

Mining Industry Safety Leadership Group

**Sector Strategy Document
2014 - 2017**

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1. Strategic context

Scope

1. This sector strategy covers the health and safety system applicable to underground:
 - coal mines
 - mines producing other minerals
 - tourist mines and mines used for adventure activities
 - storage mines
2. The range of major and other hazards in underground mines in the Great Britain is no different from mines elsewhere. Worldwide the mining industry has seen disaster from explosion, fire, flood or collapse. The mining industry within the UK must not become complacent, there remains a potential for catastrophic mining incidents in Great Britain, such as the inrush of water at the Gleision Mine in South Wales in September 2011 that killed four miners. A significant spontaneous combustion on a coal face at the Daw Mill Mine in February 2013 closed the mine with the loss of over 500 jobs. Reducing the likelihood of such incidents aligns with the strategy goal of avoiding catastrophe.
3. The coal sector has a continuing strategic value to the country as deep mines produce about 12% of the coal burned in Britain's thermal power stations. Energy generators, steel producers and a number of other energy intensive industries are dependant on domestically produced coal.
4. The rock salt sector is significant as it plays a major role in keeping open Britain's road transport arteries during the winter months and is important to the British economy.
5. British potash production underpins a large part of European agricultural fertiliser manufacture.
6. Domestically produced gypsum is important to Britain's construction sector.
7. Barytes production supports a number of other energy industries, being an important constituent of drilling mud for oil and gas wells and an ingredient in the heavy concrete used for radiation shielding.
8. Throughout this document there are references to operators, trade unions and the HSE and other specific roles which are self-explanatory. There are also references to 'leaders' and 'employees'. In this document a leader is not intended to be limited to senior people in an organisation, a leader is some who demonstrates leadership irrespective of their hierarchical position. The term 'employees' is intended to understand in its literal sense in that, with the exception of the owner, we are all employees of the operator, trade union or the regulator.

Description

9. The mining sector is small and relatively isolated from other sectors comprising around 100 mainly small and medium sized mines. Only three mine owners employ more than 500 people and two of these are part of larger companies whose deep mining interests are not the dominant part of their businesses. HSE data derived from a number of sources indicate that the sector employs no more than 3500 people.
10. Coal mines employ about 1500 mine workers and produce 2-3 million tonnes per annum from five large mines and about 20 smaller mines. The remaining large coal mines are in Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and South Wales. Most small coal mines are in South Wales and the Forest of Dean. Coal industry regulation and structures were set up to deal with a large nationalised industry and adjusting to the much smaller sector size is a continuing issue.
11. Non-coal mines are more evenly spread. Britain's largest, deepest, and highest output mine is a potash and rock salt mine employing over 800 below ground. One company operates a group of five gypsum mines and there are also two other large rock salt mines.
12. The mining sector is not large enough to support a supply chain of specialist equipment and materials manufacturers. There remain a few British mining equipment manufacturers but their main business is overseas and Great Britain operators are faced with fewer and fewer choices. This can cause difficulties with equipment availability and standards.
13. There are also around 40 mines used for tourism, storage, training and adventure activities.
14. Local authority fire and rescue services are not required, and currently they are not trained or equipped, to undertake rescue operations in mines. Rescue services continue to be supported by two private companies who train part-time brigadesmen in rescue techniques, including the use of breathing apparatus. They provide coverage for all producing mines, storage mines and larger tourist mines.

Employment and employment trends

15. At most coal mines the workforce is long-standing, ageing and almost exclusively male. While coal mining jobs are relatively well-paid compared to other manual occupations, coal mining is seen as a dirty, dangerous and unattractive job. The twin pressures of falling coal prices and the £/\$ exchange rate, coupled with current carbon tax policies suggest that total employment in the deep mined coal sector could be less than 1,000 by the end of 2015.
16. Set against this development work will commence in 2015 to sink a new coal mine in West Yorkshire with a projected 20 year life and employment peaking at about 75. Several similar projects may follow if this proves successful.
17. Sustained contraction over the past 30 years means that the sector isn't attractive graduates. The range of training providers has shrunk and in some

cases disappeared. Many experienced managers, engineers, supervisors and mine surveyors have left the industry and the replacement pool is very small.

18. Non-coal mines generally have a higher employee turnover and a more even age spread. There is a well-developed proposal to sink a very large polyhalite mine near Whitby that will produce up to 12 million tonnes per year. A planning application is expected in 2014.
19. The workforce contraction is putting increasing pressure on the numbers of part-time brigadesmen available to maintain their competencies. Additionally the age spread of the permanent employees of rescue service providers means that medical fitness is an increasing issue.

