

- give it credibility in influencing and commissioning from the higher education sector
- enable it to attract high calibre academic staff
- symbolise and reinforce its position as an autonomous and challenging *critical friend* to the NHS.

2.6 The first two of these arguments carry some force, but there are a number of potential disadvantages of University title -

- as a University NHSU would be fully independent of DH and the NHS. It would set its own objectives and would not be tied to those envisaged by its creators. It is doubtful whether such a degree of independence would be compatible with its corporate role. It is worth noting that, as far as we know, no corporate university has acquired University title
- there is an inherent conflict between the role of a University - essentially a provider – and NHSU's intended strategic and commissioning roles. At best, intricate arrangements would be needed to ensure that conflicts of interest did not arise
- NHSU has assumed that, while it will seek funding from a range of sources, direct subsidy from DH will continue to form a significant revenue stream. It is questionable whether, as one University among many, an NHS *University* should receive such significant direct funding without market-testing
- the inevitable focus of a University is degree-level education and research. It is unclear whether, from the outset, this could be squared with the priority Ministers placed on NHSU's role in basic training for less skilled NHS staff groups. This became even more of an issue with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Universities UK, which reduced the scope for NHSU involvement in degree-level training for health professionals
- The impact of the MoU was reinforced by a MORI poll of NHS learning needs commissioned by NHSU which indicated that by and large doctors and nurses consider themselves to be relatively well served already compared to other NHS staff groups.

2.7 It appears that, until recently, the impact of these factors – and the full implications of University title – were insufficiently understood.

SUMMARY

2.8 We believe that the disadvantages identified are significant. In our view NHSU's quest for University title –

- carries major strategic implications which have not been fully thought through
- has added to confusion over NHSU's role