

## **Attachment to place**

### **Social networks, mobility and prospects of young people**

*Anne E Green and Richard J White*

This report explores how social networks and attachment to place shape young people's attitudes towards education, training and work opportunities, and looks at the scope for interventions to 'widen horizons' and enhance access to opportunities.

Through case studies of three deprived neighbourhoods – the New Deal for Communities areas in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton – the study:

- examines the implications for people and places of economic restructuring and the operation of labour markets
- considers the importance of family and friends in social networks
- examines whether attachment to place is a strength or a weakness for young people's employment prospects
- explores the extent to which geography can restrict young people's choices of training, jobs and careers
- assesses whether 'wider horizons' would improve training and employment prospects.

This report is important reading for researchers, policymakers and practitioners concerned with regeneration, economic development, labour market, skills, education and transport.



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**Anne E Green and Richard J White**



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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 613 5

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)

Further copies of this report, or any other JRF publication, can be obtained from the JRF website ([www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/](http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/)).

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# Acknowledgements

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded the research reported here as part of a programme of research on transforming places. This particular project focused on the importance of attachment to place as an issue affecting young people's experiences and opportunities in deprived areas.

Thanks are due to Katharine Knox (project manager from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) and members of the Project Advisory Group: Jane Carr (Department for Transport), Paula Coppel (Merseytravel), Jenny Crook (Department for Work and Pensions), Lucy Dillon (Communities and Local Government), Stuart Gardner (Learning and Skills Council), Alison Herrington (Department for Work and Pensions), Andy Hirst (Cambridge Policy Consultants), Steve King (Per Temps Employment Alliance), Rob MacDonald (University of Teesside), Marion Morris (National Foundation for Educational Research) and Kirby Swales (Communities and Local Government). They provided the authors with ideas and advice during the research process. We would like to thank all of those individuals and organisations who responded to requests for guidance, information and practical support in suggesting contacts and setting up interviews. In particular, we are grateful to all those young people, stakeholders and employers who participated in interviews and focus groups. Without their willingness to give freely of their time this study would not have been possible.

Iftikar Karim was responsible for organising much of the fieldwork in Wolverhampton and Walsall, and was assisted by Vincent Bailey, Richard Boothroyd, Ranjit Bansal and Amit Kajla. Ian Shuttleworth from Queen's University Belfast provided consultancy support to the project.

# Summary

## Scope of the report

This report explores how social networks and attachment to place shape training and work opportunities of young people (aged from 15 years to their early twenties), drawing on research from three deprived neighbourhoods in England: the Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas. It also investigates the scope for interventions to ‘widen horizons’, to enhance access to opportunities for training, employment and further/higher education, and what form such initiatives might take.

## Key messages

The findings from this research relate to the three case study areas, but many of the key messages are likely to have a wider resonance, particularly for other deprived neighbourhoods. However, they may not be applicable everywhere.

- Social networks give some young people strong advantages in the labour market, with family and friends providing valuable sources of support and sometimes directly influencing patterns of recruitment. However, the size and quality of social networks vary and not all young people have such support.
- In some instances, reliance on family support is positive in encouraging young people to pursue their interests and take up education and training, and in helping them to decide on what opportunities to pursue. This is particularly the case when family members have connections into employment networks and/or are able to make useful suggestions regarding channels for gathering further information concerning opportunities for further/higher education and training. However, in other instances, when such networks and knowledge of information sources are lacking, such reliance operates to reduce ambition and to curtail choices to familiar options and locations.
- Social networks and place attachment shape how young people see the world.
- Place and identity can be powerfully connected. For some young people, attachment to place is a very important factor in their decisions about life choices. In particular, it may mean that they do not consider opportunities beyond their



neighbourhood or home town, or which are different from those conventionally followed by local people.

- The local environment may, in some circumstances, be a barrier to accessing and progressing in the labour market, but the relationships emerging are complex.
- Geography matters. Where people live matters in terms of their access to transport and education, training and employment opportunities and the horizons that they have. It also matters in terms of their perceptual reading of the opportunities available to them. Where people are looking from affects what they see, or choose to see. The same set of objective opportunities – for example, training places or jobs – may not be *viewed* as accessible (in spatial terms) by people in one location, but may be regarded as accessible by people in another location, even though in reality they may be equally accessible from each location. Perspectives about possibilities differ.
- Some young people ‘transcend space’ in their aspirations and knowledge of opportunities, while, because of circumstances and/or the choices that they make, other young people are ‘trapped by space’ and confine themselves to a narrower subset of the opportunities available to them. Confidence and motivation to attain personal ambitions (especially if they involve higher education) are important factors here, as is the experience of travelling outside the home neighbourhood and the extent to which individuals feel comfortable in doing so. The influence of family and friends is also important, with links outside the local area often helping young people to transcend space, while strong networks of family and friends within a tightly defined geographical area may lead to a tendency to look inwards to the immediate locality.
- Some young people believe that ‘getting on’ in the labour market means ‘getting out’ of the local area, pointing out that there is a broader range of high-quality job opportunities elsewhere. Success in the labour market is associated by some with investing in a ‘nicer’ house in a ‘better’ area; while others point out that some successful people had remained in the local area.
- In principle, a widening of horizons improves education, training and employment prospects by expanding the pool of opportunities available – in social terms by increasing the range of opportunities considered and in spatial terms by increasing the geographical area in which opportunities are sought. In particular, there is a need for some young people to expand their spatial horizons to take in a broader range of opportunities by looking beyond the immediate neighbourhood and stereotypical educational, training and employment options.

- Factors such as an individual's age, economic position, skills, confidence and motivation, monetary resources and household context are influential in widening their horizons. In general (but not always), experience increases with age and the very fact of being in employment can enhance confidence and widen horizons. Motivation is an important influence in encouraging a widening of horizons and monetary resources are an important enabling factor in facilitating travel and/or engagement in a broader range of social activities. Place-based factors such as geographical location and the physical transport infrastructure are also influential. In general, those individuals in accessible locations with a good transport infrastructure are better placed to travel to a range of opportunities in different locations than those in more peripheral locations with a poorer transport infrastructure.
- Current initiatives to widen young people's horizons take various forms and aim to tackle actual and perceived barriers to education, training, employment and social participation across several policy domains. Key focuses include transport (raising awareness of available services and help with costs); visits, trips, sporting and social activities designed to provide new experiences, enhance confidence and broaden spatial horizons; and educational and work-related initiatives designed to raise awareness of opportunities and pathways and provide experiences of relevance to the workplace. All of these have a role to play. Youth workers, community workers, schools and charitable organisations often play a key role in such activities, sometimes in partnership with transport providers, education-business partnerships, training providers and employers. To date, initiatives/projects tend to have been focused on young people in danger of not being in employment, education or training (NEET), but it is likely that a wider range of young people would benefit from such initiatives.

It is important that, in designing interventions, policymakers keep in mind that not all neighbourhoods or all people are the same – where they are located, their history, their socio-demographic and economic characteristics matter. Place-specific factors, such as geographical location, community norms and historical and current patterns of local employment, are crucial in understanding how and whether interventions work, alongside who is involved in their delivery. This calls for local flexibility in design and implementation of policy.

# 1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the background and introduces the aims and scope of this research.

- The report explores how social networks and attachment to place shape further/higher education, training and work aspirations of young people (aged from 15 to their early twenties), drawing on research from three deprived neighbourhoods (in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton) in England.
- In particular, it explores whether their geographical and aspirational horizons are constrained and whether social networks and place attachment open up or close down the range of opportunities considered.
- It investigates the need and scope for interventions to ‘widen horizons’ of young people to enhance access to post-16 education, training and employment and what form such initiatives might take.
- The research findings are of significance for several key policy domains including enhancing employability, the skills agenda, transport, area-based policy and policies focusing on young people.

## Background

### Scope and context

This report is concerned with exploring the role of area perceptions in shaping the attitudes, aspirations and behaviour of young people as they come to the end of formal education, consider entering further or higher education and training and/or move into employment or unemployment. Drawing on research from three deprived neighbourhoods in England, it investigates how social networks and attachment to place shape spatial horizons and affect young people’s aspirations, and how these relate to education, training and work opportunities.

There are ongoing policy concerns about the deprivation of individuals, poverty relating to place and how the prospects of deprived places might be transformed. From a labour market perspective it has been recognised that ‘concentrations of worklessness’ exist and persist despite labour market activation policies, institutional reforms and a favourable economic climate. This has provoked an upsurge of

interest in the 'role of geography' in the labour market behaviour of people resident in deprived areas. In objective terms, where seemingly 'suitable' jobs exist, transport problems and inaccessibility have been identified as reinforcing social exclusion for disadvantaged people in deprived areas, preventing access to work and training (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). It has been hypothesised that choices made regarding whether and where to work are based on 'subjective' values and aspirations (Ritchie *et al.*, 2005), which, in turn, may be constrained by 'objective' opportunities available to individuals at local level. Shaped by social experiences (e.g. geographical knowledge gathered in the course of other activities, community norms, peer group pressures, etc.), subjective factors are likely to influence people's decision making about jobs over and above objective physical constraints. This study explores this issue further, building on a number of previous studies.

### Previous studies

Twenty years ago, a study of school leavers in Birmingham found that their job search tended to be limited to familiar localities; while there were accessible areas of the city where jobs were not sought (Quinn, 1986). Mental maps revealed that *perceived* job opportunities were a subset of *actual* job opportunities. The last 20 years have seen important changes in post-16 educational opportunities, in the structure of the economy and in transitions of young people from education to work. There has been an increase in staying-on rates and a rise in the proportion of 15/16 year olds achieving five or more A\*–C GCSEs (or equivalent), from 30 per cent at the start of the 1980s to over 50 per cent in England by the early years of the twenty-first century. Currently, 76 per cent of 17 year olds are participating in education and training (Department for Education and Skills, 2007) although the lowest achieving are most likely to drop out at the age of 16 years. More young people than ever before are participating in further and higher education (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

Despite a 'tightening' of labour markets, recent research in Belfast suggests that 'bounded horizons' and relative immobility continue to constrain the labour market behaviour of young people (Green *et al.*, 2005). Limited 'life worlds' and strong attachment to the immediate locality may be indicative of the strengths of ties to family and friends (termed 'bonding' social capital – as explained in Chapter 4), but weak development of more extensive links to a broader and more varied social circle of acquaintances (termed 'bridging' social capital) that can play an important role in labour market entry and advancement (Granovetter, 1973; PIU, 2002). However, other studies have highlighted the importance of familial and place-based social networks in facilitating labour market inclusion, especially in circumstances where jobs are advertised by 'word of mouth' (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005).

## **Contribution of this study**

The research reported here seeks to provide new insights into the role of attachment to place and its relationship with relative (im)mobility and labour market prospects among young people in selected deprived areas. It addresses the question of whether, and how, young people's spatial and social horizons need to be broadened for them to access more opportunities and how this might be done in the light of experience of some current initiatives. As such, the research examines a pertinent topic of academic interest and practical policy relevance on attachment to place, (im)mobility, area regeneration, labour market participation and aspects of disadvantage. The findings are of relevance to policy audiences across a range of domains and at different geographical scales – including the Department for Transport, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Children, Schools and Families,<sup>1</sup> and Communities and Local Government at national level; Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council and Regional Development Agencies at regional level; and Local Strategic Partnerships and those concerned with area regeneration at neighbourhood level.

## **Aims and scope**

The research has two main aims.

- 1 To investigate the role of social networks and attachment to place in shaping the attitudes, aspirations and behaviour of young people from deprived areas in accessing post-compulsory education, training and work.
- 2 To identify whether young people's horizons need spatial/social widening and what opportunities and policies would be helpful in 'widening horizons' in order to improve their prospects as people in deprived places.

More specifically, the research seeks to address the following questions.

- What are the key features of mental maps of young people and how do they vary?
- How do networks (familial, social, neighbourhood, other) shape these mental maps?
- What is the geographical extent of likely/actual job search?

- Would 'wider horizons' improve training/employment prospects?
- What interventions are in place and/or would be needed to help 'widen horizons'?
- Do residents feel that employers 'discriminate' against them because of where they live?
- Does 'getting on' in the labour market mean 'getting out' of the area; and, if so, does this matter?
- What are the implications from this research for policies on area regeneration; education and skills; economic development, the labour market and welfare reform; and transport?

## Methodology

### A focus on young people ...

Although issues of attachment to place, (im)mobility and labour market prospects are of relevance to all people of working age, the rationale for a focus on young people aged between 15 years and their early twenties is that they are about to start making decisions about, or are in the early stages of, their labour market careers, and their decisions and actions at this age could play an important role in shaping later labour market trajectories. They are likely to have limited direct experience of employment; therefore their attitudes and perceptions are 'the starting position' that they bring to their initial involvement in adult life and the labour market. Some are in their final years of compulsory schooling, some are continuing at school post-16 or are studying for further qualifications at college on a part-time or full-time basis, some are in higher education, others are on training courses with work placements, in apprenticeships or in employment (on a part-time or full-time basis). Others are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

### ... from deprived areas

Furthermore, the focus is on young people from deprived places, reflecting the long-standing concerns of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with issues of poverty and place. From a methodological perspective, a case could be made for contrasting the

attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of young people in deprived areas with those from more affluent areas, but instead a decision was made to compare and contrast results from three specific deprived neighbourhoods (all of which are New Deal for Communities [NDC] areas) to consider different geographical, economic and socio-demographic contexts and their relationship with young people's aspirations: in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Box 1 provides an introductory overview of the key features of the three case study areas in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton in terms of location, demography and labour market context; Chapter 3 provides further details on these and other characteristics.

### Box 1 Case study areas

- *Hull*: the NDC area is located in East Hull. It has an overwhelmingly white population in a city that has a smaller than average share of population from minority ethnic groups. Hull has a relatively sluggish economy with low levels of growth, productivity and earnings. There are no other major employment centres within easy reach.
- *Walsall*: the NDC area has a peripheral location in north west Walsall. The NDC population is overwhelmingly white, whereas the wider local authority population is more mixed. The local area has seen decline of heavy manufacturing, but there are new employment opportunities close to the NDC area and elsewhere in the metropolitan West Midlands.
- *Wolverhampton*: the NDC area is located adjacent to the city centre and there are good public transport links to other parts of the West Midlands. There are substantial Asian, black and mixed-race populations in the NDC area, more so than in the city as a whole. The local area has seen decline of traditional manufacturing but there are employment opportunities in the city centre and beyond.

The focus on young people from disadvantaged areas is justified on the grounds that their 'life worlds' are likely to be more localised than average because of more limited access to private transport than average, and they are likely to face particular constraints in seeking employment, with high rates of worklessness existing locally. An advantage of selecting NDC areas for case study purposes is that a broader range of research utilising secondary data sources, household surveys and partnership evaluations can be drawn on to provide a richer context for the research than would otherwise be the case. As part of the national evaluation of the NDC programme, a household survey has been carried out across the 39 areas by Ipsos MORI in 2002, 2004 and 2006. Some of the 2006 data for the three individual case



study areas are presented in this report. (A report presenting an overview of change data at a programme-wide level is available at <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1898>.) Reference is also made to administrative data compiled for the national evaluation of the NDC programme.

### Methodological approach

In each of the three case study areas (i.e. the neighbourhoods in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton) the primary focus is on the background, attitudes, aspirations and experiences of young people aged between 15 years and their early twenties. As noted above, this age group encompasses young people at different stages in their transition from school to the labour market, including those in their final years at school, in further or higher education, on training courses combining work and study, in full-time or part-time employment, those not in employment, education or training (NEET) and those who are unemployed. The aim was to capture views across this range. Information was collected via various different research instruments.

- A *survey* (hereafter referred to as the ‘young person survey’) was conducted of approximately 60 individuals in each of the three case study areas using a guided structured self-completion questionnaire collecting information on: links to and attitudes towards the local area; patterns of mobility and use of transport; current position and future intentions; employment aspirations; job search and sources of information and guidance used; job locations; and individual characteristics. Young people were recruited purposively via schools, colleges, youth groups and community involvement workers. In each of the three areas just over half were male. Across the three case study areas around 50 per cent of respondents were 15–16 years old (i.e. in their final year of school or in their first year following post-compulsory schooling), 30 per cent were 17–19 years old and 20 per cent were 20–24 years old. Nearly all in the youngest age group were at school or college, while nearly all of the oldest age group were in employment. Those in the middle age group were most likely to combine further/higher education with part-time employment or to be on a training course with a work-based component. The sample in Wolverhampton had a slightly older age profile than in the other two areas with 40 per cent of respondents aged 15–16 years and 40 per cent of respondents aged 17–19 years. In Walsall slightly fewer of the respondents were at school than in Hull or Wolverhampton and slightly more were at college or on training courses. In Hull all respondents were white British and in Walsall the share was 98 per cent. There was a much more diverse ethnic mix in Wolverhampton where a third of respondents were Asian, just over a quarter were from a mixed group, a further quarter were white British and the



remainder were black. It should be borne in mind that the sample of young people filling in the questionnaire is not statistically representative within or across case study areas (since the characteristics of respondents reflect purposive sampling and access to different groups of young people in different areas). However, it provides useful illustrative information on very broad baseline tendencies across the case study areas, which were supplemented by more in-depth qualitative information collected by other means.

- *Focus groups* (four in each case study area, typically with four to eight participants) were held to explore in greater detail young people's perceptions of the neighbourhood and city (via sketching of mental maps – see Chapter 4 for further details), attachment and attitudes to the local area; knowledge of local job opportunities; factors influencing job search behaviour; employer attitudes; barriers to mobility; and future labour market and residential intentions (i.e. likelihood of staying in the local area). Focus group participants were recruited from survey respondents to reflect the full range of respondent characteristics. In some instances focus groups included young people at a similar stage (e.g. at school), but in other instances the groups were more mixed (including those in employment, at college, on training courses, unemployed, etc).
- *Individual face-to-face interviews* (at least eight in each case study area) were conducted to explore social networks, attachment to place, attitudes, perceptions, experiences and future intentions in more detail. Interviewees were recruited mainly from focus group respondents. While young men and women were selected from across the age range and included those at school, college, on training courses, in employment and not employed, particular care was taken to include older respondents with more post-school experience.

This information was supplemented by material collected in *face-to-face interviews* (around ten in each case study area) with *stakeholders* (including NDC staff, project managers, youth workers, representatives from further and higher education, training providers, Jobcentre Plus and associated delivery organisations, public transport providers and community organisations) and employers. Topics covered included employee attributes sought (especially among young people), recruitment/selection and screening practices, barriers to employment faced by local people, the changing nature of the employment market and views on whether worklessness was a 'drag' on the local economy.

Taken together, the different methodological strands provide valuable insights into how subjective behavioural factors intermesh with objective opportunities in influencing choices made by young people about *whether* and *which* education,

training and job opportunities are sought *where*, *when* and *why*, in order to address the research questions outlined above. The survey information was analysed using SPSS. Focus group discussions and interviews were recorded and analysed using standard coding techniques.

### Structure of the report

Chapter 2 sets the context for the research. It examines the role of mobility and immobility in the operation of urban labour markets, key features of labour market restructuring and associated implications for people and places, area regeneration policies and the changing nature of youth transitions to work.

Chapter 3 introduces the case study areas for the research: Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Dimensions of similarity and difference are explored.

Chapter 4 focuses on young people's social networks, place attachment and labour market aspirations, and asks whether they act as barriers or bridges to work. It addresses the important question for area regeneration of whether young people think 'getting on' in the labour market means 'getting out' of the neighbourhood.

Chapter 5 examines the extent to which training, jobs and careers are spatially constrained. It addresses issues of the nature and accuracy of labour market knowledge, the geographical extent of job search and the role of transport, wages and discrimination in shaping access to employment.

Chapter 6 asks whether 'wider horizons' would improve education/training/employment prospects and discusses how a broadening of horizons might be achieved.

The main findings and conclusions from the study are summarised in Chapter 7 and implications for policy are outlined.

## 2 Context

This chapter sets out the context for the study. It discusses:

- the operation of labour markets
- key features of labour market restructuring – by industry and occupation – since the 1980s
- implications of such changes for people and places
- inherent tensions in area regeneration policies between ‘places’ and ‘people’
- changes in youth transitions into work.

It highlights the:

- complexity of economic and socio-institutional factors shaping the operation of labour markets
- importance of variations between individuals in mobility and in their ability to adjust to change in understanding the volume and nature of employment opportunities available in different areas
- shift in employment from manufacturing to service industries and the associated demise in manual jobs, alongside a ‘professionalisation’ of much employment, but also growth in lower-level service jobs
- particular importance of local opportunities for those who face most constraints in the labour market
- contested role of mobility in area regeneration policies
- trend towards longer, more complex and varied youth transitions into work.

### The operation of labour markets

#### Labour markets and their geographies

In understanding employment prospects for different people in different places it is important to understand how labour markets operate. In basic terms a labour market is where employers and potential workers come together as buyers and sellers of labour to achieve a ‘match’. In practice, however, the matching process is not

necessarily simple. Typically, there are barriers and frictions to achieving a 'match' (i.e. markets tend to be 'imperfect' rather than 'perfect'). Moreover, labour market operations are shaped by formal and informal customs, norms and practices that underpin how 'matching' operates and how employment processes, the nature of work and wages are shaped (i.e. labour markets are socio-institutional constructs). Furthermore, the variation in labour demand and supply is such that there is not one single labour market in any one place, but rather a mosaic of overlapping sub-markets demarcated by industry, occupation and geography.

Given the focus of this report on place attachment, the geographies of labour markets are of particular interest. In essence, the geographical subdivision of labour markets is largely a consequence of the costs (monetary and otherwise) of extensive daily travel to work and the typically greater costs of migration between different areas (Goodman, 1970). These costs subdivide spatially a labour force already stratified by occupation and other attributes, because, by deterring migration, they tend to restrict an individual's 'employment field' to workplace sites within daily commuting distance of his/her residence. Where 'employment fields' of workers and the 'labour catchments' of employers coincide, local labour markets are relatively self-contained (i.e. the majority of employed residents will work within the local area and the majority of jobs will be filled by residents of the local area). This principle of self-containment underpins empirical attempts to delineate local labour market areas. In practice such exercises are difficult because of the fuzzy nature of multiple labour market geographies: there are well established differences in commuting propensities and patterns of different sections of the workforce (by age, gender, skills level and hours of work), ongoing changes in such propensities and patterns resulting from changes in the geography of residences, workplaces and the infrastructure linking them. There has been a long-term trend towards longer (in terms of time and distance) and more diffuse commuting flows, but such long-distance flows are confined mainly to those in professional and managerial occupations (Green and Owen, 2006). Furthermore, as highlighted above, local labour markets are not merely 'spatial containers'; rather they are continuously reconstructed through social and institutional processes taking place within and between them (Martin and Morrison, 2003), in accordance with variations and changes in cultural norms, recruitment practices and interventions of labour market intermediaries.

