

## **Coalfields and neighbouring cities**

### **Economic regeneration, labour markets and governance**

*Tony Gore, Steve Fothergill, Emma Hollywood, Colin Lindsay, Kevin Morgan, Ryan Powell and Stevie Upton*

**This study assesses how far the regeneration of coalfield areas relies upon their links with neighbouring cities.**

Through case studies in England, Scotland and Wales and analysis of labour market trends in the British coalfields, the authors look at:

- economic, social and governance links between the coalfields and their neighbouring cities;
- whether the coalfields are thriving in their own right or are becoming more closely integrated with newly resurgent cities;
- patterns of commuting and migration, job search, social networks and the level of collaboration between official bodies in coalfields and neighbouring cities.

They find that a one-size-fits-all approach to reviving former coalfield communities on the back of city growth would be inappropriate – relationships between the coalfields and their neighbouring cities vary according to geographical and political context, and some former coalfield areas remain major economic zones in their own right.



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The **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policymakers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

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First published 2007 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

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ISBN: 978 1 85935 582 4

A CIP catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

Prepared by:

York Publishing Services Ltd, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ  
Tel: 01904 430033; Fax: 01904 430868; Website: [www.yps-publishing.co.uk](http://www.yps-publishing.co.uk)

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of our Project Advisory Group for their comments and guidance throughout the study. They were: Professor Rick Ball, Head of the Centre for Economic and Social Regeneration, Staffordshire University; Jonathan Atherton, Community Regeneration Unit, Communities Scotland; Janet Bibby, Chief Executive, Coalfields Regeneration Trust; Helen Bushell, Social Justice and Regeneration Research and Information Unit, Communities Directorate, National Assembly for Wales; Martin Cantor, Principal European Officer, Barnsley Borough Council; Craig Griffiths, Coalfields Regeneration Team, Department of Communities and Local Government; Christine Murphy, Business Support Group Manager, Scottish Business in the Community; Alistair Shaw, Economic Development Manager, West Lothian Council; Peter Slater, Coalfield Communities Campaign; Professor Alan Townsend, Department of Geography, University of Durham; and Dr Victoria Winckler, Director, The Bevan Foundation.

We would also like to thank the officers and other representatives of public and voluntary sector bodies who took part in the interviews exploring governance arrangements and policy interventions, and the coalfield residents who participated in the interview survey of job seekers. Thanks are also due to the labour market intermediaries (including Jobcentre Plus in South Yorkshire) and other organisations that provided access to these job seekers, and that kindly allowed us to use their premises to conduct the interviews. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr Julian Hunt, who undertook the job-seeker interviews in the Central Valleys. Advice and assistance was also gratefully received from our colleagues in Cardiff, Napier and Sheffield Hallam Universities throughout the study. The three study area location maps were expertly assembled by Louise Bailey at CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University.

Any errors of fact or interpretation are of course the exclusive responsibility of the authors.

# Executive summary

## Background

This study looks at the extent to which the regeneration of Britain's coalfields depends on links with neighbouring cities. It is about the relationship between places – in terms of the economy, labour market and governance.

As Britain has moved further away from its position as one of the world's industrial powerhouses, people and places have had to adapt to new social and economic requirements. In particular, increasingly open local economies raise questions about how a growing network of links between places alter the role and identity of former industrial areas. This question is closely bound up with key contemporary policy issues. These include geographical disparities in welfare and productivity, the uneven operation of the labour market, the governance of economic development, and the competing claims of 'city regions' on the one hand and 'regions' and 'sub-regions' on the other as the appropriate arena for sub-national policymaking.

The evidence and analysis presented in this report seeks to shed light on these issues. The report is based on a study of three former coalfield areas and their neighbouring cities (Lothian and Edinburgh; Central Valleys and Cardiff; and South Yorkshire and Sheffield). This investigated economic, social and governance links between the coalfields and their cities, and assessed whether the coalfields are reviving in their own right or are more likely to become residential hinterlands for newly resurgent cities. These matters were examined in terms of commuting and migration links, the job-search patterns and social networks of unemployed individuals in the coalfields, and collaborative governance and policy arrangements covering coalfields and neighbouring cities.

## Labour market connections

Labour market and demographic data for the British coalfields combined show that migration and commuting flows have provided part of the response to job losses in the coal industry, but they account for a relatively small proportion of the overall adjustment. The dominant trends have been internal to the coalfield labour market, particularly in the shape of new job creation (on the positive side) and withdrawal of men into economic inactivity (on the negative). Success in job creation has been in part dependent on location and context, but, importantly, new jobs are being



created in conjunction with business growth in the coalfields themselves, not simply in neighbouring areas to which coalfield residents can commute. In other words, the success or failure to date of economic regeneration in the coalfields has principally been dependent on trends in the coalfield economy, not in neighbouring areas.

However, this is not the case for every coalfield. The three case study areas each display different relationships to their neighbouring cities.

Thus, the *South Yorkshire* coalfield emerges as a large, relatively self-contained economic zone whose economic fortunes have been determined largely by what has happened within its own boundaries. Job creation has been strong in recent years and there is no evidence of any increase in net commuting to neighbouring areas. Links with Sheffield exist, but they do not appear to be driving the overall pattern of change in the coalfield labour market. Established urban centres such as Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham act as important hubs, as do newer employment zones such as the Dearne Valley.

Similarly, the *Central Valleys* coalfield remains a substantial economic zone in its own right, but new job creation has been relatively weak. In this context, Cardiff's exceptionally strong employment growth in recent years has stimulated rising commuting from the coalfield. To some extent, therefore, there does appear to be increasing dependency in the Central Valleys on its neighbouring city. However, this should not be overstated, since the proportion of Central Valleys residents of working age travelling to jobs in Cardiff remains relatively small at just under 10 per cent. The growth in commuting is perhaps more a symptom of economic weakness and continuing labour market distress in the Central Valleys themselves.

At the other extreme, the links between the *Lothian* coalfield and Edinburgh are very strong and continuing to grow. Its small population and fairly close proximity to the city mean that the coalfield is less an economic zone in its own right and more part of the city's interdependent hinterland. The labour market trends bear this out. Commuting into Edinburgh is a dominant feature of the Lothian coalfield and this has been rising through time. Its population too has been rising, mainly through overspill from Edinburgh.

## **Job-search patterns, social networks and coalfield–city links**

The researchers interviewed 85 unemployed job seekers living in the three coalfield areas and gathered information on geographical aspects of job search, such as

attitudes to commuting and general mobility, and on local attachments and social networks.

Respondents' willingness to consider working in the adjacent city only partly mirrors the differences in labour market trends detected by the quantitative analysis. A majority of Lothian respondents were searching for jobs in the neighbouring city, partly because this falls within their definition of the 'local area'. South Yorkshire occupies the 'middling' position – some people have a positive attitude to working in Sheffield, depending on the exact location and type of work. Far fewer respondents in the Central Valleys include Cardiff in their job search than recent commuting data might suggest. However, these interviews included young people living further from the city in the north of the Valleys area, which will have affected the responses.

In line with other studies, the interviews show that travel to the neighbouring city for work is constrained by a number of factors. For many, simple economics generally rule it out – commuting costs would swallow up a large proportion of a typical wage. The time required for the return journey is a deterrent for many, while others are restricted by the lack of early-morning or late-evening public transport services, or by childcare responsibilities.

Knowledge and experience of the city are also important factors. Respondents often focus solely on areas they know, such as the city centre, or along the route between there and their home. This effectively excludes large areas of the city from consideration. Moreover, not many have access to private transport, so rely on public transport to get them to work, which limits them to workplaces near bus routes or railway stations, and to working hours that coincide with service operating times.

Most respondents have closed, locally based social networks built around family and friends. These networks provide important sources of support and information for job search. However, the support appears to be more important than the information, as most use conventional sources when looking for jobs, such as local newspapers, the Jobcentre or employment intermediaries.

However, the local nature of people's social networks does play an important role in influencing attitudes to acceptable types and locations of work. The contacts of many unemployed people can provide only limited experience and knowledge of other areas. There is also a contrast between the Lothian and South Yorkshire coalfields on the one hand and the Central Valleys on the other, with respondents in the Valleys area more likely to have unemployed or inactive people in their social network. In Lothian and South Yorkshire most respondents tended to be part of more mixed and diverse networks.

One question that arises from these findings is the feasibility of asking job seekers in the coalfields to look further afield to increase their chances of finding work. If people are to be encouraged to commute longer distances, more consideration needs to be given to the most effective means of achieving this, for example some kind of financial support to cover travel costs. However, there are also many non-economic constraints that deter people seeking relatively low-paid jobs from commuting to cities, and these are likely to derail attempts to secure labour market reattachment by means of commuting across the city region.

## **Coalfield–city collaborative governance**

A lively debate continues over the most appropriate strategic scale for sub-national economic development and the extent to which different types of place should be prioritised within it. One common feature is the designation of particular centres or zones as the location for new economic activity and the need for these to connect to areas of disadvantage. It was important, therefore, for the study to examine governance arrangements and policy interventions that seek to provide a bridge between the coalfields and their neighbouring cities.

The evidence indicates that there are similarities and contrasts between the three study areas. Parallels exist in the local frameworks and measures aimed at fostering economic development (involving increasing strategic co-ordination of district-level activities) and those geared towards community regeneration (involving intensive partnership-based working at neighbourhood level). However, co-ordination between these two spheres is generally limited. Wider collaborative structures are noticeably further developed in South Yorkshire (including Sheffield) than in either the Lothian–Edinburgh or Central Valleys–Cardiff areas.

Most importantly, the strength of such governance across the three areas does not match the pattern of economic change. The analysis of labour market links shows that the Lothian coalfield demonstrates the strongest economic interactions with its neighbouring city, Edinburgh, yet its sub-regional governance structures are weakest. Conversely, in South Yorkshire, the former coalfield has recently been outstripping Sheffield in terms of employment growth, yet South Yorkshire’s wider governance structures are most firmly established.

At first sight this inverse relationship between coalfield–city economic links and collaborative governance arrangements appears surprising. It might have been expected that stronger collaborative governance at sub-regional level would have gone hand in hand with greater economic integration between coalfield and city

– promoting the city’s growth has for many been the rationale behind the city-region approach. In fact, in the three case study areas, stronger collaborative governance appears to sit alongside weaker economic links.

In the Lothian–Edinburgh case, the coalfield–city links are already so strong via the normal workings of the market that public sector agencies need do little more than ‘go with the flow’. Extensive intervention is not required. However, several interviewees observed that the lack of formal co-ordination makes it difficult to maximise the benefits of Edinburgh’s growth for the coalfield area. In particular, it has meant that progress with attempts to connect employability schemes in the coalfield to job opportunities in the city has been slow. Similarly, lack of co-ordination means that land allocated for employment in the coalfield is not being used to ease development pressures within the city boundaries.

In South Yorkshire, on the other hand, the competing requirements of different urban centres and employment zones call for stronger co-ordination. There is an important political element to this, which is intended to deliver a spread of resources, developments and benefits across the sub-region, and a need to connect where people live to places of opportunity. South Yorkshire comprises several urban centres, so a balance needs to be struck between its constituent parts – coalfield, city and other urban areas alike.

The more disparate and fragmented pattern of governance in the Central Valleys echoes the findings of the recent Beecham review of local service delivery in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006b), which noted the institutional difficulties of improving quality and efficiency, and the need to accelerate joint working and expertise sharing across both policy domains and geographical boundaries. However, the economic and physical geography of the Valleys is hardly advantageous. Stronger city-region governance structures alone could not be expected to overcome these formidable obstacles.

## Pointers for policy

Four key policy implications emerge from the findings of this study.

First, *a one-size-fits-all approach to the revival of former coalfield communities is inappropriate*. The geographical context of Britain’s former coalfields varies a great deal. Some are able to rely on jobs in neighbouring cities to rebalance their local labour market; others need a solution that is internal to the former coalfield area itself. Physical distance and market forces will largely determine which is the best way forward in each case.

Second, *several former coalfield areas remain major economic zones in their own right and should be treated as such in spatial policy terms.* These areas actually include the majority of the coalfield population. The loss of the mining industry from these coalfields was a grievous blow, but it did not result in the complete destruction of the local economy. Nor did it mean they could never become home to new layers of economic development. Several of Britain's larger coalfields, including the South Yorkshire study area examined in this report, have shown strong signs of economic revival.

Third, *there are limits to the validity of treating cities as the dominant economic hub in relation to the coalfields.* In particular, to frame the coalfields simply as part of the commuting hinterland of their neighbouring cities is to misunderstand Britain's new economic geography. The links are there, but they vary in strength and significance between different places. If governance structures are to reflect underlying economic realities, it would be better to proceed incrementally, cautiously and selectively. Moreover, this should be in a way that balances the claims of city-driven sub-regional growth with a recognition of the contribution made by other parts of the area. There is little merit in imposing city-region mayors, or other types of formal city-region governance, where the economic links are weak and where there is little local enthusiasm for new structures.

Fourth, *there should be greater recognition of the essentially local sphere in which many people still live and work.* Long-distance commuting may be fine for middle-class professionals who can control their own hours and meet the cost. However, for many of the residents of Britain's former coalfields, and especially the job seekers among them, long-distance commuting into neighbouring cities remains an unlikely prospect. The coal industry once provided local jobs; for many men and women, local jobs still remain the way forward.



# 1 Introduction

## **Aims of the report**

This study looks at the extent to which the regeneration of Britain's coalfields depends on links with neighbouring cities. It is about the relationship between places – in terms of the economy, labour market and governance.

The coalfields are a substantial part of Britain. On fairly tight boundaries they have a combined population of more than five million – more, indeed, than some whole regions. They have also had to deal with profound and rapid economic change. Since the end of the 1984–85 miners' strike, 250,000 jobs have disappeared from the coal industry. At the start of 2007, only six collieries remained in production, employing barely 3,000 men. The industry that once defined countless communities across England, Scotland and Wales has now all but disappeared.

The relationship between these former mining communities and their neighbouring cities is of considerable policy significance. Can the coalfields be revived in their own right to become new centres of commerce and industry where people both live and work? Or are they fated to become mere residential hinterlands for newly resurgent cities? And does it make sense, therefore, to move to new structures of city-region governance that formally recognise the interdependence of adjacent areas? These are the questions that this report seeks to address.

## **Adjustment to industrial decline: the context<sup>1</sup>**

As Britain has moved further away from its position as one of the world's industrial powerhouses, people and places have had to adapt to new social and economic requirements. Whether the pace of industrial decline has been gradual, as in the case of textiles, or rapid, as with coalmining, these processes of adaptation have tended to be universally prolonged and occasionally painful. After all, many traditional industrial areas and their residents have in a relatively short space of time gone from making a recognised contribution to the national economy to a much more indeterminate role.

The difficulty of finding dominant economic activities to replace those lost has made it hard for such places to redefine themselves successfully from within. This has been compounded by externally imposed images and epithets, such as 'unemployment



blackspots' in the early days and, more recently, 'concentrations of deprivation'. Even so, most areas have made considerable strides in restructuring their economies and reskilling their workforces. In broad terms, economic regeneration policies have incorporated a mixture of physical, financial and human interventions – for example, through land reclamation, property development and environmental improvement, initiatives to encourage inward investment, business creation and expansion, and policies to support unemployed people through skills training and access to employment measures.

The prime emphasis of these interventions has been on job creation, initially via the attraction of new industries but increasingly by seeking expansion of the service sector. The former has proved to be something of a continuing process, as productive activities have become progressively internationalised in terms of both control and location. Rapid technological advances in many of those manufacturing industries that have remained have entailed a reduction in staff requirements. The growing service sector, in contrast, has brought with it very different skill requirements from those deployed in traditional industries, as well as altered working terms and conditions, such as part-time, flexible or short-term contracts and generally lower rates of pay. At the same time, many people, particularly men of prime working age, have found it hard to move from the view that an acceptable job should involve some form of skilled trade. In other words, it has been difficult for many to adapt themselves from the needs of traditional manual and technical activities to the greater emphasis on interpersonal skills and customer relations involved in the service industries.

Alongside these sectoral shifts there have been wider associated changes in the operation of the labour market. As well as the move away from 'jobs for life', mentioned above, there has been a marked increase in female labour market participation, especially allied to service sector growth. While this has been in line with national trends, in some traditional industrial areas it has started from a much lower base, so that, even with rapid rates of increase, women's employment rates may lag behind the average. The other main general trend has been for journey-to-work distances to grow, particularly for those engaged in managerial, professional and administrative occupations. However, the travel costs involved may deter those in lower-paid jobs from seeking employment further afield. Unless transport is provided, they are generally restricted to finding work in their local area.

In these circumstances, it has proved difficult for many localities to generate new jobs in sufficient volume both to replace the extensive job losses in traditional industries and to accommodate new entrants to the labour market. Factors behind this include not only the very different staff requirements for service sector and knowledge-based economic activities, but also productivity growth, the rapid pace of technological



change and the ever-increasing complexity of the networks involved in modern economic development. These all bring with them changes in locational prerequisites that inevitably favour some places more strongly over others.

The result has been the emergence of ‘new geographies of uneven development’ (Hudson, 2003), with some areas of Britain forging ahead and others struggling to keep up. One facet of this is the emergence of marked ‘islands of growth and affluence’ within regions of northern and western Britain where the overall economy remains relatively weak. These include areas like greater Edinburgh, the Leeds-Harrogate-York ‘Golden Triangle’, the Nottingham-Derby-Leicester axis and the South East Wales coastal belt. All of these are adjacent to areas that over the past 25 years have continued to experience the far-reaching economic and social after-effects of industrial decline.

Current policy approaches to regional economic development may play a role in these polarising trends. They promote a mixture of industrial ‘clusters’ (similar activities located in relative proximity to one another) and accessibility to major transport infrastructure (leading to ‘corridor’ developments of hi-tech, logistics and other distributional activities). Most of the strategies prepared by the English Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) actively promote these methods of spatial economic development. The intention is that such developments play a role as key regional ‘drivers’, pulling along with them places in the surrounding sub-region that are facing economic difficulties.

