Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland: Are Changes Required to Meet Current Economic and Social Needs?

by

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Abstract

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Apprenticeship today is in decline and has been over the past four years. However, now would appear to be the opportune time to consider changes to the current Standards Based Apprenticeship System, first, to allow a broader base for inclusion from all sections of society and also to update the current curriculum to meet the needs of all learners. This research investigated the experiences and sought opinions of young trade apprentices throughout Phase 1 and Phase 2 of their apprenticeship. Nine people were also interviewed from FÁS, this included seven instructors, one ex instructor who works on assessment development and one senior member from management. Their opinions were sought due to their high level of experience concerning standards based apprenticeship.

Eighty five apprentices took part in a survey from a total population of one hundred and twenty seven apprentices. Questionnaires were distributed to gather information on their thoughts and opinions on year one of their apprenticeship, also to ascertain factual information relating to their level of education and similar points relating to apprenticeship. Interviews took place which gathered valuable data important to this research work.

This research has revealed that change is required in certain areas; the increasing high number of entrants with leaving cert would suggest that the pathway for many is fast closing. It is suggested that a number of changes need to take place within the current apprenticeship model. A number of recommendations have been made to accommodate weaker learners and also to enhance the learning experience for all within a revised apprenticeship system.
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<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>An Céard Comhairle</td>
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<td>AONTAS</td>
<td>National Adult Learning Organisation</td>
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<td>AnCO</td>
<td>An Chomhairle Oiliuna</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIBB</td>
<td>Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>CDM</td>
<td>Competency Determination Mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>C &amp; J</td>
<td>Carpentry and Joinery</td>
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<td>CTC</td>
<td>Community Training Centre</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Central Statistics Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>DATI</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIT</td>
<td>Dublin Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>European Economic Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETB</td>
<td>Educational Training Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>FÁS</td>
<td>Foras Aiseanne Saothair (Training &amp; Employment Authority)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FETAC</td>
<td>Further Education and Training Awards Council</td>
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<td>HETAC</td>
<td>Higher Education Training and Awards Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>IUQB</td>
<td>Irish Universities Quality Board</td>
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<td>NAAC</td>
<td>National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee</td>
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<td>NALA</td>
<td>National Adult Literacy Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARC</td>
<td>Naac Assessment Review Committee</td>
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<td>NQAI</td>
<td>National Qualifications Authority of Ireland</td>
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<td>NSB</td>
<td>National Skills Bulletin</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development</td>
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<td>PESP</td>
<td>Programme for Economic and Social Progress</td>
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<td>QQI</td>
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<td>RAPS</td>
<td>Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>RTC</td>
<td>Regional Technical College</td>
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<td>SAI</td>
<td>Sociological Association of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOLAS</td>
<td>Seirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEC</td>
<td>Vocational Education Committee</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<td>WBE</td>
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Chapter One
Context of the Research

1.1 Introduction

First of all I think it is appropriate to give background information of my role in relation to this research and why it is important to me. I started serving my time as a carpenter and joiner in 1972 over a five year period. I served my time in a joinery workshop and have since worked in all areas of my trade over a thirty year period prior to becoming a C&J (Carpentry and Joinery) instructor with FÁS at the beginning of 2004. It was just prior to starting to serve my time that in 1967 AnCO (An Chomhairle Oiliuna) was set up with the responsibility for apprenticeship (O’Connor and Harvey 2001). My current role as an instructor within Foras Aiseanna Saothair (FÁS) means that I instruct apprentices during Phase 2 of their apprenticeship which takes place during the second half of year one of their apprenticeships (FÁS 2013). It is during Phase 2 that the foundations are laid to allow a successful pathway for learners onto future phases of their apprenticeship. Changes within apprenticeship are currently under way, with SOLAS having been established, the formation of the Educational Training Boards (ETB) and the gradual integration of FÁS into the ETB’s. Initially FÁS and apprenticeship will stay with SOLAS (FÁS Intranet 2013), however the eventual location of apprenticeship is currently unclear.