### **Understanding the operation and interconnectedness of labour markets**

Differences in mobility and in the ability to adjust to change are crucial in understanding how labour markets operate and the implications of such operations for different people in different places. For example, people with fewer skills, who are

able to command only relatively low wages, are more constrained in skills and spatial terms in the number of jobs for which they can realistically compete than their more highly skilled counterparts, who can both 'bump down' to less skilled occupations as well as competing for jobs at their skill level and who can typically afford to spend more on travelling to work. Likewise, non-work factors – such as childcare and other caring responsibilities – may place constraints on workplace locations and hours of work for some individuals, such that their job search is restricted to a relatively confined geographical area.

From a policy perspective, debates about so-called 'segmented' and 'seamless' models of urban labour markets are of significance in understanding the fortunes of less skilled people in disadvantaged areas and some of the policy options for addressing such disadvantage (Morrison, 2005). Proponents of a 'segmented model' of urban labour market operation emphasise that the labour market consists of a number of spatially defined sub-markets and that concentrations of local unemployment exist because of deficiencies in highly localised demand for labour. Given the constraints on spatial and occupational mobility faced by the less skilled, the solution to local concentrations of unemployment is to boost labour demand by 'bringing jobs to the workers'. Conversely, proponents of a 'seamless model' of the urban labour market emphasise the interconnectedness of sub-markets through occupational and geographical mobility, leading to ripple effects throughout (Gordon, 2003), such that the city can be thought of as a single labour market, with links to other urban labour markets. Here, local concentrations of unemployment are seen as reflecting residential clustering of the most vulnerable individuals and the solution is one of supply-side interventions to upskill individuals so that they can compete more effectively for jobs, on the basis that 'bringing jobs to the workers' will only be a short-term fix since local impacts will be diffused spatially across a 'seamless' market covering the entire city region.

## **Key features of labour market restructuring**

### **Changes by industry and occupation**

Over the last 25 years or so there have been marked changes in the industrial structure of employment. Agriculture, fishing, mining and manufacturing have shed jobs and are projected to continue to do so. In 1984 manufacturing accounted for around 5.3 million jobs nationally (20 per cent of total employment), but only 3.5 million manufacturing jobs (12 per cent of total employment) remained in 2004. Numerically, a 6.5 million increase in jobs in services over the same period more

than compensated for these losses, with service employment increasing from over 67 per cent to nearly 80 per cent of total employment (Wilson *et al.*, 2006).

The changes in the industrial composition of employment have been accompanied by changes in occupational structure. As well as reflecting industrial changes, these are a function of technological advances and changes in the occupational profile of employment within industries. There has been substantial growth in employment in higher-level managerial, professional and associated occupations, and in personal service and sales and customer service occupations. There have been job losses in skilled trades occupations, operative and elementary occupations (e.g. factory workers, labourers, office juniors, etc.), although the decline has slowed since the major shake-out of employment in the early 1980s.

### **Consequences for skills ...**

The major changes outlined above reveal a clear shift towards the service sector and also a 'professionalisation' of employment. The former has been associated with growing numbers of women in the workforce, while the latter highlights the demand for a more highly qualified workforce: those individuals without formal qualifications at the level of five GCSEs at grades A\*–C (or equivalent) are now defined as being in 'skills poverty'. Employer surveys consistently underline the importance of generic skills such as communication, customer service, planning and problem solving alongside formal qualifications as attributes that they seek in employees.

Despite the changes outlined above, there are still jobs requiring relatively low-level skills. Typically, such jobs require less 'muscle labour' than in the past and are more likely to be in the service sector than formerly. However, the wages, terms and conditions of these jobs are sometimes regarded as undesirable by job-seekers, such that employers find vacancies 'hard to fill' and/or face problems of labour retention.

### **... and for areas**

Alongside these changes in the industrial and occupational structure of employment, there have been changes in the geographical distribution of jobs. Some local areas have witnessed the decline of major employers (e.g. in coal mining, fishing and manufacturing) and, where this has been combined with a lack of alternative local opportunities, spatial concentrations of worklessness have developed, which take time to address – particularly in more peripheral locations. Also of particular

significance here is the fact that, over a prolonged period, cities have generally come to adopt more decentralised spatial patterns of population and employment (to urban peripheries and beyond), for which it is more difficult to provide public transport infrastructure.

## **Implications for people and places**

### **People**

Restructuring of the labour market has favoured some sub-groups at the expense of others. Those with poor skills have lost out relative to other groups, with men seeing a greater contraction of their traditional job options than women. However, opportunities for those with poor skills remain, especially in the context of a relatively favourable macroeconomic climate, albeit that those opportunities may be fewer than in the past. Moreover, typically, they are characterised by low wages and they may be less secure than in former times, when notions of a 'job for life' were common. Some of the jobs that are available offer 'precarious' employment and it is possible for some workers to become trapped in such jobs with little or no scope for progression. Since 2004 migrants from eastern and central Europe have become an important source of labour for some of the less desirable jobs that employers find 'hard to fill' (Salt, 2006). Those young people with poor skills are particularly vulnerable to displacement by recent economic migrants (especially those from central and eastern Europe), who typically have higher-level skills (which are often not fully utilised in the jobs they are working in) and who can be particularly valued for their work ethic (Learning and Skills Council, 2006).

### **Places**

Likewise, labour market restructuring has impacted on some areas more than others. Impacts of job loss have been particularly acute in areas where there were historically strong foundations of 'place communities' established around male work ties (e.g. in mining and heavy manufacturing) that have been eroded. Given the focus of this report, it is significant that 'place anchorage' of key industries facilitated 'place attachment' of the nuclear family, which in turn assisted the growth and maintenance of multigenerational family ties. In such areas, the rupture caused by major job losses has been particularly stark, impacting not only on economic prospects, but also on social and cultural infrastructures.



The nature and availability of employment at local level matters most acutely for those who face most constraints in the labour market – notably those with poor skills (Green and Owen, 2006). Research focusing explicitly on young people has also highlighted the importance of local opportunities, especially for those who leave school at the earliest opportunity, who tend to be the least qualified (Roberts, 1995; Hodgkinson *et al.*, 1996; McDowell, 2003). These studies emphasise that ‘place’ has an important role to play alongside class background, qualifications, gender and personal qualities at the start of working lives in terms of the opportunities young people face.

Another key issue, albeit strongly linked to skill levels and age, is reliance on public transport and access to private transport. Young people and those with poor skills tend to be more reliant on public transport to access opportunities than the population in general. Availability of and access to public transport varies by location, with buses displaying a wider coverage than trains. Buses, in particular, are generally slower, less predictable and less convenient than the car. In the context of deregulation, local planning to ensure that those who are most reliant on public transport have access to it is increasingly difficult. Indeed, the disadvantaged may be ‘immobilised by the car’ (Gough *et al.*, 2006, p. 120) and suffer particular problems of physical access to jobs – i.e. they may suffer ‘spatial entrapment’.

### **Concentrations of worklessness**

The uneven geography of job loss and economic growth means that opportunities in the external labour market will vary from one local area to another. Particular policy concern has been focused on spatial concentrations of worklessness and associated ‘cultures of worklessness’. The latter is a contested concept, but the term is sometimes used to describe a situation in which there is relatively widespread inactivity, which may be intergenerational in nature, characterised by a relative lack of role models of people in work and by lower incentives to work because peers are also unemployed and perhaps because the informal economy has a strong pull factor. In such circumstances, joblessness may come to be viewed as unproblematic within a context of lowered aspirations and short-term horizons (Ritchie *et al.*, 2005; Dewson *et al.*, 2007).

Spatial concentrations of worklessness may exist for different reasons in different places, including changes in the nature and location of jobs, the operation of housing market ‘sorting’ processes, with the most disadvantaged members of society who have least residential choice drawn together, and ‘area’ effects (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). Notions of ‘spatial mismatch’ (i.e. geographical mismatch between residences



and potential workplaces) and of 'skills mismatch' (i.e. the [im]balance between the characteristics of potential workers and the attributes required by available jobs) have been invoked to 'explain' the persistence of spatial concentrations of worklessness (Kain, 1968; Holzer, 2001; Houston, 2001, 2005). A key issue for this study is to explore whether and how far real issues of spatial mismatch, skills mismatch and spatial entrapment exist and may be shaping the decisions and labour market behaviour of young people.

## Area regeneration policies, mobility and immobility

### Area regeneration policies

The discussion above indicates that economic disadvantage is not patterned merely by place, but is actively produced through it. Both people- and place-based policies have been used to tackle spatial concentrations of disadvantage. As mentioned in Chapter 1 and outlined in more detail in Chapter 3, the case study areas selected for this research are from one of the most ambitious area-based regeneration programmes in England: New Deal for Communities (NDC). Announced in 1998, NDC is designed to help turn around 39 of the poorest neighbourhoods in England by tackling problems of crime, education, health, worklessness, and housing and the physical environment over a ten-year period (Lawless, 2006). Each NDC area has been allocated roughly £50 million funding over this period and issues concerning young people, learning, education, skills and worklessness are among the key policy priorities.

### Encouraging mobility?

Area-based policies face inherent complexities. A fundamental question is whether policies are 'for the place' or 'for the people in it'. Related to this is the issue of *mobility* – which, as outlined above, is fundamental in understanding how labour markets operate and is one of the key concerns in this report. Should area-based policies encourage people to stay in an area and to help rebuild it, or to move on elsewhere to areas where there may be more opportunities? In a neighbourhood context, if an area-based policy helps residents gain jobs through training or other initiatives and they subsequently leave the neighbourhood to be replaced by the non-employed, should this be counted as a 'success' for the people and a 'failure' for the place?

Sprigings and Allen (2005) argue that there are fundamental contradictions between the spatial logics of policies to promote economic opportunity for individuals and to increase the density of social, economic and political linkages within areas to stabilise them and promote their development, so highlighting that the objectives of policies for 'people' and for 'places' may not necessarily coincide. They suggest that policy strategies to create area stability are out of place in a world of movement and hence that promotion of spatial mobility of individuals should take precedence, arguing that individual ability to be mobile to take up economic, social and cultural opportunities elsewhere is a key indicator of social inclusion. Conversely, they argue that discouraging individual mobility in the interests of prioritising area stability and development reinforces individual disadvantage, albeit that such movement represents a loss of skills to the local area when people move away.

## The changing nature of youth transitions into work

### Increasing length, complexity and differentiation

The transition from school into work is only one of a number of transitions experienced by young adults. However, it is a particularly crucial transition in determining future life chances. There has been a trend over time towards longer, less linear, less predictable and more complex transitions. Early careers of young people are often turbulent (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004), with no clear trajectory. Often they are characterised by moves in and out of a series of jobs, interspersed with periods of training and sometimes of unemployment. Moreover, transitions vary between and within social classes and localities.

Important structural changes serving to differentiate the current experiences of young people in their transition to the labour market from those of their parents and grandparents are the greater impacts of global change on local labour markets (through the internationalisation of supply chains, outsourcing of certain jobs to lower-cost locations, etc.) and the sharp decline in the number of jobs for 16-year-old school leavers. In the mid-1970s, well over half of 16 year olds left school rather than staying on in education and most moved directly into jobs, including the high prestige apprenticeship. By the 1980s, employment was becoming an increasingly difficult option for this age group (Bynner *et al.*, 2002) and, today, 87 per cent of young people nationally participate in education or training a year after compulsory schooling. The 1980s saw the introduction of widespread youth training provision and employment preparation programmes, and the reform of benefits with a reduction in young people's entitlement to state welfare. Increasing numbers of young people are

taking advantage of the expansion of opportunities in further education and higher education (the current Government has a target of 50 per cent of young people in higher education by 2010, which represents an increase from 42 per cent in 2004/05) and incentives have been introduced for young people who might previously have been unlikely to continue in post-compulsory education. The increase in the proportion of young people with formal qualifications places the most poorly qualified in an increasingly disadvantageous position, given the growing requirements for skills in the UK economy highlighted in the Leitch Review of Skills (2006).

### **Navigating the options**

These wide-ranging structural changes mean that, while opportunities to enter employment immediately after leaving school at the age of 16 years have reduced, a greater range of education and training options (in some cases linked with employment) is available to young people in general than was formerly the case. The transformations in the economy mean that employment options for those who are least successful at school may be reduced (McDowell, 2003). To young people and their parents, the range of opportunities for continuing education (academic and vocational), training and employment may seem like a 'maze' through which it is difficult to navigate. Cross-generational research of poorly qualified school leavers has indicated that the nature of changes has been such that the value of social networks of today's young people relative to those of their fathers has declined, leading to greater risk and uncertainty in transitions (Strathdee, 2001). In the context of change, a key issue is the relative importance of social networks rooted in place for understanding youth transitions to the labour market and whether the influence of these networks is positive or negative.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has highlighted how a complex array of economic, social and institutional factors shapes the operation of labour markets. The restructuring of labour markets over the last quarter century has led to a reduction in manufacturing jobs and the growth of employment in services, alongside a decline in manual jobs and increases in professional and managerial and in lower-level service jobs. The geographical impact of labour market restructuring has been uneven at regional and local levels. However, a general trend across many cities has been a decentralisation of employment to sites on urban peripheries that are often difficult to access by public transport. Those with poorest skills/fewest qualifications and who otherwise

face most constraints in the labour market have generally faced the greatest difficulties in adjusting to the changed landscape of employment opportunities – in skills and spatial terms. ‘People-based’ and ‘place-based’ policies have been introduced in an attempt to enhance opportunities and prospects for those facing disadvantage. In area regeneration policies there is ongoing debate concerning the relative emphasis that should be placed on possible conflicts between individual mobility and area stability. Likewise, the relative merits of policies of taking ‘jobs to workers’ or ‘workers to jobs’, in order to tackle concentrations of worklessness, remain an important focus for discussion and policy intervention choices.

In this context of change, young people (both young men and young women) face a considerably different set of opportunities for further/higher education, training and/or work than their parents and grandparents did at 15/16 years of age. In general, youth transitions into work have become longer, more complex and varied than was formerly the case. In subsequent chapters, the relative importance and influence (both positive and negative) of social networks rooted in place for understanding youth aspirations, experiences and transitions to the labour market is investigated.

### 3 Case study areas

This chapter provides contextual material on the three case study areas (denoted here by the name of the city of which they are a part). It highlights the following.

- The location, demographic structure, socio-economic and housing profile, educational context and key features of the local and sub-regional economy of the three sites.
  - *Hull*: there are few jobs in the immediate vicinity and, although there are jobs in other parts of Hull, no other major employment centres are within easy commuting reach.
  - *Walsall*: the case study area has a peripheral location in north west Walsall, a bus ride away from the town centre. There are employment opportunities in adjacent areas and elsewhere in the Black Country, South Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation.
  - *Wolverhampton*: lying adjacent to Wolverhampton city centre, this case study area has some jobs in the immediate vicinity and more within walking distance in the city centre. It has good public transport links to employment opportunities in other parts of the West Midlands.

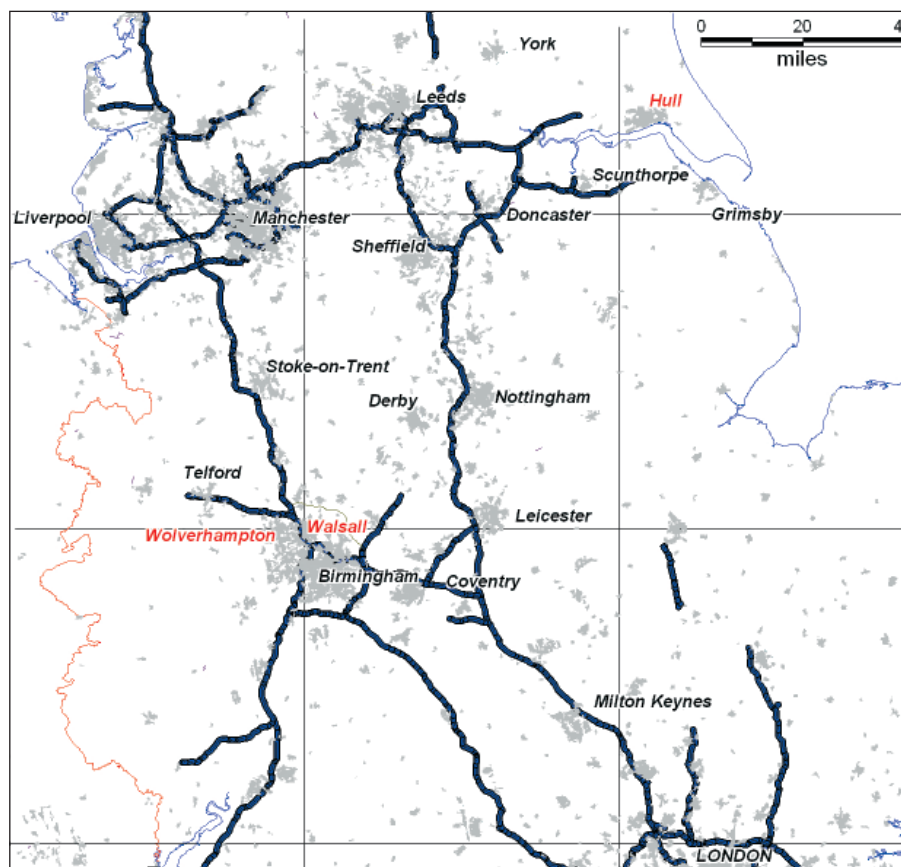
The chapter identifies:

- key dimensions of similarity and difference at neighbourhood and broader sub-regional scales
- Hull and Walsall may be characterised as homogeneous white ‘working-class’ areas, whereas Wolverhampton is more ethnically and socially diverse
- the three areas provide variations in geographical, economic and socio-demographic context in which to investigate social networks, attachment to place, spatial awareness and access to opportunities.

Three case study areas for this study – Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton – were selected from the 39 NDC areas in England. Account was taken of factors such as demographic characteristics, economic context, urban location (i.e. whether inner or outer areas), geographical location vis-à-vis job opportunities in the selection of case study areas in order to provide some contrasts and similarities between areas. With only three case study areas it is not feasible to take account of all possible dimensions of variation, nor is it possible to generalise to the whole country from the

three case study areas. However, from the case study areas selected, it is possible to identify similarities and differences across and within areas. Through the case studies the research sought to consider not just how young people's aspirations and opportunities varied, but also the role of geography and the context of place in shaping them. A map showing the cities of Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton in a broader regional and sub-national context is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** Location of the case study cities in a broader regional and national context



Note: Urban areas are shown in grey and some key settlements are labelled. The urban areas where the NDC case study areas are located are shown in red. Motorways are identified in dark blue.



## Hull

### Location

Hull has a periperal location on the north bank of the Humber. There are no other major urban centres within easy commuting distance, although it is possible to travel on a daily basis to the south bank of the Humber or on the M62 to Leeds (although the latter is over an hour away by car). The city is divided into East and West Hull by a river. The case study area lies three miles to the east of Hull city centre (see Figure 2). It is divided into ‘four quarters’ by Preston Road (a dual carriageway) and a waterway (‘The Drain’). Traditionally, there were relatively few shops and public service outlets in the NDC area, although recent NDC developments have meant more community facilities have become available. There are shops on the edge of the case study area at Holderness Road but main public service outlets and a broader range of shops are located a bus ride away in the city centre.

**Figure 2 NDC area – Hull**



Source: Social Disadvantage Research Centre, University of Oxford. Produced for the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme. NDC area delineated in red.

## **Demographic, socio-economic and housing profile**

The 2001 Census indicates that there were just over 6,000 residents in the area. Around 98 per cent of the population of the case study area and of Hull (which has a population of around 250,000) is 'white British', although, since 2004, there has been significant in-migration to the city of economic migrants from eastern and central Europe (availability of housing and low-skill employment are important factors here). Over three-quarters of households in the NDC area live in the social rented sector. Much of the area is characterised by pre-war low-density housing. Over time the area became run-down and a feeling developed that services had been allowed to deteriorate. The area is now part of a Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder area, where concerted action is being taken to address problems of low housing demand. There are strong family ties among residents of the area and unemployment across generations within the same families has been identified in NDC evaluations as a key issue. According to the 2006 NDC Household Survey, residents in employment are concentrated to a much greater extent in elementary and operative occupations (which account for just over 40 per cent of employed residents in the NDC area) requiring only lower-level skills than the average across all NDCs (30 per cent) and nationally (20 per cent).

## **Educational infrastructure**

There are secondary schools within and adjacent to the NDC area. Traditionally, results have been poor, but have improved considerably in the last few years at a rate in excess of that for the city as a whole (see Table 1). Typically, schools in Hull do not have sixth forms. The main further education (FE) college is in the city centre, although some courses (e.g. construction) are run from sites in the local area. The University of Hull is located in the west of the city and there are no direct public transport links there from the NDC area. Entry to higher education (HE) is markedly lower than the city average, which is in turn lower than that across England as a whole (see Table 1).



**Table 1 Education indicators for the case study areas and comparator areas, 2005 (%)**

	Hull		Walsall		Wolverhampton		All NDCs	England
	NDC	LA	NDC	LA	NDC	LA	average	average
<i>Key Stage 4 (five A*–C GCSEs or equivalent)</i>								
2002	11.0	30.1	24.6	42.3	31.9	43.2	26.0	49.4
2005	33.0	44.5	42.9	45.7	52.8	52.9	36.8	54.4
<i>Staying-on rates</i>								
2001	19.1	34.4	26.9	44.5	53.0	47.3	39.4	51.2
2005	48.5	49.2	42.0	53.9	58.1	57.9	58.7	60.7
<i>Entry to HE</i>								
2001	3.8	13.3	8.8	25.1	28.9	31.4	15.3	32.1
2005	1.9	15.7	11.1	26.7	30.7	33.6	18.6	33.1

Source: Social Disadvantage Research Centre, University of Oxford. Administrative data packages produced for the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme.

Notes:

- 1 'NDC' relates to the NDC area and 'LA' relates to the broader local authority area in which the NDC is located.
- 2 Key Stage 4 statistics relate to the proportion of pupils in the NDC area achieving at least five GCSEs or equivalents A\*–C grades at Key Stage 4. The Department for Education and Skills target is for 60 per cent of pupils to reach this by 2008.
- 3 The staying-on rate is the estimated proportion of those aged 17 and 18 years who are continuing in full-time education.
- 4 Entry to HE relates to the percentage of under-21s entering HE.