A similar line of argument has been advanced more recently in support of the ‘city-region’ concept. This rests on the argument that the interdependence between cities and their hinterlands is of fundamental importance in terms of economic development, productivity growth and competitive performance. As the third report of the UK Government’s Core Cities Working Group, *Our Cities Are Back*, claims: ‘if you can improve the economic performance of cities this will have a major impact upon the economy of the entire region’ (Core Cities Working Group, 2004, p. 26). As a result, many parts of Britain are currently in active pursuit of city-region arrangements that seek to maximise the beneficial effects of such developments, with a particular focus on the cities acting as ‘drivers’ for the wider area.

However, the mechanisms by which these links between cities and their surrounding areas are to be achieved remain unclear. Indeed, many areas suffering the aftermath of severe economic shocks, labour market dislocation and their adverse social consequences have been the subject of separate economic regeneration initiatives. In general, these have been pitched at a local authority level and have sought to promote economic recovery locally, rather than on the back of growth in neighbouring

cities. Any benefits that may have spilt over from growth in neighbouring cities have tended to occur through conventional socio-economic processes, rather than via any special policy interventions. At the same time, the traditional industrial areas that have fared best are arguably those that have benefited from both internal economic growth and access to external opportunities. Conversely, places have struggled to recover fully where it has proved difficult for local residents to take advantage of employment growth in neighbouring areas.

Similar issues are at play at a broader geographical level. A lively debate continues over the most appropriate scale for sub-national economic development and the extent to which different places should be prioritised within it. A prominent example is the recent countering of 'city-region' advocacy by other government voices in the Treasury.<sup>2</sup> They argue that it would be wrong to assume that the successful London model, based on its unique position in the UK as a 'world city', can simply be transposed to all other conurbations. These have very different structures, histories and mixtures of local identities. The authors also contend that the reallocation of roles and responsibilities to new city-region arrangements could well destabilise the existing multilevel approach that brings together the RDAs, sub-regional partnerships and local authorities and other partner agencies. Instead, they consider that a combination of strong regional co-ordination and increased local flexibility would be the best way to increase prosperity and reduce inequalities.

Increasingly open local economies raise questions about the nature and scope of links between places, and how these alter the role and identity of former industrial areas. The previous discussion illustrates how this topic is closely bound up with key contemporary issues. These include geographical disparities in welfare and productivity, the uneven operation of the labour market, the governance of economic development, and the competing claims of 'city regions' on the one hand, and 'regions' and 'sub-regions' on the other as the appropriate arena for sub-national policymaking. It is important for the future of disadvantaged areas that an improved understanding of such issues is gained, particularly the methods and mechanisms by which such spatial interactions might be established and developed. The study reported here addressed these issues by assessing how far the regeneration of coalfield areas relies on their links with neighbouring cities, with particular reference to labour market interactions, governance structures, policy interventions, and the job-search patterns and social networks of unemployed coalfield residents.

## Examining coalfields and their cities

The report focuses on three coalfield areas located in different parts of Great Britain: one in England (South Yorkshire), one in Scotland (Lothian) and one in Wales (the Central Valleys). This spread across three of the constituent parts of the UK provided an excellent comparative arena for the investigation. In particular, the devolution of selected powers to Scotland and Wales, and the growth of regional structures in England, offer a varied comparative mix. Certainly, at one level, devolution has been justified as providing an appropriate scale for the co-design of policies across a range of functions such as economic development, employment, housing and transport. As these arrangements are now well established, it is timely to investigate the extent to which they are leading to greater policy and geographical integration, and what effects they have had on the lives and prospects of people living in disadvantaged communities.

Comparative study of such matters under different devolved jurisdictions should provide important insights into a range of governance issues as they affect the prosperity and prospects of different places. For example, the varying powers and structures in the three countries may lead to very different outcomes with regard to the nature and extent of any integration that has taken place (Goodwin *et al.*, 2002). More practically, there is the question of how effective such policy integration has been in terms of increased labour market and migration links between the coalfields on the one hand, and their neighbouring cities on the other, and the extent to which these have led to 'place improvements', in the coalfields themselves.

This subject is undoubtedly a topical one. As part of the 'city-region' debate outlined above, there appears to be some tension between the cities that are promoting themselves as prime 'drivers of economic growth' and many coalfield areas that consider themselves to be important economic spaces in their own right, and not just part of a commuting hinterland. In a sense, such political/spatial conflicts have always been part and parcel of economic development policymaking, but they have been brought to a head in recent years by the efforts to afford greater prominence to cities over other areas in the drive to increase productivity and competitiveness. This has been seen particularly in the high-level thinking informing the Northern Way initiative, an inter-regional growth strategy for the three northern regions that aims to bridge the productivity gap between them and the rest of the country. The nub of this debate is what the respective roles of different places should be in the drive for social and economic inclusion, and the appropriate geographical distribution of economic activity that will maximise access to the job opportunities on which a share in increased prosperity would be mainly based.

The coalfields of Britain are distributed over a wide area, with extensive tracts in England, Scotland and Wales (see Figure 1). Moreover, the distribution of coalfield areas across England, Scotland and Wales means, not only that policies and programmes have been rolled out under different administrative and financial arrangements, but also that their content and focus have varied.

Thus, while there is a dedicated coalfields regeneration programme in England, involving English Partnerships and the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – and parliamentary select committee scrutiny – nothing similar exists in either Scotland or Wales. Here, coalfield areas are subject to regeneration policies designed to cover a wide range of situations, and consequently they also have to compete directly with other areas of decline and deprivation for the resources to implement such policies at the local level. Even initiatives shared between the three countries, such as the grant-based community activity supported by the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, have generally developed relatively independently once in place, in terms of the focus of their work and the scale of resources available to them. All of these considerations suggest that important lessons regarding the regeneration of specific types of area can be drawn from a comparison of coalfields between the three countries.

### Scope of the report

This report is based on a three-part study, the components of which were:

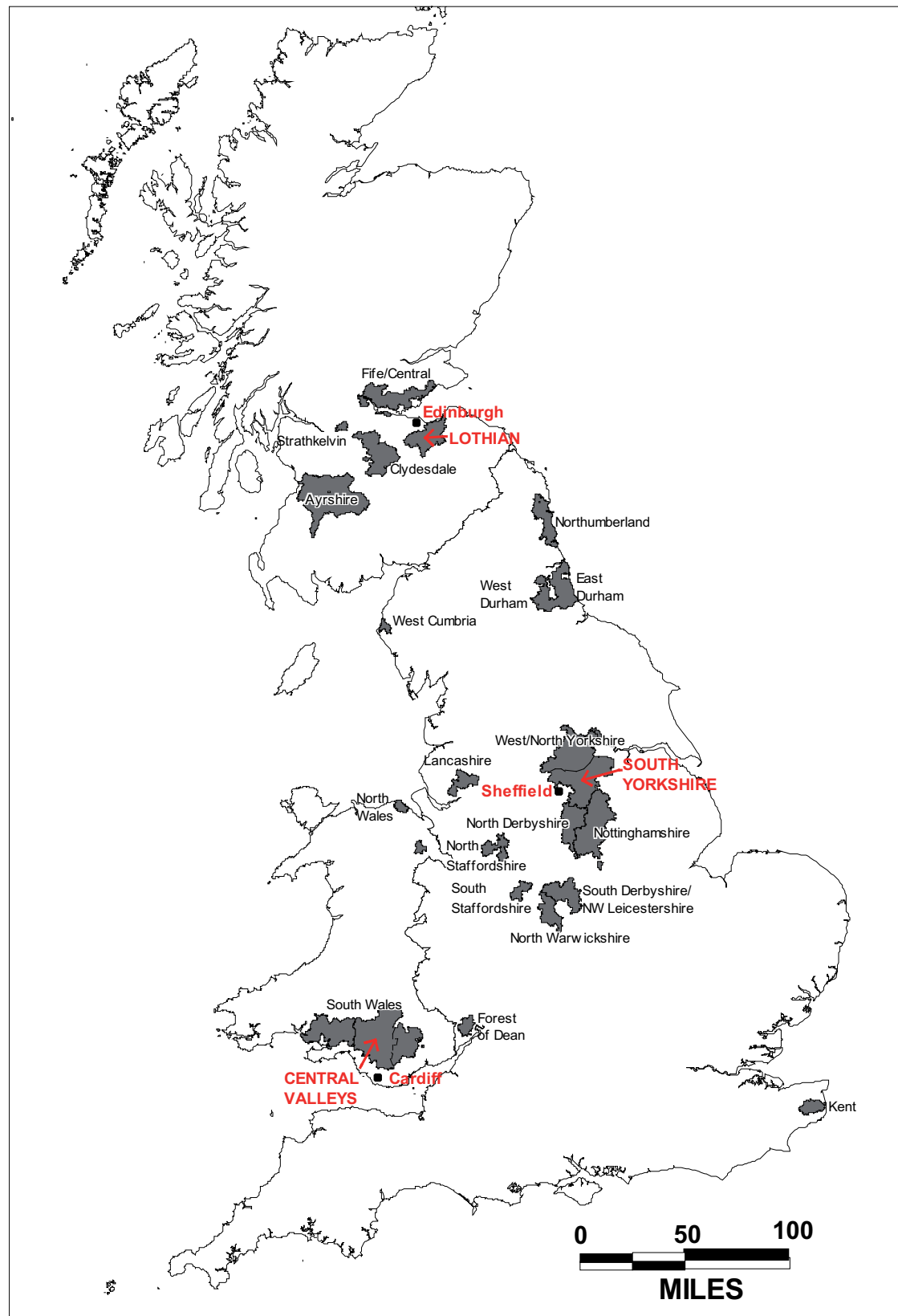
- an analysis of coalfield–city labour market, commuting and migration links
- an examination of job-search patterns among unemployed coalfield residents
- a review of governance structures and policy interventions.

This work involved some national data analysis as well as work in three case study areas: Lothians–Edinburgh, Central Valleys–Cardiff and South Yorkshire–Sheffield.

### Coalfield–city links

The starting point for the study was a quantitative analysis of the changing economic and labour market links between the three coalfield areas and their neighbouring cities. Data were drawn from a variety of sources such as the Annual Business Inquiry, the Census of Population and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Figure 1 The coalfields of Britain and the three study areas



Benefit Claimant statistics. A number of different methods were used to make sense of the figures. These included:

- labour market accounts for each of the study areas, charting the adjustment in employment, commuting and migration that took place between 1991 and 2001
- calculation of commuting flows between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities
- calculation of migration flows between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities
- assessment of employment change by sector.

### **Job-search patterns in the coalfields**

The second component of the study examined the labour market participation of unemployed residents in each of the three coalfields. This covered the geographical range of their job search and the impact of social networks on this behaviour. Information was gathered from structured interviews with 85 coalfield residents who were currently unemployed and actively seeking work (30 in the Lothians, 30 in South Yorkshire and 25 in the Central Valleys). Interviews were conducted with 45 men and 40 women whose ages ranged from under 20 to over 50 – with over a third aged between 20 and 34 (see Appendix 1 for a full profile of the interviewees). Most were in receipt of benefits and had just basic school or vocational qualifications, although several had none at all. Access to respondents was gained mainly via contracted providers of employment advice and support, with only a small number being referred directly by Jobcentre Plus. The interviews were carried out face to face with the respondents. A standard interview schedule was used, and this covered questions on labour market history, qualifications, attitudes to commuting, access to transport, job-search techniques and the use and extent of social networks.

### **Governance structures and policy interventions**

The third part of the study involved an assessment of the extent to which structures and practices of governance and policy in these areas help to promote or to hinder the development of coalfield–city links. Two main sources were used during this stage of the study:

- a series of semi-structured interviews with officials representing different public agencies operating in the three study areas (see Appendix 2)
- a review of relevant documentation on the strategic and operational policy frameworks affecting those areas.

These investigations focused on the remit and objectives of the various agencies; their policy priorities, especially in relation to economic development, labour market participation, transport links and health/disability issues; the spatial frameworks that underpin these policies; the extent of collaborative and partnership working at city-region or sub-regional scale; and involvement in initiatives explicitly targeted at linking cities and coalfields. The overall objective was to assess the existence of collaborative governance structures and policies in the study areas, and the relative strength of links between coalfields and their neighbouring cities.

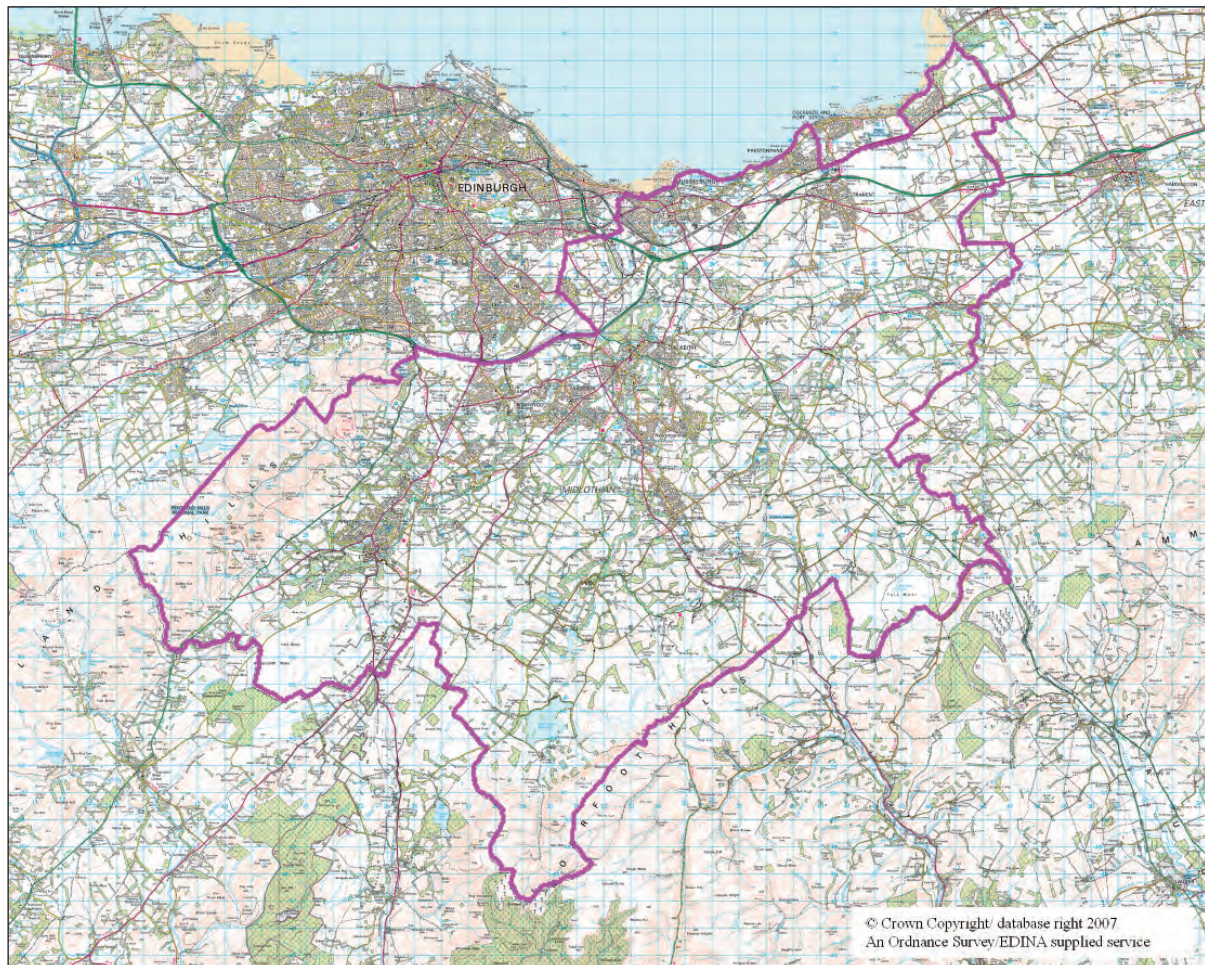
### **Coalfield–city study areas**

The study focuses on three coalfield–city areas, one each in England, Scotland and Wales:

- the Lothian coalfield, covering the bulk of the Midlothian local authority area (15 out of 17 postcode sectors), the western portion of the East Lothian local authority area (eight out of 19 postcode sectors) and its relationship with the neighbouring city, Edinburgh (see Figure 2)
- the Central Valleys coalfield of South Wales, covering the majority of electoral districts in the council areas of Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff, and its relationship with the city of Cardiff immediately to the south (see Figure 3)
- the South Yorkshire coalfield, comprising 95 per cent of wards in the Barnsley and Doncaster borough areas and two-thirds of those in Rotherham, and its relationship with the adjacent city of Sheffield (see Figure 4).



**Figure 2 The Lothian coalfield and Edinburgh**





**Figure 3 The Central Valleys coalfield and Cardiff**





**Figure 4 The South Yorkshire coalfield and Sheffield**



A brief profile of the size and population of the study areas is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1 Profile of the three study areas**

	Area (sq km)	Total population	Working-age population	Employment rates	
				Males	Females
Central Valleys coalfield	755	435,000	265,000	65.8	59.0
Cardiff County Borough	140	315,000	205,000	73.9	67.6
South Yorkshire coalfield	1,004	655,000	405,000	70.9	64.5
Sheffield City Council	367	515,000	320,000	77.0	67.8
Lothian coalfield	457	120,000	65,000	79.8	75.4
City of Edinburgh Council	262	450,000	295,000	77.5	72.1

Sources: Regional Trends, 2001; Mid-year Population Estimates, 2003; Local Area Labour Force Survey, 2003.

Note: population estimates have been rounded to the nearest 5,000.

## Report structure

The rest of the report is divided into four chapters, the first three presenting the findings of the study, plus a final chapter that distils the main messages and identifies key policy implications.