1.2 Subject of the Research

Vast changes have taken place with apprenticeship since the late sixties when time served was acceptable to allow qualification as a tradesman, to the current model of today; which is the standards based apprenticeship model, with set standards having to be achieved to allow qualification for the National Craft Certificate (FETAC 2012). This study will focus on the current Standards Based Apprenticeship model to determine what if any changes are required; various trades within year one of apprenticeship will also be a focus of attention within this research. I would see apprenticeship as a time for learning; it is vitally important that the learning which takes place both on and off-the-job meet current and future needs of all, more so the apprentice. One important point in relation to this study is apprenticeship numbers,
what they currently are and what they were at the peak of the construction boom. While apprentice registrations across the trades differ, carpentry and joinery will be used to draw comparisons from. In the Annual Report presented by FÁS in 2011 it gives a breakdown of registrations for that year (FÁS 2011), also included will be registration figures for 2012 (FÁS Intranet 2013). The total number of apprentices in training for 2011 was 13,001, with new registrations standing at 1,307 (FÁS 2011). The new entrants for carpentry and joinery were 72; while in contrast the number of registrations in 2006 for C and J was 1,907 (FÁS 2006). The question on this point is, are these low numbers sustainable? It has been stated in the Hunt Report (2011, p. 49) ‘that the Minister for Education and Skills is committed to a major review of the apprenticeship scheme’. In this research work all elements within apprenticeship will be reviewed, including entry requirements, adjustments to the current apprenticeship programme, recognition of prior learning and pathways to apprenticeship to determine if all within society have the opportunity to avail of a place within current and future apprenticeship programmes.

1.3 Purpose of the Research
The decision on a topic for this research work appeared to be a natural choice, having spent thirty years working in the trade prior to becoming a carpentry and joinery instructor. If we look at the word ‘apprentice’ it means as defined clearly by (Collins English dictionary, 2007) ‘someone working for a skilled person for a fixed period in order to learn his or her trade’. The term comes from a French word “aprendre” which means to learn and the Latin “apprendre” which means to apprehend (Harvey and O’Connor 2001). It is this capture and retention of knowledge through training that can provide the skills to young people to allow a gradual integration into working life (Harvey and O’Connor 2001). In this research work I will argue that apprenticeship is in ‘a time’ when change is required, with little or no opportunity for young people to enter an apprenticeship, this being highlighted by the low number of registrations in 2011 (FÁS 2011) and 2012 (FÁS Intranet). It is important that young people who may not do well in traditional education and may not aspire academically but do possess intelligence at a more practical level (Nyhan 2009), have the opportunity and support to allow this cohort of learners enter the apprenticeship system.
An important point to make is that the current apprenticeship model is well respected worldwide, with the performance of the Irish World Skills team in London in 2011 highlighting the high standard achieved with their average points placing them in 6th place out of 48 countries (DIT 2011). It has been found that in a survey undertaken in late 2006 and early 2007 of 7,513 apprentices who had gone through the apprenticeship system (FÁS and Conway 2007) as cited by Nyhan et al (2009, p.464) that the ‘level of satisfaction with the apprenticeship programme, without exception, was very high’. While this research is not setting out to undermine the current standards based system, it is however, setting out to further enhance the learning experience for the learner through evaluating the current system and introducing new idea’s generated through interviews and questionnaires which were carried out throughout the research process.

The Research Statement is as follows: ‘Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland: Are Changes Required to Meet Current Economic and Social Needs?’

This needs to be investigated to determine if apprenticeship should be allowed to decline to such a level in some trades that there are no apprentices going through the apprenticeship system, this relates mainly to the construction trades. Redundancy within apprenticeship, particularly within the construction sector will need to be addressed as according to Steedman (2010, p.29) that ‘those in apprenticeship are also (2010) severely affected by redundancy before completion’. This research is attempting to discover what changes may take place and if these changes will benefit the apprenticeship programme, the stakeholders and more importantly, the learner. It is envisaged that this research will reflect a need for change, the need to introduce new elements into the apprenticeship programme, such as the benefits of a blended learning approach in some of the trades and how they may benefit the learner. The overall aim of this research is to evaluate the current model and determine if it meets the needs of the country and society, now and in the future.