## The economy

Hull has been 'slowly haemorrhaging' population since the mid-20th century – the adjacent East Riding is seen as offering better schools, services and quality of life. The Hull economy may be characterised as 'sluggish', despite having the advantages of a port and a broadly based economy (Hull City Council, 2004). However, on a range of economic indicators, the Hull economy underperforms: unemployment is persistently high (the city unemployment rate is around twice the national average and the NDC unemployment rate is nearly double the city average – see Table 2), the employment rate is lower than sub-regional and national averages, the city is characterised by poor educational attainment (albeit there have been improvements in recent years) and high levels of basic skills needs. There is little tradition of self-employment. The fishing industry (most important in West Hull) collapsed around 30 years ago, whereas East Hull has traditionally fed off the commercial docks, which have also seen widespread job losses. The dock industries and food production/processing industries contribute to a tradition of 'casualisation' in the local labour market, where public sector services are also an important employer. The picture emerging is one of a low-wage, low-cost, low-skill economy.

**Table 2 Unemployment and worklessness data for the case study areas and comparator areas, 2005 (%)**

	Hull		Walsall		Wolverhampton		All NDCs	England
	NDC	LA	NDC	LA	NDC	LA		
Unemployment rate	9.2	5.2	5.4	3.9	7.8	4.8	6.7	2.4
Worklessness rate	23.7	13.7	17.1	12.1	18.5	13.4	19.8	8.8

Source: Social Disadvantage Research Centre, University of Oxford. Administrative data packages produced for the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme.

Notes:

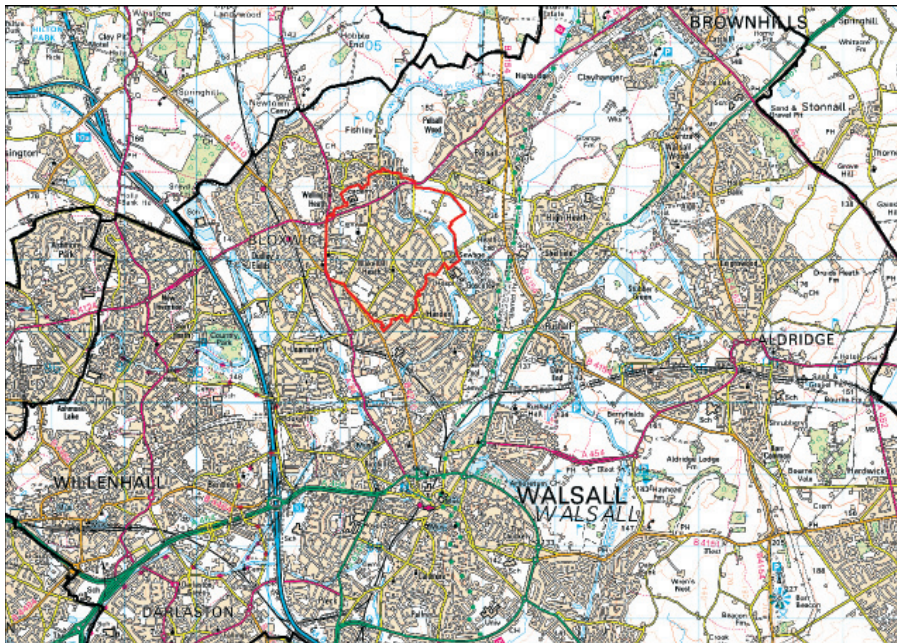
- 1 'NDC' relates to the NDC area and 'LA' relates to the broader local authority area in which the NDC is located.
- 2 Unemployment is defined as being out of work and being in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance. The unemployment rate represents the number of unemployed (as defined here) as a percentage of people aged 16–59 years.
- 3 Worklessness is defined here as being out of work and being in receipt of one of three benefits: Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) or Incapacity Benefit (IB). The worklessness rate represents the number of workless (as defined here) as a percentage of people aged 16–59 years.
- 4 The unemployment rate is a subset of the worklessness rate.

## Walsall

### Location

The Walsall case study area covers the Blakenall, Bloxwich East and Leamore area in north Walsall (see Figure 3), which is part of the West Midlands conurbation. There are links to the motorway network from Junction 10 of the M6. From Walsall town centre, which is a bus ride away, there are good public transport links to the rest of the West Midlands conurbation. There are some shops and public services available in the area or close by. The NDC flagship Blakenall Village Centre houses a range of community and service facilities, and another key NDC has been the establishment of 'Work on the Horizon' (a high street shop providing a range of employment, training and related services) in the local area. A broader range of services is available in Walsall town centre.

Figure 3 NDC area – Walsall



Source: Social Disadvantage Research Centre, University of Oxford. Produced for the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme. NDC area delineated in red.

### Demographic, socio-economic and housing profile

The case study area has an estimated population of around 12,000 (the population of the Walsall local authority area, which encompasses the town of Walsall and some neighbouring urban areas, was around 250,000 in 2005) of which 98 per cent are white British. There is a 'settled traveller' community within the area, who may be thought of as a 'hidden minority'. The population is very stable: three in five residents interviewed in the NDC 2006 Household Survey had lived in the area for at least 20 years. There is evidence from the NDC National Evaluation of strong familial links, with many residents having extended family in the immediate vicinity. The area is characterised by low-density local authority and former local authority housing stock in varying states of disrepair, as well as some desirable owner-occupied properties in the north of the area. In order to regenerate the area, attempts are being made to broaden the tenure mix, to help create a more balanced community. According to the NDC 2006 Household Survey just under half of households were in owner-occupation and the same proportion were in the social rented sector, with the remainder (only 5 per cent) living in private rented accommodation.

### **Educational infrastructure**

The majority of young people attend secondary schools (which have sixth forms) outside the NDC area, typically walking or travelling by bus to them. The former local secondary school located within the NDC area and serving many local residents now has Academy status and takes in students from outside the local area as well as NDC residents. There is a large FE college in Walsall town centre and the University of Wolverhampton has a presence at a new campus in Walsall. Educational attainment standards have been improving markedly: there have been significant increases in achievement at Key Stage 4 in recent years and in staying-on rates (see Table 1 earlier in the chapter). Entry to HE remains markedly lower (11 per cent) than the local authority (27 per cent) and England (33 per cent) averages. The broader context for these developments is an entrenched problem of poor basic skills in the area. Historically, aspirations have been low and the proportion of 2006 NDC Household Survey respondents wishing to improve basic skills (5 per cent for reading, 6 per cent for writing and 13 per cent for maths) is substantially lower than the average across all NDCs (where the respective proportions are 12 per cent, 13 per cent and 19 per cent).

### **The economy**

The economy of the area has suffered from the decline of traditional manufacturing industry, but, even so, employed residents are more concentrated in skilled manual occupations than nationally. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, the Walsall area, as part of the historic 'Black Country', developed localised coal mining, ironworks and metal industries. After experiencing unemployment in the 1920s, the area was more prosperous in World War II and the immediate post-war period. In the 1950s there were blast furnaces, iron foundries and general engineering foundries in the area. Other important industries included toolmaking, manufacturing of electrical fittings, stainless steel manufacture, the brush industry and the leather industry. Over the last 20–30 years, the economy of the area has suffered from the decline of traditional manufacturing industry and this is reflected in unemployment and worklessness rates in excess of the national average (see Table 2 earlier in the chapter). Yet there are employment opportunities within or adjacent to the NDC area, although perhaps not quite 'on the doorstep' to the same extent as formerly. Many of the jobs available in manufacturing, distribution and other services require relatively low skills levels.

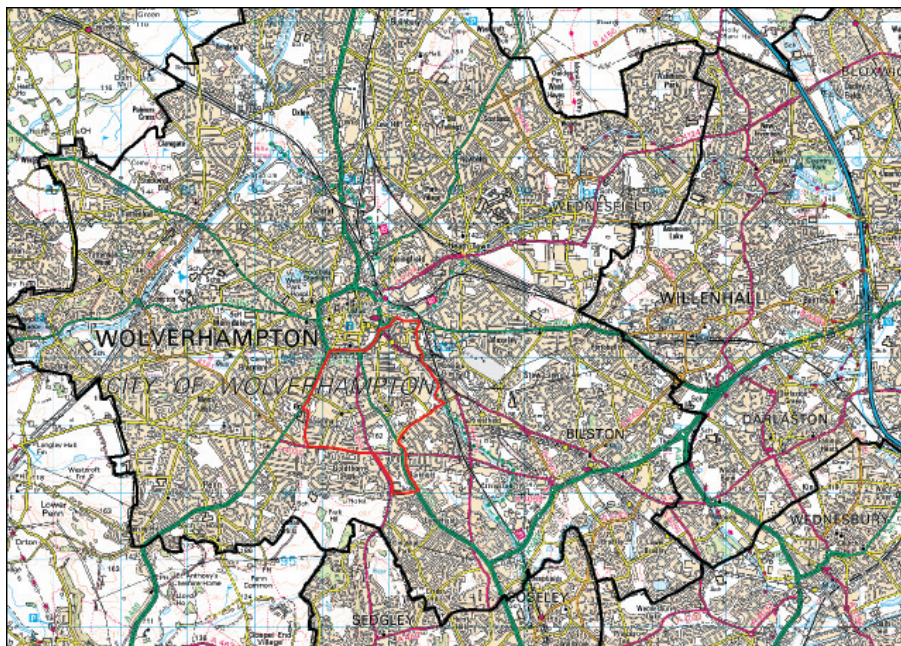


## Wolverhampton

### Location

Wolverhampton is the second largest city in the West Midlands and, along with Walsall, Dudley and Sandwell, is part of the 'Black Country'. The case study area consists of two distinct areas – All Saints and Blakenhall – which are adjacent to, and within walking distance of, the city centre but are separated from it by the ring road (Figure 4). It has good public transport (rail, metro and bus) within walking distance and motorway connections to Birmingham and the rest of the West Midlands city region and beyond. There are some shops and community facilities in the NDC area, but the city centre close by provides access to a full range of services.

**Figure 4 NDC area – Wolverhampton**



Source: Social Disadvantage Research Centre, University of Oxford. Produced for the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme. NDC area delineated in red.

### Demographic, socio-economic and housing profile

The case study area has an estimated population of around 11,000 (the population of Wolverhampton local authority area was around 240,000 in 2005). According to the 2001 Census, around 55 per cent of the population were from minority ethnic groups, although some community representatives feel that this represents an

underestimate (especially with the passage of time since the Census), suggesting that the share is closer to 70 per cent. The Asian/Asian British population accounts for about 40 per cent of the population, with the Indian group being easily the most dominant. Many of this group are Sikhs. Around 10 per cent of the population describe themselves as black/black British and around 5 per cent are of mixed race (although this proportion is higher in the younger age groups). The area is traditionally home to refugees and asylum seekers. Just over 40 per cent of residents are white. The NDC area is more ethnically diverse than the Wolverhampton local authority area, which in turn has a more ethnically mixed population than the national average. Traditionally, Blakenhall is known for its strong community infrastructure, particularly through religious organisations, while All Saints has been considered to lack this infrastructure. The housing stock is of mixed density and is fairly evenly split between owner-occupied and renting (with the social rented sector representing around 80 per cent of the rented stock and private renting the remaining 20 per cent). Housing quality is an issue – especially in parts of the private sector. The area has been characterised by high levels of burglary, prostitution and theft. A larger than national share of employed residents work in operative and elementary occupations. The proportion of residents working in managerial, professional and associate professional occupations is higher than in the NDC but below the national average.

### **Educational infrastructure**

The NDC is served by secondary schools (with sixth forms) within and adjacent to the NDC area. There have been improvements in attainment levels (and, in 2005, achievement at Key Stage 4 in the NDC area matched the city average – see Table 1 earlier in the chapter), but there are variations by ethnic group, with Asian young people tending to outperform their white and black counterparts (with young men displaying the lowest attainment levels). There is an FE college close to the NDC area and the University of Wolverhampton has buildings in and around the city centre and the main campus is within walking distance of the case study area. The rate of entry to HE is around 30 per cent, which is markedly higher than the average across all NDC areas (see Table 1 earlier in the chapter). The university has a strong record of community outreach and has one of the highest proportions of non-traditional students (defined as those who had at least one of the following characteristics: from a minority ethnic group; with a long-term disability; possessed non-standard qualifications on entry to higher education; were aged over 25 years on entry to university; were from lower socio-economic groups of origin) of any university in the country. The local authority has been a Pathfinder for the Government's 14–19 initiative, which is concerned with reform of the curriculum for the 14–19-year-old age group (including greater stretch for the most able young people, and greater support

for those with lower levels of achievement, the introduction of a new vocational diploma and a fresh emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy).

### **The economy**

Like Walsall, Wolverhampton has suffered from the decline of traditional manufacturing industry. The unemployment rate in the NDC area and in the city exceeds the England average (see Table 2 earlier in the chapter). The case study area once hosted significant industrial activity and was home to some well-known industrial enterprises, including the Nyphon Works (a nineteenth-century factory), Sunbeam Motors/Villiers (the car and motor cycle manufacturer) and the 150-year-old Baker's Boot Factory. While a few traditional industries remain, there are now car dealerships in the area and residents have relatively easy physical access to the retail and commercial opportunities in Wolverhampton city centre, which is the subject of redevelopment. From Wolverhampton there is access to a wider range of employment opportunities in Birmingham.

### **Overview of dimensions of similarity and difference**

The three case study areas provide contrasting contexts in which to investigate issues of social networks, attachment to place, (im)mobility and access to employment opportunities. Key dimensions of similarity and difference are summarised in Table 3 (and Tables 1 and 2 earlier in the chapter).

Wolverhampton emerges as especially distinctive in terms of ethnic profile, social mix and educational participation (especially in relation to HE) and attainment indicators. The Wolverhampton case study area also has a more central location and better transport links than either Hull or Walsall. Hull and Walsall are more homogeneous communities and the latter, in particular, has an 'outer' urban location. However, Hull has the most peripheral location in terms of access to a broader range of sub-regional and regional economic opportunities; whereas Walsall is part of the broader West Midlands metropolitan area.

**Table 3 Key characteristics of the case study areas**

Characteristic	Hull	Walsall	Wolverhampton
Location	East Hull – 3 miles from city centre.	Peripheral location – north west Walsall.	Central area – adjacent to city centre.
Sub-regional context	Peripheral city – no other major urban/employment centres close by.	Edge of metropolitan area – polycentric urban context.	Main city in Black Country.
Demographics	Overwhelmingly white population in NDC area and city.	Overwhelmingly white population in NDC area; mixed in Walsall.	More than 50 per cent non-white – Asian/Asian British (particularly Indian) and black/black British; large Sikh population; less mixed in city.
Population turnover	Relatively stable – although recent influx of eastern and central European economic migrants.	Stable.	Greater turnover – including refugee, asylum seeker and economic migrant populations.
Housing tenure	Overwhelmingly (nearly 80 per cent) social rented.	Fairly even split between owner-occupation and social/private renting.	Smaller (but sizeable) social rented sector, majority owner-occupation, significant private rented sector.
Educational infrastructure context	Few sixth forms in schools. FE college in city centre. University – north west Hull.	Walsall Academy. Other schools outside NDC area. FE college in town centre.	Local secondary schools. 14–19 Pathfinder. FE college and university close by.
Participation of young people in post-compulsory education	Marked increase in staying-on rates in recent years. Entry to HE remains much lower than average.	Despite increase in staying-on rates in recent years these remain lower than average. Entry to HE is lower than average.	Traditionally, relatively high staying-on rates – higher than average. Entry to HE is much higher than the all-NDCs average.
Qualification profile of working-age population (for Key Stage 4 statistics for young people see Table 1)	High level of skills poverty – two-thirds have only Level 1 or no qualifications.	Relatively high level of skills poverty – half have only Level 1 or no qualifications.	Nearly two-fifths have no qualifications, but a fifth have degree-level qualifications or equivalent (Levels 4 and 5).
Occupational profile of residents in employment	Dominated by elementary occupations, followed by operative and skilled trades occupations.	Higher than average share in skilled trades and personal service occupations.	Bimodal profile – with greater than NDC average shares in higher-level and elementary occupations.

*(Continued)*



**Table 3 Key characteristics of the case study areas (continued)**

Characteristic	Hull	Walsall	Wolverhampton
Economic context (for data on unemployment and worklessness rates see Table 2)	Sluggish economy – low levels of growth, productivity and earnings.	Manufacturing decline; new jobs nearby.	Employment restructuring; the city centre is earmarked for retail expansion.
Location vis-à-vis job opportunities	Very few jobs in immediate area; jobs mainly in other parts of the city.	Job opportunities not in immediate vicinity, but close by and in other parts of the city region.	Job opportunities in the NDC area and close by.
Public transport	Reasonable links – especially to city centre.	Good bus service to Walsall centre; poor to industrial estates.	Good public transport links – bus, metro, rail.

## Conclusions

The three case study areas provide useful dimensions of difference and variations in context for investigating social networks, attachment to place, spatial awareness and access to opportunities.

If strong attachment to place acts as a constraining factor in taking up educational, training and employment opportunities outside of the immediate vicinity, it would be expected that young people in Walsall and Hull would be most curtailed in the options that they would consider. For residents of these areas, a journey to the town or city centre is necessary to take advantage of a greater range of opportunities. From the town centre the young people from Walsall are within reach of a much wider range of education, training and employment opportunities in the wider metropolitan region – including Birmingham and Wolverhampton. For young people in Hull, however, there is no obvious place that provides a comparable or better range of opportunities to travel to easily beyond Hull.

With a similarly strong attachment to place and unwillingness to travel far from home, young people from the Wolverhampton case study area would have a greater range of education, training and employment opportunities available to them than their counterparts in Hull and Walsall. Moreover, there are a range of other easily accessible destinations beyond Wolverhampton. The ethnic and social diversity of the Wolverhampton case study area also means that, within their immediate local vicinity, young people are exposed to a greater variety of people and of experiences of education and work than young people from the more homogeneous areas of Hull and Walsall.

The following chapters test out these propositions.

## 4 Social networks, place attachment and aspirations: barriers or bridges to work?

This chapter explores the social networks and place attachment of young people and investigates how these shape aspirations and future location intentions. It draws on material from all parts of the research but especially on interviews with young people and stakeholders. Findings from all three case study areas are considered together. Topics investigated include:

- the importance of social networks of family and friends and of place attachment to young people
- whether such social networks and strong place attachment constitute a strength or a weakness in accessing education, training and employment opportunities
- issues of work and worklessness in deprived areas for these young people
- the nature of labour market aspirations and variations in such aspirations
- whether they feel it is necessary to ‘get out’ of the local area to ‘get on’.

It reveals the following.

- Social networks give some young people strong advantages in the labour market, with family and friends providing valuable sources of support and sometimes directly influencing patterns of recruitment. However, not all young people have such support.
- The size and quality of social networks, and the willingness of network members to provide help, matters. In practice, this is variable.
- Social networks and place attachment shape how young people see the world.
- Place and identity can be powerfully connected.
- Generally, the young people in these areas had high labour market aspirations and displayed a strong motivation to work – although there were exceptions.

*(Continued)*

- Young men and young women display marked similarities in their use of social networks, in place attachment and in motivation to work, although occupational choices were highly gendered.
- The local environment may, in some circumstances, be a barrier to accessing and progressing in the labour market, but the relationships emerging are complex.
- Some young people believe that 'getting on' in the labour market means 'getting out' of the local area.

### Social networks: the importance of family and friends

#### Context

Fifty years ago Young and Willmott (1957) described the important role of kinship systems in understanding the lived experience of a deprived community in East London. Despite dramatic changes in the world of work and the fracturing of families, it remains important to consider perceptions, attitudes and experiences towards place, training, employment and future aspirations in their wider social context. Young people continue to derive from their class and family backgrounds particular sorts of social and cultural capital rooted in local economic history and conditions (Forrest and Kearns, 2001). Hence, an appreciation of the impact of family, friends and other contacts in the particular local environment in which a young person lives helps in understanding how attitudes and behaviours are shaped.

#### Social capital

Notions of social capital are useful in understanding the shape and strength of social networks in terms of raising awareness and access to employment opportunities, or in levelling down expectations and attitudes towards employment and spatial horizons. Social capital is generally referred to as the set of trust, institutions, social norms, social networks and organisations that shape the interactions of actors within a society (Sabatini, 2006). At the micro level, it explains how some people gain more success in a particular setting through their superior connections to other people. For current purposes, bonding and bridging social capital, and the strength of weak ties and strong ties, are of significance in terms of conceptualising how spatial and social horizons may be extended, and in considering different ways in which access to education, training and employment opportunities may be enhanced.

*Bonding social capital* refers to the value assigned to social networks between homogeneous groups of people with similar lifestyles and socio-economic interests (Lin, 2002). It is characterised by 'strong ties' between family and friends, is often associated with heightened place attachment and tends to be inward looking. In theory, it limits the extensiveness of the take-up of opportunities; indeed, it may be more about mutually supportive behaviour for subsistence and survival (i.e. for 'getting by'), rather than to achieve a step up towards broader integration (i.e. 'getting on') (Putnam, 2000). However, in practice, a certain amount of bonding social capital may be needed to provide a source of familiar social support as a precursor to developing bridging social capital.

*Bridging social capital* is about more extensive, outward-facing ties involving heterogeneous groups. Focusing on job search success, Granovetter (1973) coined the term 'strength of weak ties' to describe these social contacts that are important but less familiar to the individual. They include contact with work acquaintances, friends of friends or others who, crucially, have access to wider social circles and thus (for Granovetter) would hold better – or at least different – information for the job-searcher than would those individuals more immediate and familiar to them, who are more likely to be tied into the same circles of interest and experience.

In practice, young people's attitudes and behaviour largely reflect the reality they experience: the decisions they make are not undertaken in social isolation. The support (or lack thereof) from family and friends can be crucial to understanding individuals' attitudes, preferences and pathways. The influence of these others, particularly parents, in (in)forming aspirations, attitudes to employment, education and training, and in helping access jobs, can be very important for young people, as many are still in transition to independent living. Bonding social capital is likely to be particularly important for young people. However, bonding social capital and bridging social capital are not mutually exclusive; social networks may provide important bridging social capital links also. As Deviren and Babb (2005, p. 2) observe:

The exchange between people within their social networks, and the shared identities that develop, can influence the amount of support an individual has, as well as providing access to other sources of help.