- Chapter 2 presents a quantitative analysis of the demographic and labour market links between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities.
- Chapter 3 examines the job-search patterns of a small sample of unemployed coalfield residents from the point of view of their geographical scope and the influence of social networks on this.
- Chapter 4 contains a review of the governance arrangements, the extent of cross-boundary collaboration and the existence of policy initiatives to tie the coalfield and city areas closer together.
- Chapter 5 concludes the report with a summary of more general lessons and policy implications.

## 2 Coalfield labour markets and neighbouring cities

### Introduction

How the labour market works is central to an understanding of the problems of the British coalfields. It is the historical dependence of these areas on employment in the coal industry that first distinguished them from other parts of the country and it is the major job losses arising from pit closures that subsequently generated such a need for regeneration. At the beginning of the 1980s, the coal industry accounted for about a quarter of all the jobs held by men in the British coalfields, though the exact proportion varied from area to area (Beatty and Fothergill, 1996). Since the miners' strike of 1984–85, more than 250,000 jobs have been lost from the British coal industry, including not only miners but also white-collar staff and workshop employees. Total employment in the industry has fallen by more than 95 per cent. Of the 170 collieries in 1984, only six remain in production in early 2007. No other large industry in modern times, in Western Europe or North America, has experienced such a dramatic contraction in such a short space of time.

However, Britain's coalfields do not exist in physical or economic isolation from surrounding areas and some of the solutions to their economic decline might reasonably be expected to be found beyond their confines. This chapter therefore examines the labour market links between the coalfields and their neighbouring cities. It does so using statistical data for the coalfields as a whole and for our three case study areas. Chapter 3 looks at the issues through the eyes of men and women seeking work, and provides insights into how far unemployed coalfield residents are willing to look to nearby cities to find jobs.

What needs to be kept in mind is that, even 20 or 30 years ago, Britain's coalfields were never exclusively dependent on the coal industry. The coalfields are an extensive part of the UK and, by the second half of the twentieth century, many already contained substantial manufacturing employment as well as jobs in public and private services. Additionally, even before the pit closures began, there were substantial commuting flows into neighbouring cities. The key issue, in the context of the current investigation, is the extent to which growing economic links with neighbouring cities have proved to be the way forward for the coalfields in the wake of the pit closures.

## Trends across the coalfields as a whole

Table 2 looks at the way the overall coalfield labour market has adjusted to job loss. The table covers the English and Welsh coalfields as a whole over the period 1981–2004 and is based on data from the Census and other sources, described in full elsewhere (Beatty *et al.*, 2005). The table presents ‘labour market accounts’ that quantify all the main flows in the coalfield labour market over this long period, and show how they relate arithmetically to generate the overall pattern of change. The figures cover all residents of working age, not just ex-miners. The Scottish coalfields are unfortunately not included – this is because of difficulties with the availability of some of the key data for the 1980s.

**Table 2 Labour market accounts for the English and Welsh coalfields, 1981–2004**

		Men		Women	
		No.	As % working age in 1981	No.	As % working age in 1981
Job loss in coal		222,000	15.9	–	–
<i>Plus</i>	Natural increase in workforce	86,600	6.2	60,200	4.8
<i>Plus</i>	Net in-migration	–57,900	–4.1	3,300	0.3
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in net in-commuting	–30,700	–2.2	–72,500	–5.7
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in economically active	–162,500	–11.6	125,000	9.9
<i>Minus</i>	Increase in non-coal jobs*	132,400	9.5	131,500	10.4
<i>Equals</i>	Increase in recorded unemployment	–74,900	–5.3	–15,800	–1.2

\* For women, includes job losses in coal.

Sources: Census of Population; Annual Business Inquiry; ONS; Coal Authority.

At first sight, labour market accounts can appear complex. In fact, they are made up of a number of simple and easily understood variables, such as employment and unemployment. The trends in each of these variables are the interesting part and there is much of significance in this key table.

Regarding men, it shows how a very large reduction in coal industry employment (222,000) has been able to co-exist with a sizeable fall in recorded unemployment (75,000). The difference is partly due to replacement jobs for men in other sectors in the coalfields – at 132,000 a very substantial increase, showing that there is real forward progress in regeneration. This job growth is nevertheless equal to only 60 per cent of the job loss from the coal industry. The biggest single labour market adjustment among men has actually been a reduction in ‘economic activity’, accounting for 162,000. These are additional men aged between 16 and 64 who are neither in employment nor recorded as unemployed. It is this large-scale withdrawal into economic inactivity that has been the single largest factor stabilising the local labour market in the wake of pit closures.



Regarding women, the labour market trends differ in important respects. Women were of course less directly affected by coal industry job losses because the coal industry was an overwhelmingly male employer. The growth in the number of jobs held by women in the coalfields has been broadly comparable to the growth in the number of jobs for men in sectors other than the coal industry. However, whereas more men have withdrawn from the labour market into economic inactivity, the opposite has occurred with women. Rising female labour force participation added 125,000 to the coalfield workforce between 1981 and 2004. One result was that recorded unemployment among women fell less sharply than for men.

Two lines of the accounts say something about how the coalfields relate to other areas, including neighbouring cities. The first concerns migration. The figures here show the balance between migration flows in both directions, in and out of the coalfields. The negative figure for 'net in-migration' for men tells us that the coalfields did on balance lose men of working age to other areas. This is to be expected in areas of job loss.

More significantly, the commuting figures point to the changing relationship with neighbouring areas, including nearby cities. The figures in the labour market accounts measure the 'increase in net in-commuting' – in other words, the change through time in the balance of commuting flows both in and out of the coalfields. What needs to be kept in mind here is that, across Britain as a whole, there has been a tendency for commuting in and out of all areas to increase, as local labour markets become less self-contained and more people live further from their place of work. The commuting figures in the labour market accounts for the coalfields refer to the *change in the balance* of the flows in both directions over the 1981–2004 period. A negative figure for 'increase in net in-commuting' therefore means that, on balance, the outflow of commuters has increased – or, in simpler terms, that the coalfields have become more dependent on jobs in surrounding areas.

What is interesting is that the labour market accounts show that, although the net outflow from the coalfields has increased, for men this has been a minor part of the overall adjustment process. Net out-commuting by men rose by only a little more than 30,000, or 2 per cent of the working-age male population. For women the rise in net out-commuting has been somewhat more important (an increase of more than 70,000) and it is commuting that has been one of the main factors absorbing the rise in women's labour force participation.

At this point a digression is useful. There is a widely held view that, because recorded unemployment in the coalfields is now so low, these areas must have almost fully recovered from the job losses caused by pit closures. The labour market

accounts show that recorded unemployment has fallen, despite the enormous coal job losses.

However, the view that the unemployment problems of the coalfields have been solved is simply wrong. The clue is the large rise in 'economic inactivity' among men. What this reflects above all is a diversion of non-employed adults away from recorded unemployment onto incapacity benefits. In August 2004 in the English and Welsh coalfields, a total of 193,000 non-employed men and 133,000 non-employed women, all of working age, were claiming incapacity benefits. None of these is included in the claimant unemployment figures, which refer only to those claiming jobseeker's allowance. These incapacity claimants far outnumber the 50,000 men and 17,000 women who were claimant unemployed in the same areas.

Substantial effort has been invested in assessing the extent to which the exceptionally large numbers claiming incapacity benefits represent a form of 'hidden unemployment' (see in particular Beatty and Fothergill, 2005). The most robust estimates draw on comparisons with incapacity claimant rates in fully employed parts of southern England and adjust for underlying differences in the extent of incapacitating ill health between districts. Applying these methods to the English and Welsh coalfields suggests that in mid-2004 some 90,000 men claiming incapacity benefits might be described as 'hidden unemployed' (Beatty *et al.*, 2005). These are the incapacity claimants who might reasonably be expected to be in work in a genuinely fully employed economy. Their claims are not fraudulent; all will have been certified by medical practitioners. The point is that, in difficult labour markets such as the former coalfields, many men and women with health problems or disabilities who might have held down a job are marginalised onto incapacity benefits.

'Unemployment' among incapacity benefit claimants is different from conventional unemployment. Most of the men and women on incapacity benefits have given up looking for work, often because they do not think that there is suitable work available for people like them. Their day-to-day experience of joblessness is therefore different from that of most the claimant unemployed. However, the fact that a large proportion of the slack in coalfield labour markets has been absorbed by incapacity claims rather than unemployment claims does not mean that the underlying imbalance in local labour markets has magically disappeared. There therefore remain substantial challenges in addressing the economic position of a large proportion of coalfield residents.

## Overall trends in the case study areas

While the picture above gives an understanding of the national trends in the English and Welsh coalfields, the three specific coalfields examined in this study show that some aspects of the picture vary at a local level.

### Central South Wales Valleys

Table 3 presents labour market accounts for the Central South Wales Valleys. These have been compiled in the same way as the accounts for the English and Welsh coalfields as a whole but cover the shorter 1991–2001 period. The quality of some of the available data for local areas does not allow the figures to be extended reliably to cover later years. Again, figures are presented separately for men and women, but coal job losses are not separately identified (and anyway occurred mostly in the 1980s rather than the 1990s).

**Table 3 Labour market accounts for the Central South Wales Valleys, 1991–2001**

		Men		Women	
		No.	As % working age in 1991	No.	As % working age in 1991
	Natural increase in workforce	2,700	2.0	2,300	1.9
<i>Plus</i>	Net in-migration	–200	–0.1	3,400	2.8
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in net in-commuting	–5,600	–4.3	–5,200	–4.3
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in economically active	–8,200	–6.3	2,300	1.9
<i>Minus</i>	Increase in jobs	–1,400	–1.0	4,900	4.0
<i>Equal</i>	Increase in recorded unemployment	–10,000	–7.6	–2,000	–1.6

Source: Census of Population.

There are four main features of the trends in the Central Valleys.

- Recorded unemployment among men has fallen sharply – by more than seven percentage points over the 1991–2001 period.
- On the other hand, economic inactivity among men has risen by an almost equally large amount over the same period – by more than 6 per cent of the working-age population.
- In the Central Valleys, the overall increase in employment has been less than impressive. On balance, the number of male jobs fell slightly, meaning in effect that job creation made no inroads into offsetting previous job losses. The number of female jobs did increase, but only modestly.



- For both men and women, rising net out-commuting has been an important part of the labour market adjustment process. Net out-flows increased at a similar rate for both men and women.

### South Yorkshire coalfield

Table 4 presents similar figures for the South Yorkshire coalfield. These reveal similarities with the Central South Wales Valleys but also important differences.

- As in the Central Valleys, recorded unemployment among men has fallen sharply.
- Also as in the Central Valleys, a rise in economic inactivity among men has been a major factor in the overall pattern of change. In terms of numbers, this accounts for two-thirds of the reduction in recorded unemployment in the South Yorkshire coalfield over this ten-year period.
- Between 1991 and 2001, there was net job creation in the South Yorkshire coalfield, especially for women, but the modest numbers hide what is actually a much more positive story because, in Yorkshire, far more of the coal job losses took place in the 1990s. Moreover, the 2001–04 period was one of exceptionally strong job growth in the Yorkshire coalfield as a whole (Beatty *et al.*, 2005).
- In contrast to the Central Valleys, the South Yorkshire coalfield experienced a net increase in in-commuting, among both men and women, albeit on a very marginal scale for the former.

**Table 4 Labour market accounts for the South Yorkshire coalfield, 1991–2001**

		Men		Women	
		No.	As % working age in 1991	No.	As % working age in 1991
Natural increase in workforce		2,900	1.4	1,700	0.9
<i>Plus</i>	Net in-migration	–7,700	–3.6	–4,300	–2.2
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in net in-commuting	200	0.1	1,100	0.6
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in economically active	–10,700	–5.0	8,000	4.1
<i>Minus</i>	Increase in jobs	900	0.4	9,900	5.0
<i>Equal</i>	Increase in recorded unemployment	–16,200	–7.6	–3,300	–1.7

Source: Census of Population.

### Lothian coalfield

The labour market trends in the Lothian coalfield, shown in Table 5, are radically different from those in either South Yorkshire or the Central Valleys.

- The population of working age has risen sharply in the Lothian coalfield, principally as a result of substantial net in-migration.
- There has been a correspondingly large rise in net out-commuting from the Lothian coalfield, especially among women. Given this area's proximity to Edinburgh and comparative isolation from other substantial commuting destinations, the increase will overwhelmingly represent an inflow into Edinburgh.
- In the Lothian coalfield, economic activity rates have fallen among men and risen among women, as in the Central Valleys and South Yorkshire, but this is from a higher starting point than in either of the other two coalfields.
- The number of jobs in the Lothian coalfield has also risen strongly, for both men and women, and at a faster rate than in either the Central Valleys or South Yorkshire.

**Table 5 Labour market accounts for the Lothian coalfield, 1991–2001**

		Men		Women	
		No.	As % working age in 1991	No.	As % working age in 1991
	Natural increase in workforce	700	2.3	200	0.6
<i>Plus</i>	Net in-migration	3,400	11.9	5,700	21.0
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in net in-commuting	–1,200	–4.2	–5,000	–18.4
<i>Plus</i>	Increase in economically active	–1,200	–4.2	1,600	5.9
<i>Minus</i>	Increase in jobs	3,200	11.1	2,800	10.5
<i>Equal</i>	Increase in recorded unemployment	–1,500	–5.3	–400	–1.4

Source: Census of Population.

All three case study areas have a large proportion of adults of working age on incapacity benefits, which we noted is a major feature across the former coalfields. The incidence of incapacity claimants does however vary between the three areas, from 16 per cent of all working-age adults in the Central Valleys (i.e. one in six), to 11 per cent in South Yorkshire (one in nine) and a more modest 8 per cent (one in 12) in the Lothians in mid-2004. In the Central Valleys in particular, but also in the other two areas, it is likely that a substantial share of these incapacity claims represents 'hidden unemployment'.

## Commuting flows

The changes in net commuting flows in the labour market accounts tell only part of the story. As explained, they refer to the change through time in the balance between flows in and out of each coalfield. Table 6 therefore takes a more disaggregated look at commuting in the three case study areas using 2001 census data.

**Table 6 Commuting flows to and from the coalfields, 2001**

	Men		Women	
	No.	As % working age	No.	As % working age
<i>Outflow</i>				
Central South Wales Valleys	31,100	23.3	20,100	15.9
South Yorkshire coalfield	45,700	22.1	27,100	14.0
Lothian coalfield	14,900	45.1	14,000	42.5
<i>Inflow</i>				
Central South Wales Valleys	12,700	9.9	7,600	6.1
South Yorkshire coalfield	20,900	10.1	10,200	5.3
Lothian coalfield	5,700	17.2	4,000	12.1
<i>Net outflow</i>				
Central South Wales Valleys	18,300	13.8	12,400	9.9
South Yorkshire coalfield	24,800	12.0	16,900	8.7
Lothian coalfield	9,200	27.9	10,000	30.4

Source: Census of Population.

The first part of the table shows the outflows from the three coalfields. These figures are important because they reflect the extent to which coalfield residents rely on job opportunities outside the coalfield itself. In all three areas these commuting outflows are substantial for men and, to a slightly lesser extent, for women as well. Between a fifth and a quarter of all working-age men in the Central Valleys and in the South Yorkshire coalfield work outside the area, and in the Lothian coalfield this proportion rises to nearly half. Bearing in mind that not all working-age men and women actually have jobs, the commuting outflows expressed as a proportion of residents in work are even higher – 36, 31 and 56 per cent for men in the Central Valleys, South Yorkshire and the Lothians respectively, and 27, 22 and 56 per cent for women.

The second part of the table shows the flows in the opposite direction – commuters into the coalfields from other areas. These are in all cases much smaller than the outflows. The final part of the table shows the balance or net outflow. This confirms that all three coalfields are net exporters of workers on a daily basis. In proportional terms this dependence on commuting is far greater in the Lothian coalfield than in the other two areas.

One conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that the coalfields do rely to an important extent on commuting in order to sustain the economic life of the local community. For example, in all three coalfields, the number of men now commuting to jobs outside the area matches or exceeds the number who used to work in the local coal industry 25 years ago. This does not mean that all the ex-miners have become commuters, but it does mean that, for men, jobs outside the area have become at least as important as the coal industry was a generation ago. Like the coal industry, these jobs function as part of the 'economic base' of the coalfields, bringing in income to the area, which in turn supports further jobs in local consumer services.

However, there is another way of looking at the same commuting data. What the figures are also saying is that, in the Central Valleys and South Yorkshire, though to a much lesser extent in the Lothians, a clear majority of coalfield residents are not actually commuters out of the area. They both live and work within the coalfield itself. In the South Yorkshire coalfield, for example, two-thirds of the men with jobs, and more than three-quarters of all working-age men, do not commute outside the local coalfield area for work. Moreover, in both South Yorkshire and the Central Valleys, at least a proportion of the out-commuting will be to other immediately adjacent former coalfield areas (in the rest of Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire, or in the other Welsh valleys).

In effect this indicates that, to a considerable extent, the South Yorkshire coalfield and the Central Valleys should still be seen as economic zones in their own right. This is perhaps not entirely surprising because both are geographically extensive areas with a large population – there are 400,000 working-age adults in the South Yorkshire coalfield and 260,000 in the Central Valleys. It would be implausible to expect a majority of these residents to commute to jobs in nearby cities and other neighbouring areas – for a start, there would not be enough jobs in these other places to absorb them all.

However, a further conclusion is that these points do not apply to the Lothian coalfield. This is a smaller area (working-age population of just 65,000) and the magnitude of the commuting flows points to a much stronger economic integration with Edinburgh.

Table 7 bears out these observations. This shows the commuting flows between the three case study areas and their neighbouring city. The first part of the table shows the number of coalfield residents commuting into the city ('gross flow'); the second part shows the 'net flow' after deducting commuters from the city to the coalfield.

