

- crucially, the partnerships **cannot** (because of the way they were set up) be used as a shortlist for future procurements of education and training provision

SUMMARY

3.20 NHSU delivery of training programmes is the most easily measured part of its remit and one against which – as NHSU acknowledges – its early reputation will be built. While the quality of NHS output is acknowledged, its speed of response, rollout plans, lack of prices, and late development of a prioritisation system give cause for concern.

3.21 It would be wrong to measure NHSU purely against delivery of training products. On any interpretation, this is only one part of its remit. NHSU's significant expenditure is only justifiable against a much more ambitious remit – that of creating an infrastructure to improve access to education and training and that, of acting as a co-ordinating body in this sphere. Although it is clear that significant groundwork has been done we continue to have concerns -

- NHSU has been very late to start to address the need for a systematic relationship with its stakeholders, be they NHS purchasers or higher education providers (witness the uncertainty over the role of the academic partnerships) and has perhaps relied too much on the development of informal relationships
- linked with this, the infrastructure it has sought to put in place is poorly understood by stakeholders and much work will be needed if it is to be utilised as intended by NHSU
- there are real risks in NHSU proceeding with major infrastructure initiatives ahead of clarification of its role and fit within the education and training systems. Procurement of the virtual campus is a good example and we support its termination pending clarification of its purpose and greater stakeholder involvement. The use of or adaptation of existing infrastructure (eg. LearnDirect, OU) needs to be fully considered before bespoke systems are commissioned
- NHSU's expenditure of £72m in 2003-05 can only be justified as large-scale investment which will reap major dividends in the future. This creates a potential for embarrassment if questions are asked about the value for money of NHSU. The risks identified above mean that very rapid steps will need to be taken if the threat of embarrassment is not to be prolonged well into the future
- NHSU's approach has placed too little weight on establishing constructive relationships with and a close understanding of what its customers need and are prepared to pay for. Yet paying attention to this is crucial in the new NHS, where power and budgets have largely been devolved to the front line