Regulation

20. There are four main regulatory bodies within the sector. HSE regulates health, safety and welfare; the Environment Agency (EA) / Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) regulates environmental issues, including certain hazardous mining wastes and the issue of emissions and discharge permits; the Coal Authority (CA) licenses coal mines; and Local Authorities (LA) deal with both development planning and mineral planning issues.
21. In addition to legislation of general application there is a large body of mining specific legislation, some of which dates from the 1950s. A programme to reform mining legislation is well advanced with new regulations scheduled to come into force in April 2015. These will replace over 40 sets of regulations and parts of three Acts, with a more modern and largely goal-setting framework.
22. There are a number of EU Directives relating to the extractive industries, which are largely implemented through existing legislation, and will continue to be so when the new legislation comes into force.
23. The Mines Unit of HSE's Hazardous Installations Directorate (HID) regulates health and safety in the underground mines sector across Great Britain. It comprises of mining, mechanical and electrical engineering inspectors all of whom are regulatory specialists.

Intermediaries and other influencers

24. The key intermediaries are the people within the various sub-sectors: employers/mine owners; employees and their trades unions; manufacturers; producer and manufacturer representative organisations; Other Government Departments and Non-Departmental Government Organisations; and the EU and other European bodies
25. HSE has regular contact with individual employers and mine owners through its regulatory activities. The coal producers among them participate in the trade association CoalPro. Both individual operators and CoalPro have regular meetings with Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC).

26. Most non-coal mine operators belong to their own trade association, the Mining Association of the United Kingdom (MAUK). Rock salt producers have regular contact with Department for Transport (DfT), which determines the strategic stocks local highways authorities have to keep.
27. The Mining Industry Safety Leadership Group is an industry-led body set up in 2012. It is currently chaired by an employer representative and focuses principally on major hazard risks in the mines sector.
28. The mining workforce is unionised. In the coal sector the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and The Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) represent the majority of the industrial workers and there are other, smaller, mining-based trades unions representing supervisors and managers.
29. In the non-coal sector Unite and GMB have the biggest representation and also have some presence in coal mining. However mining employees represent only a tiny proportion of their total memberships.
30. The Mines Unit has regular contact and exchanges information with The Coal Authority, principally in relation to licensing issues, pumping mines and remedial works in abandoned coal mines. EA/SEPA license emissions and discharges from mine surfaces and tips.
31. The EU will continue to exert an influence. A current proposal for member states to reduce Nitrogen Oxide (NOx) exposure limits by a factor of 10 would make it extremely difficult for mines to continue using diesel engines or explosives below ground. .
32. The Heads of European State Mining Authorities Conference meets once per year. It is independent of the EU Commission and has on occasions successfully lobbied the Commission where emerging proposals could have a significant adverse effect on mining industries. It is currently lobbying on the NOx and respirable crystalline silica exposure limits .
33. There is also an EU Standing Working Party (ACSH-SWP) for the Mining and Other Extractive Industries which scrutinises and advises the European Commission on emerging proposals. This is a sub-group of the main EU Advisory Committee of Safety and Health, and so is part of the Commission's formal advisory structures. Its principal function is to give advice in relation to health, safety and environmental issues, including commenting on discussion documents and draft policy proposals. Through its involvement HSE has repeatedly advocated goal setting rather than prescriptive policies and has sought to ensure that policy proposals achieve safety objectives whilst minimising negative effects on British businesses. The UK has been represented by a government (HSE) and employer representative since the formation of the SWP.

Production and Service Trends

34. Production from deep coal mines will reduce over the period covered by the strategy. Production from non-coal mines will remain at about the same level.

35. The mining technologies and techniques are generally well established and have evolved over many years. It is unlikely that there will be any significant technological innovation within the sector during the life of the strategy.
36. The number of mines used for storage, controlled waste disposal and other purposes is increasing slowly. Two mines contain significant defence infrastructure.
37. HSE's records indicate that the tourist and adventure activities mines sector includes nearly 40 mines and is increasing slowly. It is difficult to estimate precisely annual visitor numbers to tourist mines but it is likely to be well in excess of one million.
38. Under current legislation all coal mines have to belong to a mines rescue scheme approved by the Secretary of State. Only one such scheme has ever been approved. It has not been financially viable for several years and has been increasingly cross-subsidised by income generated by the provider from other, non-mining, sources, principally extensive training activities to other sectors. The provider has stated that they will not be able to sustain the scheme beyond April 2015. The proposed new mining regulations allow a more flexible approach.