### **The role of family and friends in shaping attitudes, aspirations and access to opportunities**

As noted in Chapter 2, studies of employment transitions of young people have highlighted the importance of family contacts in facilitating entry to work. This study

reaffirms that view. In Hull and Walsall, especially, which are relatively homogeneous communities where the majority of respondents to the young person survey conducted for this study reported that most family members lived close by in the same neighbourhood or elsewhere in the same part of the city, stakeholders reported a widespread reliance on family and friends to help get jobs. It is something of a truism that gaining access to favourable employment opportunities is often a matter of ‘who you know’ rather than ‘what you know’, and that contacts are critical to job entry and advancement. One young man who had had three different jobs and who had got his current job ‘via my girlfriend’s dad’ asserted:

Getting jobs is all about who you know – it does not depend entirely on qualifications.

(21-year-old male, in employment, Walsall)

Significantly, this ‘safety blanket’ of believing that their parents, siblings or relatives could get them a job, or knowing of people who could help them get a job, was seen by some young people as sufficiently secure to save them from unemployment, and also for them to perceive qualifications and work experience as not necessarily being all that relevant to their future. Reliance on family and friends for social and work-related support was viewed as natural by many young people:

I get loads of support from family and friends ... It is harder for people without family.

(18-year-old female, seeking employment, Hull)

Positive messages from family and friends were often instrumental in informing the desire and motivation of young people to find employment or gain qualifications. For example, one young man stated:

My mum used to work in the fire service. And that’s what I want to do. I know it means working hard and she’s brought me some information that I need to apply. I’ll even give up smoking next year so that I can pass the fitness tests!

(17-year-old male, on training course, Hull)

Clearly, family and friends are a very important source of knowledge about work and other opportunities. For some young people, this is an enabler – providing a ‘way in’ to work. Likewise, peer pressure and unwillingness to let down family and friends can provide incentives to stay in work. However, for others, a reliance on family and friends can act as a constraining factor in accessing training/work opportunities where parents are unwilling for them to travel far and/or take up new or unfamiliar

opportunities. In the latter instance, local community and family ties can be stifling – acting as a ‘brake’ on the aspirations of those wanting to aspire to a better job or to move out of the local area. Also, a preference (in some instances) for reliance on friends and family for information about jobs may mean that decisions are made on the basis of incomplete information or are restricted to what is ‘known’. In Hull, especially, a common sentiment expressed in focus groups of young people was that ‘knowing people makes you feel more comfortable’. In some instances this may lead to lack of consideration of any opportunities beyond the confines of their immediate social circle and local area by young people (as outlined in Chapter 5). So, rather than serving as a platform for building bridging social capital, very strong bonding social capital may contribute to a form of socio-spatial exclusion in which familiarity and conventionality is favoured because of a preference for the comforting benefits of familiar neighbourhoods and/or people or fear of the unknown (Kearns and Parkinson, 2001).

Some stakeholders bemoaned the fact that some of the young people they came across in training programmes had ‘Mum’s and Dad’s blinkered views’ (project manager, Walsall) and questioned the position of some parents as role models. With reference to some instances of families experiencing unemployment across generations, it was noted that any kind of work ethic and discipline needed to attend a training course on a regular basis or hold down a job was absent, rather:

Work has to fit in with home life ... not vice versa.  
(Manager of a training course, Hull)

Generally, studies of social capital have interpreted young people merely as consumers of social capital, as opposed to producers (Morrow, 2002). Yet, in many ways, this reading does not capture the experiences of young people in the case study areas. For example, in relation to kinship ties, again citing Morrow (2002, p. 12), young people:

Socialise in friendship networks, participate in local activities, generate their own connections and make links for their parents.

Evidence of young people influencing their parents’ attitudes, outlooks and opportunities to access training courses and education was highlighted in Hull, in particular. Having a young person in work was seen in some households as having a tremendously positive influence on other household members:

We quite often have parents coming in when their son or daughter comes, asking if we can also help them with their CVs, or application form.  
(Training centre manager, Hull)

So family, friends and wider social networks play an important role in shaping attitudes, aspirations and behaviour; indeed, they may play a more important role in influencing behaviour than formal services. However, relationships are uneven, multiple and complex; there were examples of families and friends acting as a brake and as a support in all three case study areas, with examples of the former being somewhat more prevalent in Hull and Walsall than in Wolverhampton. Furthermore, their form is affected by the place where they are developed, and in turn they contribute to place-based norms.

### Place attachment: strength or weakness?

#### The concept of place

Place is a contested concept and what 'place' means has been the subject of considerable debate in human geography, philosophy, planning and related disciplines. Space has been seen in distinction to place as a 'realm without meaning', but when people invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way it becomes a 'place'. Hence, place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world (Cresswell, 2004). Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) argued that, through human perception and experience, we get to know the world through places. He coined the term 'topophilia' to refer to the 'affective bond between people and place'. Hence, despite socio-economic changes and increasing geographical mobility in society in general, which might appear to undermine place and produce a kind of placenessless or non-place, cultures of class and place still matter (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; MacDonald *et al.*, 2005). As noted by Beynon *et al.* (1994) *who* people are is shaped by *where* they are; and place determines our experience (Relph, 1976). *Where* we are looking from frames what we see and how we interpret and act on it.

#### Local ties, place-based social networks and spatial awareness ...

Results from the young person survey, focus groups and individual interviews emphasise the local area as where networks of family, friends and acquaintances are concentrated. In Walsall and Hull especially, and to a lesser extent in Wolverhampton, most young people reported that their family and friends lived locally. Several focus group participants and interviewees had grandparents, siblings, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles and cousins living in the same or adjacent streets. Many young people



had lived in the area all their life and having extended family close by reinforced their familiarity with the local area and their attachment to place. In Wolverhampton more of the young person survey respondents and interviewees had experience of living elsewhere and/or had family members outside the local area (in other parts of Wolverhampton, the West Midlands, other parts of the UK and abroad).

### ... Messages from mental maps

In order to provide insights into how young people viewed their local area and in order to assess the extent and accuracy of their spatial knowledge, young people participating in focus groups were asked to draw a *mental map* of their local area (see Box 2 for details).

#### **Box 2 Details of mental mapping exercise**

Mental maps were drawn by focus group participants in each of the three case study areas. They were asked to draw a rough sketch map of Hull/Walsall/Wolverhampton as they knew it – including as many areas and as much detail as possible, starting with their own local area and marking their home, school/college/place of work, landmarks, transport routes and job locations. They were requested to identify areas they knew well and any areas they would fear to go; this is important because it may mean that young people are unwilling to take up opportunities that exist in certain areas. The participants were then encouraged to talk about what their maps showed. A few of the mental maps from each of the areas (anonymised as necessary to remove key personal identifiers such as names) are included here to exemplify key points (and a brief commentary on key features is provided for all of the maps presented). However, the following discussion also draws on a wider analysis of the content of all mental maps drawn. Note that some young people are able to engage ‘spatially’ better than others and this might account for some of the differences in the quality of the maps presented.

#### *The importance of social networks*

Social networks of family and friends definitely played an important role in shaping *mental maps* drawn by young people.



In the maps shown in Figure 5 (by a 15-year-old female school student from Hull) and Figure 6 (by a 20-year-old male on a training course work placement), the locations of friends and family appear very prominently. In Hull some maps of friends could be fitted together – a ‘friend’s house’ on one map being at the edge of the page and that friend’s house in the next map being at the centre of her/his map.

**Figure 5 Map: Hull (white female school student, 15 years old)**



This map is illustrative of detailed spatial knowledge and an accurate sense of scale of part of East Hull. Friends’ houses are marked prominently. Key local landmarks are shown also. There is an arrow to Hull city centre (identified as ‘town’), which is off the map, but West Hull does not feature at all (other maps of Hull showed similar local detail).

**Figure 6 Map: Walsall (white male on training course with work placement, 20 years old)**



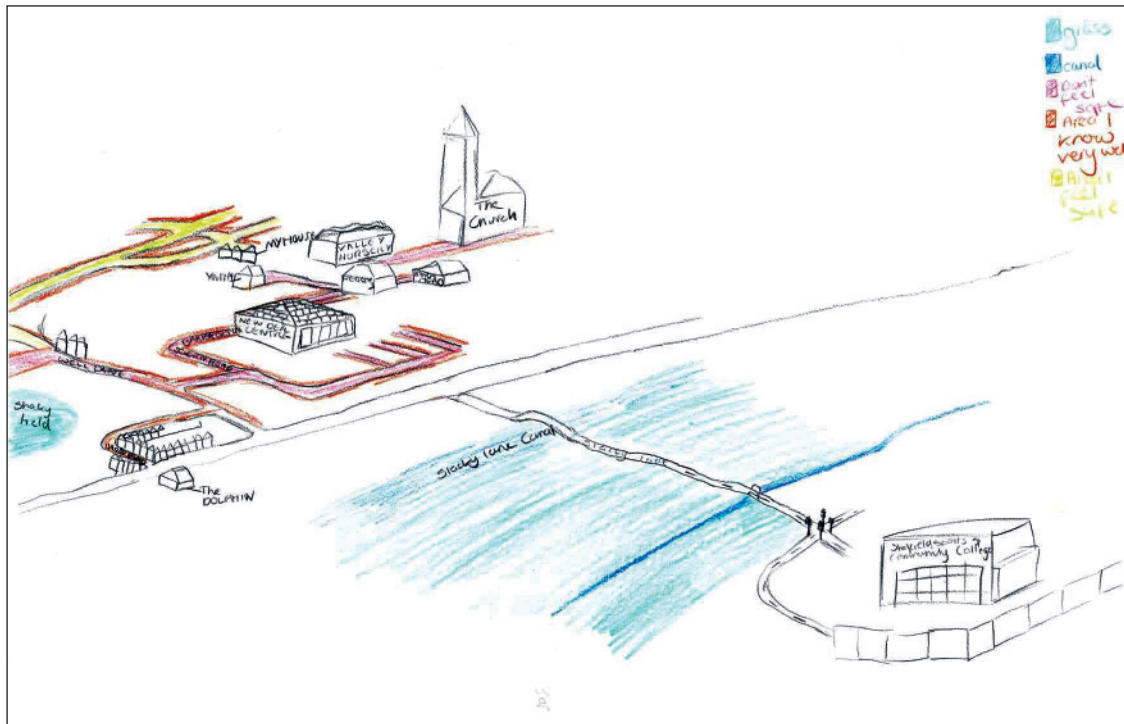
This map shows the immediate local area in detail. Several houses of family and friends are shown (see the key for details). These are in the immediate vicinity. Shops, schools and entertainment venues are shown also. Arrows to jobs (off the map) in Walsall and elsewhere are indicated. This individual had been employed in a range of labouring and factory jobs in the past and, although he was willing to travel outside the confines of the local area and Walsall if necessary, he indicated that ideally he would not travel far.

Those young people with social networks that were geographically more widespread generally had broader mental maps and, in individual interviews and focus group discussions, demonstrated a broader spatial awareness.

### *Variations in spatial awareness*

Some of the mental maps drawn by 15/16-year-old school students showed their route from home to school with a few landmarks along the route or in the immediate vicinity (see the map shown in Figure 7 for an example from Walsall). Associated discussion with some of the younger focus group participants, in Hull and Walsall in particular, revealed that some rarely left the local area and so had limited first-hand experience of other locations.

Figure 7 Map: Walsall (white male at school, 15 years old)

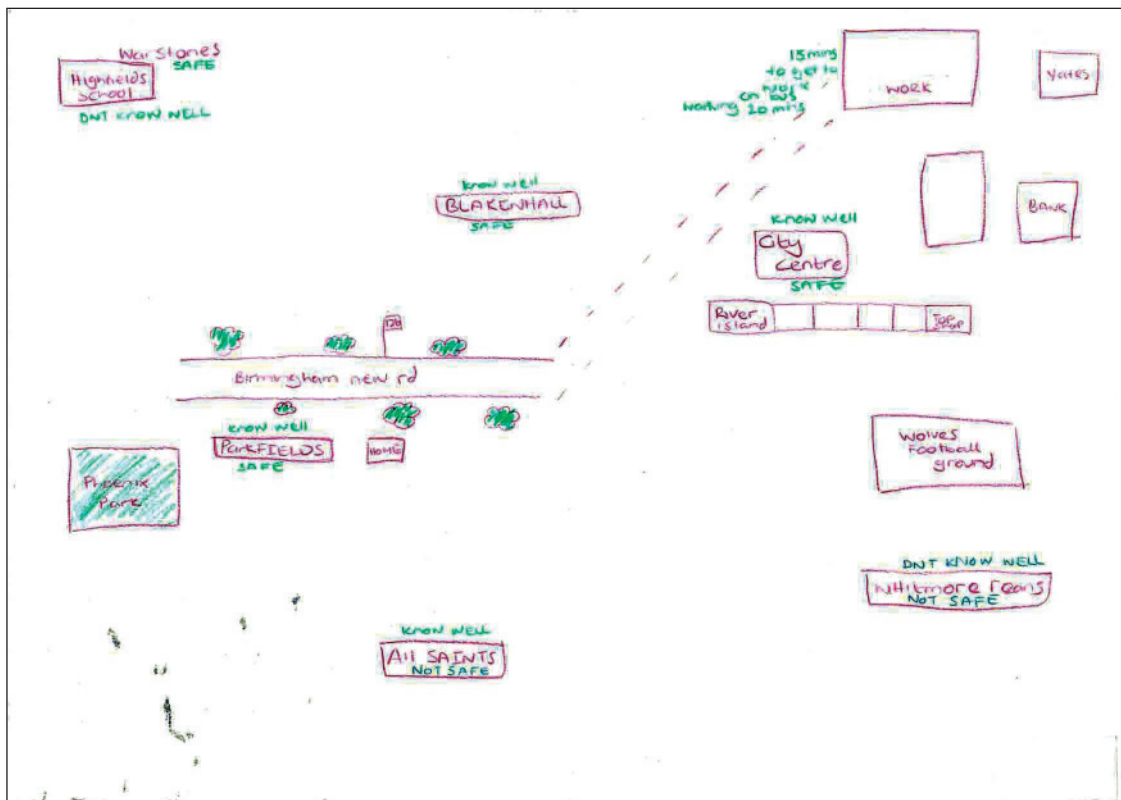


This map focuses solely on the individual's route from home to school and immediately adjacent areas, but is (unusually) presented in 3D. A few key landmarks are shown. Known areas are distinguished between those that are perceived as 'safe' and 'unsafe'.

There is some evidence from a content analysis of the mental maps across all three case study areas that mental maps became less spatially restricted with age, but this was not always the case. In part, this is likely to be related to greater experience of life beyond the immediate home and school environment and also enhanced independent mobility. The map shown in Figure 8 (by a 20-year-old female from Walsall, currently on a college course [in the town centre], but with previous experience of employment), portrays a larger geographical area than the map shown in Figure 7 (drawn by the school student) and is one of the few mental maps from Walsall to include the town centre. The map shown in Figure 9 (by a 21-year-old female from Wolverhampton who was in employment and attending college) focuses on the route from home to work, in a similar manner to the home to school route portrayed in the map shown in Figure 7, but also demonstrates a wider spatial awareness through the depiction of more landmarks and some other parts of Wolverhampton. There were few differences in mental maps by gender, except for the fact that young men were somewhat more likely to highlight sports facilities than young women.



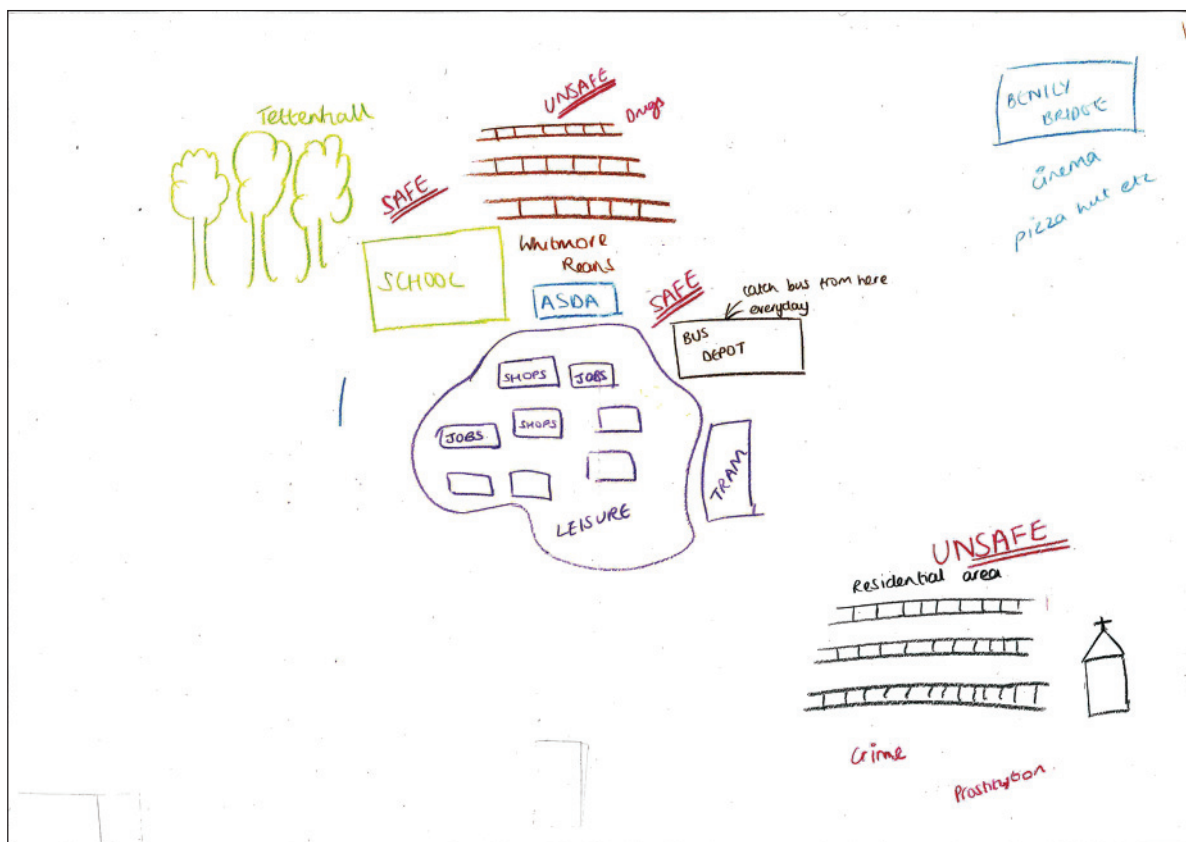
Figure 9 Map: Wolverhampton (black female in employment and attending college on a part-time basis, 21 years old)



The individual's home and route to work is shown – with the bus stop marked. This is one of a few mental maps from each of the case study areas where time taken to get to specific locations is marked: the bus journey to the individual's workplace takes 15 minutes, whereas it would take 20 minutes to walk there. Key landmarks are shown, e.g. Wolverhampton Wanderers football ground. Some parts of the residential environment are portrayed as safe, but others are not so.

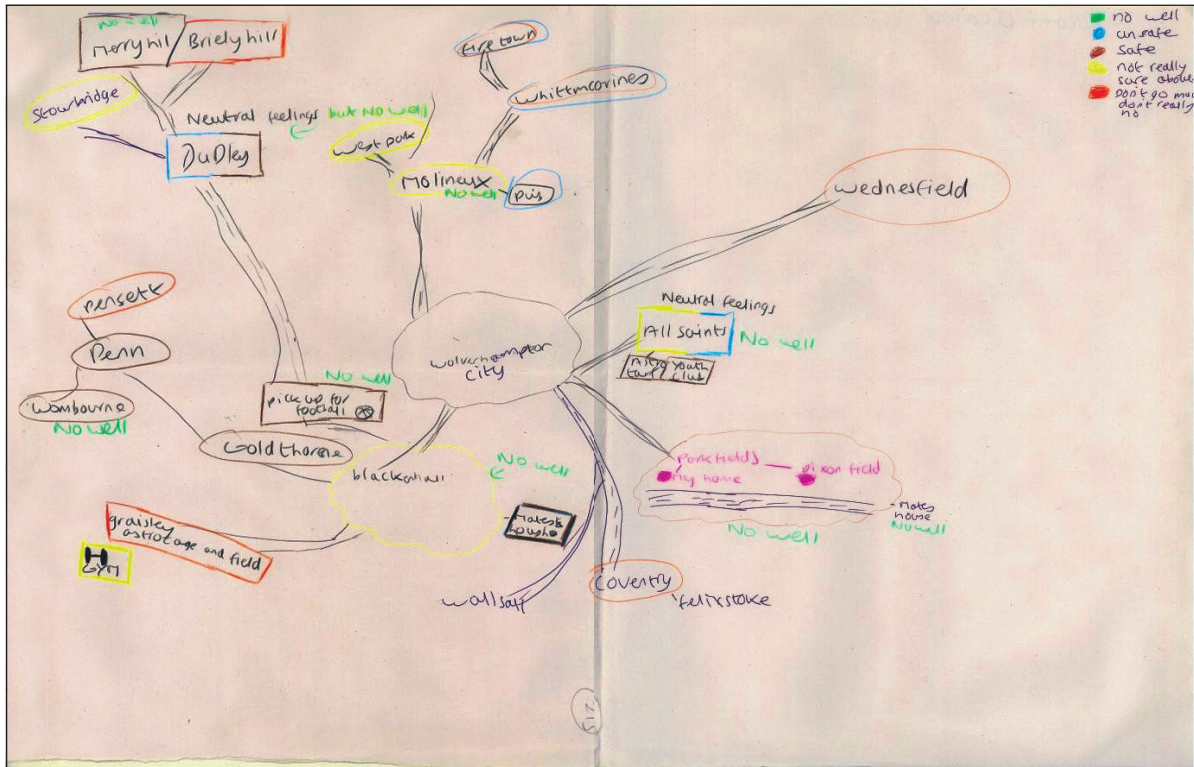


Figure 10 Map: Wolverhampton (Asian female seeking new employment, 18 years old)



Transport hubs (i.e. the bus depot and tram terminus) are prominent on this map. This individual appreciated her home area location near the city centre, regarding it as a place of opportunities for shopping, leisure and employment. By contrast this individual feels threatened by crime that she associates with some of the residential areas (including her own).