1.4 Objectives

There are a number of key objectives relating to this research work. Although in the current climate change is taking place on an on-going basis with the break up of FÁS and the current uncertainty surrounding apprenticeship.
These objectives are clearly outlined as follows:

- To determine if change is required to the current apprenticeship model?
- To determine if the increasing high level of entrants with leaving certificate entering apprenticeship will stop early school leavers and those with the Junior Certificate or equivalent from gaining an apprenticeship in the future?
- To determine if the current low levels of registrations are sustainable?
- To determine what changes are required to the current curriculum to meet and enhance the learning experience for all entering apprenticeship?
- Who should be responsible for delivering apprenticeship in the future?

1.5 Rationale for the Research
This research is important because, first of all it relates to the current economic climate and also the virtual collapse of the construction industry within this country. This is also reflected by the low number of registrations taken place within apprenticeship over the last four years. Should this stop young people from gaining an apprenticeship, should opportunities be made available for those who are less academic with supports put in place to bring this set of learners to a standard required for entry into a trade? Recent reports in the Sunday Independent (2012) highlighted the fact that ‘Irish trades people are highly sought after because of the high level of skills that they have’. According to an article in the Irish Times and as stated by Kenny (2012) in relation to the high number of people emigrating, with ‘35,800 of these in the age group 15 -24’. Options should be made available to young people who want to stay and work in this country, preferably with more opportunities available to gain entry into a trade. The level of female entrants into apprenticeship is a concern, with the gender imbalance currently within apprenticeship clearly highlighted in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development review (OECD 2010). The Education System is currently undergoing change with the introduction of the Common Awards System (FETAC 2012), what changes are required to the current curriculum within apprenticeship to reflect this?

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Research Conducted
Three training centres within FÁS were surveyed to conduct this research project. The three training centres are Dundalk, Finglas and Tallaght training Centres,
Dundalk is in the North East Region, Finglas and Tallaght are in the greater Dublin Area. Apprentices within seven different trades were surveyed in the three training centres as mentioned. The survey was by way of a questionnaire, which was personally distributed by the researcher throughout the three training centres over a six week period. Prior approval was gained from relevant managers and instructors to allow this process to take place to an agreed timetable. The reason why this approach was taken with the questionnaires is clearly outlined in Chapter 3 (Methodology). The questionnaires were distributed in a well organised and timely manner, with instant access due to the collection method adopted. The information gathered through the questionnaire was combined with the findings of the interview process to create an overall picture of apprenticeship and sets out what changes are recommended for the future.

The interview process was relatively long with the arranging of interviews difficult due to unavailability of those to be interviewed, however a schedule was drawn up with commitments made by those concerned. This took place over an eight week period, again with the consent of relevant managers. The interview process worked well, however the transcribing and analysing of interview recordings were both arduous and time consuming. There were a number of limitations in relation to carrying out this work, getting a high number of apprentices for the questionnaires proved difficult with the limited number of classes running; also scheduling the interview process was extremely difficult due to the unavailability of instructors to suit both parties. The limited availability of information relating to this topic in Ireland soon became apparent, which led to an international perspective to be included relating to this research.

1.7 Plan of Development

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter is regarded as important in order to make the reader aware of what the research work entails, both in content and background to the topic being researched. It sets out to provide a broad overview of the research which was conducted and what it is about. The research asks what it is about, why it is important and the rationale behind this research. The Research Statement is indicated as are the objectives and limitations of the research work.
Chapter 2 - Literature Review
The literature reviewed for this dissertation covered a broad range. An international perspective was required, firstly due to the sparseness of information surrounding this topic in Ireland and also to include and review relevant literature surrounding various elements of apprenticeship abroad. Literature from countries such as Australia, Germany and the Netherlands were included to provide a broad perspective and also to provide a rationale for the literature under review.