Summary of strategic issues

- Coal sector small and continues to reduce in size
- Most non-coal mines are small with only three employers employing more than 50 people
- Relatively few employees in comparison with other industry sectors
- Legislation will change, mostly to a more goal setting framework
- Maintaining an effective mines rescue service appropriate to the needs of a smaller sector
- Diverse range of operations and functions from deep coal mines to tourist mines
- Complex stakeholder relationships
- Use of deep mines for other purposes will increase steadily.

2. Health and safety issues

1. Major hazards issues predominate with the main concerns being fire, explosion, inrushes, major rock falls, transport through shafts and mass transport below ground. The major hazard risks are largely confined to the premises and there is little potential for off site effects, other than from tip failures. Dangerous tip failures have largely been eliminated by the actions taken following the 1966 Aberfan disaster. Some tips failure still occur, such as the 2013 incident at Hatfield Colliery where a tip moved 40m over three days and led to the closure of a four track rail corridor.
2. Underground mine fires have the potential to affect large parts of a mine and put significant numbers of those underground at risk. The incidence of significant mine fires has decreased in recent years with mine operators making improvements in the management of this critical risk.
3. There were 15 fatal accidents in mines between 2006 and 2011, ten of them in large mines and four in one incident in a small coal mine. HSE's investigations indicate that many fatal and major injury accidents in the past few years can be traced back to weaknesses in major hazard risk management.
4. The contraction within the coal sector has resulted in a loss of corporate memory as many experienced leaders left the industry. Improving leadership, developing and reinforcing competencies, putting in place better competence management arrangements, and improving safety performance measurement are key objectives within the sector.
5. Competence development at all levels is a key challenge. Since 2011 the sector has significantly increased its engagement with MPQC, to develop a range of NVQs and other training opportunities.
6. Basic training of mining professionals remains a concern as there are only two higher educational institutes providing mining-related training. A continued supply of graduates, gap analyses, and providing additional training and development are all factors that mine operators will need to consider more carefully going forwards to secure that enough suitably qualified and competent people are available to run their businesses.
7. The relatively low numbers of major injury accidents in this small sector makes analysis difficult. Not all operators have robust near miss reporting system that is well-resourced. Neither is there an industry wide body of data that might enable trend analysis.
8. Statutory provisions require mines to observe, measure, and record a great deal of health and safety related information. There is an opportunity for the sector to more effectively use this data to provide information that will help focus safety activities where the risk is the greatest. Similarly there are opportunities to develop major hazard safety performance measures and improve the analysis of the sector's safety performance.

9. The sector is generally good at resourcing safety representatives to undertake safety inspections and in running events such as safety days. However, safety inspections often tend to focus much more on the work environment than work processes and there would be benefits from ensuring that safety representatives were able to understand underlying safety management issues. In some operations the safety inspection system is relatively detached from other health and safety management processes. Consequently the sector does less well in reacting to issues raised during safety inspections. This remains an opportunity for the sector.
10. Ageing infrastructure on critical items of plant such as winding systems require close attention to maintenance management and are priority areas under 'Avoiding Catastrophe' within the strategy.
11. Large mines may work up to 10km from the shafts and those mines need to be well prepared in the event of an emergency situation. Well defined escape and rescue strategies must be in place, backed up by a viable mines rescue service. The proposed new legislative framework needs to facilitate a different approach to mines rescue provision for coal mines away from the current unaffordable arrangements.
12. Work-related safety issues arise from the short term effects of working in hot and humid conditions, such as the risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Operators of mines with hot and humid conditions are generally good at acclimatising workers, giving dietary advice, providing chilled drinking water, and providing medical surveillance. There has been limited progress since 2011 in considering how temperature and humidity might be progressively reduced. As this is likely to involve a fundamental shift in approach to the design of mine layouts any action is necessarily medium to long term.
13. The sector has in order to optimise the investment on high cost equipment has usually worked various shift patterns. As the larger mines have developed further from the shafts there has been a move towards alternative shift patterns (including weekends) often in parallel with increases in overall shift length shift lengths
14. In tourist mines the principal risks are to members of the public and arise from transport through vertical shafts and mass transport below ground on cableways and trains.

