. Maison & Objet, Paris and Ambiente, Frankfurt, are the leading global trade fairs for this industry and were pivotal in this market research. Such visits made Aynsley design staff aware of cutting edge products produced by their competitors and the dated character of their current product lines.</p> <p>Prof. Sanderson's research pointed to a significant gap in the market that was not being addressed</p>

by Staffordshire brands/factories. The proposal to Aynsley was a design strategy that would exploit the 'traditional' qualities and values of the fine bone china produced in Stoke-on-Trent while at the same time taking on board contemporary trends in tableware design. However, there was resistance within Aynsley to embrace a contemporary design approach on the basis that traditional design played an integral role in the Aynsley brand. As such Aynsley adopted a half-way approach updating their design but not to the extent that Professor Sanderson's research recommended.

Another aspect of Sanderson's research not exploited by Aynsley concerns the capabilities of CAD (computer aided design) technology for ceramic design rapid prototyping. Sanderson found that CAD and 3D software enable visualisations of designs that accelerated local, national and international market research evaluation of designs prior to production.

Informed by his research and disappointed with Aynsley's response Sanderson decided that there was an opportunity within Stoke-on-Trent to venture into cutting edge tableware design. It took Sanderson four years of development to set up 'Flux' an in-house spin-out company within Staffordshire University utilising all the findings of his research for Aynsley China that Aynsley felt unable to adopt.

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

Sanderson, David, 'Aynsley China KTP' chapter in *Vision and Values in Design Management*, ed. David Hands, Worthing: AVA Publishing, 2009, pp. 56-61.

The KTP between Staffordshire University and Aynsley China Limited won the Achievement in Innovation Award at the West Midlands Lord Stafford Awards held on 13 November 2008 at Worcester Cathedral. The KTP team consisting of Mr Paul Hulme, Head of Design, Aynsley China Limited, Professor David Sanderson, Academic Supervisor, Staffordshire University and Clair Renn and Adele Barnes, KTP Associates.

ktponline.org.uk, 'Lord Stafford Awards', *KTP E-Transfer*, Issue 14, December 2008. Online resource accessed March 2012:

http://www.ktponline.org.uk/assets/Uploads/eTransfer_Issue14.htm

The KTP Grading Panel awarded the highest grade of 'Outstanding' to the KTP for achievement in meeting KTP objectives.

Griffin, John, 'Ceramics firm's link up with university is rated "outstanding"' *Birmingham Post*, 12 August 2009. Online resource accessed March 2012: <http://www.birminghampost.net/birmingham-business/birmingham-business-news/technology-and-innovation/2009/08/12/ceramics-firm-s-link-up-with-university-is-rated-outstanding-65233-24376702/>

This is Staffordshire, 'High praise for design partnership', Monday 10 August 2009. Online resources accessed March 2012:

<http://www.thisisstaffordshire.co.uk/High-praise-design-partnership/story-12486804-detail/story.html>

Impact case study (REF3b)

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

The cutting edge approach to design and design methodology that was not fully adopted by Aynsley became fully realised in Flux with resultant impact on the non-academic users of the vanguard bone china tableware designs produced by Flux.

The Flux Company Stoke-on-Trent Limited (<http://fluxstokeontrent.com/>) was set up using money from the Higher Education Innovation Fund. In 2010 Sanderson set up a small batch production/research unit in the university's business village. Partnerships were set up with the Co-Creating Value Collective in Brussels and Duchess China Ltd, Stoke-on-Trent, who manufacture Flux's designs. When the first tableware products were produced Sanderson launched Flux at the prestigious Maison & Objet trade fair, Paris, in January 2011 and secured £40,000 worth of orders (see: <http://staffslive.co.uk/2011/10/21/new-stoke-on-trent-ceramics-firm-flux-launches-at-spode/>).

On 26 March 2012 Flux Stoke-on-Trent won the 'Ceramics and glassware designer' category at the Home and Gardens Designer award. In addition, it caught the attention of numerous newspapers and magazines, including the *Guardian* and *Monocle*. *Veranda* and *Elle Decoration* have featured Flux tableware and Flux was nominated for a tableware award in *Elle Decoration* in 2011 (<http://staffslive.co.uk/2011/10/20/success-for-staffordshire-university-ceramic-design-firm/>). To date over £100,000 of orders have been received for the cutting edge designs produced by Flux.

Flux is sold via a broad spectrum of channels from online to the prestigious BHV department store, 52 Rue de Rivoli Paris; Mint, an interior design store in central London (2 North Terrace London SW3 2BA). Flux also has also developed outlets in Switzerland and Russia (see: https://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/Flux%20Press%20Release%202_tcm44-61896.pdf)

Flux has been showcased in the British Embassy in Bern in 2013, and ceramics trade fairs such as Tent, London (<http://www.tentlondon.co.uk/node/1268>); Maison & Objet, Paris; NY Now, New York.

Flux has also facilitated valuable opportunities for Staffordshire University MA Ceramic Design students. After working for Flux Brazilian-born Neusa Basso, was approached by the Portuguese company Vista Alegre to head a project for their company (see: <http://staffslive.co.uk/2011/10/21/new-stoke-on-trent-ceramics-firm-flux-launches-at-spode/>).

Another MA Ceramic Design student Sarah Callard came to the attention of two well-known French companies via Flux who offered her positions as a designer (see: <http://www.staffs.ac.uk/news/ceramics-company-influxed-with-orders-tcm4235617.jsp>).

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

BBC (online), Flux fires up Staffordshire University ceramic students 13:29 GMT, Friday, 18 February 2011:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/stoke/hi/people_and_places/arts_and_culture/newsid_9401000/9401858.stm

Midlands Business News (online), Ceramics company inFLUXed with orders, 17 February 2011: <http://www.midlandsbusinessnews.co.uk/2011/02/Ceramics-company-inFLUXed-with-orders/>

Homes & Gardens (online) Designer award winners 2012 <http://www.housetohome.co.uk/product-idea/picture/homes-gardens-designer-awards-2012/3>

Impact case study (REF3b)

PraxisUnico's Impact Awards (online) Announcing the finalists
<http://www.praxisunico.org.uk/news/detail.asp?ItemID=1412>

The Style Examiner, 'Flux Ceramics: Revitalising British Pottery Traditions', Tuesday, 11 September 2012:
<http://www.thestyleexaminer.com/2012/09/flux-ceramics-revitalising-british.html#.UaThDyvTX6A>

Rebecca Smithers, Graduates bring life back to the Potteries, The Guardian, Friday 18 November 2011
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2011/nov/18/graduates-bring-life-back-to-potteries>

Luke Powell, Success for Staffordshire University ceramic design firm, October 20, 2011:
<http://staffslive.co.uk/2011/10/20/success-for-staffordshire-university-ceramic-design-firm/>

Katy Cowan, Ceramics company in 'FLUX'ed with orders, 11th February 2011
<http://creativeboom.co.uk/ceramics-company-influxed-with-orders/>