**Table 7 Commuting from coalfield to city, 2001**

	Men	Women
<i>Gross flow</i>		
Central Valleys to Cardiff	11,800	10,100
(As % working age)	8.9	8.0
South Yorkshire coalfield to Sheffield	15,200	11,100
(As % working age)	7.3	5.7
Lothian coalfield to Edinburgh	15,300	16,600
(As % working age)	37.8	41.2
<i>Net flow</i>		
Central Valleys to Cardiff	8,200	7,800
(As % working age)	6.2	6.2
South Yorkshire coalfield to Sheffield	8,700	8,000
(As % working age)	4.2	4.1
Lothian coalfield to Edinburgh	11,600	13,600
(As % working age)	28.6	33.8

Source: Census of Population.

What Table 7 shows is that, in relation to the size of the local working-age population, the commuting flows from the Lothian coalfield to Edinburgh are far larger than from the South Yorkshire coalfield to Sheffield or from the Central Valleys to Cardiff. Fewer than 10 per cent of working-age men in either the South Yorkshire coalfield or the Central Valleys work in Sheffield or Cardiff. The proportion is lower still among women. Lothian is very different, with around 40 per cent of all working-age men and women travelling to jobs in Edinburgh.

## Migration flows

Like the commuting data, the figures for net migration in the labour market accounts are the balance between flows in both directions. Table 8 therefore takes a closer look at migration between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities. The figures provide snapshots for two years, 1991 and 2001, based on adults aged 16+ who were recorded in the Census as having lived elsewhere a year previously.

The volume of migration flows increased in both directions between the two years. This may in part represent greater integration between the cities and their hinterlands, but 1991 was a year of recession and 2001 was midway through a long period of economic growth. Migration flows tend to increase (along with housing transactions) in years when the national economy is growing strongly.

**Table 8 Migration flows between coalfield and city**

	1991	2001
Central Valleys to Cardiff	910	1,430
Cardiff to Central Valleys	930	1,500
Net flow to Central Valleys	20	70
South Yorkshire coalfield to Sheffield	1,130	1,500
Sheffield to South Yorkshire coalfield	2,000	2,260
Net flow to South Yorkshire coalfield	870	760
Lothian coalfield to Edinburgh	1,180	1,570
Edinburgh to Lothian coalfield	1,620	2,270
Net flow to Lothian coalfield	440	700

Source: Census of Population.

More surprisingly, perhaps, the migration data show a net flow from the cities to the coalfields in all three areas and in both years. This is the opposite of the trend in commuting, which is increasingly from coalfield to city in two of the case study areas. Migration and commuting trends are likely to be linked in so far as people who move from the city to the neighbouring coalfield then commute back in. However, Britain's cities have always tended to attract long-distance migrants, for example university students who now comprise a major national migration flow. In parallel, for many decades there has been a shift to the suburbs and beyond by a slightly older group of workers, often with families, often for housing-related reasons. What in practice we may be observing in the migration data is that the coalfields are benefiting from this latter suburbanising flow.

## Employment change

Table 9 shows the growth in employment in the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities between 1998 and 2003. These figures are taken from the Annual Business Inquiry, which excludes the self-employed, and are for December each year. The figures refer to the jobs actually located in the areas, not the jobs held by residents, which obviously differ because of commuting.

**Table 9 Growth in employment, 1998–2003**

	Men	Women	Total	(% change)
Central South Wales Valleys	0	2,500	2,500	(2.0)
Cardiff	12,500	15,100	27,600	(18.3)
South Yorkshire coalfield	11,800	8,200	20,000	(9.5)
Sheffield	7,000	9,000	16,000	(7.2)
Lothian coalfield	1,700	1,900	3,600	(7.8)
Edinburgh	10,300	23,100	33,400	(12.0)

Source: Annual Business Inquiry.

This was a period of sustained employment growth across the UK as a whole. The pattern is not, however, one of expansion in the cities uniformly outstripping their coalfield hinterlands. Employment growth in the Central South Wales Valleys has certainly lagged far behind the spectacular growth in Cardiff. This is especially true for men, for whom the stock of jobs in the Central Valleys was static over this period – a reflection of new job creation being offset by the loss of jobs in older-established industries. Job growth in the Lothian coalfield also lagged behind that in Edinburgh. In South Yorkshire, in contrast, the overall employment growth in the coalfield outstripped that in Sheffield, both in absolute and percentage terms. This is not so much because the Sheffield economy performed badly – an overall growth in employment of 7 per cent over five years is quite respectable – but because the job growth in the former coalfield has been so impressive.

The South Yorkshire figures underline the importance of not framing the former coalfields merely as part of the commuting hinterland of their neighbouring cities. The South Yorkshire coalfield has shown that it can more than match job growth in Sheffield. More generally, the trends in South Yorkshire underline the national data for the coalfields, which show that local job creation has been a far bigger factor than out-commuting in helping to restore balance in the coalfield labour market.

Nevertheless, the density and composition of jobs in the former coalfields remains markedly different from that in the cities. This is illustrated by Table 10, which shows the number of jobs per 1,000 residents in each sector of the local economy. Compared to their neighbouring cities, the three coalfields have markedly fewer jobs in relation to their population. This is to be expected because of commuting flows but the differences are still stark. The Central Valleys, for example, have only half as many jobs in relation to their population as Cardiff. The jobs themselves are also in different sectors. The Central Valleys retain a sizeable manufacturing base, whereas this is now a very small part of the Cardiff economy. The three cities are far ahead of their coalfield hinterlands in terms of the density of jobs in banking, finance and business services, in distribution (including retailing) and in public services.

The concentration of at least some of these service sector jobs in the cities will be directly at the expense of their coalfield hinterlands. It is not just commuters who flow from one to the other. Retail spending too gravitates out of the coalfields towards the cities, and much public service delivery (for example, major hospitals, higher education) is from an urban base. In practice, the more that consumer spending is attracted into the cities, the fewer jobs it will support in the coalfields. The more centralised public service delivery becomes, the more likely public sector jobs will be found in the cities. There may be an element of inevitability in some of these trends, but they underline the fact that the links do not all operate in one direction. Cities are just as likely to feed off their hinterlands as to act as independent motors of growth for their wider regions.



**Table 10 Structure of local employment, 2003**

	Jobs per 1,000 residents					
	South Wales City	South Wales Coalfield	South Yorkshire City	South Yorkshire Coalfield	Lothian City	Lothian Coalfield
Agriculture, energy	3	3	1	2	5	10
Manufacturing	39	76	65	59	33	46
Construction	33	8	18	29	21	44
Distribution, hotels, etc.	123	55	112	83	153	113
Transport and communications	34	12	22	25	29	16
Banking, finance, etc.	128	23	84	36	231	64
Public services	183	103	136	100	188	140
Other services	40	14	23	16	35	27
All jobs	584	293	463	351	695	461

Sources: Annual Business Inquiry; Census of Population.

## Conclusions

To what extent, therefore, does the labour market analysis show that the coalfields are becoming more closely linked to their neighbouring cities?

It is important not to lose sight of the national statistics in providing an answer. These show that the migration and commuting flows linking the coalfields to neighbouring areas and beyond have provided part of the adjustment in response to job losses, but they account for only a relatively small proportion of the overall process. The dominant adjustments have been internal to the coalfield labour market itself – substantial new job creation (on the positive side) and a massive withdrawal of men into economic inactivity (on the negative). The extent of success in job creation is at least in part dependent on location and context, of course, but the important point here is that new jobs are being created in the coalfields themselves, not simply in neighbouring areas to which coalfield residents can commute.

Let us put this observation in simpler terms. The success or failure to date of regeneration in the coalfields as a whole has principally been dependent on trends in the coalfield economy itself, not on neighbouring areas.

But, like most generalisations, this does not ring true of every coalfield. The three case study areas each display a rather different relationship to their neighbouring city.

Taking the South Yorkshire coalfield first, the data point towards a large, relatively self-contained economic zone whose fortunes are largely determined by what happens within its own boundaries. Job creation in the Yorkshire coalfield as a whole has been strong in recent years and there is no evidence of a substantial increase in net commuting to neighbouring areas. There are links with Sheffield of course, but



these do not appear to be driving the overall pattern of change in the local coalfield labour market.

The Central South Wales Valleys are also a substantial economic zone in their own right, but here the process of new job creation is progressing more slowly. One consequence is that there is rising commuting from the Central Valleys to Cardiff – where there has been exceptionally strong employment growth in recent years. In contrast to the South Yorkshire coalfield, the Central Valleys appear, therefore, to be becoming more closely integrated with their neighbouring city. Even so, the extent of these links should not be overstated – only a small minority of workers in the Central Valleys travel to jobs in Cardiff. Moreover, this growth in commuting can be interpreted in part as a symptom of economic failure in the Valleys themselves. There is clear evidence of continuing labour market distress in the Central Valleys.

The odd one out is the Lothian coalfield. Unlike the other two, its small size and proximity to Edinburgh suggest that this former mining area is less an economic zone in its own right, but acts largely as a functional suburb of its neighbouring city. The labour market trends bear this out. Although it clearly provides employment for a substantial number of its residents, commuting into Edinburgh is a dominant feature of the Lothian coalfield and this has been rising through time. Population too has been rising, but this is predominantly on the back of overspill from Edinburgh.

So, while there are clearly labour market links between the coalfields and their neighbouring cities, just how much they matter, and in exactly what way, appears to vary a great deal around the country.

# 3 Job seekers and coalfield–city links

## Introduction

The demise of the coalmining industry has entailed an increased geographical separation of individuals from workplaces, highlighting the importance of understanding the spatial dimension of job search for those living in the coalfields. The previous chapter examined the commuting and migration links between the coalfields and their neighbouring cities using statistical data, which clearly demonstrated that such flows have played a part in subsequent labour market adjustments. However, a key finding was the degree to which commuting, as a means of securing employment, varies between the three coalfields. The aim of this chapter is to examine in greater depth the spatial dimension of job search among unemployed coalfield residents, particularly with respect to attitudes to commuting and the importance of social networks in influencing job search patterns. The analysis illustrates the major role that perceptions and experiences of place and space have for many job seekers in the former coalfields.

Labour market researchers who have taken a geographical perspective have highlighted the importance of location in terms of matching jobs and workers, especially with the increasing geographical separation of home and work in communities such as the former coalfields.<sup>1</sup> Access to jobs has thus become an important determinant of labour market search activity and may have an impact on employment outcomes. Studies of spatial mismatch have examined the role of the separation of people from jobs in some detail, showing that commuting tolerances vary between different sub-groups of the working population. In particular, those living in deprived communities and those with lower skills tend to be less mobile, and generally have the shortest commuting distances. Green *et al.* (2005) have also found that young people living in deprived areas of Belfast have low levels of mobility because of limited spatial experiences and horizons, and are thus less likely to travel long distances to work or to work in unfamiliar areas. Although the severe social-religious divisions characterising Belfast may make it a special case, these findings echo those made two decades earlier in Birmingham (Quinn, 1986).

It has also been argued that individuals' social networks have a bearing on job search. Social networks refer to an individual's social contacts and the links that these provide to other individuals and organisations. The literature suggests that those with 'loose' or 'bridging' social networks that link across social groups are more likely to find work than those with 'tight' social networks that include similar types of people. Thus, access to a large and diverse range of social contacts is seen to be

important to labour market participation in general, and in particular appears to have a positive impact on the reintegration of potentially excluded groups into work.<sup>2</sup>

In the past, the coalfields exemplified ‘occupational communities’, defined as areas where the social networks of work and non-work are hard to separate, and hence where communities are generally homogeneous and close-knit. Many of those living in coalfield areas were able to secure employment close to home, whether it was in the mining industry or in the associated industries and services that grew up around it. While the economic regeneration of the coalfields has involved extensive site reclamation for employment-related uses, the scale of associated job creation has varied considerably between different coalfields, as the figures in Chapter 2 demonstrate. At the same time, neighbouring cities and other urban centres outside the coalfields have experienced employment growth, and, in the absence of other alternatives (as in South Wales), some coalfield residents have increasingly looked to these more distant locations for potential job vacancies. This has not been a universal response, though. Indeed, studies tracking the fortunes of former miners have underlined the divergent experiences of those who take up jobs involving longer commuting trips and those who are unwilling or unable to do so. Adjustment to the loss of coalmining has also involved significant changes in people’s social networks, not least in terms of a lessening in their overlap with the world of work.<sup>3</sup>

In order to explore the issue of job search and its geographical dimensions, a series of face-to-face interviews was conducted with 85 residents across the three study area coalfields. These interviewees were currently out of work and seeking employment. Most were in receipt of benefits and had just basic school or vocational qualifications, although several had none at all. The interviews followed a common schedule, which included questions on attitudes to commuting, general mobility patterns, local attachments and involvement, and social networks. It focused particularly on geographical aspects of job search, such as where respondents were looking and whether they would consider taking a job in the nearby city. This chapter reports on the findings from this interview programme and is divided into four sections:

- general geographical aspects of job search
- attitudes and perceptions regarding the neighbouring city
- the role of social networks in job search
- conclusions.

The analysis includes a number of more detailed illustrative case studies of respondents interviewed in this research, suitably anonymised to protect their identities. These have been included in order to provide an in-depth picture of some of the issues facing the respondents. A brief outline of respondent characteristics is contained in Appendix 1.

### Geographical aspects of job search

Although many respondents were willing to travel to work, the scope for this was very often hampered by poor access to transport. Thus, only 18 respondents had access to a car or a driving licence, meaning that the majority had to rely on public transport, which restricted the areas to which they could travel. This was a matter not just of available services linking different places, but also of the time and distances involved. When discussing how far they would travel to work, those respondents without access to a car were quick to state that their search area was restricted by the public transport network:

That is one of the main barriers because you are restricted in where you can go to where the buses go. There is a limit to how many buses you can take.

(Lothian male, 29)

Each of the coalfields has extensive public transport networks, with regular bus services running between Lothian and Edinburgh; South Yorkshire is served by both buses and trains (and trams within Sheffield); and bus and rail networks run between each of the Central Valleys and Cardiff. However, although extensive, by their nature such services tend to provide access to the more central locations, with outlying industrial estates and business parks much less well connected. Equally, people's homes may or may not be close to these transport networks.

There was also a strong contrast between the three areas in terms of the geographical scope of people's search activity. While many stated that they wished to work locally, in the Lothian and South Yorkshire coalfields it was recognised that opportunities existed across a broader area. In the former, this principally meant Edinburgh. In contrast, South Yorkshire respondents were much more likely to mention a range of employment centres within the Yorkshire coalfield (Barnsley, Dearne Valley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Wakefield). Interestingly, the main centre of regional employment growth, Leeds, did not feature at all on people's job-search horizons. In the Central Valleys, there was a stark contrast between those living in

the northern parts, all of whom were looking just for local work. Most of these were young, which is another important factor in this equation. The small minority who were searching beyond the coalfield all lived in the southern or middle sections, and did not confine their attention to Cardiff, but included Bridgend, Cwmbran and Newport within their compass.

Moreover, travelling times (and associated costs) from some parts of the coalfields into the neighbouring city or other employment centres may be prohibitive. For example, it takes over an hour to go from the Heads of the Valleys to Cardiff by public transport. Given that people generally do not live immediately adjacent to a bus stop or train station, nor do they work right by their alighting point at the other end, then their overall travelling times are likely to be much greater. That said, some parts of the three coalfields lie much closer to their neighbouring city, and hence have shorter and more frequent services. Thus, Edinburgh can be reached from Dalkeith, Cardiff from Pontypridd and Sheffield from Rotherham in around 20 to 30 minutes.

In addition, the types of jobs sought by the respondents had a strong bearing on their willingness to commute over longer distances. As Table 11 illustrates, respondents were interested in a wide variety of occupations, covering skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled and entry-level posts. There was also a distinct gender split in the types of jobs being sought, with the vast majority of females looking for jobs in call centres, administration, secretarial work and shop work. With the exception of only three respondents, all males were looking for more traditional manual jobs. However, there is likely to be a bias in the Lothian sample, as the male respondents were on pre-employment training programmes preparing them for work in landscaping, painting and decorating and welding.

The same strong gender bias in preferred jobs emerged from the South Yorkshire and Central Valleys respondents. Another factor here was the limited time that some interviewees (mainly women) had available for commuting. This related largely to childcare responsibilities that entailed a later start or earlier return in order to take or collect children to/from school or nursery. Other respondents looking for employment in the service sector (such as hotels and catering) were limited by the fact that many jobs involved shift work or unsociable hours, which would mean travelling to or from work when public transport services had stopped running or were much less frequent.

**Table 11 Respondents' job preferences**

Area	Female	Male
Lothian	Administration Clerical work Finance Office work Receptionist Secretary Shop work	Landscape gardener Mechanic Painting/decorating Plumber Shop work Welder
South Yorkshire	Administration Call centre Childcare Office work Shop work Work with animals	Advice work Car mechanic Construction Driving Finance Food and catering Forklift truck driver Furniture maker Plumber Printing Research technician Security Train driver
South Wales	Business administration Childcare Factory work Hairdressing Office work Painting and decorating Receptionist Shop work	Administration Building Car mechanic Car valeting Computing Factory work Painting and decorating Plastering Police Shop work Welding

Note: respondents were asked to specify their job preferences without any prompting.

## Coalfield links to city labour markets

In this section, the attitudes of respondents to accessing jobs in places beyond the coalfields are examined. During the interviews, particular emphasis was placed on respondents' links with, and their views about, working in and visiting the neighbouring city.

Of particular importance in interpreting these responses are the geographical differences between the three coalfields, particularly in terms of their proximity to the city. Using computer-based digital maps, distances were calculated from each postcode sector in the three coalfields to the midpoint of the neighbouring city's central business district. This indicated that, on average, residents of the Central Valleys live at the greatest distance from the neighbouring city (16.5 miles, compared

to 7.7 miles for the Lothian coalfield, and 10.7 miles for South Yorkshire). For South Yorkshire, the furthest possible distance respondents had to travel was 16.8 miles from the northernmost part of the Barnsley area (this was only one respondent) and the nearest was Rotherham at 3.9 miles. For Lothian, the furthest possible distance was 14.6 miles from the Gorebridge area and the nearest was 3.6 miles from Dalkeith. For the Central Valleys, the furthest possible distance was 31.1 miles from the north side of Merthyr Tydfil and the shortest 6.4 miles from the Caerphilly area. The implications of these ranges in terms of travelling times and costs have already been discussed in the previous section.

