

Responses to Disability Employment Centre of Excellence Options Paper.

1.1 Why do we need a Centre?

- Services in the space at present are inconsistent in terms of quality and accessibility.
- Some of this is being driven by lack of quality assurance and oversight.
- We need to make it easy for employers to find information about supports that are available to them and how to access them.
- There needs to be a central body overseeing capacity building activities for providers and employers.

1.2 What should be the core functions of the Centre?

- Support the broad functions outlined in the summary of information received from stakeholders with the exception of suggested research focusing on individual capacity building in specific cohorts. The lack of people with disability in the workforce is overwhelmingly a function of social and environmental conditions as opposed to individual capacity.

2.1 Who can the Centre assist? Are there any groups that are missing?

- The list given in the options paper is comprehensive but the focus should very much be on employers and sector capacity.

2.2 How can the Centre work with stakeholders to increase the employment rate of people with disability?

- As stated above, the lack of participation of people with disability in mainstream employment is overwhelmingly a function of the environments in which they wish to work lacking the capacity to include them. The historic emphasis on individual capacity is the legacy of an outdated model of disability. Focus of capacity building activities must be shifted towards employer capacity. Doing this in a coordinated and consistent way nationally is the best way to reverse the trend in disability employment figures cited earlier in the options paper.

2.3 What can the Centre do to increase the capability and capacity of employment service providers?

- Mandate specific training in terms of content and frequency of updates as a contingent part of access to funding.

- Provide an easy to navigate, central repository of resources relating to how employers can support specific cohorts of staff.
- Provide easy access to the available support programs, schemes and funding.
- Support them with resources and training on person-centred practice and couple this with initiatives that preference meaningful outcomes for employees ahead of arbitrary measures around rates of placement. Current incentive structures push providers to work to place job seekers in any job as quickly as possible.

3.1 What are your views on the models presented?

- Statutory agency seems to be the best model out of those put forward here given our perspective that focus needs to be shifted towards environmental/sector capacity.

3.3 What can the Government take from existing models of Centre of Excellence? What should be ruled out?

- Rule out the idea that a statutory agency will have less focus on training and research if it also has a regulatory function. Regulations have a desired best practice ideal to which they aim to direct providers and this ideal could also form the basis of a suite of resources and research projects. If the training, upskilling and reviewing cycle is seen as iterative and bodies are set up to manage this process as one that is ongoing then there is no reason why it can't perform both functions. Any hesitation based on the scale of the undertaking should be assessed in light of the abject failure of previous attempts to improve outcomes in this space.

4.1 Where could the Centre be best place (for example, within a government agency, a university, or a stand-alone institution)?

- Within a government agency would be preferable so that it is subject to frameworks and guidelines around consulting with DROs and people with disability.

4.3 What elements of the proposed Centre and its functions should be prioritised?

- Building the evidence base and best practice materials.
- Rolling out training and resources.
- Development of necessary legislation to support future regulatory functions.