Chapter 3 - Methodology
A mixed method approach was deemed appropriate for this research project, the reason for this is that factual information was required to draw comparisons on various elements in apprenticeship. The questionnaire was used to determine what level of education was obtained by apprentices prior to the start of their apprenticeship; all questions asked were designed so that they relate clearly to the objectives of the research conducted. A qualitative approach was used to illicit information from those who have vast experience working with the current apprenticeship model.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion
Chapter 4 will provide the findings of the results obtained from the survey work undertaken. This chapter will also provide a discussion on the results obtained. The findings are presented using tables and graphs to provide clarity, also to integrate discussions and findings drawing on literature material reviewed to draw conclusions in an unbiased way. It is important that the findings are clearly outlined and supported where applicable through the literature reviewed.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations
This chapter allows conclusions to be drawn from all the research carried out. It is important that the conclusions are made which are relevant to the information reviewed in an honest and unbiased way ensuring that the integrity of the research remains intact. The recommendations relating to this research will hopefully help drive policy in this area of learning where no apparent policy currently exists.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

First of all it is important that when a social research project is undertaken that all relevant literature is reviewed, both current literature and also prior literature about what is already known about this area of study (Bryman 2012). One element within a literature review according to Bryman (2012, p.100) is that it ‘must assist you in developing an argument’, it is the way in which this argument is developed and sustained (Bryman 2012) that will allow the research question to be answered.

This research will explore what can be done to enhance the learning experience for future apprentices, also how and what changes may need to be made to the current standards based apprenticeship and the curriculum within it. It is important to explore if enough is being done to allow a broader intake from all sections of society. Could inclusion of some topics to the current curriculum allow easier progression to further education, particularly those trades’ people who may be unemployed in the future? On-the-job training is a matter of concern and will also be looked at as part of the research.

2.2 Apprenticeship Registrations

Government policy relating to registrations within apprenticeship has been closely investigated to determine if current policy allows for expansion in this area. Apprenticeship in relation to registration has varied from 1997 when registrations across the trades were 5,500, this then stood at 8,290 in 2006, however they were at a relatively low figure of 1,307 in 2011 (FÁS Annual Report 2006 & 2011), this rose slightly to 1,435 in 2012 (FÁS Intranet 2013). In some trades the number of registrations were very low in 2012, with C and J (Carpentry and Joinery) standing at just 91, this in comparison to 1,902 in 2006. One important point of note is the gender imbalance that currently exists in apprenticeship today (2013), in 2012 the number of female apprentices stood at just 6 (0.4%). This point has been highlighted in an OECD (2010, p.18) review when concerns were raised in relation to the gender
imbalance, when it stated that ‘in 2004 less than 0.5% of registered apprentices in the first phase of apprenticeship were female’.

2.3 Apprenticeship in Ireland; Past and Present.
In order to understand the current apprenticeship model, a general overview of the history of apprenticeship and how it has progressed to its current format needs to be undertaken. The term Apprenticeship as defined by FÁS (2013) is a ‘system of employment focused training and education which enables a person to obtain the Skills, Knowledge and Competence required to perform effectively as a craftsperson in industry’, apprenticeship can also be seen as a way of young people acquiring the skills necessary to enter working life as a trades person (Harvey and O’Connor, 2001).

2.3.1 Early Apprenticeship
Apprenticeship has long been associated with learning at work; it is this learning that takes place while under the expert guidance of the master craftsman. It was in earlier times that various trades operated in a guild system, this system came into Ireland with the Normans. It was the guild system which controlled entry into various trades and in time evolved from craft unions into local federations and eventually in 1894 into the Congress of Trade Unions (Ryan 1993). The length of time to obtain full recognition as a craftsman was nine years, seven as an indentured apprentice and two as a journeyman. It was the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act in 1899 that marked the beginning of the technical education system in Ireland (Ryan 1993). The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) with the assistance of various committees set about establishing technical schools within the State. This according to Ryan (1993) as cited by Harvey and O’Connor et al (2001, p.333) indicates ‘that the number of technical schools increased from 15 when the DATI was established in 1900 to 65 in 1924’. It was following recommendations made by an advisory commission headed by J Ingram that the Government of the day introduced two new Acts, the Vocational Education Act in 1930 and the Apprenticeship Act in 1931. Various committees were set up in different regions to make rules relating to various elements linked to apprenticeship, these included wages, length of time served and also educational requirements were part of their remit (Garavan et al 1995). However, these Acts
according to Murphy (1977) as cited by Harvey and O’Connor et al (2001, p.333) ‘had little or no impact on apprentice education and training’. It is important to note that during the period from the early 1930s through to the 1960s that day release and night courses were organised by the Vocational Education Committees (VEC) and apprenticeship trade examinations were introduced by the Department of Education during this period of time (Harvey and O’Connor 2001).