Figure 11 Map: Wolverhampton (white male at college, 16 years old)



This broader sub-regional view (extending over two A3 sheets) shows Wolverhampton (the NDC area and the city) in a broader sub-regional context. It displays a wide geographical perspective (also seen among some other Wolverhampton respondents, although this is quite an extreme case), with distinctions between areas that are more or less well-known. Sport plays an important role here, with the gym, a 'pick-up' point for football and Molineux (Wolverhampton Wanderers football ground) shown on the map. This individual was a confident and experienced user of public transport, who had complaints about the timing and expense of some of the services.





### *Overview*

In assessing all mental maps, the scale (and accuracy of scaling and orientation) at which mental maps were drawn was variable, but there is a broad negative relationship between amount of detail and distance covered by the map (although by no means all fit into the relationship). In Hull and Wolverhampton, most young people put their home and neighbourhood at the centre of the page. In general, this was less common in Walsall, where homes (in Bloxwich or Blakenall) tended to be on the edge of the map, with an orientation towards Walsall town centre. In Wolverhampton, nearly all mental maps also included the adjacent city centre (see the prominence of the city centre in the maps shown in Figures 9, 10 and 11), which emerged from discussion as an important location for meeting friends from other parts of the city and beyond, and so was very familiar to them. This suggests that, in general, young people in Wolverhampton had more extensive spatial horizons than those in Hull and Walsall, while those in Hull and Walsall tended to have more detailed knowledge of the immediate local area than those in Wolverhampton.

### **Identity and place attachment: strength *and* weakness**

Beyond the mental mapping exercise, interviews with young people and focus group discussions highlighted that place and identity can be powerfully connected – emotionally and physically. It is possible to gain identity through place, particularly in a context of socio-economic disadvantage where attachment to place may be among the most valuable things a young person possesses and may be worn as ‘a badge of honour’ (the term used by a youth worker in Hull). In some instances, attachment to place was so keen that individuals reported that they would be more than happy to live on that estate for the rest of their lives, particularly in Hull:

I'd never live and work out of Hull. God no! I'd live here till the day I die. I know loads of people round here.  
(Male, unemployed, 18 years old)

It is what they know, where *all* their family are and where they are comfortable:

I like Preston Road because you know where everything is and you know people. If you move you have to find things out.  
(Female, seeking employment, 17 years old, Hull)

Another young woman, who also professed attachment to Hull, indicated that she would not let it get in the way of her ambition:

I like Hull but I am not 'tied to it' like some people are. For many people Hull is their comfort zone and they do not want to move on.  
(Female, school student, 15 years old)

In this respect, there is some similarity with experience in Wolverhampton, where a somewhat stronger attachment to place emerged among the young people of Asian origin (predominantly Sikhs) than among those from the white or black groups. To some extent this reflects the relatively strong emphasis placed on family and socio-cultural ties by some members of this group. However, they made clear that this attachment to place would not necessarily operate as a barrier to accessing jobs in other areas, but that they would make some efforts to continue to live locally or maintain links with family networks in the area.

While it can be a source of strength, a very strong attachment to place also appeals to the parochial, in a manner that may seem out of tune with contemporary socio-economic trends. In Walsall, one community worker who had worked elsewhere in other parts of the West Midlands described the strong place-based community as a 'throwback' – with residents being stuck in a 'time warp' of what she had imagined life in the 1950s to have been like. Likewise, an interviewee from the education sector in Hull, with recent experience of working in London, commented on the 'parochial outlook' of many young people in Hull compared to London, and attributed this, at least in part, to the isolation of Hull – 'geographically on the edge'.

Strong identification with place often involves an 'us' versus 'them' distinction in which the other is devalued (see the map shown in Figure 12). In Hull, sporting rivalries (Hull Kingston Rovers play under the banner 'Pride of East Hull' and the supporters' magazine is entitled *East Hull is Wonderful*) and everyday banter ('so you've been over the West – I hope you've had your injections' – a project worker reporting her father's commonplace retort when she has been to West Hull) reinforce East–West intra-city divides. This is where the issue of 'does place make people?' or 'do people make place?' appears in its starkest form. Employers and stakeholders concerned with employment initiatives in Hull reported that very few people from East Hull would work in West Hull: 'It's inbred in people ... they won't cross' (project manager). This has the potential to cut them off from opportunities in education (and here it is salient to note that the university is located in the north west of the city), training and the labour market (see also MacDonald *et al.*, 2005), and in some instances (as revealed in interviews with young people and stakeholders) this inward focus is intergenerational (i.e. passed on from parents to children). In talking to young people,

in focus groups and individually, it is 'outsiders' who are seen by some as causing trouble. Recent immigrants in Hull and Wolverhampton (but less so in the latter) and gypsies/travellers in Walsall are seen, at least by some, as 'letting the area down'.

Some project managers and service providers questioned any policies that reinforced parochialism and/or resentment from other neighbouring areas, highlighting local branding of NDC areas/projects as being counterproductive:

It always surprises me that people put up signs to say 'We are an NDC area' – i.e. we are deprived. It is important for a neighbourhood and a local economy to have exchanges with the outside world. Reinforcing localism may not be a good thing.

(Interviewee from the education sector in Wolverhampton)

This may be particularly the case in some predominantly white, relatively homogeneous working-class areas, particularly in outer urban locations, which are relatively 'closed' and where having identity 'reinforced' may emphasise a tendency to look inwards rather than outwards. An inward-looking tendency is one of the key concerns that has been highlighted in debates about concentrations of worklessness (as discussed in the next section).

Overall, it is clear that attachment to place is very important to some young people and this attachment influences their decisions by placing constraints on the location and types of further education, training and employment opportunities they will consider. This means that some young people either do not seek, or choose to ignore, some opportunities that are open to them. Hence, strictly in terms of access to education, training and employment opportunities, attachment to place can be a source of weakness.

## Work and worklessness

### Concentrations of worklessness

One central element of debates on the existence of spatial concentrations of worklessness is that people not in work have become socially segregated into communities that are inward looking and have little contact with the world of work. According to the underclass thesis, in such areas, young people with strong local social networks and place attachment might be expected to have relatively poorly developed knowledge of working environments and of associated work disciplines

(Wilson, 1987; Murray, 1990). The 2006 NDC Household Survey revealed that only around 50 per cent of working-age respondents in each of the three case study areas were in paid work or in self-employment, compared with around 80 per cent nationally. Hence, while the case study areas are by no means cut off from the world of work, it is clear that worklessness is more pervasive and entrenched than in many parts of England.

### **Attitudes to worklessness and benefit dependence**

In general, despite relatively high levels of dependence on benefits in the three case study areas, reliance on benefits was not seen as a viable or desirable option among the vast majority of young people interviewed or participating in focus groups.

In Walsall and Wolverhampton derogatory comments were made about people on the dole. Their presence was identified as one of the 'bad' things about the local area in focus group discussions. A project manager in Walsall spoke of 'too many' people in the area pursuing what he termed a 'deliberate worklessness strategy', which involved supplementing money from benefits with income from the informal economy. While the young people did not brand themselves in the same terms as some of them used to describe those on the dole, some did proffer the standard stereotypical view of the area:

A lot of people around here are 'dossers' – if they got their heads down and got qualifications they would be able to work.  
(17-year-old male, on training course, Walsall)

In focus group discussions, the solution in the eyes of some young people was 'to stop the dole', suggesting that then 'people would get a job'. In the West Midlands case study areas the clear message emerging from many young people and stakeholders was the need for 'more stick and less carrot' to get people off benefits and into work.

Generally, attitudes took a less 'hard line' in Hull. Some (but by no means all) young people in Hull appeared to be more 'accepting' of people existing on benefits as a 'fact of life', with several reporting friends and family members who had adjusted to not working. In one focus group there was general agreement that 'some people cannot be bothered to work', but that in any case there were 'not many jobs around' (similar sentiments have been identified in areas of concentrated worklessness elsewhere [Dewson *et al.*, 2007]). One of the older participants (currently in employment) commented that he did not look down on people who claimed benefits

because he had done so himself. He noted that it was 'easy' to 'fall into the lifestyle' of taking benefits, identifying it as an 'easy option'. However, there was not universal agreement from the young people in Hull that the dole represented an 'easy option':

If you have been on benefits long enough you get used to being on benefits. But this 'easy' way is the hardest since it limits lifestyle and affects motivation. They get themselves in a position where they will stay on benefits the rest of their life.

(15-year-old female, school student who had participated in sessions on 'enterprise' [see Chapter 6], Hull)

### Family influences and attitudes to work and worklessness

In all three case study areas, family influences emerged as important in shaping attitudes to work and worklessness. In Hull and Walsall several young people felt the need to assert that they were from a 'working family' – perhaps in order to defend their reputations and distance themselves from negative reputations of the local area – as illustrated by the comment:

Our family is really big on getting a job. Dad said 'don't ever go on the dole'.

(20-year-old male, in employment, Hull)

It is clear that having family members in work can provide positive role modelling (as outlined earlier in this chapter), as well as providing a source of encouragement and advice, and possibly links to employment openings, lifts to work, etc.

Conversely, a number of stakeholders reported that intergenerational worklessness, and what they saw as the 'chaotic lives' and 'lack of structure' typical of such households, posed barriers to young people finding work or maintaining attendance on training courses:

It is not 'cool' to work. To be working is to be the 'black sheep' of the family and that is very difficult.

(Training provider, Hull)

It was apparent from talking to some of the young people in Hull from families where one or more parents or older sibling was not working that, often, after a few setbacks in obtaining training places and/or employment, they had adapted their own lifestyle to 'fit in' with a non-work culture – at least for the time being. Often they could speak

knowledgably about the benefits system and education and training allowances, from their own and from a broader family perspective.

Knowledge of, and especially perceptions of, how the benefits system works is very important in understanding young people's and parents' behaviour in a broader household context.

### **The benefits system**

Familiarity with the workings of the benefits system is especially pertinent given that low pay in work was raised as a fundamental problem among young people and stakeholders in all three local areas (see Chapter 5). The trade-off between life in work and on benefits may be by no means clear-cut for young people or for those with poor skills more generally. For instance:

I've been in a situation where the money I've been getting from working ... I'd have been better paid on the dole. In that case, it's easy to become dependent.

(19-year-old male on Intermediate Labour Market scheme, Hull)

Moreover, on a low income, the 'certainty' of benefits – in terms of knowing the amount of cash coming in and when – may be important:

It can be easy to rely on benefits, because you know how much cash will be coming in, and when it will be ... for me, it's very important to be in work.

(18-year-old female, in employment, Hull)

This shows that, among some of the young people in the case study areas, attitudes are being developed at a young age about whether it is worth working. This is important because, in all case study areas, there is evidence from data on employment and from fieldwork of the persistence of a 'low-skill, low-pay equilibrium' (i.e. a condition in which the local economy is trapped in a vicious circle of low value added, low skills and low wages) (Wilson *et al.*, 2003). A policy of bringing more low-skilled jobs to the local area (see Chapter 7 for further discussion) will not necessarily lead to skills development and progression.

Young people in all areas felt that there were not enough 'good' jobs (i.e. with good wages and prospects for advancement) in their local area (see Chapter 5 for further discussion). Low-skilled jobs were acknowledged to be available, but generally

commanded low pay, and were often considered relatively unattractive (some young people noted that new immigrants were a source of labour for such jobs).

## Labour market aspirations

### The nature of aspirations: in the short and longer term

Some young people had very clear ideas about careers they wanted to pursue, while, for others, ideas were still being formed. Generally, however, the young people in all case study areas had conventional and often high labour market aspirations, although in some cases there appeared to be a mismatch between aspiration and qualifications achieved (at least to date) to enable that aspiration to be fulfilled. As one interviewee noted:

The idea that young people do not have aspirations is idiotic; I have not met a young person without aspirations.

(Education sector representative, Wolverhampton)

However, from focus groups and individual interviews, especially in Wolverhampton, it became clear that many young people made a distinction between short-term *jobs* (often for money or experience while continuing in full- or part-time education, or as a 'stop gap' before moving onto something else) and long-term *careers*. Not unreasonably, they indicated that they might prioritise different aspects of work in the short and longer term. This is indicative of the elongation of youth transitions into work (outlined in Chapter 1) and the conception of 'pathways' into work (discussed in Chapter 5).

In Wolverhampton, more young people than in Walsall and in Hull had experience of friends in higher education and managerial, professional and associate professional jobs among family members. In Walsall, the proportion of respondents in the young person survey reporting that their father currently worked (or had worked most recently) in a skilled trades occupation was higher than elsewhere, whereas, in Hull, more respondents had parents in operative and elementary (i.e. low-skilled) jobs. More of the young people surveyed in Wolverhampton aspired to a managerial, professional or associate professional job than in Hull or Walsall. In Walsall and Hull, a majority of males indicated that they were aiming to work in skilled trades occupations.



Generally, there were marked similarities in use of social networks, place attachments and aspirations about work, irrespective of gender. However, while young people acknowledged that there should be no difference between males and females in jobs and careers followed, aspirations and choices tended to be strongly gendered on stereotypical lines – with construction often favoured by young men, while young women were more likely to identify caring roles (particularly in relation to children). No clear-cut differences on dimensions of age and ethnicity were evident.

### Factors in job/career choice

Some basic information on factors influencing job/career choice was collected in the young person survey. The most common reasons for job/career choice were 'good money', 'good career prospects', 'it is interesting work' and 'I have always wanted to do it', followed by job security. Generally, the relative importance of the different factors was similar across the three case study areas.

There was widespread recognition in all three areas of the importance of formal qualifications in achieving labour market success. The majority of young person survey respondents 'agreed absolutely' that 'qualifications are important to get the job/career you want' (and this was even higher among 15–17 year olds, most of whom were at school or were in further education before seeking employment), while virtually all remaining respondents considered that qualifications were 'probably' important.

Some of the interviewees were able to reflect on the way that their aspirations had changed as a result of experience of training and employment. Work experience was sometimes of value in reinforcing aspirations, but in other instances it was even more beneficial in helping show what jobs were like 'in reality' and finding out what an individual liked or did not like. One young woman in Walsall noted that she had initially thought of pursuing a career in graphic design, but on work experience found that she did not like 'sitting at a computer all day' and had revised her aspirations accordingly. Another example of experience shaping aspirations is a young woman in Hull who had worked as a cake decorator in a food factory (a job obtained through her mother), but who had then decided to pursue a career in administration, taking up a trainee post:

I wanted to better myself – get better wages, improve myself.  
(23-year-old female, in employment, Hull)



Although the picture from young people themselves regarding labour market aspirations is a generally positive one, several of the stakeholders interviewed in Hull pointed out that parents may hold back their children and have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Cases were reported of parents signing on the dole saying to their children: 'Look closely – you'll be doing that soon'. One project manager referred to this as the 'accelerator and brake' model, with young people wanting to aspire (i.e. to accelerate) but local family and community ties holding them back and closing down opportunities (i.e. acting as a brake [as highlighted in the first section of this chapter]). This scenario was recognised by an interviewee in Wolverhampton:

To stay here would erode my career ambitions and I would slip into a 'run-of-the-mill' existence.

(18-year-old male, A-level student, Wolverhampton)

This prompts the question of whether there is a need to 'get out' to 'get on'.

### Does 'getting on' mean 'getting out'?

#### Moving intentions

Results of the young people survey showed that more respondents from Hull and Walsall would like to live in their home city in the future than respondents from Wolverhampton. In aggregate, around half of the young people surveyed indicated that they would be happy – at least in theory – to leave their home city to pursue their career, recognising that opportunities might take them elsewhere. Some were eager to move to broaden their experience, despite the fact that relevant opportunities may be available close by:

The city is growing and developing, but I want to see what is happening elsewhere.

(18-year-old female, attending college, Wolverhampton)

Other young people expressed no such desire to broaden their horizons in this way. It was evident at one focus group in Hull that the notion of moving away was something that many participants had not contemplated previously:

It is easy and cheap to live in Hull – why go elsewhere?

(17-year-old male, on training course, Hull)

In all three areas some young people admitted that strong family ties meant that they would try and get a 'good job' and set up home nearby. However, in Wolverhampton in particular, as noted above, several young people indicated that these ties would not be so binding as to compromise career-related moves – after all one could always 'come back to visit'.

Whether young people who have high aspirations and who achieve success in the labour market stay or move has important implications for regeneration of deprived areas.

### **'Getting on' and 'getting out' to 'better areas'**

The issue of whether people with good jobs stayed in the local area, and why they might stay or move, was one of the topics discussed in focus groups. In Wolverhampton and Hull, most young people viewed 'getting on' in the labour market and 'getting out' of the area as being linked to the need to buy a bigger or more suitable house. This reflects the fact that most houses in the Wolverhampton NDC area were smaller terraced houses and also the relative lack of larger houses in the Hull NDC area. In Wolverhampton, the general sentiment expressed was that you need to move to a better area to improve your position and that people with 'good jobs' and 'nice cars' who stay are likely to be the target for jealousy by some local residents. Likewise, in Hull, many of the young people interviewed considered that people who got 'good jobs' would want to get better houses and move to better areas. Young people and stakeholders alike agreed that, often, moves of those who 'got on' would be to a more rural area (i.e. a move from Hull to the East Riding or a move to the countryside to the west of Wolverhampton), in a pattern typical of movement away from cities elsewhere in England.

In Walsall, there was somewhat less agreement among young people that those who 'got on' in the labour market would necessarily 'move out'. Several examples were given of local people who had done well for themselves and were still living in the area. The Walsall NDC area includes some desirable housing, which was viewed as being of good quality (see Chapter 3), and this may have contributed to the feeling that there was not necessarily a need to move out of the area. Nevertheless, some young people felt that those who were successful would be likely to move to quieter areas 'in the shires' in order to 'show off' and improve their status, and that it made sense to do so because:

People get jealous of those who do well. Why stay here to get your car scratched?

(17-year-old female, college student, Walsall)

The vandalism that, focus group participants agreed, was a negative feature of the area was attributed to the 'people' in the area, not the 'area' per se, but nevertheless, in Walsall, it meant that some people would want to leave the area. Crime was also mentioned as a negative feature for quality of life by some focus group participants in Wolverhampton, but it did not feature to any great extent in focus group discussions and interviews in Hull.

### Policy implications

Whether 'getting on' means 'getting out' has important policy implications for places and for people. As outlined in Chapter 2, commentators have pointed to a possible conflict between 'stability' (i.e. encouraging stable communities) and 'mobility' (socially and spatially) in labour market terms. Opportunities for those who are successful in labour market terms may be limited in the immediate local area; hence, social mobility may require a degree of spatial mobility – either through commuting (as discussed in Chapter 5) or by migrating to another area. In Walsall and Wolverhampton especially, stakeholders could reasonably argue that there were large pools of 'good jobs' within reach of the NDC areas if people were prepared to travel, whereas, from East Hull, there are no other obvious employment concentrations apart from those in Hull itself.

There is a policy concern that, if people with more money move out, it is likely that less money will be spent in the local area. Hence, in Walsall in particular, as in several other NDC areas, there is a policy of encouraging a greater mix of housing to bring in more affluent people and engender a more socially diverse population profile.

From an individual perspective, however, in the medium and longer term it may be advantageous to 'move out' of the local area to 'get on'. This is particularly so in the case of Hull, where the geographical location and the size and character of the labour market means that there is a limited set of opportunities. Moving away from East Hull to an area with higher house prices (and greater opportunities for increasing wealth through housing assets) and to access a wider range of employment opportunities within commuting range is understandable in economic terms in an area with low house prices in a peripheral location.

## Conclusions: barriers and bridges

Overall, most young people had conventional and often high aspirations about careers, although some were unsure about future directions. The overwhelming majority recognised qualifications as important, although some (particularly those who had not liked or had not succeeded at school) were reluctant to continue with classroom-based learning.

Social networks and place attachment shape aspirations and intentions in education, training and the labour market. This highlights the importance of understanding young people in their social and local context, because where they are frames what they see and how they interpret and act on it.

Most (but not all) of the young people interviewed could call on strong social networks to provide support in achieving their aspirations, but not always the necessary bridges to opportunities. In general, their social networks of family and friends were strong on 'bonds' and weaker on 'bridges' (especially in Hull) – at least on bridges that could bring significant advantage. This is perhaps not so surprising for young people at the start of their careers. Reliance on family and friends – particularly at this stage in their lives when young people were making decisions about leaving school, staying on at school, moving on to further or higher education, looking at training options and seeking employment or building up their work record and seeking to advance – was seen as natural by most of the young people who participated in the research. In some instances, reliance on family support was positive in encouraging young people to pursue their interests and take up training, and in helping them decide what opportunities they wanted to pursue. However, in other instances, such reliance served to reduce ambition and/or curtail choices to familiar options and locations. Given labour market restructuring and reforms of the educational and training system, it appeared that parents' knowledge was often outdated or irrelevant to current opportunities, particularly if based on what was available to them when they were young. The experience of older siblings or friends may be of more immediate relevance.

Some young people had very localised outlooks – especially in Hull. A tendency to look inwards rather than outwards was likely to cut them off from the full range of opportunities they could have taken up. While, in some cases, there was a lack of realisation of this, in other instances, they appeared content for this to be the case, trading off a reduced set of opportunities in favour of proximity to family and friends. Others felt that, to maximise the quantity and quality of opportunities available to them in education, the labour market and the housing market, they would need to 'get out', and they were happy to do so in order to 'get on'. In Walsall, the more varied

mix of housing may be a factor in encouraging more young people than in the other two areas to 'stay put' if they got better jobs.

## 5 How spatially constrained are training, jobs and careers?

This chapter explores young people's knowledge of education, training and labour market opportunities and the extent to which they are spatially constrained, both objectively and subjectively, in the education, training, job and career options they consider and/or pursue. It is especially concerned with addressing the question whether local social networks and place attachment translate into spatially constrained job search. Topics investigated include:

- what employers are looking for from their employees – particularly young employees
- young people's labour market knowledge – in terms of what employers are looking for and where jobs are located
- whether young people could identify 'pathways' to their aspirations from their current position
- how far and where – in geographical terms – they would be prepared to search for jobs and travel to work
- the influence of wages and job quality on geographical search and travel patterns
- the role of transport availability and access in influencing travel patterns
- perceptions of postcode discrimination.

It reveals the following.

- For employers, qualifications are important, but results from employer surveys reveal that they place particular emphasis on 'attitude' and 'soft skills' when recruiting young people.
- In all three case study areas, young people pointed to a lack of 'good jobs' as opposed to 'dead-end jobs' in the immediate vicinity. This prompted some to seek opportunities further afield, but others were depending on what was available locally.
- Some young people have difficulty in appreciating how work experience, even in what they consider a 'bad job', might be useful in their attempts to gain a 'good job' by providing evidence of 'soft skills'.