Evidence presented in Chapter 2 indicated that the scale of out-commuting varied between the three coalfields, with the greatest rates of commuting found in Lothian and the lowest in South Yorkshire. Respondents were asked about their willingness to travel to the neighbouring city to work. Thirty-five respondents stated that they would definitely work there and were already looking; 30 would do so if certain conditions were met (such as convenient location, type of job or wage levels); 20 stated they would definitely not. However, it should be noted that many of those who were conditionally willing to work in the city had not specifically included it in their stated area of job search.

As might be expected, more respondents living in Lothian were willing to commute to the city than in the other two areas, with those in the Central Valleys the least willing and most likely to confine their search to the local area. This can be explained partly by the closer proximity of towns in Lothian to Edinburgh, compared to many parts of the Central Valleys in relation to Cardiff. Moreover, the interviews included some young people living in the north of the Central Valleys, and the longer journey times and their lower propensity to travel longer distances will have affected the scale of these responses.

However, it should be noted that some respondents in Lothian were not willing to commute to Edinburgh and, conversely, some in the Central Valleys were willing to travel to Cardiff for work, particularly if they had ready access to one of the direct rail links. As already stated, in South Yorkshire, those prepared to travel outside the local area to find work did not necessarily mean they would travel into Sheffield, but tended to refer to travel within the wider sub-region. This contrasted strongly with the other two coalfield areas where Cardiff and Edinburgh were seen as the main centres of work, and underlines the nature of the South Yorkshire coalfield as an economic zone in its own right.

Familiarity with, and knowledge and experience of, the city were major factors that seemed to affect willingness to commute there for work. Throughout the coalfields,



those who already had experience of working in the city, knew of people who worked there or made regular journeys to it for other purposes were the most likely to consider commuting. A lack of experience of visiting the city is an important contributory factor to a reluctance to consider working there. Indeed, even for many respondents who stated that they would commute to the city, it tended to be within tightly prescribed limits. Thus, they restricted themselves to those areas that they knew and had been to before. This tended to limit them to the city centre or to locations in the transport corridor between their homes and the city. Unfamiliarity sometimes combined with the sheer size of the city to deter people, as one respondent stated when talking about Sheffield:

I went there once for a job interview but it right put me off, it's so big, the streets are a maze, I got myself lost and it was really scary.  
(South Yorkshire female, 27)

### Case study 1

Ann is 41 years old and lives in the Dalkeith area. She is a single parent with two children aged five and nine. She has currently been unemployed for six years and is on income support. Previously she worked as a cleaner, but she left that job because of a dispute with her employer over her entitlement to sick pay while she was pregnant. She has one 'O' Grade from school and a secretarial qualification. She is currently looking for clerical work, but is keen to find work that fits round school hours; she stated that she had started looking for work only once her youngest child had started school.

In relation to travel, Ann was resistant to travelling if it involved changing buses, but did not rule out travelling into Edinburgh:

I mean if your wages are not that great, what is the point in paying for expensive bus fares. I mean you are only wanting one bus, I mean Edinburgh would be fine because it is only one bus.

Her main method of finding work is through the job club that she attends. She also goes to the Jobcentre. She does use family and friends for information about jobs but this tends to be more of a secondary method.

Ann has lived in the local area for 36 years. The majority of her family and friends live locally:

*Continued*

My mum is right across the road from me, my nephew round the corner. I mean we are in the same street the three of us.

Most of her social network also work locally. She does not go out very much but will travel through to Edinburgh for her supermarket shopping, as it is on the bus route. Although this respondent has very local networks she is still willing to travel to Edinburgh:

Yes, if the job was suitable I would. Definitely, because as I say the transport, we have got a good bus system in Dalkeith, you have got four different buses.

However, she states that she would prefer to find a job in the local area first.

Experiences of the city differed between coalfields. Those living in Lothian made far more frequent trips to Edinburgh than those in either South Yorkshire or the Central Valleys did to Sheffield or Cardiff. Again, this can be explained partly by the closer proximity of Edinburgh to the Lothian coalfield towns. Those in the Central Valleys made less frequent trips to Cardiff, with a number not having been there for many years or in two cases ever. The lack of competing urban centres in the Lothian sub-region may also help to explain these patterns, particularly in comparison to the more polycentric nature of South Yorkshire. Moreover, respondents in South Yorkshire tended to express a stronger identification with their locality, with Sheffield appearing much less dominant in its sub-region than either Edinburgh and Cardiff are in theirs. Thus, fewer respondents in South Yorkshire travelled regularly into Sheffield and those who did tended to go to the Meadowhall shopping centre (on the north-eastern outskirts, and hence closer to the coalfield), rather than the centre of town. This lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity appears to act as a major deterrent to looking for work there, and ensures that people's spatial sphere remains relatively narrow.

### **Case study 2**

David is 29 years old. He had been unemployed for a total of 12 years, although he has recently done some temporary work. He has had difficulty finding work because of his fragmented employment history and lack of qualifications, as he states:

... it was kind of hard to apply for a job and they are wanting a CV, I mean what do you put, there is nothing to put in the gaps.

*Continued overleaf*

In addition, he has problems with literacy, which he states had caused problems with jobs that require an application form.

He is willing to travel into Edinburgh but concedes that he is restricted to those areas that are accessible by public transport and he highlighted the difficulty of getting to some of his previous jobs without a car. He has worked in Edinburgh before:

Well, I suppose it is anywhere that is sort of on a bus route. But jobs that need 40 buses I wouldn't really be looking for a job like that ... I would say I would travel into Edinburgh but it would depend on whether it was in the centre or way on the opposite side to where I am. Two buses would probably be my maximum; obviously if I was driving it would be different.

He was on drugs for ten years, which, he states, affected his ability to work in the past.

A number of other factors contributed to respondents' willingness and ability to travel. Thus, female respondents had a much lower propensity than men to travel outside their immediate locality for work. They were also less likely than men to have worked in the neighbouring city in the past. As already stated, this may reflect their situations – several had childcare commitments, which meant that they needed a job fairly close to their childcare provider or school. For these reasons, many women were also looking only for part-time work. The lower pay attached to such posts in turn placed further geographical limits on their job-search horizons. A number of other women (plus one man) had caring responsibilities for older relatives, which meant that they could not be too far from home.

## Social networks and job-search patterns

The interview survey also sought to examine the role that social networks play in influencing job search. Previous research has found that unemployed and low-skilled people tend to have highly localised networks, fewer links to other areas and relatively low levels of mobility. It is argued that these localised or tight networks have a restrictive influence on an individual's ability to look outside their immediate locality for work. By contrast, weak ties such as work contacts, casual acquaintances or other non-intimate associations have been shown to play an important role in job search. Such links are said to provide access to a more varied source of information from a greater range of people than is provided through a denser personal network

of family and friends.<sup>4</sup> However, as Bridge (2002) argues, while loose networks may be helpful in identifying job opportunities, people must still have job skills and access to job opportunities to be successful when applying for them.

In each of the three coalfields, respondents displayed strong attachment to their localities. For example, only 25 of the 85 respondents (and these tended to be in the younger age groups) said that they would consider moving away for work – and then only under certain fairly restrictive conditions. Interviewees generally expressed a strong identification with the area in which they lived, though this was not necessarily connected to them seeing it as a coalmining area. More importantly, the tendency was for people to see their locality as being separate and different from the city, as indicated by this response from South Wales:

The problem is you can't make the valleys like Cardiff. That's what the politicians would like to do. But you can't take Cardiff to the Valleys. Cardiff is special and the Valleys are unique in their own right.  
(Central Valleys male, 38)

When asked about their local area, many said it was quiet and a good place to live. However, problems of drugs and drinking among young people, and the lack of facilities for them were also frequently mentioned. In the Central Valleys, there was also concern about the decline of the community and the deterioration of the local environment. This dissatisfaction with the physical infrastructure of the area reflected wider negative feelings in the Valleys about general economic difficulties, including views about job prospects (see also Chapter 2).

The social networks of respondents in all three areas tended to be centred on family and friends who lived in the immediate locality. Indeed, most had lived in their local area all their lives. This may explain why so many expressed a strong attachment to their local area, as attachments tend to become stronger with length of residence (Hummon, 1992). The close proximity of family and friends also contributes to such strong identification. There was little evidence of extensive connections to other areas, although a small minority had lived elsewhere and still had friends there. However, contact with them tended to be relatively infrequent and focused on social rather than employment matters when it did occur.

Throughout the three coalfields, socialising and day-to-day contact tended to be with other people who lived locally. The predominant pattern was to use local or nearby town centre facilities in terms of both regular shopping patterns and socialising. However, Lothian respondents were more likely to make trips into Edinburgh for food shopping at one of the large supermarkets. Similarly, several South Yorkshire

respondents made regular visits to the Meadowhall shopping centre, but only a few of them included it in the geographical scope of their job search.

The interview evidence also provided information about the employment status of those in their networks. Previous research has illustrated that individuals involved in networks made up primarily of others who are unemployed are less likely to have the necessary contacts or incentives to be successful in finding work. Respondents in Lothian and South Yorkshire were more likely to have a mix of contacts in and out of work than those in the Central Valleys. Valleys respondents tended to have more people in their network who were unemployed, which may have had a negative impact on their ability to find work.

Older interviewees were more likely to have networks that included people who had already retired. However, many of these contacts had had relatively recent experience of work.

The social networks of women also differed. Women respondents were more likely to have frequent contact with those in their network, as well as having more local and child-related networks. Those with young children, in particular single mothers, were more likely to socialise with other single mothers who were out of work (see, for example, case study 3 below). These more closed networks did not necessarily have a negative impact on the women's labour market outcomes, as they provided a vital source of support and advice. Indeed, a number of women recounted how they had heard of pre-employment courses from other women in their network, which highlights a positive outcome for closed networks.

### **Case study 3**

Carol is 24 years old and lives in Doncaster. She is a single parent with a seven-year-old daughter. She has been out of work for seven years and is in receipt of income support. Her previous jobs have been as a cleaner and have all been short term. She is currently looking for a job as a shop assistant and uses local papers, word of mouth and a local employment intermediary as search methods. She states that she is looking for work only in the local area, as she does not drive and would want to be home in time to look after her daughter.

All Carol's friends and family live within the local area and she sees them regularly (although she has limited contact with some of her family). Many of her friends and family, including her sister, are unemployed lone parents, so they are not able to pass on information on jobs, but they have given advice in the past.

*Continued*

It was her friends who discussed whether it would be worth her while getting a job (if she would be better off) and then suggested that she would be. It was also one of her friends who put her in touch with the employment access project that she now attends.

Most of her socialising and shopping is carried out in the local area; she travels to Sheffield only once or twice a year (in which case it is to Meadowhall). She expresses a feeling of the unknown about anywhere else. When asked about working elsewhere she states:

I wouldn't know where else to go.

She would not consider working in Sheffield and does not know anyone else who works or lives there.

Social networks were an important source of information about jobs (mentioned in 70 cases) and many respondents seemed to be heavily influenced by these flows of information. Those who used social networks the most tended to be in younger age groups and it may be that peer influences are greater in this age group. In addition, younger respondents tended to have a greater number of friends that they saw more frequently than those in older age groups. Many of the latter suggested that friends and families were able to provide little in the way of useful contacts or information, possibly because they were in settled careers or workplaces where few new opportunities arose.

However, interviewees made it clear that support from their network was not just about sharing job vacancy information, although this of course played a prominent role. Other aspects cited included assistance with CVs and job applications; accompanied visits to employer premises in advance of interviews; financial help to purchase interview or work clothes; childcare; and general emotional support. In a number of cases this involved only selected family members. Many found these closed networks useful in finding work, as one respondent noted:

Most of the jobs I have had have been from friends just saying that they are looking for people and me really wanting the money.

(Lothian male, 18)

In contrast, for some respondents, their network was simply not suitable because its members were either not in the line of work that they were seeking or were out of touch with the part of the labour market they were looking to enter. This reiterates the argument of Bridge (2002) that social networks will be of little use if the individual is not able to access the jobs available.



### Case study 4

Sandra lives in Blackwood in the Central Valleys of South Wales. She is 36 years old and a single parent to three children aged between five and 11. She has lived in the local area all her life. Sandra has been unemployed since 1998 and is currently in receipt of Incapacity Benefit because of depression. Previously she had worked as a sewing machinist in a number of factories, including three years in a factory in Cardiff. She is currently looking for factory work on a part-time basis during school hours because of her childcare commitments. One of her children has learning difficulties and there is little affordable childcare locally. Although she drives, she is looking for work locally so that she can still pick her children up from school.

Sandra has strong connections to the local area and still lives in the street where she was brought up. Her parents still live in the same house and her brother and his family live opposite. All her friends live locally and she has known some of them since she was at school. She sees her friends most days and members of her family every day. Although her network is very local she gains a lot of support from it; her mother helps out with childcare; her parents, brother and friends pass on information about jobs that are going locally; and she also receives support from other mothers in the area:

... just by being there for one another with everyday problems.

Sandra plays an active part in the local community, as she is involved with the parents' association at her children's primary school. She also organises Christmas trips for local mothers.

When asked about moving away, she states that this would be unlikely because of the important support she receives from her family and friends. Most of her family and some of her friends have jobs, generally based in the local area. The rest of her friends tend to be unemployed mothers whom she has met through her children's schools. In addition, she still believes there is a strong sense of community and closeness in the village where she lives, despite her feeling that the area has become 'rougher'.

Sandra travels to Cardiff about five times a year, mostly for rugby internationals or for Christmas shopping. She would not consider working in Cardiff until her children were older, although she worked there before her children were born.

*Continued*

Only one person in her social network works in Cardiff and the city does not play an important role in her life at present. As she states:

Cardiff is a nice place to visit but nothing more. It is too busy with too many people rushing around.

Despite the fact that many of the respondents used these 'tight' networks to find work, this was not generally viewed as their main method. Most tended to use conventional channels such as the local newspaper, the Jobcentre or an employment intermediary. This illustrates that, although information about jobs from friends and family may be useful, it was not seen as the main way of finding permanent employment. Rather it was a supplementary method for gathering information and securing assistance to support people's operation in the labour market. This highlights that the role of more formal job search methods should not be dismissed when understanding what part social networks play in the job search of the unemployed.

## **Conclusions**

Job seekers in the former coalfields face a number of barriers to accessing work in their neighbouring cities. In addition to the more commonly recognised barriers to labour market participation, such as a lack of qualifications and work experience, the interview evidence reviewed in this chapter has demonstrated that there are also geographical barriers that affect job search over a wider area. These include access, availability and proximity of transport, local peer group effects, and perceptual barriers relating to a lack of familiarity with places beyond the local area.

Various factors restricted respondents' ability to travel to the neighbouring city for work. Most respondents were reliant on public transport, which restricted the areas to which they could travel, and the times when they could get to and from their destination. Familiarity with the city and experience of travelling to the city were also important. Those who made frequent trips to the city and had worked there previously or knew of people who lived and/or worked there tended to most willing to consider travelling there for work. Knowledge and experience of travelling to different areas outside of an individual's immediate locality thus appears to be an important factor in influencing the geography of their job search.

Local attachments and social networks were also important. Although social networks were used by many of the respondents to find information about job opportunities, more formal methods were still the main source. Where social networks were of most influence was in providing emotional and practical support. However, in a number of cases, the very localised nature of people's social networks, and their composition predominantly of other unemployed people, appeared to have a negative influence by restricting the outlook of individuals to only the very immediate locality. These findings highlight the fact that social networks play a complex role in people's lives, and that closed social networks may have positive and negative connotations with respect to labour market activity. Certainly, many people living in the former coalfields reported that they provided an important source of support. In all three areas, respondents had a strong identification with their local area and maintained strong social networks with others living there.

Moreover, there are important differences between the three coalfields. Thus, respondents in the Lothian coalfield had the greatest links to the city, making frequent trips into Edinburgh and being most likely to consider it as a potential place to work. This is hardly surprising given the labour market context outlined in Chapter 2. In contrast, there was greater reluctance to include the neighbouring city within the scope of people's job search in the other two areas. In South Yorkshire, respondents tended to look to other areas within the sub-region rather than automatically looking to Sheffield. This no doubt reflects the fact that employment creation and economic regeneration has been just as effective *within* the South Yorkshire coalfield itself as in Sheffield. In the Central Valleys, the reluctance to travel to Cardiff can be explained partly by the geography of the area, which makes such journeys very time-consuming, particularly for those living at the Heads of the Valleys. Many respondents were aware of the job opportunities that Cardiff offers, but were unable to access them because of slow public transport and long journey times.

A key question that arises from these findings is the feasibility of asking unemployed job seekers in the coalfields to expand their spatial horizons as a means of increasing their chances of finding work. If people are to be encouraged to commute over longer distances, then more consideration needs to be given to the most effective means of achieving this – for example, some kind of financial support to cover travel costs. However, there are also many non-economic constraints that deter people seeking relatively low-paid jobs from commuting to cities and these are likely to derail attempts to secure labour market reattachment by means of commuting across the city region.

## 4 Bridging coalfields and cities through governance and policy

### Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities in terms of existing and emerging structures of governance and policy initiatives. It presents the findings from a review of policy documents and from interviews with public officials in the three study areas. The overall objective was to assess the existence of collaborative governance structures and policies in the study areas, and the relative strength of links between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities.

The findings of this part of the study are presented in this chapter under seven themes.

- Historical connections: a brief review of prior economic and governance links between the three coalfields and their neighbouring cities, as a basis for further development.
- Economic development: covering the policy approaches to business growth, land development and job creation across different agencies, and how far these connect the coalfields to centres of opportunity.
- Poverty, disadvantage and the labour market: an examination of the various strategies to tackle area-based poverty and disadvantage within the coalfields, and any role played by neighbouring cities in these strategies.
- Transport and place-linking initiatives: a review of transport connections between the cities and the coalfields, and any attempts to improve them.
- Coalfield regeneration and city links: the extent to which coalfields are a specific focus in regeneration policies in England and the two devolved administrations.
- Cross-boundary collaboration and city regions: the three coalfields' position in terms of city-region developments, and the extent of collaborative working at sub-regional levels in each case study area.