Work-related ill health issues

15. Working conditions in mines have improved greatly over the years but mineworkers can still be exposed to a range of hazardous dusts, gases and other substances. Information from the state compensation scheme for occupational respiratory diseases among mine workers shows that prevalence rates have fallen but due to the long latency period new cases are still being diagnosed, mainly among retired mine workers who are beyond the scope of this strategy.

16. Legislation introduced in 2007 tightened the controls on exposure to inhalable dusts in coal mines. The current regulatory reform process proposes to bring the framework into much closer alignment with COSHH, and should bear down further on the prevalence of coal miners' pneumoconiosis in the long term. The adequate control of exposure to coal dust and respirable crystalline silica will remain a priority for the coal sector.
17. Other issues centre around Musculo Skeletal Disorders (MSD), exposure to hazardous substances (CO, NO_x and diesel particulates), and uncertainties around the long-term effects of working in hot and humid conditions.
18. Exposure limits are likely to continue to be reduced over time and this will require the sector to introduce increasingly tighter controls. If Britain adopts the recommendation from the EU's Standing Committee on Occupational Exposure Limits (SCOEL) to reduce the NO₂ exposure limit by a factor of 10 (to 0.2mg/m³) the continued use of diesel engines in mines may not be possible. Engineering controls on diesel exhaust emissions and dust from mineral cutting machines have probably reached the limit of what is practicable. However it is possible that further reductions in exposures might be achieved by adjusting working practices. The reduction in exposure limits will in some cases present a challenge for exposure measurement technologies for other industries as well as mines.
19. MSDs arising from the use of vibrating equipment are generally well understood and the sector deals with them well. Vibrating equipment is eliminated where possible and health surveillance has identified people at higher risk. Deployment procedures ensure that those workers do not use such equipment.
20. Whole Body Vibration affects far fewer people and newer vehicles fitted with rubber tyres, and designed specifically for the sector are much better ergonomically than older models, although very few remain of any type.
21. Exposure measurement and medical surveillance within the sector is generally very good at larger mines, and appropriate to the health risks at most smaller mines. This driven in part by statutory requirements but also recognition among larger employers that many mining jobs are physically challenging.
22. The impact of shift working patterns, shift length, the relative environment and the nature of the role relative to fatigue are all factors which if not adequately considered could increase the risk to the individual and the control of the major hazards

Summary of health and safety issues

- Potential for catastrophic incident through fire, explosion, flood, collapse, etc.
- Loss of knowledge at leadership level of the hazards and risks of the industry
- Limited data and metrics for monitoring major hazard safety performance (leading and lagging indicators).

- Ageing infrastructure (e.g. winding systems)
- Challenging work environment
- Maintenance of effective emergency arrangements, including the availability of a mines rescue service
- Occupational health risks, particularly long latency respirable disease risks arising from exposure to harmful dusts and gases
- Possible further reductions in work exposure limits for respirable crystalline silica, DEEEs and NO₂
- Changes in shift working patterns as mines progress further might impact the control of major hazards

3. Strategy goals

The following aims and objectives have been devised to address the issues highlighted in this sector strategy and will contribute towards delivering the Health and Safety Strategy for Great Britain. They cover the particular strategic goals of: Leadership; Involving the Workforce; Avoiding Catastrophe; Building Competence; and Creating Safer, Healthier Workplaces.

Strategy Goal: Leadership

Aim 1

Recognising the value of health and safety leadership is vital and that demonstrating this is what will make the difference to the industry. Senior mining company executives are the sector leaders that will set the safety culture of any organisation. The distinction between leaders and managers is clear (leaders set direction and managers facilitate the journey), yet both roles have to be able to engage the workforce. Effective Health and Safety leadership will be achieved through demonstrated, authentic leadership behaviours.

Objectives

- Leaders lead by example. They set the safety culture and identifiable behaviours and do not turn a blind eye to poor behaviours and standards that increase the likelihood of major incidents or hazards.
- They identify appropriate training and development strategies to provide effective leadership at all key levels within the management structure.
- Leaders set realistic and measurable targets for themselves to attend and actively participate in mine health and safety management processes.
- Leaders set targets for those in senior management posts at mines to carry out health and safety over inspections, and monitor performance.
- The HSE will support the strategy by focusing on major hazard management and leadership