Further efforts were made to regulate the apprenticeship system with the introduction of the Apprenticeship Act which was introduced in 1959 which attempted to address issues relating to the 1931 Act (Harvey and O Connor 2001). It was at this point that a national body was set up, An Céard Comhairle (ACC, the Apprenticeship Board), its remit was to examine various elements within apprenticeship (Garavan et al 1995). This new Act applied to all trades, it included various elements within apprenticeship, ranging from a system of examination to ensuring the release of apprentices for attendances at technical college.

2.3.2 AnCO 1967 - 1984
It was with the introduction of the Industrial Training Act of 1967 that saw the establishment of An Comhairle Oiliúna – AnCO. Its remit concentrated on three areas, namely the Training Advisory Service, Training for Individuals and Apprenticeship Training. This act also allowed for the imposition of a levy/grant scheme, one of the objectives of this scheme was to make firms aware of the benefits of systematic training (Garavan et al 1995).

While legislation in the 1967 Act gave AnCO the power to compel employers to release apprentices for off-the-job training, this as stated by Nyhan (2009, p459) that ‘in practice 40% of registered apprentices were not released’. The author of this research work served his time between 1973 and 1978 as a carpenter and joiner, the process at that time was that during year two and three of apprenticeship, one day per week throughout the academic year was spent on day release, after which time the junior trades exam were taken. This was followed by block release in year four at a Regional Technical College (RTCs), with the senior trades exams completed at the end of that off-the-job training, a point of note is that those who completed their
junior and senior trade exams successfully were entitled to the Pre-National Craft Certificate.

While this period of time with AnCO was primarily time served, there were a large number of apprentices who did do their Junior and Senior trade exams which were standards based which entitled them to the Pre-National Craft Certificate. It is important in order to allow those who may not find themselves at home in an academic school environment (Nyhan 2009), that an alternative pathway be found for those who leave school without adequate qualifications. Currently entry into Apprenticeship is FETAC level 3, although in a recent survey conducted with several apprenticeship groups relating to this research only 15% had junior cert (FETAC level 3, FETAC 2013), this does highlight the fact that only a small number of registrations at this level are taking place. Some lessons can be learned from other countries such as Australia and Germany in how various pathways exist for entry into apprenticeship, which will be covered later in this chapter.

The late seventies saw an expansion of the AnCO training centres, this being largely due to availability of grant-aid funding after Ireland joined the EEC in 1973. It was in 1973 that AnCO produced a discussion document ‘Apprenticeship – a new approach’ and with the agreement of the social partners a new revised system was implemented in September of 1976 (Harvey and O’Connor 2001). One such change was that the duration of apprenticeship was set at four years.

It was during this period as stated by Nyhan (2009, p460) that ‘the competence of AnCO instructors, who were highly qualified craftsmen with a long experience in industry but for the most part lacking a third level education qualification, was challenged by the education sector teachers trade unions’, this has changed considerably over the last decade with the majority of instructors within FÁS having obtained that third level qualification, notably at degree level. This would indicate that FÁS as an organisation have a pool of highly educated and highly experienced craftsmen as instructors who would be more than capable of delivering all off-the-job phases of the apprenticeship system. In a relevant report by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (2010, p44), it is stated that ‘FÁS has paid increasing attention to the pedagogical development of its instructors’. This
report highlights the fact that all teachers, trainers and instructors should have some pedagogical training, but this is not always the case. FÁS as an organisation has endeavoured to ensure that its instructors within apprenticeship have the academic qualifications to compliment their practical craft skills.