- **Conclusions:** drawing together the evidence from the three study areas on coalfield–city collaborative governance and assessing the impact on the extent of labour market links between them.

### Historical connections

It is important to consider prior economic and administrative links when looking at current connections between coalfields and neighbouring cities, as they can provide a legacy or foundation for future collaboration in terms of inherited practices, successor bodies, ways of working and personal acquaintances.

### Economic links

Previous economic ties were by far the strongest in South Wales, between the Central Valleys and Cardiff. Indeed, the growth of the city in the late nineteenth century was almost entirely based on its role as a trans-shipment port for coal exports from the mines in the adjacent valleys. Cardiff's prosperity stemmed from the proceeds of this trade, extracted by both land-owning and mercantile classes (Daunton, 1977). The Central Valleys themselves featured a range of small towns that acted as local service centres, with expansion constrained by the physical configuration of the Valleys landscape and by limited scope for widening their catchment areas. A key factor here has been the transport networks, which generally flow north–south along the valley floors and thus feed directly to Cardiff and the coastal belt in the south.

For many years, economic development policy has aimed to promote a bipolar geographical distribution of activity, with improvements to the A465 Heads of the Valleys trunk road and associated industrial estates acting as a counterbalance to the capital city. For a time this approach had some success, perhaps best epitomised by the Hoover domestic appliance factory in Merthyr Tydfil. However, the continued decline of manufacturing and the area's peripheral location in relation to major markets has made it difficult to replenish jobs that have been lost. As the job-seeker interviews summarised in Chapter 3 indicated, the southern parts of the Central Valleys coalfield have increasingly looked to Cardiff and the coastal belt for employment and service provision, while many communities at the northern end have experienced growing isolation from job opportunities.

City–coalfield links were always weaker in the other two study areas. In the Lothians, the coalfield area was always fairly limited, comprising a series of small

self-contained settlements. The mines themselves originally served industries in Scotland's Central Belt (albeit with some exports through Leith) and latterly power stations such as Cockenzie in East Lothian. Indeed, the coal trade made a negligible contribution to the development and prosperity of Edinburgh during the industrial era. That said, the small size of the towns and villages in the Lothian coalfield has meant that there has always been a degree of reliance on the city for retail and other services, as well as a propensity for some residents to commute to jobs there.

This small size has in turn been reflected in regeneration activity. The scattered location of the collieries and the relatively small population has meant that only a handful of former pit sites have been redeveloped for commercial uses. Instead, in some parts of the coalfield, there has been a stronger emphasis on new housing, on both greenfield and former pit sites, designed specifically to take advantage of their proximity to the booming Edinburgh economy.

In South Yorkshire, the coalfield never had much reliance on the city. While the local steel industry provided an important customer for some of the area's coal output, the bulk was either exported via the Humber ports or found its way to power stations in other parts of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. Moreover, the steel and engineering industries were always a feature of South Yorkshire as a whole, rather than just Sheffield. Likewise, in terms of consumption, the city has never had an exclusive role as a retail centre, or as a provider of public services, for the coalfield.

The existence of hitherto thriving town centres in Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham, alongside the provision of a wide range of local public services, has fostered a strong sense of independence in these places. The size of the coalfield population and its dispersal across much of South Yorkshire, combined with the scale of the physical redevelopment task, has resulted in a more distributed pattern of new economic development. The location of Sheffield to the south west, just off the main body of the coalfield, has also meant that the coalfield naturally developed links in other directions as well, particularly northwards towards Wakefield and the regional capital, Leeds.

### **Administrative links**

All three study areas are currently characterised by a rather fragmented structure of local governance, in the sense that they are all administered by a number of different unitary local authorities (three in the Lothians, four in South Wales and four in South Yorkshire). However, this has not always been the case. In both the Lothians and South Yorkshire, the two-tier local government structure dating from the mid-1970s



included upper-tier authorities that covered both coalfield and neighbouring city (Lothian Regional Council and South Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council). These have a legacy in the form of public sector agencies that still operate at this scale, such as the police (Lothian and South Yorkshire), economic development (Lothian) and transport (South Yorkshire). In many ways, contemporary efforts to establish cross-boundary collaboration (see below) are seeking to recreate a modernised if less powerful version of these erstwhile statutory structures.

In South Wales the historical picture was slightly different. Although the old Glamorgan County Council included the whole of the study area, its territorial jurisdiction was much wider, stretching beyond Swansea in the west and covering the Western Valleys as well. Its upper-tier replacements in the post-1974 system, Mid Glamorgan and South Glamorgan County Councils, effectively split Cardiff and the Central Valleys from one another. The different political complexions of these two bodies, allied to the divergent issues that they faced, meant that practical collaboration tended to be limited, with competition and conflict being more the order of the day. It has also meant that there was no legacy carried forward in the shape of wider sub-regional bodies or partnerships.

## Economic development

The common pattern across England, Scotland and Wales is for economic development initiatives to be framed or co-ordinated at sub-regional level, within the remit of an overarching national or regional strategy, but for detailed planning and practical implementation and delivery on the ground to be the remit of local authority districts and their locally based partners. As will be seen, the extent of co-ordination between the different levels varies between the three areas.

### Lothian coalfield

In the Lothians, the broad parameters for economic development are set by the Scottish Executive's *Framework for Economic Development* (Scottish Executive, 2004b). This focuses on productivity, competitiveness, city-region development, social inclusion and sustainability. Within this framework, enterprise development in southern and central Scotland is the remit of the public development agency Scottish Enterprise. This oversees the operation of 23 Local Enterprise Companies, including one for Edinburgh and the Lothians.

Since 2001 the Local Enterprise Companies have taken the lead in establishing joint working on economic development at the sub-regional level through a Local Economic Forum. This is charged with resolving overlap and duplication, improving partnership working and engaging the business community. Its membership comprises key public and private sector representatives, including local authorities. Although the Forum bears some resemblance to an English Regional Development Agency, its remit is more restricted, limited largely to improving communication and co-operation, rather than implementation.

In Edinburgh and the Lothians, the Forum's main role so far has been to improve the co-ordination of services for small firms. It has also established a labour market intelligence service. Attention has been mainly on broad strategic issues at the sub-regional scale, rather than on access to employment or social inclusion. Its current strategy document (Edinburgh and Lothian Local Economic Forum, 2003) advocates a number of measures to build on links between Edinburgh and other parts of the city region, including a commitment to argue for transport improvements. It also presents a vision of East Lothian and Midlothian as hubs for 'niche market clusters' and entrepreneur-led business development.

Nevertheless, on a practical day-to-day basis, economic development in the Lothians remains a largely local rather than sub-regional matter, with local authorities taking the lead, for example through their land-use planning functions. At the same time, Edinburgh City Council and the coalfield local authorities are gradually building partnerships to enable them to better 'match up' to public sector bodies organised on a more sub-regional basis, such as Jobcentre Plus and Scottish Enterprise.

### **Central South Wales Valleys**

The overall aims and objectives for economic development in Wales are set out in the strategy paper *A Winning Wales* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002). This was subsequently given geographical expression in *People, Places, Futures* (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004a). The vision is for a series of distinct but interlinked regions and sub-regions. Within these, local authorities and other public sector players are expected to create detailed plans for specific policy areas, such as transport and health.

The Central Valleys fall within the South East Wales sub-region, or the 'Capital Network' as Welsh policymakers now prefer to call it. This is envisaged as 'an innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life, international yet distinctively Welsh' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004a, p. 49). New regional offices are also

being rolled out to oversee the improved delivery of public services (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004b). This new focus on wider spatial units is a radical departure from the previous national–local model. Its requirement for increased co-operation between hitherto fiercely independent local agencies is already requiring difficult adjustments to be made.

Within this overall approach, the continued growth of Cardiff and the coastal belt appears to be taken as a given (Bristow and Morgan, 2005). The key linking actions being advocated are around improving the skills of Valleys residents, enhancing access to childcare facilities, and increasing the speed and quality of transport services. As a counterbalance to the strength of Cardiff and the coastal belt, a strategic framework for the Heads of the Valleys, *Heads – We Win*, was launched in 2005. This covers Blaenau Gwent to the east, as well as the northern parts of the Rhondda, Rhymney and Taff valleys that are within the study area. The aim is to develop ‘a strong, better balanced economy’, prioritising health, education and training, transport, the natural and built environments, and tourism (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005).

Strategic direction and co-ordination of economic development in the Cardiff sub-region is nominally the responsibility of the South East Wales Economic Forum. Dating from 2005, its members are drawn from the local authorities, government agencies and public services such as the police. Its initial goal is the development of more coherent regional economic policy for South East Wales. There remains a concern, however, that its weak resource base will hamper any attempt at reconciling the needs of different parts of the area (Morgan, 2006). Certainly, the local authorities in the Valleys remain central players in developing and implementing the Forum’s goals and at the moment they are still independently involved in the economic development of their own areas, with only occasional reference to what is happening beyond their borders. They each provide their own business support services, advertise themselves as attractive business locations and promote their local tourist attractions.

The Heads of the Valleys Strategy is widely viewed as a vital opportunity for promoting collaborative working. Although there is no formal partnership in place, most of the public bodies concerned have committed themselves to working together, and indeed the availability of resources for implementation has been made contingent on collaboration. The designation of this part of the Valleys by the Department of Work and Pensions as one of its City Strategy pilot areas may also help to push matters forward. However, breaking down the self-reliance that is commonplace across most policy domains is likely to pose a major obstacle.

### **South Yorkshire coalfield**

In England, the regional economic policies of the Westminster Government currently find expression less through national planning frameworks than through regional and sub-regional governance arrangements. In particular, since 1999, regional development has been closely associated with the activities of the nine Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). The RDA covering South Yorkshire is Yorkshire Forward.

In 2004, the remit of the RDAs was widened to cover employment, enterprise, innovation, skills, foreign investment and international trade, neighbourhood renewal and housing markets. These concerns are articulated in Yorkshire, as in other regions, in a ten-year Regional Economic Strategy (Yorkshire Forward, 2006). A key element of Yorkshire Forward's strategy is the revitalisation of the region's network of towns and cities as economic drivers for their surrounding areas. Another key element is ensuring connections between local communities and areas of opportunity. This is also a key component of the Regional Spatial Strategy (Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Assembly, 2006)

In Yorkshire, implementation of the Regional Economic Strategy has been devolved to sub-regional partnerships. In South Yorkshire, the sub-regional partnership covers the three coalfield local authorities plus the city of Sheffield. Since 2004, 80 per cent of Yorkshire Forward's expenditure has been allocated through sub-regional investment plans. These attempt to link its own resources with those of other public bodies to maximise the impact. A major catalyst for this approach in South Yorkshire was the planning and implementation of the EU Objective 1 programme for 2000–06 (Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, 2000).

The four South Yorkshire local authorities have a strong input to the sub-regional planning process. Their contributions are inevitably influenced by concerns and priorities in their own local areas; but the difference in South Yorkshire is that there is a common planning and resource allocation mechanism that ties all concerned into a single economic development framework. The input from four substantial local authorities also ensures that there continues to be a spread of new development across the sub-region rather than a focus simply on Sheffield.

### **Poverty, disadvantage and the labour market**

The welfare-to-work policies introduced by the Labour Government are based on the presumption that employment is often the best way out of poverty and social

exclusion. Alongside UK-wide New Deal programmes that seek to encourage people into work, there are a variety of spatially targeted initiatives designed to address deep-seated concentrations of deprivation. Area-based regeneration is a devolved policy area for Scotland and Wales, and accordingly such initiatives have varied across the coalfields, which is reflected in their adaptation to local circumstances in each of the three study areas.

### **Lothian coalfield**

In 2004, the Scottish Executive launched a new strategy to tackle poverty and disadvantage, *Closing the Opportunity Gap* (Scottish Executive, 2004a). Its aims are to prevent individuals or families from falling into poverty; to provide routes out of poverty; and to sustain a lifestyle free from poverty. The strategy combines an area-based approach to targeting resources with strategies for addressing inequalities in educational attainment, worklessness, in-work poverty, health, access to public services, and other facets of social and financial exclusion.

The Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation are used to target resources at Scotland's most disadvantaged communities, which are particularly concentrated in Glasgow and other urban areas. This approach gives little priority to post-industrial areas that show strong signs of recovery, such as the Lothian coalfield. However, the area is still subject to the comprehensive community planning approach overseen in each local authority area by Communities Scotland, the country's regeneration and housing agency. This has brought additional, limited funding to the Lothian coalfield. East Lothian and Midlothian councils have developed similar approaches to community planning, seeking to combine local economic development with improved links to opportunities in Edinburgh. The city's own community plan also notes the value of links with neighbouring areas as a source of labour for Edinburgh employers. However, mechanisms for achieving such links are largely missing.

### **Central South Wales Valleys**

The Communities First programme is the Welsh Assembly Government's tool for improving the living conditions and prospects for people in the most disadvantaged communities in Wales. It seeks to empower residents, community and voluntary organisations, public bodies and the private sector to collaborate in deciding what is needed. Around 130 small geographical areas have been selected for inclusion in the programme, mostly on the basis of the Welsh Indices of Multiple Deprivation. The difficulties faced by the Central Valleys are indicated by the fact that it contains over a third of these area-based partnerships.

An interim evaluation of the Communities First initiative (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006a) praised the 'hands-off' approach that has given those involved on the ground the flexibility to develop local solutions. The main problems have been a lack of engagement on the part of several mainstream service providers and the limited resources at the disposal of the partnerships themselves. The absence of joined-up working at local level means that collaborative working over wider geographical areas has not even been raised as an issue.

There is also a plethora of training and employability schemes across the coalfield. One example is the Want to Work programme in Merthyr Tydfil, supported by EU funding, which provides tailor-made support to those who are furthest from the labour market. A key point about such schemes is that they are labour and resource intensive, and hence difficult to sustain in the long term or over a wider geographical area.

In fact, experience has shown that the local scale of such projects is important, not least because of an aversion to officialdom among many participants. The type and quality of jobs on offer also remains crucial. Many people are prepared to travel to jobs involving a structured production line, a unionised system and a good wage (e.g. the Ford plant at Bridgend), but there remains a distinct reluctance to take up jobs in an unattractive working environment with relatively low wages (e.g. the St Merryn Meats factory in Merthyr Tydfil).

The other major dimension of social exclusion in the Central Valleys is the high level of long-term limiting illness. This is associated both with the area's industrial past and its persistently high level of worklessness. The problem is compounded by limited referral options in terms of specialist health facilities. Efforts are being made to improve matters. For example, a network of Healthy Living Centres in the Upper Rhymney Valley is focusing on engaging communities in creating a healthier environment; while the Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Board is employing nurses with psychiatric training.

### **South Yorkshire coalfield**

In England, each local authority has to work with its Local Strategic Partnership (which brings together public sector service providers and private and voluntary sector representatives) to produce a Community Strategy. This is intended to tie together the activities of the partnership members and align them behind common aims and objectives. The intention is to improve the well-being of the area's residents, particularly those living in deprived neighbourhoods.



In South Yorkshire, each of the four local authorities has produced its own strategy and vision for the future. Thus Barnsley now styles itself as a '21st century market town' (One Barnsley, 2005), Doncaster as 'the North's premier transport interchange' (Doncaster Strategic Partnership, 2005) and Sheffield as a 'creative and innovative city of European significance' (Sheffield First Partnership, 2005). While these are primarily marketing phrases, they do indicate a keener realisation of each town's potential place in the wider world.

The 88 local authorities with the highest scores in the English Indices of Deprivation qualify for additional support from central government through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. All four local authorities in South Yorkshire have been designated for support from the Fund. This approach has been complemented by elements of the EU Objective 1 programme for which South Yorkshire was eligible until the end of 2006. This has supported Community Partnerships in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the sub-region, many of them in coalfield communities. These 'bottom-up' initiatives have focused mostly on debt advice, guidance and signposting for training, and childcare provision, plus some economic development activity.

A number of initiatives have been introduced to address the health problems faced by coalfield residents. These include the South Yorkshire Coalfields Health Action Zone, a seven-year programme started in 1999. Although its main targets have been residents with the severest problems, for whom employment options are not always relevant, some projects have linked participants with education and employment opportunities. A recent report has suggested that health conditions in deprived coalfield communities in South Yorkshire have improved, with evidence of links between better health, improved public safety and greater participation in the labour market (Gilbertson *et al.*, 2005).

## Transport and place-linking initiatives

The integration of transport planning with other aspects of the built environment has become a policy mantra at the national, regional and local level. Transport policy also covers one of the main channels through which the economies of the coalfields and their neighbouring cities become linked, and, as noted earlier, can make a difference to coalfield residents in their ability to access opportunities.

### **South Yorkshire coalfield**

Since the 1970s, transport planning in South Yorkshire has been conducted at a sub-regional level by the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive. This body was retained after the abolition of the metropolitan county in 1986 and, during the era of deregulation, it has played an important role in maintaining existing public transport services and developing new ones. More recently it has developed ambitious plans, including the *2020 Vision* Transport Manifesto (South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, 2001) and a recently revised Local Transport Plan (South Yorkshire Local Transport Plan Partnership, 2006). Both focus on improving three core bus routes as an internal network that ties together the main urban centres and strategic economic zones such as the Dearne Valley. There is also a commitment to support new bus services that link isolated coalfield communities to areas of employment.

Within the coalfield, two subsidised bus services providing access to the Dearne Valley strategic economic zone have had a measure of success, with one, the Manvers Shuttle, set to become a mainstream service. There has also been investment in a new 'Joblink' bus service that connects deprived areas in northern Sheffield with new job opportunities in the coalfield. Financial support has been given to a new semi-fast Sheffield–Barnsley–Leeds train service, patronage of which has already exceeded forecasts, and to a scooter-based 'Wheels to Work' project.