*(Continued)*

- The geographical extent of job search is inextricably linked to the types of jobs available.
- ‘Low wages’ emerge as an issue in all case study areas; and, generally, young people are not prepared to travel far for low pay.
- Public transport networks in some areas do not serve the employment geography of the twenty-first century as well as they might, but, even so, transport barriers to accessing opportunities emerged as more ‘perceived’ than ‘real’.
- Postcode discrimination was acknowledged to be less of an issue than formerly, but lingering perceptions that it continues is a discouraging influence on some young people.

## Labour market knowledge: skills and space

### Introduction

Young people may face skills and spatial constraints (as outlined in Chapter 2) in their transition from compulsory education to further and higher education, training and employment. The focus in this section is on young people’s knowledge of the labour market, in terms of skills and other attributes and the geography of employment, and how well their knowledge and perceptions match reality. Knowledge of sources of information on jobs and preferred job search methods are also discussed.

### Skills and other attributes

*What attributes are employers looking for when they recruit young people?*

An employer interviewed in Hull as part of this study gave a very clear answer: ‘You recruit for attitude and train for skills’. Likewise, a business survey in Wolverhampton commissioned by the NDC emphasised the importance of ‘soft skills’ – encompassing ‘attitude’, ‘people skills’, ‘commitment’ and ‘general employability’.

When the young people from the three case study areas were asked this question in focus groups they mentioned many such ‘soft skills’, including reliability, maturity, confidence, punctuality, communication skills, presentation, etiquette, appropriate



body language and dress, willingness to work with others and general attitude. They also emphasised the importance of qualifications, grades and work experience. This indicates that, at least in theory, the majority of young people demonstrated a good awareness of what employers are looking for.

While it is clear that most (but not all) of the young people in the Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton focus groups knew that these attributes are important, it is questionable whether, in aggregate, they recognised that some may be perceived, at least by some employers, as having shortcomings in these respects. Indeed, numerous studies have found employers to be generally dissatisfied with young people's non-occupational specific skills (Prince's Trust, 2005). For instance, a minority of interviewees in the three case study areas considered that it was okay to behave in a less than professional way in short-term 'jobs for money' and indicated that they intended to remedy such behaviour – at least to some extent – when they moved on to employment that they felt more committed to. One interviewee from Hull who exemplified this lack of work discipline and inappropriate behaviour stated:

If I got a job I would rather be out with my mates. I would try and pull some sickies. A lot of people I know do it. One mate has just been fired. But I have not got a 'proper job' yet. I would still pull a sickie in a proper job – although I would have to do it once in a blue moon.  
(18-year-old female, Hull, currently unemployed but with previous experience of part-time jobs)

When asked whether they felt that young people had an informed view of education, training and employment opportunities, stakeholder views differed – even in the same local area. Some considered that most young people were well informed, whereas others responded 'absolutely not'. There was general agreement that lack of an informed view was particularly prevalent among those young people who came from a background where worklessness was entrenched:

They cannot even get on the playing field, let alone get involved in the game.  
(Agency manager, Hull)

### **Job search**

It is possible that people may constrain their opportunities for employment by using a limited number of, or inappropriate, job search methods. In focus group discussions, participants were asked about sources of information on jobs and about job search methods.

A variety of job search methods were mentioned in focus groups. For local short-term jobs in particular, but also in getting established in careers, 'asking around' was highlighted. Family and friends were perceived as having a store of knowledge on types of work and individual employers, as well as the ability to signpost them to specific jobs available. This echoes findings of research by Gore *et al.* (2007) in coalfield areas, which highlights the importance of social networks of families and friends for information about jobs. Some young people – especially in Hull and Walsall – preferred this route, even though friends and family may have only limited knowledge and perspectives in relation to possible employment opportunities. The Jobcentre, Connexions, newspapers and local job shops were also mentioned. In large measure, these findings reflect the results of the 2006 NDC Household Survey, which showed that, in all three areas, the single most important way in which residents of all ages in employment got their current post was by 'hearing from someone who worked there', with around one in four people getting their current job in this way. Other key recruitment channels mentioned by young people in focus groups were replying to job adverts, direct applications and the Jobcentre. In Wolverhampton especially, but also among some young people in Walsall and Hull, there was a recognition that different methods were appropriate for different jobs/careers.

### **The location and nature of jobs**

A lack of knowledge or inaccurate perceptions of the location and nature of labour market opportunities may cause people to place constraints on their options that are unnecessary in objective terms. In focus groups, in the young person survey and in interviews, information was collected on young people's perceptions of jobs in the local area and their knowledge of the local and broader sub-regional geography of employment.

Young people in Wolverhampton indicated that they knew largely where to find training and employment. A common view – among both young men and young women – was that it was advantageous to travel out of Wolverhampton to a wider range of jobs/more specialist opportunities in Birmingham (or London or Manchester). There was a perception that there was only short-term work (i.e. casual or 'fill-in' work 'until something better comes up') and 'dirty factory work' available locally. Very few of the young people consulted said they would consider doing the latter. Therefore, in the immediate vicinity, they considered that they would be restricting themselves to minimum wage retail work and temporary work. Objectively, it was certainly the case that, in the immediate vicinity, the number of jobs was limited, but a greater volume and wider range of jobs were available close by in Wolverhampton city centre – albeit not as many as in Birmingham.

In the Hull focus groups, several young people felt there were few opportunities available locally beyond 'shelf stacking', although one participant was adamant that she had a 'good job in this area'. One young man considered that there were fewer suitable opportunities for young men than for young women (this is indicative of the prevalence of gender stereotyping mentioned in Chapter 4):

Lots of jobs are childcare and hairdressing – for the lasses.  
(19-year-old male, seeking work, Hull)

For many of the young people interviewed in Hull, awareness of education, training and employment opportunities did not extend beyond their immediate confines of East Hull or Hull city centre.

Young people in Walsall generally considered there to be 'limited work opportunities of any kind' within or close to their own immediate neighbourhood, although they were able to point to opportunities in construction, shop work, cleaning, security work and 'dead-end factory jobs' nearby. However, from an exercise mapping a variety of employment locations, young person survey respondents in Walsall were able to identify correctly Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall town centre (in that order) as having most jobs, while Blakenall/Bloxwich and Leamore were seen as having relatively few jobs. They identified Walsall town centre, Birmingham and Wolverhampton as having 'most jobs for them'. Finally, in terms of 'most jobs you can get to', Walsall town centre, and their home areas of Blakenall/Bloxwich and Leamore, were ranked highest, followed by another group of centres – including Willenhall, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Aldridge and Brownhills, all with similar rankings. This suggests a reasonable general awareness of the geography of employment opportunities, but indicates that some young people (as in Wolverhampton) may be discounting local jobs and looking for more 'variety' elsewhere. However, an awareness of larger numbers of jobs and/or more attractive jobs further afield did not necessarily translate into a preparedness to undertake longer journeys to work (as discussed further below).

## The existence and clarity of 'pathways'

### Introduction

Young people may have their labour market aspirations (discussed in Chapter 4) constrained by shortcomings in their ability to identify 'pathways' to their achievement from their current position. This section outlines the notion of 'pathways' and the

difficulties that some young people face in identifying and following appropriate pathways, and so in fulfilling their aspirations.

### **Pathways**

As outlined in Chapter 2, youth transitions are becoming more complex, such that post-school pathways into further and higher education and employment are changing and arguably becoming less clear, particularly so for some young people from traditional working-class areas. An interviewee from the higher education sector in the West Midlands stressed the importance of young people having identifiable pathways and used the characterisation of two contrasting pathways (with family networks playing an important role in each) to illustrate the differential impact of these changes. The first was a 'privileged pathway' of prep school, public school, Oxbridge and a professional career, while the second was a 'working-class passport' whereby, from an early age, it would be clear what school and factory an individual would work in because of the strength of place-based social networks in shaping labour market destinations. Neither pathway may be as clear as formerly, but this is especially so for the second case. This highlights that 'pathways' are important for all young people, but that labour market restructuring has reduced the viability of the 'working-class passport' pathway, with no such clear identifiable alternative emerging in its place, such that young people may be uncertain as to how best to navigate the transition from school, through further/higher education or training, to employment and in so doing achieve their goals.

### **Identifying and following appropriate pathways**

Some of the young people interviewed in the three case study areas had a good idea of pathways and the progression necessary to achieve their goal. Others reported making 'false starts' before finding their preferred pathway. Importantly, some young people were able to distinguish between short-term and long-term objectives and trade-offs. One young man in Walsall said that some of his friends went for factory work because of the short-term monetary benefits, reporting that they earned £160 per week compared with his £120 per week on an apprenticeship, but that he would soon earn more than them.

Others had difficulty in seeing a longer-term perspective, bemoaning the lack of 'proper jobs' and being reluctant to engage in further education/training or to take the 'low-paid jobs – not the type of jobs you want' that were available. There was

often a lack of recognition that taking a 'bad job' in order to gain work experience and associated 'soft skills' may, at least in some instances (although not always), be a stepping stone on the way to a 'better job', either in the same local area or elsewhere. One young woman asserted:

Without the experience of the crap jobs you won't get the good jobs.  
That's why I'm not washing and proud of it.  
(17-year-old female, in further education and part-time employment, Hull)

This was the exception rather than the rule in Hull. Likewise, a young man in Wolverhampton who had taken part-time jobs in sales and telesales, and felt that he had gained 'sales experience, reliability and work ethic', considered that this work experience would stand him in good stead later. Others could not see how to use 'short-term' jobs as a stepping stone to get to a longer-term objective by building work experience and a positive track record.

### **Navigating complexity**

Many of the stakeholders and some of the young people interviewed considered that more help was needed to 'navigate' increasingly complex opportunities and pathways. An interviewee from the education sector in Wolverhampton spoke of the need to 'create pathways in people's heads' at every opportunity – starting in primary schools. In the context of the current government policy target of expanding participation in higher education (outlined in Chapter 2), it is salient to note that only a small minority of young people interviewed were following, or envisaged, a pathway involving higher education. Certainly, the young people in Wolverhampton were more aware of pathways involving higher education than those in Walsall or Hull (indeed, one interviewee in Wolverhampton was currently a university student). The socio-economic profile of the Wolverhampton NDC area reveals that a greater share of the population are from managerial and professional groups, and entry to HE is higher than in Hull or Walsall (as discussed in Chapter 3). Moreover, the location of the University of Wolverhampton near the NDC area is helpful in this respect. The university occupies large buildings in the city centre, to which young people gravitate for shopping and entertainment, and is very close to Wolverhampton Wanderers football ground, a great attraction for thousands of young people. Hence, young people from the NDC area and from other parts of Wolverhampton may be very physically aware of the university. This is not the case in Walsall (where there is a new University of Wolverhampton campus [although not located near the NDC area]) or in Hull (where the university is located in the north west of the city and so beyond the radar of many of the young people interviewed in East Hull).

Stakeholders and young people alike spoke of the need to ‘map out routes’, indicating ‘this is what you have to do to get there’. The research revealed some examples of successful initiatives designed to help young people negotiate options and map out ‘pathways for progression’ – including the work of the Walsall Education Business Partnership (EBP) and Enterprising Youth in Hull (discussed in Chapter 6). Generally, young people found such individualised support extremely helpful. Those without such support described the difficulty of ‘choosing [between college courses or other options] on your own’. It appears that, as options and pathways become more complex, the ability of young people to navigate a pathway on their own (or solely with support from their parents) is variable. This suggests that there is a need to develop skills related to careers exploration and research (as discussed in Chapter 7).

## The geographical extent of job search and travel to work

### Introduction

The likelihood of finding a job tends to be positively related to the distance that an individual is prepared to travel to find work, since this widens the pool of job openings. National analyses of commuting patterns reveal strong relationships between occupations and wages on the one hand and distance travelled on the other, with people in professional occupations that command higher wages tending to travel further than those in less-skilled occupations with lower wages (Green and Owen, 2006). The relative costs of commuting are higher for people in low-wage than in high-wage occupations, such that a low wage earning capacity confines individuals to a smaller geographical area. Willingness and capacity to travel to work is also constrained by transport availability (and associated dimensions of reliability and affordability) – discussed later in this chapter – and other household responsibilities (including childcare, etc).

### Where do people work?

Spatial issues underpin the choices and behaviour of young people (and of employers). They can be ‘trapped by’ space or they can ‘transcend’ space in the sense of opening up a broader set of opportunities across a wider geographical area (Ball *et al.*, 2000). The ‘limits of possibility’ for some individuals may be within narrow confines, whereas others may be prepared to venture into areas that are only vaguely comprehended by, or are unknown to, others.



It was established in Chapter 4 that social networks of family and friends played an important role in shaping expectations, aspirations and behaviour. In focus groups participants were asked where their family and friends worked. In East Hull, the workplace locations reported included nearby factories, East Hull, 'town' (i.e. Hull city centre) Goole and Barton-upon-Humber and Scunthorpe on the southern side of the Humber. Analyses of census travel-to-work data confirm that the workplaces of East Hull residents are concentrated overwhelmingly in the central and eastern parts of Hull and neighbouring areas. In Walsall, young people reported family and friends working locally (in Bloxwich), Walsall, Wolverhampton, Birmingham and 'all over' (in the case of the self-employed father of one participant). In Wolverhampton, the locations mentioned by young people were more widespread, including Wolverhampton city centre, Telford, Bilston, Dudley, Walsall, Birmingham, Coventry and Leicester (where there are strong Asian links). Local-level analyses of census travel-to-work data for the West Midlands case study areas by and large confirm these patterns. So, while home cities (especially those neighbourhoods closest to the case study areas themselves) received foremost mention as workplace locations, in all case study areas, but particularly in Wolverhampton, there was an awareness of people travelling further afield for work.

### **How far is it reasonable to travel to work?**

When focus group participants were asked how far it was reasonable to travel to work and how far *they* would be prepared to travel to work, the foremost response was 'it depends' – on the nature of the job (i.e. a 'career job' or a 'dead-end job'), pay, and the cost and availability of public transport and access to private transport. Results from the young person survey indicate that 'more money', 'a job I really want' and 'a job with good prospects for promotion/career advancement' were the main factors that would encourage young people (both males and females) to extend their geographical search area.

In general, the maximum reasonable travel time that young people considered feasible on a daily basis was two hours (i.e. around one hour each way), although a journey of no more than 30 minutes was preferred. This is in accordance with findings from local household surveys in other areas. Moreover, in practice, how long/far people are prepared to travel may be more limited than it is in theory. Here again, however, the geography of young people's social networks was a factor in either widening their horizons: 'I'd commute for an hour to find work – my dad does the same' (18-year-old male, on training course, Walsall) or retarding the extent of their search:



I want to work round here. All my mates work round here – they won't look for work anywhere else.

(17-year-old male, seeking work, Hull)

In Wolverhampton, there was a general willingness to travel to get work in the broader sub-region and most focus group participants and interviewees displayed a good working knowledge of public transport services. In general, they were more widely travelled than their counterparts in Hull. As noted above, many young people in Wolverhampton saw Birmingham as having a lot of employment (and social) opportunities and were prepared to travel there. This suggests that exposure to other areas through social contact when young, and knowledge and familiarity with other places impacts on spatial horizons in relation to education, training and employment. Birmingham was also considered as an employment location by some young people in Walsall (as noted above), but the journey there is less straightforward than from Wolverhampton.

Despite national-level analyses of secondary data revealing that women have shorter work journeys than men, there was no clear gender differential among the young people interviewed in their ideas of how far it was reasonable to travel to work. However, a female interviewee in Walsall with a young child indicated that her caring responsibilities meant that she was restricted to the immediate neighbourhood in her search for work. Likewise, other young people spoke of sisters/other relatives with young children working locally. This illustrates that there was a recognition that childcare responsibilities could constrain job search areas for mothers (and lone mothers in particular).

In Hull and Walsall, in particular, many stakeholders interviewed pointed to a widespread unwillingness of local people to travel very far to work – particularly in the context of low pay (i.e. it is not worthwhile travelling very far for a low-paid job). 'Wanting a job on the doorstep' was a common refrain and was acknowledged by some young people either for themselves: 'I'm a home bird – I want something close by' (18-year old female, at college, Walsall) or for their friends:

I have a friend who wants to get a job, but he's only prepared to look on his own doorstep, otherwise he won't do it.

(17-year old male, Hull, on a friend seeking work)

Several reasons were suggested for an unwillingness to travel. In Walsall, one stakeholder considered that not travelling far and wanting to work only in certain areas could be traced to family tradition, characterised by a view that:

We have always worked 'here'. You don't want to be going 'there' for work.  
(Manager, Walsall)

He noted that:

The fact that the industry has gone is immaterial!

There was a feeling that parents, and some young people themselves, expected to make the same local commuting journeys as their grandparents, despite changes in the location of employment. History matters. Fear of travelling out of the home area 'comfort zone' was also mentioned by stakeholders and young people alike. One stakeholder in Walsall highlighted the need to change attitudes and perceptions:

There is a need to change the 'geographic silo' mentality ... to ensure that the end of the street is 'somewhere to go further', rather than 'somewhere to look and see what is happening'.  
(Manager, Walsall)

Other stakeholders and young people pointed out that there was a widespread unwillingness among the population in general to put up with the 'hassle' and time taken in travelling beyond the local area – particularly if it involved taking two buses. As one young person pointed out:

If you have to go far you have to get up earlier – which most people are not prepared to do.  
(20-year old female, in employment, Walsall)

From the evidence of stakeholders and young people themselves, it is clear that, while some young people are transcending space in their aspirations and job search, others are 'trapped by space' and are not accessing the full range of opportunities that are available to them. The extent to which wages and transport play a central role in this, vis-à-vis lack of confidence, lack of knowledge and perceptual barriers, is examined in the following sections.

## Wages and the quality of jobs

### Introduction

This section explores the significance of wages and job quality in constraining job search and in understanding spatial concentrations of worklessness. As highlighted in the previous section, there is a clear association between wages and the distance that people are prepared to travel to work. Changes in employment structure are also of significance here, as are people's knowledge and perceptions of jobs that are available. As outlined in Chapter 3, all three case study areas have undergone major employment restructuring over the last 30 years or so, with the demise of traditional manufacturing (and dock-related employment in the case of Hull) and a shift towards services. In all case study areas, stakeholders pointed to changes in the 'composition' of jobs, rather than a shortfall in jobs per se, as being a crucial factor in understanding worklessness. In the West Midlands, an economic development manager noted that 'in a drip, drip fashion the low-value manufacturing jobs are going', although job opportunities in these industries remain and vacancies often prove 'hard to fill'. In Walsall, it was noted that: 'Walsall used to be manufacturing and engineering. Now it is call centres, leisure and customer services.' Several stakeholders in the West Midlands pointed out that these are not the sort of jobs that many people want (especially men with former experience of working in manufacturing) and, crucially, the wages are relatively low.

### Low wages ...

In all three areas 'low wages' were considered as 'the real issue' by many of the stakeholders interviewed. Table 4 shows that hourly wage rates for full-time workers in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton local authority areas are appreciably lower than the England average (which is inflated by higher than average wages in London). The gap between local and national rates is higher when measured on a residence basis (i.e. for people living in the area, whether working in the area or elsewhere) than on a workplace basis (i.e. for jobs in the area), suggesting that residents are not taking a proportionate share of the better-paid jobs locally, and lower pay persists throughout the earnings distribution. Given the socio-economic profiles of residents in the NDC areas, it is reasonable to expect that their average wages would be lower than the respective local authority averages.

**Table 4 Hourly earnings (£) in Hull, Walsall and Wolverhampton local authority areas, 2006**

Local authority	Resident analysis			Workplace analysis		
	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile	Lower quartile	Median	Upper quartile
Hull	6.75	8.86	12.35	7.07	9.30	14.28
Walsall	7.20	9.36	12.84	6.99	9.20	12.33
Wolverhampton	7.30	9.67	12.98	7.80	10.71	14.57
<i>England</i>	<i>8.05</i>	<i>11.37</i>	<i>16.77</i>	<i>8.03</i>	<i>11.33</i>	<i>16.73</i>

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2006, via Nomis.

Notes: Information relates to the larger local authority districts within which the NDC case study areas are located. The median relates to the mid-point of the entire earnings distribution, the lower quartile relates to the mid-point of the lower half of the earnings distribution and the upper quartile relates to the mid-point of the upper half of the earnings distribution.

### ... and poor quality jobs

As noted by Holzer (1996), the 'work side' of welfare to work consists of low-skilled jobs with high turnover rates, and sometimes erratic scheduling of working hours and/or part-time or seasonal employment. Globalisation and outsourcing further increase the instability of low-skilled occupations. Hence, for local people with relatively poor skills, it is not worthwhile, in monetary terms, travelling far from home for a low-paid job, particularly if it is, or is perceived to be, unattractive, temporary and insecure – especially given the greater certainty of income on benefits. Some may question whether it is worth working at all (even taking account of any in-work benefits). Indeed, an official in Hull with long experience of working on employment and worklessness issues reported that, in objective terms, the monetary advantage of working vis-à-vis reliance on benefits (and it is salient to note here, as outlined in Chapter 4, that knowledge of workings of the benefits is well developed) was often quite small:

Wages, benefits and skills are interrelated – it is not worth working with the skills they have for the jobs round here.

Furthermore, he noted that increasing skill levels to Level 2 (i.e. the equivalent of five GCSEs at grades A\*–C, which is the threshold identified by the Government for individuals leaving 'skills poverty') is unachievable for some people and in any case may not necessarily result in any significant financial gain compared with their current position, although at least for some individuals there may be non-financial benefits in terms of self-esteem, etc. Nevertheless, this helps explain why, in all three areas, a 'low-skills equilibrium' persists and why, for some young people, a 'dead-end job', especially as an end in itself rather than as a means to a different goal, is unattractive.

## Transport

### Introduction

Alongside wages, availability and cost of transport is a key issue in understanding spatial constraints on job search. This section sets the context for contemporary concerns about transport to work and presents evidence from the case study areas on attitudes to and use of public transport and other means of transport.

### Context

In a review of the impact of new transport technologies on mobility over the last century, Pooley *et al.* (2006) argue that, despite new forms of transport, basic mobility aspirations in terms of access to services, jobs, etc. have changed little since the late nineteenth century. However, technological changes and growing affluence have enabled more people to utilise fast and individualised transport modes – notably the private car. Allied to this, changes in the spatial distribution of workplaces and residences have spawned increasingly complex commuting patterns. A more decentralised spatial distribution of employment and rising car ownership has led to public transport being viewed as increasingly uneconomic and inconvenient, and, if use of public transport decreases as a result, this is likely to lead to a reduction in services.