Activities for delivery

- Senior leaders continue make regular underground visits focused on major hazard safety
- All leaders receive major hazard leadership training or development
- Mine operators receive reports of the number health and safety over-inspections carried out and their outcomes
- The focus of the safety management system will move towards assessing the inputs into the process [for example...] rather than concentrating on the outcomes.
- HSE will continue its prioritised strategic leadership interventions at higher hazard mines to help leaders assess their own performance at company and mine level, and to develop and implement strategies and plans to address any shortcomings

Strategy Goal: Involving the workforce

Aim 2

Mine operators will work effectively with their staff to tackle major hazard and other health and safety issues within their organisations

Objectives

- Leaders within companies and unions regularly and constructively engage people at all levels to establish a shared perspective of the health and safety priorities and agree how best to address them;
- Leaders work together to develop safety representatives' inspections to focus equally on: work processes (safe/unsafe acts observations) and the working environment;
- All safety representatives at mines work together during safety inspections to improve their quality and effect
- Senior managers at mines give visible support to the health and safety representatives' inspection regimes
- Workforce representatives work together and co-operate constructively with mine operators and managers in taking forward initiatives designed to improve health and safety performance, particularly in relation to avoiding catastrophe.

Activities for delivery

- Where necessary. mine managers, supervisors and safety representatives receive additional training to enable them to work together more effectively to identify, communicate and deal with major hazard/risk issues, including determining the underlying causes of significant incidents and near misses
- Senior managers will ensure that they personal safety activities are completed to a good standard.
- HSE continues to engage mine operators, safety representatives and other stakeholders:
 - in reviewing progress with the mine's major hazard intervention activities
 - during reactive work (incident investigation etc)
 - more generally in relation to current and emerging issues and trends
- Intervention plans include accompanying safety representatives on a safety inspection and attending a safety committee meeting at each mine
- Intervention plans include looking at SMS to see how issues raised in various inspection and reporting regimes are closed out and how key health and safety information is communicated at the mine and beyond

Strategy goal: avoiding catastrophe

Aim 3

Mine operators understand fully the range of major hazards at their mines and have in place procedures to ensure the risks from these hazards are properly controlled.

Objectives

- Leaders understand the nature of the major hazard risks that can arise in their businesses and monitor the extent to which control systems are in place
- The coal sector continues to work to reduce to zero the number of mine fires by 2017
- The non-coal sector works to keep high potential fires to zero to 2017
- The sector demonstrates that it has in place appropriate procedures for identifying specific risks that may arise from ageing structures and equipment such as shafts and winding systems, and other structures whose collapse could result in multiple fatalities

Activities for delivery

- Mine operators will take further steps to identify and prioritise key major hazard safety performance indicators and ensure that adequate arrangements are in place to identify trends and take appropriate preventative action, and where necessary commissioning research and arranging for scientific and technical support.
- Mine operators will ensure that adequately resourced near-miss reporting arrangements are in place
- Leaders ensure that every fire is investigated fully to:
 - identify its immediate and underlying causes
 - ensure effective measures are taken to minimise the likelihood of recurrence
- and to communicate the findings and actions to the workforce
- HSE will further develop its hazard and risk based intervention strategy
- HSE will continue its prioritised major hazard interventions at higher hazard mines

Aim 4

Mine operators have in place suitable arrangements for measuring and benchmarking their safety performance

Objectives:

- The sector identifies and makes use of appropriate major hazard safety performance measures and improves its analysis of the health and safety data it collects
- The sector reviews and improves its mechanisms for sharing good practice and learning from major hazard incidents and high potential near miss events.

Activities for delivery

- Leaders will take further steps to identify and prioritise key major hazard safety performance indicators and ensure that adequate arrangements are in place to identify trends and take appropriate preventative action when necessary
- Leaders will ensure that adequately resourced near-miss reporting arrangements are in place
- Leaders will continue to share learning from successes and failures through MISLG and other forums
- HSE will investigate accidents, incidents and complaints in accordance with its criteria
- HSE will prepare an annual summary report to MISLG on its findings from all interventions

Aim 5

The sector has in place an appropriate regulatory framework.