The general tenor of the existing approach has been given support by the Sheffield City Region Development Programme. One of its four priorities is to develop a comprehensive connectivity strategy. At present, limited availability of resources means that the focus is on selected 'demonstration' projects that illustrate wider possibilities. Indeed, the question of resources is a key one: with only £20 million a year available over the five years of South Yorkshire's Transport Plan, it is difficult to see how all its aspirations can come to fruition.

### **Central South Wales Valleys**

Similarly, strategic approaches to develop transport infrastructure schemes in the Valleys are at a relatively early stage. Indeed, there was little in the way of co-ordinated transport planning in Cardiff and the Central Valleys prior to the establishment of the South East Wales Transport Alliance in 2003. This is a partnership of the ten local authorities in the wider sub-region, along with public transport operators and users, and the Welsh Assembly Government. Its key roles are to prepare co-ordinated plans and to apply for external funding.

Ceding powers on transport matters to a new sub-regional partnership may underline individual local authorities' relative lack of influence over such matters. However, it also demonstrates a commitment to integrating the urban areas of South East Wales through improved transport links. Proposals include a fast regional bus network, the dualling of the A465 Heads of the Valleys road and track improvements on the Cardiff–Merthyr line to enable more frequent services and to cut journey times (South East Wales Transport Alliance, 2005). However, the current impasse over both the proposed congestion charges within Cardiff and the potential uses to which the resulting revenue could be put means that the key resource and implementation questions concerning these schemes remain unresolved (Morgan, 2006).

These new ideas concern wider sub-regional travel flows and hence have direct relevance to coalfield–city links. Existing transport initiatives, on the other hand, are pitched at a smaller scale. For example, the 'Two Wheels to Work' scooter loan scheme has generally targeted short intervalley journeys between places poorly served by public transport, rather than coalfield–city links.

### **Lothian coalfield**

In the Lothians, the paper commitments to improve the coalfield's links with Edinburgh have yet to be translated into concrete action. That said, many employment initiatives in the coalfield emphasise the importance of the city in terms of job search. Indeed, the relatively small number of job opportunities in the coalfield means that many job seekers automatically include Edinburgh within the scope of their job search. Even so, the lack of formal institutional or operational links across the coalfield–city divide means that employment advisers in the coalfield tend to be restricted to local vacancies in terms of detailed information and referral networks.

Similarly, while public transport links between parts of the coalfield and the city are well established, there are some more remote and isolated pit villages where these services are poor. At present, there do not appear to be any particular initiatives or proposals to address such problems.

### **Coalfield regeneration and city links**

While the social and economic dislocation caused by the rapid decline in employment in the coal industry is recognised, there has been a long-standing divergence of opinion between those who see coalfield issues as distinctive and requiring separate treatment, and those who view them as comparable with other

former industrial areas, and therefore capable of being treated along similar lines. These opposing views are reflected in the divergent regeneration frameworks developed in England, Scotland and Wales.

### **Lothian coalfield**

There is no coalfield-specific regeneration programme in Scotland. The economic revival in the Lothian coalfield has been used to justify the view that coalfield-specific initiatives are inappropriate, especially when the continuing severe problems in parts of Glasgow are factored into the equation. Conversely, the former Ayrshire coalfield, located at some distance from both Glasgow and Edinburgh, remains one of the most disadvantaged areas anywhere in Scotland.

That said, there remain smaller pockets of disadvantage even in the Lothian coalfield. Limited recognition of this was given by the Scottish Executive's decision to co-finance the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, established in the wake of the English Coalfields Task Force report of 1998 (Coalfields Task Force, 1998). However, under pressure from the Scottish Executive, even the Trust now concentrates its attention on more disadvantaged coalfield areas elsewhere in Scotland.

The Lothian coalfield's recovery has been complemented by new house-building and in-migration, fuelled by proximity to Edinburgh. Parts of Midlothian have been earmarked as a suitable location for affordable housing developments to serve the city, with refurbishment of existing poor housing a key element in this. Nevertheless, prosperity in the Lothian coalfield has not been evenly spread. There remains a danger of polarisation between those communities that are well connected and form part of the commuter belt, and those with weaker transport links and a limited range of low-paid jobs.

### **Central South Wales Valleys**

In Wales, too, the thinking of the Assembly Government is that coalfield areas should qualify for regeneration programmes on the basis of the scale of their disadvantage, not because they once relied on coalmining.

Most of the reclamation of former pit sites is now complete, with those that remain having little economic or recreational potential. However, in the Central Valleys, the problems of former coalfield communities are compounded by isolation and inaccessibility, unlike deprived communities in the cities. This has received some

recognition, not only via the Communities First programme (see the section on 'Poverty, disadvantage and the labour market' above), but also with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust receiving funding from the Assembly Government, albeit on a very limited scale.

The difficulties facing communities in the Central Valleys are not just a matter of funding. In particular, there are severe constraints imposed by a relatively weak and underperforming local economy, located at some distance from strategic transport routes and major markets. The difficulties are compounded by the area's hilly topography. Apart from places with good access to Cardiff at the southern end of the Valleys, where there has been rising commuting and in-migration, the majority of communities continue to experience economic and social dislocation. The situation is not helped by low levels of educational attainment and relatively poor health. The prospects of many Valleys residents competing for the higher-level, better-paid jobs in Cardiff are slim. Nor are they in a position to consider lower-paid jobs there, given the travel costs involved.

There also appears to be a divergence of opinion between policymakers and residents with respect to the area's coalfield heritage. Policymakers are often pushing to move away from what they see as a backward-looking image that hampers efforts to market the area as a business location and tourist destination. However, as the job-seeker interviews intimated (see Chapter 3), residents often retain a strong sense of identity with the area's traditions, for example preferring public art on a new bridge in Caerphilly to have coalmining references, rather than the futuristic modern piece favoured by council officials.

### **South Yorkshire coalfield**

In England the picture is very different. Here, the multimillion-pound English Partnerships National Coalfields Programme was established in 1996 specifically to regenerate former coal sites. A key feature is the use of proceeds from commercially attractive sites to help cover the cost of reclaiming those whose only viable future is as public open space. Further recognition of the scale and nature of the problems came with the publication of the Coalfields Task Force (1998) report. The English Partnerships programme was expanded in the wake of the report and there have been three more expansions since, so that it now involves more than 100 sites in all, with ambitious targets in terms of job creation, commercial floorspace and house building (English Partnerships, 2004).

Moreover, in England, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust has always been more generously funded and hence has been able to deliver a wider spread of support than in Scotland or Wales. The main themes of the projects it has supported include improved access to services and facilities; healthier lifestyles; financial inclusion; and active citizenship (Coalfields Regeneration Trust, 2004).

South Yorkshire is the focus for a significant proportion of the English Partnerships coalfield programme, with 22 sites in the sub-region. Implementation is the shared responsibility of Renaissance South Yorkshire, the delivery body bridging EU Objective 1, Yorkshire Forward and the four local authorities. Many of the sites have already been redeveloped, some as industrial estates and business parks, some for new housing and some for public open space. Several still await treatment. A prominent recent example at Dinnington, south of Rotherham, involves £12 million spent on reclaiming the site – half for commercial development, half for open space. It is estimated that, when completed, it will support 2,000 jobs and £100 million of private sector investment.

Such developments have been instrumental in improving the economic situation in the South Yorkshire coalfield. This in turn has helped bring new housing development and in-migration to some of the more accessible villages. Indeed, some Yorkshire pit villages in semi-rural locations have now become quite desirable places to live. Nevertheless, there remain several disadvantaged and isolated communities that have struggled to obtain benefits from the new developments.

## **Cross-boundary collaboration and city regions**

The changing nature of Britain's economic geography and the importance of access to job opportunities has increasingly prompted a quest for co-ordination of policy interventions across larger spatial units. The city-region concept, in particular, currently enjoys prominence in thinking on economic development and governance. This rests on the argument that cities and their hinterlands are interdependent, and that these links are likely to grow and should be encouraged. However, there are competing visions of how these city regions work. In broad terms these can be summarised as three models: first, a single central city that serves its wider hinterland (the 'monocentric' or 'core-periphery' model); second, an area that has two main centres or zones of development that link into the intervening area (the 'bipolar' model); and, third, a broader conurbation comprising multiple service centres and employment zones (the 'polycentric' model) (Herrschel and Newman, 2002).



### Lothian coalfield

In the Lothians, the few cross-boundary structures that exist are focused exclusively on fairly loose partnerships that set strategic directions for other local agencies to follow, with little in the way of resources to help achieve their goals. The bulk of public sector investment decisions still occur within a local authority framework, both in institutional and spatial terms. The corollary of the absence of strong sub-regional governance is that there are few mechanisms to secure intra-area agreement on public resource allocation.

There are incipient moves towards a loose form of city-region governance involving Edinburgh and the surrounding area. The concept of 'Metropolitan Edinburgh' – a fluid city-region labour market – is one way in which this is articulated. Communities Scotland also uses a 'Greater Edinburgh' unit for strategic planning purposes.

Nevertheless, there is also a widespread concern in the coalfield that it is not seen as a mere dormitory for Edinburgh-bound commuters. The coalfield local authorities are committed to the development of strategies that maximise the 'spill-over' benefits from the Edinburgh economy but they also emphasise the need to encourage their own distinctive industries. So, while support is from time to time expressed for the promotion of employment and regeneration through city-region strategies, converting this into a coherent vision and practical working arrangements still appears a distant prospect.

### Central South Wales Valleys

Cardiff and the Central Valleys provide rather more in the way of embryonic cross-boundary structures. As well as those already mentioned in connection with economic development and transport, there are collaborative groupings addressing common issues of sustainable waste management and housing policy (Morgan, 2006). However, these collaborative arrangements are relatively new and untested, and there would appear to be a long way to go before the distrust of Cardiff is overcome, let alone the traditional rivalry between the different local agencies in the Valleys.

The collaboration that is under way is so far mainly about strategic priorities and policies. The bulk of sub-national public investment decisions continue to be made at local authority level or below (e.g. Communities First partnerships). In terms of city-region planning, the Assembly Government has adopted a circumspect approach. The Central Valleys are not designated as part of 'Cardiff city region' – which might signal their relegation to a secondary status – but rather as part of a looser 'Capital

Network'. This encompasses a wider segment of Wales, including Newport and the Eastern Valleys. Cardiff is its main focal point, but other towns are expected to make their own distinctive and complementary contributions within this framework. The Heads of the Valleys are intended to act as a secondary and counterbalancing axis of development to the north.

At present this is little more than a vision, with a dialogue around strategic policymaking in train and a few specific projects (such as improved transport infrastructure) mooted as a means of getting things moving. There are no proposals nor any appetite locally for any reorganisation of governance arrangements. The first task involves the development of greater collaboration between agencies, especially the local authorities. Funding conditions aimed at securing efficiency savings through partnership-based delivery are being gradually introduced, but it is too early to discern an impact. Several barriers to joint working remain, not least the considerable scepticism in the Valleys about the prospects of spreading the benefits of Cardiff's growth (Morgan, 2006). As in the Lothian coalfield, nowhere in the Central Valleys wants to see its future solely as a dormitory for city workers.

### **South Yorkshire coalfield**

In contrast, in South Yorkshire, cross-boundary collaboration is firmly established. To a large extent this has built on pre-existing sub-regional structures.

A key point was the establishment in the mid-1990s of the South Yorkshire Forum. This was initially an attempt to secure increased inward investment but it quickly became the vehicle for delivering EU Objective 1 funding. The whole process entailed overcoming considerable mutual suspicion between the four South Yorkshire local authorities and acted as a watershed in terms of collaboration between them. Implementation has also involved rolling out most initiatives across South Yorkshire. In 2003, the Forum was restructured and renamed the South Yorkshire Partnership as the collaborative strategic body for the sub-region. The catalyst was the introduction of sub-regional investment planning by Yorkshire Forward, the Regional Development Agency.

This new sub-regional plan (South Yorkshire Partnership, 2004) is now fully aligned with the South Yorkshire Spatial Vision, which explicitly recognises the sub-region as a 'dispersed conurbation', maintaining a focus on four urban centres – Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham as well as Sheffield (IdeaSmiths Consulting Partnership, 2004). The strategy acknowledges the role played by other major employment locations, including the Dearne Valley (in the heart of the former coalfield), southern Rotherham and the new Robin Hood Airport near Doncaster.

At the same time, South Yorkshire has been prominent in the development of city-region planning within the framework of The Northern Way – the Westminster Government's initiative to promote faster economic growth across the North of England. In general, this posits the core cities as the key sites where economic development and innovation will help to drive forward the fortunes of their surrounding areas (Northern Way Steering Group, 2005). The Sheffield city region covers South Yorkshire but also includes parts of North Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire. It has been the subject of high-level collaborative work involving an amalgam of local authorities and other public sector bodies. However, rather than follow a simple 'monocentric' or 'core-periphery' model, the Sheffield city region development plan mirrors previous policy by adopting an explicitly polycentric approach to economic development, focusing on urban centres, strategic economic zones and major colliery redevelopment sites (South Yorkshire Partnership/Alliance Sub-regional Strategic Partnership, 2005).

## Conclusions

In terms of collaborative governance arrangements that seek to link coalfields and their neighbouring cities, this chapter has shown that there are similarities and contrasts between the three study areas.<sup>1</sup> Certainly parallels exist in the local frameworks and tools used to foster economic development (involving increasing strategic co-ordination of district-level activities) on the one hand and those geared towards community regeneration (involving intensive partnership-based working at neighbourhood level) on the other. However, co-ordination between these two spheres is generally limited. It is also clear that city-coalfield collaborative governance structures are further developed in South Yorkshire than in the Lothian coalfield or the Central Valleys.

The most important point is that the strength of city-region governance across the three areas does not match the pattern of economic change. As the analysis of labour market links shows, the Lothian coalfield demonstrates the strongest economic dependence on its neighbouring city, Edinburgh, yet it is here that sub-regional governance structures are weakest. Conversely, in South Yorkshire, the former coalfield has recently been outstripping Sheffield in terms of employment growth, yet it is in South Yorkshire that such wider governance structures are most firmly established.

At first sight this inverse relationship between the labour market and governance appears surprising. There might have been an expectation that stronger collaborative governance at sub-regional level would have gone hand in hand with greater

economic integration between coalfield and city, not least because promoting the city's growth is so often the rationale behind the city-region approach. In fact, in the three case study areas, stronger collaborative governance appears to sit alongside weaker real-world economic links.

In the Lothians, it seems that the coalfield–city links are already so strong via the normal workings of the market that public sector agencies need do little more than ‘go with the flow’. Extensive intervention is not required. However, several interviewees in the Lothian coalfield observed that the lack of formal co-ordination makes it difficult to maximise the benefits of Edinburgh's growth. In particular, there were no mechanisms whereby employability schemes in the coalfield could easily be linked to job opportunities in the city. Similarly, lack of co-ordination means that employment land in the coalfield is not being used to help ease development pressures within the city boundaries.

In South Yorkshire, on the other hand, the competing requirements of different urban centres and employment zones call for a stronger degree of co-ordination. There is an important political element to this, which is intended to deliver a spread of resources, developments and benefits across the city region, and a need to connect where people live to places of opportunity. The fact that South Yorkshire comprises several urban centres and other employment hubs requires a balance to be struck between its constituent parts – coalfield, city and other urban areas. To be fair, this was always the intention behind the concerted efforts to foster collaboration. It was never directed solely towards increasing city–coalfield links; this is something that has been grafted onto the set-up much more recently via the Northern Way initiative.

The more disparate and fragmented pattern of governance in South Wales echoes the findings of the Welsh Assembly's recent review of local public service delivery, which noted the institutional difficulties of improving quality and efficiency, and the need to accelerate joint working and expertise sharing across both policy domains and geographical boundaries (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006b). However, the economic and physical geography of the Valleys is hardly advantageous. Stronger city-region governance structures alone could never have been expected to overcome these formidable obstacles.

# 5 Conclusions

## The main findings

The purpose of this research has been to assess the extent to which the regeneration of coalfield areas relies on links with neighbouring cities. This question has been pursued through detailed case studies of three contrasting areas — the Lothian coalfield in Scotland, South Yorkshire in England and the Central Valleys in Wales.

Our research shows there is no single model in the emerging relationship between former coalfields and their neighbouring city. Geographical and political context matters. Indeed, the study areas revealed three distinct development trajectories taken by these former coalfields and their adjacent cities.

Thus, the *Lothian coalfield* demonstrates a close relationship with its neighbouring city, Edinburgh. The physical distances between the two are not large and the former coalfield has a total population that is roughly a third of Edinburgh's. The city has also been undergoing considerable economic growth. The consequence is that the former coalfield is increasingly becoming an integral part of the Edinburgh city region. This is reflected in commuting flows into the city and the overspill of population in the opposite direction. Even in the minds of the local job seekers we interviewed, there is no strong distinction between Edinburgh and its surrounding coalfield area, in terms of accessing either jobs or services. People do retain a Lothian coalfield identity, but their willingness to commute into the city for work is mainly a practical question of bus routes, times and cost.

The *South Yorkshire coalfield* has far fewer links with its neighbouring city, Sheffield. It has a total population that is about a fifth larger than that of Sheffield. The distances between the two are slightly greater than in the Lothians, but, more importantly, the urban structure is multi-centred, with Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham acting as important hubs in their own right. There are commuting flows from the coalfield to Sheffield, but these are proportionally smaller than in the Lothians and the net flow shows no tendency to increase substantially through time. In South Yorkshire many job seekers are distinctly sceptical about the merits of travelling into Sheffield for work. There is also evidence of a strong economic revival in the coalfield, with more new jobs being created through recent inward investment than in Sheffield. This means there is less pressure to commute into Sheffield (or for that matter Leeds, which is a few miles further in the opposite direction). In other words, the South Yorkshire coalfield functions as an economic zone in its own right, with the majority of

residents both living and working in the former coalfield area. Economic revival has been based mainly on local dynamics rather than on trends in Sheffield.