In general, the transport literature suggests that public transport modes that minimise personal control over journeys are viewed as ‘second best’ (especially outside the largest cities, such as London, where there is a relatively good public transport system and public transport is often a favoured option, especially in central areas). Young people, older people and the most socio-economically disadvantaged are more reliant on public transport than the population in general. Hence the availability and cost of public transport is of particular importance to them. However, findings from the NDC 2006 Household Survey in the three case study areas indicated that around 75 per cent of adult residents in all three areas did not consider that, in general, public transport was a particular problem in their area, nor did problems with lack of transport emerge as a major factor in stopping people from getting a job they wanted, especially in comparison with skills-related factors. Of course, many of these respondents would be less reliant on public transport for travel than the young people focused on in this study.

## Young people's perspectives on use, cost and availability of transport

Results from the young person survey undertaken for this study show that, in Wolverhampton, the majority of respondents felt that there was a good public transport system in the area. In Walsall, the share agreeing was slightly lower and, in Hull, the proportion of respondents who felt that there was a good public transport system was lower still. Nearly all of the survey respondents in Wolverhampton indicated that the public transport system went where they needed to go, but the proportions were lower in Walsall and in Hull. The majority of young people in all three areas disagreed with a statement that 'I do not know much about the public transport system round here', although the proportions were lower in Walsall and Hull than in Wolverhampton. In all three areas, a small minority of respondents indicated that they hardly ever used public transport. So the picture emerging is one of reasonable or good public transport systems, which most young people claimed to know about and use. Views about the cost of public transport are likely to depend to some extent on the money people have available and are prepared to spend on transport vis-à-vis other items and also whether they have a lack of other choices for travel. The majority of young people surveyed in Hull considered public transport expensive, compared with around half of respondents in Walsall and Wolverhampton. In focus groups, it was questioned why pensioners get free bus passes when young people do not, since, in both groups, many people are reliant on buses for local travel and have limited incomes.

## Public transport and spatial entrapment

In Wolverhampton, reliance on public transport did not emerge as a barrier (in terms of routing, frequency of service or cost) to accessing education, training or employment opportunities, with bus and metro stops and a main railway station (as depicted in the maps shown in Figures 9 and 10) all within walking distance:

It is easy to get into the centre of Birmingham in half an hour and relatively cheap.

(18-year-old male, in education, Wolverhampton)

In Walsall, the picture was less clear-cut. It was generally recognised that there was a regular bus service to the town centre and buses from there to 'anywhere'. One young man pointed out:

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## How spatially constrained are training, jobs and careers?

Generally, you have to get a bus to the centre and out, but that should not be a problem. People who say there are not good transport links do not know what they are talking about.

(17-year-old male, on work placement, Walsall)

However, in both Walsall and Hull, widespread unwillingness was reported among young people and the population in general to travel on more than one bus ('one bus' goes as far as the city centre, but not beyond). It was clear that this 'two bus' problem curtailed travel horizons for many dependent on public transport. Some stakeholders complained that, while the public transport system served residential areas, and that, in the case study areas, everyone was within reasonable distance of a bus stop, it does not match the employment geography of the twenty-first century. There is both a 'spatial' element here (in terms of job locations on the fringes of urban areas) and a 'temporal' element (the need for public transport to tie in with flexible/shift work patterns). Hence, there is a mismatch between a hub-and-spoke approach of services from outer areas to a central hub (usually a city centre) serving a conventional working day and current travel patterns.

Some young people and stakeholders reported that parents were sometimes unwilling for young people to travel far – even if opportunities were accessible by 'two buses' or a 'bus and train'. Stakeholders also mentioned that many young/other local people lacked the necessary discipline to travel by public transport to arrive at a place by a certain time; as one interviewee with considerable experience and interest in using public transport asserted:

Transport itself isn't the problem – it's the attitude of people towards using it.

(Transport operator representative, West Midlands)

So, despite some shortcomings in the public transport system, the suggestion was that travel difficulties are more 'perceived' than 'real'. Objectively, and as acknowledged by some young people in the case study areas, perceived travel difficulties are sometimes greater than actual travel difficulties.

### **The role of private transport in transcending space**

In general, most young people in the three case study areas looked forward to the time when they could have a car of their own. Some of the young men (especially in Hull) viewed a motorbike as a precursor to getting a car. They made a connection between getting a car and enhanced access to jobs. One young woman in Hull



who had a car and was no longer constrained by how far she could cycle or by the confines of the public transport system agreed:

It is easier if you have a car. You do not need to worry about the hustle and bustle of getting there on time.

(23-year-old female, in employment, Hull)

Likewise another interviewee commented:

It is a big barrier not having your own car. In a car you can get to more places and get to them quicker than on a bus.

(21-year-old male, in employment, Walsall)

So the car is seen as a means to greater spatial flexibility in travel, and perhaps in job search also.

## Is postcode discrimination a factor?

### Introduction

One reason put forward for spatial concentrations of worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods is employer discrimination against deprived neighbourhoods (termed 'postcode discrimination'). Research on worklessness and the economies of deprived neighbourhoods has found limited evidence of overt postcode discrimination, although area stigmatisation and discrimination are routinely reported (North *et al.*, 2006). It is difficult to measure discrimination directly; as one employment programme manager in Hull acknowledged: 'sometimes you have a sneaky feeling but no evidence'. Yet, even if discrimination does not exist, perceptions that it does may curtail the aspirations and job-search behaviour of young people, and contribute to a reduction in confidence and self-esteem.

### Perspectives from the case study areas

Most stakeholders and young people disputed the existence of postcode discrimination in reality, as did all employers interviewed. Some stakeholders noted that such discrimination is a 'thing of the past', which is not applicable in the context of tighter labour markets – thus acknowledging that postcode discrimination probably

had existed in the past, but that employers could no longer afford to be so choosy in changed economic circumstances. In those instances where a negative perception of the area by potential employers was thought of as a problem, it was not considered a major problem; indeed, there was generally more concern expressed by young people that, if they were discriminated against, it was on grounds of age, not area of residence.

However, while most young people did not feel that the area where they came from would be a barrier for them in finding work, a few did consider that, at the margin, if two job applicants had the same qualifications, then the one from a better area would get the job. Most young people felt that they could not let any such area stigmatisation affect them and that they would succeed on their own merits.

Generally young people thought that unjustified negative views of their local area were held by 'outsiders' (see Chapter 4). Respondents in all case study areas felt that their areas had improved over recent years and some more travelled respondents compared their areas favourably with other areas in the same city or beyond. However, it was acknowledged that some negative views persisted, but there were mixed views on whether these would manifest themselves in discrimination by employers. Most young people tended not to see their own experiences as compounded by poor reputations of their areas and of workless people in them, but some considered that these negative stereotypes harmed their own prospects. For example, a young woman in Hull asserted:

People think you are gobby and a 'bad influence'. They think you are a load of idiots.

(18-year-old female, seeking employment, Hull)

Likewise, a young man in Walsall was convinced someone from a 'better area' would always be preferred to him:

Because of the area you come from they think you are lazy.

(19-year-old male, on training course, Walsall)

In some instances, such feelings could contribute to a 'victim mentality' discouraging participation in education, training and employment. As one school student in Hull explained, reflecting on the bad reputation of areas in Hull such as Preston Road:

This reputation filters through to the mentality of the people. They think 'well I won't go to school', 'I won't get a job', etc.

(16-year-old female, in full-time education, Hull)

However, the majority of young people interviewed, and especially those with a good record of school achievement and/or who had identified a clear 'pathway' that they were following, expressed a determination not to put up barriers for themselves and had a positive outlook.

## Conclusions

This chapter has explored whether local social networks and place attachment translate into limited labour market knowledge and spatially constrained job search. Most young people knew about the skills and attributes employers were looking for, although they did not always recognise their own shortcomings. Most aspired to work, but some were unclear how to achieve their aspirations, or how generic work experience could be helpful in attaining longer-term goals.

In general, young people thought they knew where education, training and employment opportunities were. In the West Midlands case study areas, most of the young people demonstrated a reasonably accurate spatial knowledge of job locations and sometimes they discounted local jobs on the grounds of perceived 'poor quality'. In Hull, spatial knowledge of job locations was more limited, as were actual opportunities.

Analyses of commuting data show that the majority of travel-to-work journeys are over short distances. How far young people think it is reasonable to commute is influenced by social networks (i.e. whether family and friends work locally or travel further afield). Some young people 'transcend space' in their aspirations and knowledge of opportunities, while others are 'trapped by space' and confine themselves to a narrower subset of the opportunities available. Low wages are a key factor in understanding how geographically constrained people are in their job search. Wages, benefits and skills are interrelated and may influence perceptions of whether it is worth working in local jobs.

Public transport services do not facilitate access to opportunities as well as many young people and stakeholders would like, but, in Hull and Walsall, there were relatively frequent and direct links from the case study areas to city centres, and from there to other areas, while Wolverhampton was widely acknowledged to have a good public transport system with frequent links to other parts of the West Midlands conurbation and beyond. The 'hassle' of 'difficult journeys' involving 'two buses' or a change of transport mode was offputting to many young people, the majority of whom considered themselves to be 'confident' public transport users. Access to a car

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## How spatially constrained are training, jobs and careers?

was seen as overcoming such constraints and as facilitating job search over a wider area.

In general, postcode discrimination was considered to be less important now than was formerly the case and was not a widespread concern, although the negative impacts of area reputation and stigma may linger for some young people. However, their overall outlooks were positive.

Overall, some young people display relatively wide horizons, both socially and spatially. The findings from this study suggest that wider social networks, positive role models and experience of and confidence in travelling outside the local area are all important factors in widening horizons. Other young people have limited aspirations and restrict their consideration of opportunities to the immediate local area rather than to all that they can reasonably access. It is this latter group of individuals who would benefit most from a broadening of their horizons – both socially and spatially, although there is a strong case for raising awareness among all young people to enable them to make informed choices about education, training and employment in the light of all opportunities available to them and to assist them with identifying potential career pathways. However, it is also important to acknowledge that geography matters and, in more peripheral areas (exemplified here by Hull), the real limits and constraints of the labour market are more significant than in some other (more central) locations.

## 6 Widening horizons

This chapter explores the following key questions concerning widening horizons.

- How far do horizons need widening?
- Would 'wider horizons' improve education, training and employment prospects?
- How might a widening of horizons be achieved?

It reveals the following.

- In principle, a broadening of horizons expands the pool of potential training places and jobs, but individuals' opportunities may still be curtailed by skill deficiencies.
- A range of people- and place-based factors may be influential in widening horizons – including age, experience, family and household attitudes and behaviour, confidence, location and the availability and nature of transport links.
- Experience of employment is likely to play a role in widening horizons.
- In the non-work domain, leisure, sports or other activities/trips taking young people outside their familiar 'comfort zone' help raise confidence and self-esteem, which are important factors in encouraging broader perspectives.
- Geographical location and transport availability may facilitate or curtail a widening of horizons.
- The nature of local and wider links – in social, cultural and geographical terms – appears to play an influential role in broadening (or narrowing) of horizons.
- Current or suggested initiatives to widen horizons include help with transport costs, travel training, visits/trips to unfamiliar places, bringing people from other districts into the local area, advice and guidance, coaching, work experience and confidence building.
- Since some individuals face multiple barriers, it is important to connect up solutions relating to different issues.

## **Would ‘wider horizons’ improve training and employment prospects?**

### **Spatial and social horizons**

Widening horizons may take a spatial form (i.e. a broadening of geographical possibilities considered) or a social form (i.e. a consideration of a greater range of socio-economic possibilities). Chapter 5 shows that, although the number of jobs in all three case study NDC areas was limited, an overall numerical shortfall of jobs within reasonable commuting reach was not seen as the key issue, but there were concerns about the nature and quality of jobs available (especially in terms of pay). Hence, in principle, a spatial extension of horizons beyond the immediate vicinity should enhance employment prospects by expanding the potential jobs pool in terms of both quality and quantity. A socio-economic widening of horizons would mean that, in any given spatially defined area, more jobs would be considered. So, in theory, there would be a greater chance of getting on the ‘jobs ladder’ if horizons were widened. However, overall, there is a skills mismatch issue to contend with; higher-paid jobs are not attainable for many local residents because of a lack of requisite qualifications and/or experience.

### **Perspectives from the case study areas – geography matters!**

In social/aspirational terms, there was a widespread awareness in all three case study areas that further/higher education and vocational training was linked to enhanced employment prospects. Among the young people interviewed there was some recognition of the benefits of ‘wider horizons’ in spatial terms, although, for many young people, these came into play for full-time ‘career’ positions, rather than part-time/temporary jobs.

An awareness that ‘wider horizons’ in geographical terms meant improved labour market prospects was especially developed in the case study areas in the West Midlands, where there are a range of employment centres within daily commuting reach. There was also some recognition of this among young people in Hull, although it was less clearly articulated. Sub-regional geography plays an influential role here. Hull is very much separate from the large conurbations of West and South Yorkshire – Leeds and Sheffield are over an hour away. Unlike their counterparts in Wolverhampton and Walsall, who can access, relatively easily, other parts of the West Midlands conurbation and wider region, the inhabitants of Hull are relatively isolated. There is no obvious place for people to go to access opportunities outside

the city, because Hull is the major urban hub in the sub-region. As one young man in Hull responded in disbelief when asked about looking for work outside Hull:

Why? People come into Hull for work.  
(18-year-old male, seeking employment, Hull)

There are more limited options for commuting to other large job centres within reasonable commuting range from Hull compared to the other two areas. Nevertheless, in East Hull, a preparedness to broaden horizons beyond the immediate local area and their 'comfort zone' of familiar social contacts to other parts of the city, including West Hull, may improve prospects for some young people. Indeed, working alongside 'friends and family' or in locally subsidised employment may induce a local area 'lock in'. Some stakeholders highlighted the importance of young people working among non-local people to help promote a greater degree of 'professionalism' and knowledge of standards of behaviour expected in a workplace (i.e. greater mixing is advantageous).

So, 'wider horizons' are likely to improve prospects of getting work, but a willingness to travel and to consider unfamiliar roles does not necessarily guarantee employment. This is particularly the case in peripheral and isolated areas, which have fewer alternative opportunities within reach than more central areas: *geography matters*. Strong place attachment (see Chapter 4) may also mean that residents are reluctant to move away from their home area. If those individuals who are most enterprising relocate from the area (as opposed to remaining resident in the area while commuting to opportunities further afield), the skills base of the area will be depleted, so posing problems for regeneration of the area. Hence, there are tensions between the advantages of mobility for the *individual* and the possible disadvantages for the *area* associated with such mobility (as outlined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4).

## Factors in wider horizons

A range of factors based on 'people' and 'place' may serve to broaden horizons. Both are examined here, in order to consider how current interventions could help to inform young people's prospects.



## People-based factors

It is reasonable to hypothesise that *age* would be a factor in broadening horizons – with young people becoming more confident and experienced in independent travel as they get older. But the research conducted in the three case study areas reveals that there is no automatic positive relationship between age and wider horizons. It is also reasonable to hypothesise that *economic position* would be an important factor in widening horizons; indeed, the very experience of work is, for a young person, a widening of his/her horizons, relative to school or college; moreover, the discipline of *employment* also widens horizons. There is some evidence from the case study areas that this is the case. The *confidence* gained through obtaining and maintaining employment provides an important social and psychological widening of horizons also. This confidence can lead to a young person seeking work because a job is interesting, regardless of where that job might be based, whereas, initially, for confidence reasons, they may have sought work near to home and ‘security’. Furthermore, through work, an individual builds up his/her stock of human capital and monetary resources, which, in turn, are enabling factors in broadening horizons still further – perhaps aiding geographical mobility to an area perceived as ‘more promising’ (as outlined in Chapter 4).

Social networks of family and friends also play a role here. Having *family or other household members in work* can broaden horizons and be influential in shaping young people’s aspirations to work further afield (as discussed in Chapter 5), since geographical distance to work no longer appears as an unsurmountable ‘barrier’.

In the non-work domain, a broadening of horizons may occur through *leisure* activities or *residential trips*, or through provision of other ‘new experiences’, which ‘break down barriers’ and ‘stretch’ people by separating them from their comfort zone. Notably, confidence, self-esteem and challenging existing mindsets are recurring themes here. This suggests that *perceptions* of barriers and of what can be achieved matter, as do *actual barriers* experienced by some young people – including constraints of childcare for some young parents, which may tie them to the immediate local area.

## Place-based factors

*Geographical location* – at both sub-regional and intra-urban scales – appears to be an important factor in facilitating or hindering a widening of horizons. As noted above, the peripheral location of Hull at the sub-regional level limits the number and range of employment opportunities within commuting reach compared with the West

Midlands urban centres. At the intra-urban level, the proximity of the Wolverhampton case study area to the city centre appeared to be important in opening up social opportunities and in facilitating travel to other areas, whereas, for those reliant on public transport in Walsall and Hull, it was necessary to get a bus into the centre first, before travelling out again. The nature of *transport* links and the cost of transport are important factors in widening horizons spatially and, as indicated in Chapter 5, access to a car often marks a step change in broadening geographical possibilities and awareness.

### Issues for policy

The *nature of local and wider links* – in social, cultural and geographical terms – appears to play an influential role in broadening (or narrowing) of horizons. As noted in Chapter 3, Hull and Walsall are relatively homogeneous communities. By contrast, residents in Wolverhampton experience more heterogeneity at a younger age in cultural and social terms – indeed, an 18-year-old male interviewee in full-time education suggested that ‘the ABCD area [i.e. the NDC area] builds life experience’. So, whereas the socio-demographic diversity and connectivity of Wolverhampton appear to help to broaden horizons and aspirations in Walsall, and more particularly in Hull, it appears that monoculturalism and peripherality reinforce each other. Moreover, it may be the case that tackling cultural issues and changing mindsets may be more of a challenge in ‘stable’ than in ‘fluid’ contexts.

From a policy perspective, a key question of relevance here is whether there is too much of a ‘*local*’ emphasis in area regeneration initiatives (see also the related discussion in Chapter 4 and discussion on this issue in Chapter 7). There was some disillusionment among stakeholders (especially in Hull and also in Walsall to a lesser extent) that NDC activities have led to an ‘expectation’ that all services/training/jobs should be provided in the immediate neighbourhood – captured in the refrain from a local resident in a focus group: ‘They [i.e. the State] should bring more jobs here’. This is indicative of adoption of a ‘passive’ (i.e. waiting for things to be done for/to them) rather than an ‘active’ role (i.e. going out and finding opportunities for oneself). Some stakeholders noted that locating provision (of services) ‘on the doorstep’, while less costly and more easily accessible for the residents concerned, reduces geographical awareness of other parts of the city/sub-region where people would have needed to go to access that provision. There was a feeling from stakeholder interviews that perhaps too much emphasis had been placed on ‘engaging locally’ and that insufficient attention to policy has been placed on encouraging people to look outwards and move ‘out of their comfort zone’. An example was provided from a project in Hull of the difficulty of achieving a desirable ‘balance’ between helping young people widen their horizons and allowing them to stand ‘on their own two feet’:

Sometimes we worry that we create barriers we seek to address. You have to be careful, you don't want individuals to be dependent. We had one young person who was on/off projects for over a year – we couldn't shake them off. We need to allow people to stand on their own two feet – that is success.

(Worker on youth employment project in Hull)

## **Initiatives to widen horizons**

Initiatives to widen horizons can take several forms. During the research, a number of existing initiatives were identified and interviewees suggested others that might be helpful.

### **Transport**

It was noted by stakeholders that, often, people's perceptions of travel possibilities are limited and they do not tend to apply for jobs/training opportunities outside known travel routes, so curtailing their opportunities. Transport initiatives to widen horizons are likely to need to address both 'physical' barriers (concerning availability and cost) and 'perceptual' barriers (relating to raising awareness of, and confidence in using, public transport). Currently, Workwise assists with travel costs and provision of trip information for job-seekers in the West Midlands. There is also a role for travel training (inside and outside schools) to raise awareness of transport opportunities available. More direct transport services to training/employment destinations, so obviating the 'two bus' problem, would be advantageous also.

### **Moving beyond the immediate locality and out of the 'comfort zone'**

In Hull and Walsall, part-day *visits and residential trips* were identified as being influential in widening horizons. As well as allowing young people the opportunity to move beyond their everyday life-worlds and express themselves outside their own comfort zones, field trips organised by some of the key stakeholders in Hull, whether to museums in the city centre, or day trips to London or week-long residential trips to the Lake District, emphasised the importance of developing social relationships, building trust and instilling a sense of responsibility between young people. These youngsters benefited from working in teams, seeing the value of undertaking communal tasks and learning to look out for each other. This awareness and ability

to interact well with other people, especially when common goals are set, was seen as crucial to the young person being successful in the workplace. One of the main criticisms of young people (certainly in Hull) was that many did not know how to behave in a professional environment, they did not know how to communicate well, or see the connections that their role had with other colleagues. So, for example, if they did not do the job that they were required to do, this had negative implications for the business/workplace as a whole.

*Sports initiatives* were identified as fulfilling a similar role in terms of team working, discipline and self-confidence. Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter 4, participation in sporting activities involving travel to fixtures elsewhere may also help counter any myths that: 'the world ends at the boundary of the estate' (a description by a programme manager in Walsall of the localism that prevails among some local people). The results of the young person survey and findings from interviews and focus groups suggest that travel for sporting and social activities was linked to wider spatial horizons in terms of education, training and employment.

### **Bringing in outsiders as 'role models'**

Bringing non-residents into the neighbourhood was also viewed as a plausible way to 'break up the myopia' (Crow *et al.*, 2001) engendered by strong place attachment and an unwillingness to travel elsewhere. In Hull, it was hoped that, by opening up first-level courses in a local training centre to people from outside the NDC area, local residents would in time foster personal links with people from elsewhere and gain confidence to venture to centres elsewhere in the city to pursue second-level and more advanced courses. This idea of bringing different people into the area has links to 'mixed communities' initiatives; indeed, in Walsall, a key NDC objective has been to provide a more mixed housing stock and foster a broader social mix of residents in the local area and so break up the existing homogeneity (at least to some extent).