From the perspective of the supporting arguments it is this pedagogical development of its instructors to such a high standard that should be noted by Government when FÁS is finally disbanded and policy dictates who and where apprenticeship is delivered in the future. I argue that apprenticeship should stay within the newly formed Education Training Boards (ETBs), with FÁS instructors being utilised fully to deliver all phases of apprenticeship. Apart from having the skill base, all current FÁS centres have modern facilities in place to deliver this area of training.

2.3.3 The Standards Based Apprenticeship System

It was with the introduction of the White Paper on Manpower in 1986 that eventually led to the introduction of the current standards based apprenticeship system in 1991 in Ireland. One of the key proposals in this as cited by Garavan et al (1995, p76) was that ‘the apprenticeship system be revised and modernised with a view to develop a system based on standards achieved to ensure a satisfactory balance between supply and demand and at a reduced cost to the state while still maintaining quality’. It was following criticisms from employers and various parties that the White Paper also perceived apprenticeship as being ‘costly, inflexible and inefficient’, it was all the above factors that created an impetus for change, which resulted with the then Government establishing a new body to be known as ‘an Foras Aiseanna’ (FÁS) under the Industrial Training Act of 1987. This literature review is setting out to see if as according to Field, J and O’Dubhchhair, M. (2001, p248) that the current model of apprenticeship is ‘widely accessible, inclusive and flexible, on the one hand, and consistent and robust in its standards on the other’. The author of this research argues that it is a time for change, that even in the current climate more apprentices need to be brought into the apprenticeship system and also to include those from various social backgrounds. The gender imbalance within apprenticeship needs to be addressed, the number in 2004 as according to OECD (2010, p18) ‘0.5% registration were female’ and ‘0.4% female registration in 2012’ (FÁS Intranet 2013).
2.4 Structure of Apprenticeship

It should be noted that there are currently 29 apprenticeship listings, although in a OECD (2010, p6) report it does refer to apprenticeships as being ‘limited to a narrow set of occupations’. It is currently the responsibility of FÁS and the Department of Education and Science for all apprenticeship programmes, likewise all on and off-the-job Phases. There are seven Phases within apprenticeship, these alternating between On-the-job and Off-the-job training and education. This dual system is seen as a way of integrating the knowledge and skills gained during Off-the-job training and education with those of On-the-job training, with employers given a list of activities to be achieved and certified during their On-the-job Phases (Steedman 2010).

2.4.1 Duration of Apprenticeship

The duration and length of different Phases is determined by the requirements of each trade/occupation, with the exception of Floor and Wall Tiling which has 5 Phases over 4 years and Print Media which is over 3 years (FÁS (b) 2013). The duration for off-the-job phases are as follows:

- **Phase 2** – 20 weeks, (FÁS Training Centre)
- **Phase 4** – 10 weeks, (Institute of Technology)
- **Phase 6** – 10 weeks, (Institute of Technology)

On-the-job training with the employer last a minimum period of time for each phase, which are as follows:

- **Phase 1** – 12 weeks
- **Phase 3** – 26 weeks
- **Phase 5** – 26 weeks
- **Phase 7** – 12 weeks

It is important to note that all phases need to be completed successfully in order for the apprenticeship to be completed and allow the apprentice to be awarded a level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate by the Further Education and Training Awards Council.
(FETAC). There are other avenues available to gain the Advanced Craft Certificate for redundant apprentices and those who may be time short but have completed all off-the-job phases, this will be looked at further in this chapter. It should also be noted that there are places available for progression to 3rd level education for those who hold an Advanced Craft Certificate; progression routes are available to level 6, 7 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications on a full or part-time basis (FETAC 2013), it should be noted that FETAC has become part of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) which was announced by Ruairí Quinn TD on the 6th of November 2012, Along with FETAC the QQI replaces the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education Training and Awards Council (HETAC) and it will also take over the functions of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) (Quinn 2012). There are also opportunities for post Phase 4 redundant apprentices to a level 5 certification in construction and engineering technologies, these opportunities are available at a number of higher level institutions. It should be highlighted that courses available are quite limited and narrow in nature.

