

# Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP)

## Case Study **Tough Furniture Limited**

*Award winning partnership in tough times*

### The Company

Tough Furniture Ltd design and manufacture strong, durable and safe furniture to meet the needs of challenging environments; including young offenders institutions, social care homes and mental health units. The company was established in 1997 and is based in Craven Arms, Shropshire.

### Challenge



Prior to the KTP, the company lacked a dedicated design capability with rapid growth in demand outstripping the management team's resources. Additional expertise and capacity was therefore urgently needed.

KTP was identified as the ideal solution to address these issues and help the company move forward.

Rhys Thomas, a graduate in Product Design, was employed as a KTP Associate

by the University of Wolverhampton. He was mentored throughout the scheme by Rob Cooksey, a senior lecturer in Furniture Design.

### Solutions

The ultimate aims of the KTP were to embed an integrated design capability; create an accessible CAD library; undertake market research; collaborate with the University in researching modern design techniques; and develop new product ranges.

As part of the project, a new design department was established, with the Associate managing the department's daily activities. The department has helped widen the company's offer, increase responsiveness and achieve its aim of designing and introducing new ranges. It has been responsible for the development of fully rendered 3D drawings to show to customers, helping customers to visualise the finished product.

Rhys has also overseen the creation of a full CAD library of past and future products, allowing for full integration between different departments within the company. All data attached to products such as images and technical data, have been embedded in a way that allows staff to access it, increasing efficiency and speed.

## Results

The KTP produced positive results for all those involved.

### Key successes include:

- Company profits have increased by 20 percent since the KTP began
- Company now has reduced production times and costs
- All products now have an assembly manual which reduces supervision and training time of new staff
- Acquisition of new software has enabled Tough to produce drawings and images quickly and of a much higher quality
- Tough won the special recognition category at the National Impact Awards, run by PraxisUnico
- Company won the Technology, Enterprise and Innovation Award at the prestigious Shropshire Business Awards
- Company was a finalist at the Lord Stafford Awards
- Associate employed by the company at the end of the programme as Design Manager
- The project has helped the University relay business processes and operations into teaching.
- The Associate used the skills that he developed within his role to give lectures on kitchen design to current undergraduate students at the University of Wolverhampton
- The Associate organised a workshop on chair design with a local secondary school, which helped promote the design courses offered by the University of Wolverhampton to prospective students
- KTP funded a trip to the world's largest furniture fair in Milan, allowing the Associate and University staff to gather research on emerging design trends.

## In their words

### Company

*"The KTP has proved very rewarding for Tough Furniture; the programme has equipped the company with sought after expertise and resources which have helped increase efficiency and productivity.*

*The company now has a dedicated design capability which would have been difficult to establish without the programme."*

**Nigel Reaney**  
**Commercial Director**

### Associate

*"The KTP has enabled me to develop new and existing skills that I would not have had the opportunity to do so otherwise. I was able to utilise these skills in helping Tough Furniture improve its service and product offering within a competitive market.*

*It has been a great honour to help Tough Furniture become an award winning company."*

**Rhys Thomas**  
**KTP Associate**

### Academic Partner

*"It was a rewarding experience to undertake a collaborative venture with Tough Furniture, as they are a dynamic and innovative company who are focused on solving real world design issues that can significantly impact and improve people's lives."*

**Robert Cooksey**  
**Lead Academic**  
**University of Wolverhampton**

For further information:

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