### **Initiatives to raise awareness of education, training and employment opportunities and pathways**

In the three case study areas, a series of initiatives designed to raise awareness of opportunities and pathways, and facilitate positive transitions from school to further education/training and work were identified. In Hull, there was a series of Young Enterprise and associated initiatives – including 'Learn to Earn' (about the links

between qualifications and earnings), 'Steps to Success' (linking lifestyle scenarios to the jobs needed to accommodate them) and 'Enterprise in Action' (about creating a business and working as a team) – designed to raise awareness about links between education, work and lifestyles and to broaden horizons more generally. Likewise, in Wolverhampton, university outreach activities and website resources were reported by some young people as having value in promoting positive perceptions of education as a lever to move on.

In Walsall, the Education Business Partnership ran a programme for selected NDC residents in Year 11 who were identified as being in danger of entering neither employment, nor education and training on leaving school to provide extra help, coaching and guidance in identification of post-16 pathways. One graduate of the programme, who admitted he had not particularly liked classroom learning and had 'messed around' at school, acknowledged that the individualised help and support had 'turned him around'. Like other participants, he had valued sessions with outside speakers talking about health and safety issues, and their own pathways and experiences, etc., as well as the opportunity to undertake placements at the local college. It was reported that other pupils were jealous of the programme participants. The individual attention, opportunities for training and work-related experiences, and awareness raising about a range of different options and pathways appear to be the crucial ingredients in the programme's success. While some young people had not settled on their education/training/employment options, those that had taken part in wider 'enterprise' programmes/initiatives designed to broaden experiences/vocational options generally had greater awareness of possibilities.

### **Careers advice and work experience**

Several young people felt that there was scope for improvement of careers advice in schools. It was suggested that, when potential employers make presentations in schools, more young people should be given the opportunity to find out more and encouraged to attend, rather than restricting invitations only to those who had definitely expressed an interest (as was reported in one case). Young people and stakeholders alike considered that a greater number of young people could benefit from 'better', 'earlier' and 'longer' work experience programmes, which would help to widen their horizons socially (and often spatially) and raise their awareness of employment. However, a reluctance of employers to take on young people was identified – often for safety and/or insurance reasons. In relation to work experience some young people reported: 'It was up to us to find somewhere to go' and those who 'did not see the benefit of it' or who lacked appropriate connections to find a placement lost out. It was also noted that fewer business people were prepared

to come into schools and work with young people on projects than formerly. The fact that schools had become 'too focused on A–C grades' was bemoaned by stakeholders in Hull and Wolverhampton, such that young people had 'lost out on all-round education – the eye has been taken off that' (stakeholder from the education sector, Wolverhampton). In this respect, the broadening of educational and vocational options in the 14–19 strategy was welcomed.

### **Boosting confidence**

Some young people reported finding the whole interview process 'scary' and felt that they needed help in raising their confidence in interviews. In Wolverhampton, sessions on emotional intelligence had been organised to meet a specific need identified by young people.

### **Utilising the information, advice and support available**

In all three case study areas, a range of *information, advice and support initiatives* was available and it was down to the individual to make use of such help. As one interviewee in Walsall concluded:

The Jobcentre, Work on the Horizon [*the local Jobshop and information centre*] and Steps to Work provide numerous forms of training ... They are doing everything right. It is people's attitudes that have to change.  
(17-year-old male, on training course, Walsall)

So, in the three case study areas, a variety of initiatives and interventions that helped to widen horizons were in place, but not all young people could or would take up services available. In addition to raising awareness of initiatives that are available, there may be scope here to learn from innovative interventions elsewhere that connect up solutions – for example, provision of childcare at a central location alongside transport to a training provider for young mothers, so tackling transport and childcare barriers and encouraging positive peer effects as participants encouraged each other to take part.



## Conclusions

Many young people would benefit from a widening of horizons – in both spatial and social terms.

A numerical shortfall of jobs was not considered to be a problem in the three case study areas. However, the suitability of available jobs (in terms of qualifications, ‘soft skills’ and experience requirements) for local residents given their current skills levels was an issue, as was the desirability of such jobs (in terms of pay, conditions and prospects).

In all three case study areas, a greater willingness to seek employment beyond the immediate local area would open up more (i.e. a greater number and variety of) employment opportunities. Hence, widening of horizons in spatial terms would be of benefit to young people. However, sub-regional geography is influential here in determining the volume and range of job opportunities available, as well as in shaping attitudes regarding whether wider spatial horizons would open up more employment possibilities. Spatial horizons were most and least limited in the Hull and Wolverhampton case study areas, respectively, but the options were also more limited in Hull than in Wolverhampton. Nevertheless, the residents of the Hull case study area would benefit from a widening of spatial horizons in order to take account of opportunities in the west of the city as well as in the east. An important and related issue for policy is that of achieving an appropriate balance between provision of local services and jobs and encouraging people to widen their horizons and take up opportunities further afield.

In relation to social horizons, people-based factors such as age, economic position, skills, confidence and motivation, monetary resources and household context are influential in widening horizons, as are place-based factors such as geographical location and the physical transport infrastructure. Subsuming both people-based and place-based factors, local and wider social, cultural and geographical links appears to play an important role in widening horizons. Those young people in areas characterised by greatest social homogeneity are likely to benefit particularly from a widening of social horizons.

Initiatives to widen horizons take various forms and aim to tackle actual and perceived barriers across several policy domains. Key focuses for such initiatives include transport (raising awareness of available services and help with costs); visits, trips, sporting and social activities designed to provide new experiences, enhance confidence and broaden spatial horizons; and educational and work-related initiatives designed to raise awareness of opportunities and pathways and provide



experiences of relevance to the workplace. Young people who had taken part in such initiatives were generally positive about them and felt that they had benefited from the experience.

## 7 Conclusions and implications for policy

This final chapter of the report presents:

- key findings from the analyses in previous chapters
- policy implications and issues arising from the research.

It highlights the following.

- The importance of perceptions in understanding behaviour.
- The operation of place-based social networks as an enabling factor in accessing training and employment opportunities in some circumstances and as a 'brake' in others.
- Geography matters – objectively and subjectively. Geographical location and transport availability may facilitate or curtail a widening of horizons.
- Some young people are 'trapped by space' (either by circumstances or desire) whereas others 'transcend' it.
- Young people display variable ability to identify and navigate 'pathways of progression' through education and training to the labour market.
- The findings of the research are of relevance to policy at national, regional and local level across a variety of domains, including the following.
  - Area regeneration and mixed communities: the study contributes to debates on the role of area regeneration policies and about whether 'getting on' means 'getting out' of the local area.
  - Economic development and labour market issues: the study is relevant to debates on the role of demand-side and supply-side economic development strategies and labour market policy more generally.
  - Education and skills: the study examines young people's decision making about further/higher education opportunities and their appreciation of the importance of skills and qualifications in obtaining and progressing in employment.
  - Careers education and information, advice and guidance: the study identifies the sources of information used by young people in navigating the opportunities available to them at the end of compulsory education, and outlines the role for careers education.

*(Continued)*

- Transport: issues relating to attitudes to, and use of, transport are considered in this study in the broader context of the role of social networks, place attachment and access to opportunities.
- To fill gaps in the evidence base, possibilities for future research include: comparative research (e.g. on non-deprived areas, in rural areas and in London); the role of parents and the implications of the fracturing of families for young people's opportunities; the impact of new migrants on the opportunities for young people; and policy issues relating to transport and case studies of initiatives to widen spatial and social horizons.

## Summary of key findings

The research reported in previous chapters has explored how social networks and attachment to place shape the education, training and work opportunities of young people, drawing on case study research from three deprived neighbourhoods in England.

### The importance of perceptions in understanding behaviour

The research has shown that subjective factors influence decision making over and above physical constraints. Perceived opportunities may represent a subset of all opportunities actually available. Behavioural factors intermesh with objective opportunities in influencing choices made by young people about which education, training and job opportunities are sought.

### Changing opportunities in a context of structural change

Economic and socio-institutional factors shaping the operation of labour markets are complex. The industrial and occupational profile of employment has altered dramatically over the last two generations and some local areas have been ruptured by the decline of traditional place-based industries. In general, changes in the geography of employment have enhanced the disadvantage faced by those with poor skills and those without private transport. Spatial mismatch and skills mismatch may be mutually reinforcing.

In theory, and often in practice, most young people in the twenty-first century have a greater range of options on reaching compulsory school-leaving age, but these options are different from those of their parents and grandparents. The likelihood of a direct transition from school into a job has diminished, while opportunities for further and higher education have expanded.

### **Place-based social networks and access to opportunities**

A key question for policy is whether familial and place-based social networks facilitate or constrain labour market prospects. Family and friends are an important source of knowledge about jobs. The evidence suggests that in some instances – especially when they provide access to training and employment – they operate as an enabling factor in accessing training and employment opportunities, but in others they act as a ‘brake’ by discouraging young people to look beyond the immediate local area and/or traditional or stereotypical opportunities. In these latter circumstances, strong bonding social capital may contribute to a form of socio-spatial entrapment. So, while family, friends and social networks play an important role in influencing attitudes, aspirations and behaviour, the relationships can be uneven, multiple and complex.

Place shapes people and their outlooks: where an individual is looking from frames what they see and how they interpret and act on it. Place and identity can be powerfully connected. Place identity can be a source of strength, but it also appeals to the parochial. People need to be encouraged to look ‘outwards’ as well as ‘inwards’.

### **Aspirations to work and labour market knowledge**

Non-employment is more pervasive and entrenched in NDC areas than in many other neighbourhoods, but most young people in the case study areas are not cut off from the ‘world of work’. The vast majority of young people, both male and female, wanted to work and forge a career for themselves. Generally, they had positive outlooks about future options. Here family influences emerge as important in shaping outlook, attitudes (e.g. ‘we are a “working family”’), aspirations and job-search geographies. The research findings highlight the particular difficulties facing those young people from workless households and/or with few or no role models. The general feeling among the young people who participated in this study – especially in the West Midlands – was that benefit claimants ‘drag the area down’.

Individuals displayed variable ability to identify and navigate 'pathways of progression' through education/training to the labour market. There was general agreement that qualifications were very important in access to 'good jobs'. While many young people also highlighted, and could identify, the attributes and 'soft skills' emphasised by employers, they were unlikely to regard themselves as having deficiencies in this respect. Many young people made a clear distinction between 'dead-end jobs' in the immediate vicinity and 'good jobs' elsewhere, but some discounted what they regarded as more mundane jobs as having any value as a 'stepping stone' along a pathway to attainment of their longer-term objectives.

### **Geography matters**

The geographical extent of job search is inextricably linked to types of jobs available/sought. It is not worthwhile bothering to travel far for poor pay and, significantly, low wages emerged as a key issue in all case study areas. While there may be deficiencies in the way that public transport networks serve key employment locations, 'perceived' transport barriers to accessing opportunities may be greater than 'real' barriers. Journey times are important to people and many will not consider undertaking a long journey (in terms of time and distance) unless the rewards (in terms of pay, opportunities for advancement, etc.) are good. In particular, some individuals were unwilling to take 'two buses' or consider journeys that involved a change of mode of transport. This means that some young people are 'trapped by space', while others 'transcend' it.

The issue of postcode discrimination was considered to be diminishing in importance, but lingering perceptions of its existence may have a discouraging influence on some young people.

### **Widening horizons**

In principle a broadening of horizons expands the pool of potential training places and jobs, although the sub-regional geography of training and employment opportunities is also important. In peripheral locations, there are fewer alternative concentrations to consider commuting to than is the case for central locations. A range of people- and place-based factors may be influential in widening horizons, including age, experience, family and household attitudes and behaviour, confidence, location and the availability and nature of transport links. Experience of employment plays a role in widening horizons for some, but not all, people. In the non-work

domain, leisure, sports or other activities/trips taking young people outside their familiar 'comfort zone' help raise confidence and self-esteem, which are important factors in encouraging broader perspectives. Current or suggested initiatives to widen spatial and social horizons include help with transport costs; travel training; visits/trips to unfamiliar places; bringing people from other districts into the local area; advice and guidance – including identification of the links between education and different types of employment opportunities; coaching; work experience; and confidence building.

Geographical location and transport availability may facilitate or curtail a widening of horizons. The nature of local and wider links – in social, cultural and geographical terms – appears to play an influential role in broadening (or narrowing) of horizons. While acknowledging that there is diversity within as well as between areas and individuals, in simplistic terms, the three case study areas can be thought of as lying on a continuum with greatest attachment to place in Hull and least in Wolverhampton (although the Sikh community provides an example of a community that is relatively aspirational but with strong local roots). Walsall occupies a point in between Hull and Wolverhampton on the continuum, but perhaps in a position closer to Hull than to Wolverhampton. Both Walsall and Hull NDC areas are overwhelmingly white British outer estates, to some extent psychologically (if not geographically) cut off from the city centre in the minds of some local people. Moreover, Hull is also geographically distant from opportunities in other major urban areas, although this is not the case for Walsall. In contrast to Hull, where homogeneity and a peripheral location appear to be factors in narrowing horizons, Wolverhampton is more ethnically diverse, is located close to the city centre and has good transport links to other cities in the region and beyond, and social networks are more widespread. All of these factors appear to play a role in broadening horizons.

## **Implications for policy**

### **Introduction**

The findings of this study address a range of strategic issues cutting across various *policy agendas*, including:

- 1 area regeneration and mixed communities
- 2 economic development and labour market issues

- 3 education and skills
- 4 careers education and information, advice and guidance
- 5 transport.

They are of relevance to audiences at:

- 1 *national* level – including:
  - Communities and Local Government (CLG): findings concerning prospects for people in deprived areas, area regeneration initiatives and mixed communities
  - the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP): findings relating to welfare-to-work policies and initiatives to combat worklessness
  - the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS): findings in relation to schools and services for children and young people
  - the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS): findings on skills-related issues, and further and higher education
  - the Learning and Skills Council (LSC): findings relating to skills development, access and attitudes to training, and workforce development issues
  - the Department for Transport (DfT): findings relating to transport and travel
- 2 *regional* level – including:
  - Regional Development Agencies (RDAs): issues relating to regional and sub-regional economic development, area regeneration, skills issues and place attachment
  - Jobcentre Plus: issues concerning benefits and attitudes to work
  - the Learning and Skills Council: regional and local issues relating to skills development and training
- 3 *local* level – notably:
  - Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) including local authorities and their partners – in relation to economic development, area regeneration and service delivery.

In this section, after an overview of some of the most important general messages arising from the study, key implications of the findings outlined in the previous section are addressed under the five substantive policy agendas identified at the beginning of this section. Some key gaps in the evidence base are identified also.



### General messages

There are a number of general messages from this study, which are pertinent to policy across a number of domains and at a range of different geographical scales.

- The *perceptual reading* of labour markets (and of other opportunities) is important – i.e. people’s perceptions of opportunities may not accord with opportunities that are available. In general, perceptions of opportunities represent a subset of all opportunities available.
- Local place-based *social networks* affect aspirations and behaviour – for some young people, attachment to place is an important factor (possibly the most important factor in some cases) in their decisions about life choices.
- It is important that young people are aware of and can access *opportunities* beyond their immediate neighbourhood, even though they may ‘choose’ to stay in their home area.
- In the context of the importance of social networks, pathways to work may be influenced only marginally by *formal services*.
- *Geography matters* – where people live matters in terms of their access to transport and education, training and employment opportunities.
- Place-specific factors are important in understanding perceptions and opportunities.

### Area regeneration and mixed communities

A key issue in area regeneration policy is the conflict between promoting ‘stability’ and ‘mobility’. Although many young people displayed a strong attachment to place and believed that NDC initiatives had improved their neighbourhood, some of the young people interviewed in this study (especially those with the highest aspirations) believed that ‘getting on’ in the labour market meant ‘getting out’ of the local area. Other individuals appear unwilling to move out of their ‘comfort zone’ and this is reflected in attitudes to travel, and an emphasis on jobs and services being brought to them. This raises the question of whether there is too much of a ‘local’ emphasis in area regeneration initiatives, so encouraging people to look inwards, rather than outwards to opportunities elsewhere.

In some NDC areas a policy of greater social mixing is being pursued. In theory, 'mixed communities' may facilitate a raising of aspirations; conversely, they may impact negatively on social capital. (However, even if a community became more 'mixed', there may not be more interaction across social groups.) A strong evidence base on these issues is currently lacking.

### **Economic development and labour market issues**

There is a long-standing debate in economic development regarding the relative merits of a policy of 'jobs to workers' vis-à-vis 'workers to jobs'. A policy of encouraging some employers to locate in or near NDC areas, and ensuring access to resulting opportunities for local people, may be appropriate in more peripheral areas. However, a policy of 'jobs to the workers' is unlikely to be sufficient in addressing spatial concentrations of worklessness because of substitution effects (i.e. better qualified people from other areas may fill local jobs) – especially in geographically more accessible areas. There is also a need to encourage people to travel to employment opportunities elsewhere; indeed, spatial mobility is an essential element in the 'employability mix'.

The 'quality', as well as the 'quantity', of jobs is important. Poor quality jobs with no prospects are unattractive to young people and many local people on benefits. Yet skills deficiencies often preclude people from taking higher quality jobs. Supply-side policies also have a role to play in enhancing residents' chances of competing successfully for jobs that are available.

### **Education and skills**

The importance of 'soft skills' comes through very strongly from this study. Much of the emphasis of education and skills policy is on formal qualifications and, while these are undoubtedly important and are in some cases lacking, there is a case for greater attention to be placed on initiatives to enhance the soft skills of young people.

Work experience has a role to play here. However, the prevalence of subcontracting of specific tasks to other organisations and a primary emphasis on budgets/profits means that employers may be unwilling or unable to take on students for placements/work experience. Getting relevant work experience, or work experience of any kind, appears to be a problem for some young people – especially those with the most restricted social networks. Hence, an important issue for policy is how to improve access to work experience.

The former Department for Education and Skills' 14–19 strategy concerned with reform of the curriculum, including an emphasis on vocational learning, was welcomed. However, in designing new policy initiatives, such as specialised diplomas, account needs to be taken of the fact that some young people may not be able or willing to travel to take up such education/training opportunities. This is an important message for policymakers nationally and also for the LSC at regional and sub-regional level.

### **Careers education and information, advice and guidance**

This study has emphasised the difficulties that some young people face in identifying and navigating the options available to them at the end of compulsory schooling and identifying 'pathways' through further/higher education and training to employment. The refocusing of the Careers Service on the NEET groups means that many other young people are missing out on the development of skills related to careers exploration and research that they need to make sense of the information on opportunities available to them. Where careers education in schools is weak there is likely to be greater reliance on the family, so perpetuating existing social stereotyping. It is clear that, where individualised support is available, it is valued highly by young people. Hence, it is important to explore whether and how such individualised support can be made available to more young people and to ensure that all young people have an opportunity to develop careers exploration and research skills.

### **Transport**

Transport is often placed in a silo on its own in policy terms but this study has emphasised its importance as a key bridging theme providing links across policy domains. The study has underlined the importance of transport for young people to reach education, training and employment opportunities, although in many instances transport did not emerge as a primary issue vis-à-vis other considerations. Nevertheless, it is important that, wherever possible, efforts are made to ensure that public transport provision aids physical accessibility to education, training and job locations, in accordance with the Department for Transport guidelines on accessibility planning for local authorities. Transport operators, economic development managers, the LSC, Jobcentre Plus and employers all have a role to play here. Many people are reluctant to take 'two buses' or undertake a journey involving a change in public transport mode (e.g. bus and train). Provision of more direct services and raising awareness of, and confidence in using, public transport through journey planning and travel training may have a role to play in addressing the 'two bus' problem.

### Gaps in the evidence base

This study has focused on three deprived urban neighbourhoods in England. There is scope for comparative research in non-deprived areas. Such research would provide insights into similarities and differences into place attachment and the role of social networks between deprived and non-deprived areas. It would also reveal whether mental maps are more extensive in non-deprived than in deprived areas. Likewise, comparative research in rural areas (where the geography of education, training and employment opportunities and the transport network is sparser than in the three case study areas that are the focus in this study) and in London (which offers a larger, more complex geography of opportunities, a dense transport network and has an ethnically diverse population) would add new insights.

The research reported here included interviews and focus groups with young people and with a range of stakeholders. There was no specific spotlight on the parents of the young people who were the focus of the study. In future research, there would be value in interviewing both young people and their parents, and comparing their attitudes towards education, training and employment, their spatial awareness and knowledge of the geography of labour market opportunities.

Likewise, while this study has highlighted the importance of place-based social networks of family and friends, it has not focused specifically on the implications of family breakdown for young people's networks. For some young people a fracturing of families might mean loss of, or infrequent contact with, a parent, while for others it might bring a broadening of social networks to include step-relatives. Clearly, family breakdown leads to instability of home life for some young people. During the fieldwork undertaken for this study the issue was raised (by a training provider in Hull) that some young people do not have a clear grasp of their own personal history and that this contributes to making completion of application forms a difficult task for them. In turn this creates a further barrier to accessing opportunities. Hence, there is a role for further research to explore the possible implications of the fracturing of families on young people's access to opportunities.

Immigration emerged as a live issue among young people (and others) in the case study areas. It is also a key issue in public policy debate. In Hull, in particular, concerns were raised by some young people that immigrants were taking local jobs (albeit that jobs filled by immigrants may be so unattractive and poorly paid that local residents may not be interested in filling them or may lack the requisite work ethic and/or skills to do those jobs). The impact of new economic migrants (who are often young) on the attitudes and labour market chances of young people, especially those who are disadvantaged and so vulnerable to labour market restructuring, is a possible topic for further research.

Additionally, there is scope for further research on a range of policy issues highlighted in this study. For example, a nexus of issues around transport are worthy of further investigation – including the role of travel training for children and young people in raising confidence and widening horizons, and the scope and limitations of policy initiatives to enhance access to jobs by improving access to public transport and private transport. There is also scope for detailed case studies of specific initiatives designed to widen spatial and social horizons – in order to identify what works where, when, for whom, how and why.

### **Final recommendation**

It is recommended that policymakers pay cognisance to the general messages from the research outlined at the start of this chapter when designing policy interventions. The spatial and social context in which people are located matters. It influences how they see the world and their access to opportunities. Hence, an understanding of the geography, history, socio-demographic characteristics and economic circumstances of different neighbourhoods is useful in informing how they operate and how policy can best be tailored to local circumstances.

# Note

## Chapter 1

- 1 In late June 2007 (i.e. after the research reported in this study was completed) some of the functions of the former Department for Education and Skills relating to school-based education were taken forward by the newly established Department for Children, Schools and Families, which has responsibility for improving the focus on all aspects of policy affecting children and young people. At the same time, responsibility for further and higher education and skills (previously part of the Department for Education and Skills) was passed to the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

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