2.4.2 Entry Requirements
There are a number of requirements for entry into standards based apprenticeship.

Entry Requirements:

1. Grade D in five subjects in the Department of Education & Science Junior Certificate or an equivalent’

   Or

   The successful completion of a pre-apprenticeship course

   Or

   Be over 18 years of age; have at least 3 years work experience approved by FÁS.

2. You must obtain employment in your chosen trade, your employer must be approved by FÁS and you must be registered by your employer within 2 weeks of your start date.

Another supporting argument is that the entry requirements are set too low; however, the raising of the entry requirements would further ostracize those at FETAC level 3. A pass in maths is not required for entry into apprenticeship, although a good knowledge of maths is essential within a majority of the trades to allow successful
progression throughout all off-the-job phases. An example of one such trade is Carpentry and Joinery (C and J), with a good understanding of maths required for the roofing module. An important to note is the education level of young people coming into apprenticeship over the past decade. In 2002 the percentage of new registrations with leaving cert standard entering apprenticeship was 50%, this increased to 56% in 2007 and rose sharply to 74% in 2012 (FÁS Intranet 2013). This would indicate that those with lower than a leaving certificate will find it increasingly difficult to get an apprenticeship in the future.

A point highlighted in the OECD (2010, p.38) report stated that ‘Some employers reported to the review team that certain apprentices are unable to complete the final (more sophisticated and academic) phases of their training because of their weak literacy and numeracy skills, and it is very difficult to help apprentices at such a late stage’. While there is no evidence to indicate why a high number of apprentices fail theory assessments on later phases, I as a researcher feel that this is a valid point and call for a more thorough investigation on this point. The point in relation to literacy and maths is indeed for some an issue.

A recent study which was done on a ‘project-based learning approach to applied craft calculations within apprenticeship education’ (Furlong 2010) highlights some interesting points in the use of maths through project based learning. This study was carried out over a one year period with three phase 6 apprenticeship groups in plumbing. In his research Furlong, K. (2010, p.111) states in his findings that ‘most of the apprentices are aware that applied mathematical calculations are an essential part of their craft and in order to acquire this skill, the mathematical tasks must be challenging, link to their craft subjects and lead to practical outcomes’. The author of this research would tend to agree with Furlong (2011) that in order to gain a deep understanding of maths a ‘practical based approach’ needs to be taken incorporating a problem solving technique to work undertaken.

The point is that apprenticeship is currently standards based, with a good knowledge of maths essential for progression onto further phases and completion of all phases. Issues such as maths will be discussed in Chapter 4. Maths should at least be mandatory at junior cert level for entry into apprenticeship.
When apprenticeship was time served maths or indeed literacy was not an issue as no formal assessments had to be undertaken in order to complete your apprenticeship. There are those who would advocate and argue as stated by Nyhan, B. (2009, p. 457) that in ‘work based apprenticeships that learning through practice alongside and under the guidance of an expert practitioner is the most effective way to transmit professional expertise and skills from one generation to the next’. The question has to be asked what do people, as according to Nyhan, B. (2009, p. 458) ‘who possess a more practical form of intelligence’ and indeed may not have done very well within the educational system and want to enter apprenticeship, what pathway will this cohort of learners take in the future? It is important for learners who are weak academically to build on their strengths, while at the same time use their creative and analytical abilities to adapt to the social environment they find themselves in (Sternberg 1999). It is this cohort of learners who may benefit to a similar style education to that of Germany, with an apprenticeship as part of their vocational training at the latter end of their secondary level education.