Objectives

- The mining legislative reform package of regulations and supporting guidance is completed
- The sector understands and is prepared for the change

Activities for delivery

- HSE will develop the proposed regulations and guidance through to implementation
- HSE will continue to consult relevant stakeholders to understand the key changes, help them prepare for implementation and transition, and will continue to monitor and advise on compliance post-implementation
- During 2014 and early 2015 HSE will undertake a series of interventions targeted at effective escape and rescue arrangements under the proposed new regulations, to help coal mines in particular prepare for the transition

Strategy Goal: Building Competence

Aim 6

Employees at all levels are developed to appropriate levels of competence with respect to the tasks they undertake and their responsibilities for health and safety risk control within the sector

Objectives

- Leaders within mine operating companies will assess their companies against HSE's competence management framework to identify safety-critical activities, determine key competencies, prioritise areas for improvement, and implement training, instruction and mentoring programmes as appropriate;
- The mining sector will continue to work together to develop and implement programmes designed to reinforce the health and safety competencies of employees (linked to the 'Involving the Workforce' Strategic Goal);

Activities for delivery

- Mine operators will ensure that arrangements are in place for managerial and supervising staff at all levels to further develop the knowledge and competence required to effectively implement safety management systems and to demonstrate effective safety leadership;
- The mining sector will continue to progress work with a range of training providers to develop training opportunities that include health and safety requirements in competencies for mine workers.
- Through participation in industry forums sector representatives will facilitate the sharing of good practice in health and safety competence management and approaches to upskilling
- HSE will undertake a programme of interventions to assess the effectiveness of the competence management system for safety-critical activities at company and mine level.

Strategy Goal: Creating Healthier, Safer Workplaces

Aim 7

The mining sector will effectively manage key health issues.

Objectives

- The sector identifies steps that might be taken to reduce exposure to excessive heat and humidity and develops a plan for implementing effective measures.
- The sector recognises the age of some of the workforce and has suitable medical and other screening process in place to manage the wider health issues

Activities for delivery

- Operators of hot and humid mines will identify how, in the short to medium term, working practices might be changed to reduce exposure to high temperature and humidity, and consider how in the long term mines might be planned to reduce temperature and humidity.
- Operators will assess the effect of longer working shifts on the health of workers.
- Development of suitable medical screening arrangements, relative to the mining sector
- Encouragement of the workforce to attend these screening facilities
- Reduction in the broader health issues affecting operators and their families within the mining sector

Strategy goal: Taking a wider perspective

Aim 8

The sector engages with the wider health and safety community

Objectives

- There are no specific objectives

Activities for delivery

- HSE will continue to engage with the EU through its UK representative to the ACSH-SWP
- HSE will canvass sector stakeholders on developing issues that may adversely affect deep mining operations

4. Ways to achieve the aims and objectives

These aims and objectives have been developed in discussions at tripartite meetings between industry, trades union representatives and HSE. The disposition of the sector, which has only a few large operators, and relatively small trades unions, is such that the few remaining larger operators will be best placed to lead on matters that fall principally to the sector. Trades unions will play their part by making constructive contributions and encouraging their members to engage with the health and safety issues affecting their mines.

The Mining Industry Safety Leadership Group should consolidate its role as the main forum for promoting good practice, exchanging information and sharing success. In addition to delivering core regulatory functions HSE's priorities are designed to support improved health and safety performance in the sector. The leadership, competence and safety performance measurement intervention process has been rolled out and will continue. HSE will continue to engage with employers and workers to develop further the mines major hazard intervention plan.

5. Roles and skills

The diverse range of hazards and risks in much of the sector means that those running and regulating the industry need high levels of experience and professional expertise.

6. Potential for success/impact and rationale

There have been some successes. Continued success will depend on everyone continuing to play their part, which in itself is a challenge given the small and shrinking size of the sector and the consequent dwindling of both operator and TU resources. There is no other forum where both coal mine and non-coal mine operators and TUs meet, and it is the vehicle most likely to stimulate improvements. For this reason HSE will continue to support the work of the SLG by providing a secretariat and sufficient front-line resource to play its part.

7. Political/Societal issues, mandatory work and statutory functions

Most priority activities within the strategy are directly related to the goals within the Strategy for Health and Safety. The following HSE activities do not readily relate to a strategy goal but are nevertheless considered a priority.

Statutory functions

- Make provision for the storage of abandoned mine plans and access to the information contained on them.
- Approve statutory mining qualifications and issue certificates in accordance with approved criteria.

Advice and support to Other Government Departments and Europe

- Participate in the European Commission's Standing Working Party for Mining and Other Extractive Industries to monitor regulatory and other developments that might affect the mining sector and ensure that safety objectives are achieved without placing British mining at a disadvantage.
- Participate in the Heads of European State Mining Authorities Group to identify issues of joint interest and to make representations to the Commission where necessary.
- Provide intervention and technical support (under a fees for service agreement) to the Northern Ireland Health and Safety Agency for mining and related activities.