The *Central Valleys* in South Wales fall some way between the Lothian and South Yorkshire study areas. This is a large area with a total population 50 per cent greater than the neighbouring city of Cardiff. The majority of residents still live and work in the former coalfield. However, unlike in South Yorkshire, there is rising labour market integration between the Central Valleys and Cardiff. This is rooted in the contrasting economic trajectories of the two. Cardiff has been undergoing an economic boom in recent years, whereas the coalfield part of the study area, in line with the Valleys generally, has remained in the doldrums, with little net growth in employment. The growing take-up of jobs in Cardiff by coalfield residents is one result. In the perspective of many job seekers, the long and costly commute into Cardiff is rarely welcomed, especially as many are restricted to low-skill, low-wage posts. But this option is often the only way forward, as there are a limited number of appropriate jobs in the coalfield itself. In essence, then, the economic strength of Cardiff, combined with the weakness in the former coalfield, is slowly incorporating the more accessible southern parts of the Central Valleys into the city's widening commuter hinterland, while casting the more distant Heads of the Valleys further adrift.

## **Collaborative and city-region governance**

Chapter 4 of the report reviewed the evidence on the structures of governance linking the three former coalfields with their neighbouring cities.

Whereas it might be expected that more co-ordinated structures of governance are associated with rising economic integration, in the three case study areas the converse appears to be the case. The formal institutional links between the Lothian coalfield and Edinburgh city are the weakest, yet the labour market links are the strongest.

Conversely, South Yorkshire has the best-developed network of collaborative and city-region structures, but the weakest tendency towards city-coalfield economic integration. This reflects the wider opportunities for coalfield residents provided by a number of employment centres across the sub-region. South Wales has rising labour market integration between the Central Valleys and Cardiff, but against a backdrop of merely embryonic and slowly developing collaborative arrangements. Here it will take some time to overcome the historic suspicion and long-standing rivalries between the coalfield and Cardiff, as well as between local authorities in the Central Valleys themselves.



This inverse relationship between coalfield–city economic links and collaborative governance arrangements appears surprising at first glance. However, there does appear to be a strong association between the two. Thus, sub-regional co-ordination may be a less significant requirement in fairly compact, rapidly growing conurbations such as Edinburgh and the Lothians. Where there is a larger polycentric economic geography and relatively dispersed growth prospects, as in South Yorkshire, a greater degree of inter-agency collaboration may be required to maximise economic development opportunities, and to ‘lock in’ potentially rival local agencies to a common policymaking and resource allocation framework. In other words, the co-operation across the sub-region has been more about securing a balanced distribution of economic activity than about seeking to cement city–coalfield links. The absence of similar structures for the Central Valleys and Cardiff is a product of the twin problems of an unbalanced economic geography and weaknesses in local governance.

What this tells us is that the general economic trajectory of different coalfield areas does not depend primarily on governance arrangements, but on other factors, including the market. Employment rates in the Lothian coalfield have bounced back mainly because it is fairly easy to travel into prosperous Edinburgh. While a greater degree of collaboration might serve to secure more of these benefits for coalfield residents, these additions would probably be marginal in the overall scheme of things.

The South Yorkshire coalfield has been better able to secure investment in distribution and logistics centres mainly because it is centrally located within Britain and well connected to the motorway network. It has also been the preferred location for so many call centres because Enterprise Zone status in the Dearne Valley led to the development of the right sort of floorspace at the right point in time. This underlines the importance of finding the appropriate policy instruments for different locations at particular points in the economic development cycle. These are essentially independent of any collaborative or city-region structures; the difference that the latter can make is in taking an overview of the best mix to cover a range of development options across a sub-region.

A significant implication for current debates is that reform of public sector management structures is perhaps less important than underlying economic dynamics and policy instruments to exploit them. The success of a former coalfield in adapting to economic change appears to depend mainly on issues like accessibility, location, inherited economic structure and general trends in economic activity. The deployment of appropriate policy tools and sufficient resources to support them can serve to maximise the benefits that flow from these in a way that inter-agency

management arrangements alone could never do. In an era when ‘partnership working’ has become a totem it is unfashionable to emphasise its limitations, but they are real nonetheless. Where it could score more effectively is through the development of genuinely integrative mechanisms that connect disadvantaged residents to opportunities, whether these are located in the neighbouring city or another employment hub.

The other implication is that it is premature to write off the former coalfields as mere appendages of their neighbouring cities. Some of them remain substantial economic zones in their own right. Whether their residents enjoy employment and prosperity or exclusion and deprivation still depends primarily on what happens within their own boundaries. The South Yorkshire coalfield provides the clearest example. It is also obvious, from the respective numbers of people and jobs, that Cardiff alone could never become the dominant source of economic activity serving the Central Valleys area. The fact that this area has in recent years come to rely more heavily on Cardiff is predominantly a sign of its continuing economic weakness.

## **A wider perspective**

Combining the evidence from this study with that gathered as part of other recent studies by members of the research team allows us to speculate more widely about the current position of Britain’s former coalfields as a whole. In particular, the analysis reported by Beatty *et al.* (2005) provides a solid and comprehensive basis for projecting from the findings of this study. Table 12 is an attempt to generalise from all these findings to provide a typology of Britain’s principal former coalfields.

The situation in the Lothian coalfield, characterised by rising interdependence between coalfield and city and by mutual prosperity, is broadly replicated in three of the small coalfields in the English Midlands – North West Leicestershire/South Derbyshire, South Staffordshire and North Warwickshire. Labour market accounts indicate that these three areas, like Lothian, have largely put the impact of coal job losses behind them. More local residents commute to the cities and there has been overspill of both people and jobs into the former coalfield. To some extent the former coalfields are now providing the space for economic growth – especially in warehousing and distribution, but also in modern manufacturing – that their neighbouring cities lack.

**Table 12 A typology of Britain's principal former coalfields**

	Coalfield	Neighbouring city
Rising integration, mutual prosperity	<i>Lothian</i> North West Leicestershire/South Derbyshire South Staffordshire North Warwickshire	Edinburgh Leicester, Derby Birmingham Coventry, Birmingham
Rising integration, coalfield weakness	<i>Central Valleys</i> Lanarkshire Northumberland Eastern Valleys Western Valleys	Cardiff Glasgow Newcastle Newport, Cardiff Swansea
City links, strong coalfield dynamics	<i>South Yorkshire</i> Durham Fife North Nottinghamshire/North Derbyshire West Yorkshire & Selby	Sheffield Newcastle Edinburgh Sheffield, Nottingham Leeds
Urban coalfields: already integrated	Lancashire North Staffordshire	Manchester, Liverpool Stoke
Rural coalfields: lack of city links	Ayrshire Kent North Wales West Cumbria	n/a n/a n/a n/a

The more problematic situation in the Central Valleys (and its neighbours to the east and west in South Wales) is mirrored in Northumberland and probably in Lanarkshire as well. These are areas where the local labour market is increasingly kept in balance by rising commuting flows into Newcastle and Glasgow respectively. At the same time a large proportion of the working-age population remains economically inactive, especially among men. The rising labour market integration between coalfield and city reflects the weak growth of local job opportunities in the former coalfield.

The South Yorkshire model, of links with the neighbouring city but strong and independent coalfield dynamics, is one that seems to fit Durham, Fife, North Nottinghamshire/North Derbyshire and West Yorkshire. These are the areas with a substantial amount of economic activity, including large swathes of new development on former colliery land, and as such they are still a long way from becoming mere appendages of their neighbouring cities. The significant point about this group is that they are all relatively large. Collectively, they account for around 55 per cent of all the population in Britain's former coalfields, or around 2.7 million people between them.

Finally, there are two further groups of coalfields that the current study has not covered. The first are the 'urban coalfields' in Lancashire and North Staffordshire. Here coalmining always took place in primarily urban locations, cheek by jowl with

other industry and services, and the coal industry was never such an overwhelming local employer. Coalfield and city always were integrated here – though in Lancashire the integration was with towns such as Salford, St Helens and Wigan rather than the urban cores of Manchester and Liverpool. At the same time, the local economies of these two areas remain in a fragile state.

The other group is the ‘remoter rural’ coalfields. Individually, each of these is quite small, both in population terms at present and in mining employment in the past. The distinguishing feature of this group is that the distance of these coalfields from any large city means that close integration with a metropolitan centre never has been, nor is ever likely to become, a significant feature of their local economy. Their remoteness and location away from main transport routes combine to keep their local economies relatively weak.

## **A new phase in coalfields regeneration?**

Twenty years ago, as collieries were closing at a furious rate, there was no doubt as to the nature of the main economic problem in the coalfields. It was job loss and unemployment. More recently, the nature of the problem has changed. Claimant unemployment – the number of people out of work and claiming unemployment benefits, mainly jobseeker’s allowance – is now far below previous levels in every coalfield.

Yet joblessness remains. As Chapter 2 of the report showed, the withdrawal of men from the labour market into ‘economic inactivity’ – above all onto incapacity benefit – remains the main factor stabilising coalfield labour markets in the wake of pit closures. Across England and Wales as a whole, five times as many men and women are now out of work on incapacity benefits as on unemployment benefits (Beatty *et al.*, 2005). Not all the men and women on incapacity benefits could work, but a great many would be in employment in the right circumstances.

The Labour Government shares this view. Its reforms to incapacity benefit (IB), announced in 2006, are intended to reduce the number of IB claimants by one million within ten years. If this ambitious target is to be met, the largest reductions will have to be in places such as the coalfields where IB claimants are disproportionately concentrated. Some of the reduction will have to come from moving existing IB claimants back into work, the rest from keeping in work the men and women who would otherwise have drifted onto IB.

The significance of this is that the former coalfields are moving into a new phase of regeneration. The challenge of providing enough jobs will remain, but progress will be measured not by falling unemployment but by rising economic activity rates. This brings its own distinctive challenges.

The job seekers we interviewed were in various ways all close to the labour market, either because they were looking for work or because they were in touch with labour market intermediaries, even those who were claiming IB. However, the majority of IB claimants are a more problematic group, and not simply because of ill health or disability. Their distance from the labour market is usually much greater – few actively look for work and they are on average an older and less well qualified group. Yet we noted, in Chapter 3, that many existing job seekers in the former coalfields can already be reluctant to travel far to work. The very localised nature of their social networks appeared to be a negative influence by restricting their outlook to the immediate locality, especially where these networks consisted predominantly of other unemployed or inactive people.

If the Government is successful in bringing hitherto marginalised workers back into the labour market it is distinctly possible that the willingness to travel of each successive group will diminish. In part, this may be an entirely rational response. If they are likely to find only low-paid employment, they may quite reasonably decide that it is simply not worth the effort and cost of travelling to a nearby city.

At this point the Government's welfare reform and city-region policies collide. Bringing down IB numbers in the coalfields may well require more genuinely local jobs; fostering the cities as the hub of economic growth within their regions, in line with current thinking, requires more commuting. More commuting also suggests that travelling to work will become more difficult and time consuming as congestion rises.

The point here is that there may be limits to the extent to which job growth in the cities might be expected to turn around coalfield labour markets and that those limits might already be surprisingly close. The next phase of coalfield regeneration may actually require a greater emphasis on local jobs.

## Pointers for policy

Four key policy recommendations emerge from this study.

*First, a one-size-fits-all approach to the revival of former coalfield communities is inappropriate.* The geographical context of Britain's former coalfields varies a great

deal. Some are able to rely on jobs in neighbouring cities to rebalance their local labour market; others need a solution that is internal to the former coalfield area itself. Physical distance and market forces will largely determine which is the best way forward in each case.

*Second, several former coalfield areas remain major economic zones in their own right and should be treated as such in spatial policy terms.* These areas actually include the majority of the coalfield population. The loss of the mining industry from these coalfields was a grievous blow, but it did not result in the complete destruction of the local economy. Nor did it mean they could never become home to new layers of economic development. Several of Britain's larger coalfields, including the South Yorkshire study area examined in this report, have shown strong signs of economic revival.

*Third, there are limits to the validity of treating cities as the dominant economic hub in relation to the coalfields.* In particular, to frame the coalfields simply as part of the commuting hinterland of their neighbouring cities is to misunderstand Britain's new economic geography. The links are there, but they vary in strength and significance between different places. If governance structures are to reflect underlying economic realities, it would be best to proceed incrementally, cautiously and selectively. Moreover, this should be in a way that balances the claims of city-driven sub-regional growth with a recognition of the contribution made by other parts of the area. There is little merit in imposing city-region mayors, or other types of formal city-region governance, where the economic links are weak and where there is little local enthusiasm for new structures.

*Fourth, there should be greater recognition of the essentially local sphere in which many people still live and work.* Long-distance commuting may be fine for middle-class professionals who can control their own hours and meet the cost. However, for many of the residents of Britain's former coalfields, and especially the more disadvantaged job seekers among them, long-distance commuting into neighbouring cities remains an unlikely prospect. The coal industry once provided local jobs; for many men and women, local jobs still remain the way forward.



# Notes

## Chapter 1

- 1 This section summarises the findings of a broad range of academic literature on this topic. The following were found to be of particular relevance: Allan, 2004; Baker and Billinge, 2004; Dicken, 2003; Dorling and Rees, 2003; Goodchild and Hickman, 2004; Hudson and Williams, 1989; Hudson, 2003; Lawless *et al.*, 1998; Mohan, 2004; Perrons, 2000; Sharp, 2000; Sunley *et al.*, 2006; Turok and Webster, 1998.
- 2 Balls *et al.*, 2006.

## Chapter 3

- 1 Key examples of contributions to this literature include Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001; Green *et al.*, 2005; Green and Owen, 2006; Houston, 2001, 2005; Kain, 1968; Rouwendal and Nijkamp, 2004; Turok and Webster, 1998.
- 2 See, for example, Chapple, 2002; Holzer, 1988; Lévesque and White, 2001; Lindsay *et al.*, 2003; Ooka and Wellman, 2001.
- 3 This section has drawn on a range of existing literature, most notably Bennett *et al.*, 2000; Bulmer, 1976; Dennis *et al.*, 1956; Fieldhouse and Hollywood, 1999; Frankenberg, 1969; Hollywood, 2002; Parry, 2003; Salaman, 1974; Strangleman, 2001.
- 4 Examples of such research on 'social capital' include Granovetter, 1983; Putnam, 2000; Wellman *et al.*, 1988.

## Chapter 4

- 1 Such variations have also been noted by those who have analysed the overall experience of devolution in the three counties. This includes Adams and Schmueker (eds), 2006; Cooke and Clifton, 2005; Goodwin *et al.*, 2002 and Royles, 2006.

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# Appendix 1: Outline of job-seeker interview respondents

A total of 85 interviews were completed across the three coalfield study areas. Some of their key characteristics are outlined below.

The respondents ranged in age from 16 to 59. The overall average age was 31. In Lothian it was 29.6, in South Yorkshire 34.8 and in the Central Valleys 27. Table A1.1 provides a summary of respondents' key characteristics.

There was an even split in the number of male and female respondents.

Many of the respondents were long-term unemployed with the average time unemployed being 4.4 years in South Yorkshire, 3.1 years in Lothian and one year in the Central Valleys. The lower figure in the Welsh case can be accounted for partly by the lower overall age of the respondents.

**Table A1.1 Gender and age of interview respondents**

	Number	Male	Female	Age <20	Age 20–34	Age 35–49	Age 50+
Lothian	30	15	15	7	13	8	2
Central Valleys	25	15	10	8	10	5	2
South Yorkshire	30	15	15	7	7	10	6
Total	85	45	40	22	30	23	10

The majority of respondents were claiming some form of social security benefit, with most either on jobseeker's allowance (JSA), income support (IS) or incapacity benefit (IB) (see Table A1.2).

**Table A1.2 Type of benefit claimed**

	JSA	IB	IS	Other
Lothian	11	3	9	7
Central Valleys	12	2	0	11
South Yorkshire	10	9	3	8
Total	33	14	12	26

Notes:

JSA: jobseeker's allowance.

IB: incapacity benefit.

IS: income support.

Other: includes those on New Deal or other employment training scheme.

One of the main patterns revealed by the data was the low level of qualifications among the respondents, detailed in Table A1.3. A lack of qualifications was the factor most commonly mentioned by respondents as a reason they could not get work and also why they had been stuck in low-skilled jobs.

**Table A1.3 Highest level of qualification**

	None	GCSEs/ Standard Grades	A Levels/ Higher	Vocational qualifications	Degree
Lothian	8	12	3	8	0
South Yorkshire	9	11	1	6	3
South Wales	8	11	0	5	0
Total	25	34	4	19	3

## **Appendix 2: List of organisations consulted in the governance and policy interviews**

Barnsley Borough Council  
Barnsley Development Agency  
Caerphilly County Borough Council  
Caerphilly Local Health Board  
Capital City Partnership, Edinburgh  
Cardiff County Council  
City of Edinburgh Council  
Coalfields Regeneration Trust  
Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation  
Communities Scotland  
Community Enterprise Ltd  
East Lothian Council  
East of Scotland European Partnership  
European Social Fund Objective 3 Partnership  
Jewel and Esk Valley College (Midlothian further education provider)  
Jobcentre Plus (Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster District)  
Jobcentre Plus (Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders District)  
Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council  
Merthyr Tydfil Local Health Board  
Midlothian Council  
Midlothian Volunteer Action  
New Leaf Adult Careers Guidance, Midlothian  
NHS Lothian Public Health  
ODPM Coalfields Regeneration Team  
Renaissance South Yorkshire  
Rhondda Cynon Taff Borough Council  
Rotherham Borough Council  
Scottish Business in the Community  
Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations  
Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian  
Scottish Executive (Chief Executive's Department)  
Scottish Executive (Development Department)  
Sheffield City Council  
South East Wales Economic Forum

South East Wales Transport Alliance  
South Yorkshire Coalfield Partnership  
South Yorkshire Objective 1 Programme Executive  
South Yorkshire Open Forum  
South Yorkshire Partnership  
South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive  
Welsh Development Agency  
Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Assembly  
Yorkshire Forward





# Sheffield Hallam University

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