

Issues in the support of Interchange by the University (from David Hall, Irene Hall: *Collaborative Action Research at Interchange: a UK model in Pedagogies of Practice* (2006) editors Hofman & Rosing, Anker Press)

The question of funding for outreach activities such as Interchange, to provide the means for delivering a public benefit through student research, has always been problematic... Part of the thinking behind the registration of Interchange as a charity under UK Charity Law was to give it the legal status helpful for applying for support from funding bodies (which can usually only allocate money to registered organisations). This strategy has had limited success, as many of the grants obtainable are relatively small, and in nearly all cases funding bodies are prepared to finance new initiatives, as start-up or pump-priming activities, but are much less willing to cover regular costs or core funding such as staffing the Interchange coordinator post.

The funding of Interchange has therefore been supplemented by research funds awarded to the academic supervisors which have enabled the mediation work to exist alongside research on applied research, science shops, learning and teaching, and volunteering within the curriculum. While no unrestricted university funding is available, Interchange has been able to benefit, albeit indirectly, from initiatives for reach-out activities by universities by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (the channel through which the Government supports state universities). The first of these was the CoBaLT project, supported by the Government's Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning in England, while more recently some funding has come from the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) which promotes volunteering by students, and the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) which focuses on reach-out to business and the community.

Within the national context, Interchange fits well with the outreach agenda establishing a third mission of universities in addition to teaching and research. A key component of this is the concept of knowledge transfer from universities to business and the community and community based action research (CBAR) actually works both ways, in bringing the knowledge and experience of community practitioners into the university while addressing their needs for research. In the university context of educating students, Interchange and CBAR also meet the employability agenda by offering advanced skills development through practical experience of applied research.

However, one difficulty that has emerged in trying to promote Interchange to potential funding-providers is its links with the university and with learning and teaching. While many funders can see and understand the benefit of applied social research to small and medium voluntary sector organizations, and to the communities and service users that they serve, they also consider that the benefits to students in terms of learning and skills acquisition mean that the university itself should be funding such activity. When the competition for funding is with other needy community-based charities, such funding-providers find it difficult to justify grants to Interchange which is assumed to have university largesse to draw on, which in reality it does not.

Interchange has survived thus far through the dedication of its members to the ideal of CBAR as research that makes a difference to the community, and through its ability to garner small amounts of resources from a variety of sources. The beauty of CBAR is that it can truthfully be presented as meeting many needs – in learning and teaching, in community development, in regional social and economic policy, in science and society policy, in empowering the voluntary sector, in knowledge transfer, in science communication, in skills assists, in lifelong learning, in work based learning, in graduate employment – with impact both for students and for community members. CBAR is well placed to take on and benefit from initiatives in all these directions.