

PURPOSE AND STRATEGY

THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT

1.1 The idea of an NHSU first emerged into the wider public gaze in the Labour manifesto for the 2001 General Election. This promised that “we will set up a University of the NHS to guarantee for staff at all levels opportunities for training and career development”. Discussions with some of those closely involved at the time indicate that the idea was driven by three distinct objectives -

- *improving access to lifelong education and training*, in particular for the “non-professional” staff groups. This in turn was based on the view that “lifelong learning and development are key to delivering the vision of patient-centred care in the NHS” (*Working Together, Learning Together*, DH, November 2001)
- *enforcing corporacy*, in other words helping unite the NHS round shared values (for example, customer care), and increasing the effectiveness of staff by improving their knowledge of the NHS system
- *improving value for money and quality from education and training procurement*: there was a strong sense (supported by previous Audit Commission and NAO reports) that the NHS should obtain better value for its >£3bn. annual expenditure

EARLY EVOLUTION OF PURPOSE AND ROLE

1.2 Early work to pin down the strategic purpose of NHSU was led by the DH Strategy Unit. An August 2001 paper proposed that NHSU should –

- provide a core curriculum
- signpost existing provision for all staff
- commission new products
- quality assure and accredit

1.3 This helped clarify some early priorities for the proposed organisation. However, it did not set out where NHSU should be positioned in the training and education provision workflow –

- as a national level needs analysis and intelligence-providing body?
- as a purchaser?
- as a broker / facilitator of access to improved training?
- as a direct provider of training?

1.4 Nor was there anything more than a broad-based description of NHSU by reference to other players in the already crowded health education and training