

CONCLUSION

6.1 Overall, our assessment of NHSU's performance in its first years can be summarised as follows.

PROGRESS IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS

6.2 Much of NHSU's effort over the last two years has gone into laying foundations for future delivery – whether through the development of training provision or the setting up of infrastructure to improve access to training and influence over providers. Therefore the crucial questions are whether this investment has been appropriate and over what timescale is it likely to bear fruit.

6.3 We have reservations on both counts –

- our primary concern centres round the fact that NHSU's investment has not been preceded by sufficient clarification of purpose nor complemented by sufficient effort to set up the systems or stakeholder engagement that will ensure full utilisation and success
- some work is now underway to remedy this – in particular with respect to the selection of NHSU's priorities for training and development and a new business model. Both are late in the day.
- the absence of robust market surveys or prices for NHSU's provision means the real extent of take-up – once prices are available – is hard to judge
- significant and rapid further work will be needed to clarify the purpose of projects, and secure full stakeholder engagement if a return on the £72m investment up to March 2005 is to be realised
- at best, this return will take some time to materialise and NHSU will need to make real strides to overcome a reputation for over-promising and under-delivering. The damage that NHSU's reputation has already suffered means that radical change is likely to be needed if lost ground is to be regained
- in the meantime, DH is exposed to the risk of significant embarrassment if the value for money delivered by NHSU were to be probed.

GOVERNANCE

6.4 We have three observations -

- the successful development of the *Joint Strategy Committee* as a key mechanism for engagement with and oversight of NHSU by its DH and NHS stakeholders will be crucial