2.5 An Foras Aiseanna (FÁS) 1987 - 2013
FÁS has been in existence since 1987, it replaced the then training authority known as AnCO under the Industrial Training Act, 1987. One of the remits of FÁS was to manage apprenticeship from phase 1 through to phase 7, at which point successful apprentices would be entitled to the National Craft Certificate (FETAC 2012). The current apprenticeship system is highly regarded worldwide as has already been mentioned through its participation and success while completing in the World Skills Championships (DIT 2011). Over a period of a few years prior to 2006 FÁS developed revised curricula for all the apprenticeship trades. A number of revised curricula were endorsed by the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) in 2006 (FÁS Annual Report 2006). During 2006 FÁS with the assistance of the Institute of Technology developed protocol and procedures to assist those who were eligible to gain exemptions from earlier phases of the seven phase system, 180 persons availed of this in 2006 (FÁS Annual Report 2006).

2.6 SOLAS
It was on the 27th July in 2011 that the then Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D., announced that a new further education and training authority was to be
established, this to be called SOLAS (Seirbhísí Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna). One point of note which is relevant to this research and clearly stated as according to Quinn, R. (2011) ‘SOLAS will also ensure that there is a shift away from skills provision for traditional occupations like construction which have seen a huge fall in employment’. Although apprenticeship is not mentioned, it is clear that with the current low number of registrations within apprenticeship that there is currently no Government policy in place to address this issue. SOLAS was set up primarily with the responsibility for the co-ordination and funding of the soon to be established Further Education and Training Boards (ETBs). FÁS is due to be disbanded and merged with the VECs as part of the soon to be established ETBs. A Consultation Paper on the setting up of this new authority was initiated in December by the newly appointed Minister for Training and Skills Ciaran Cannon T.D. In late 2012 ETBs were set up in a small number of regions to pilot the process, this process will continue and allow the integration of FÁS and its staff to the newly established ETBs. There is currently no indication on who is going to be in charge of apprenticeship or where it is going to be located, however it is envisaged that apprenticeship will remain within SOLAS as a temporary measure (FÁS Intranet 2013). In a recent communiqué to colleagues Paul O’Toole (2012) (Director General FÁS) has stated that SOLAS will ultimately have three strands to its work:

- Further Education and Training (FET) Finance and Monitoring
- FET Policy, Strategy, Research and Planning
- Educational Training Boards (FET) Services

**2.7 Pathways to Apprenticeship**

This section will look at various pathways which may lead to apprenticeship both in Ireland and abroad. While Ireland is in recession, it is important to look ahead, particularly with apprenticeship. Traditionally apprenticeship was open to a broad cohort of people, from different social backgrounds, varying levels of education and generally there was a good mix from all within society. This has changed somewhat as recent evidence suggests from the survey carried out in three FÁS training centres relating to this research project, it found that the majority of apprentices surveyed had attained leaving cert standard. This would imply that those who leave school early have less of a chance of gaining an apprenticeship, Figures from the Central Statistics
Office (CSO 2012) show that in 2011 the level of education among the population shows that there were 250,000 people who had completed their education before the age of 15, however this is a big improvement compared to 1991 when the figure stood at 600,000 (CSO 2011). Further more 29.6% of those unemployed were under 25, of these 24.7% were lower secondary or less (National Skills Bulletin 2012). Policies need to be put in place to prevent dropout, this can be achieved by allowing transitions for those who are less academic into an improved vocational education and training system OECD (2012). It could be argued that some within this cohort of early school leavers should be given the opportunity to work within the trades provided that appropriate courses can be provided with meaningful job opportunities, once the required standard is achieved. It is worth mentioning some of the bodies that promote lifelong learning, whether it is doing a trade or progressing onto further education.

2.7.1 AONTAS
Aontas is the National Adult Learning Organisation, the mission of AONTAS is to advocate for the right of every adult in Ireland to quality learning. One of its functions is to provide the latest, most up to date information about learning options and supports for adults (AONTAS 2013). Following the construction boom it is estimated that one in every five people unemployed was in the construction sector, with a high percentage of those being tradesmen (National Skills Bulletin 2012). AONTAS provides guidance to all those who request it.

2.7.2 Youthreach
Youthreach is a VEC sponsored programme that is currently in place in Ireland that allow early school leavers with little or no qualification the opportunity to gain certification at Fetac level 3 and level 4. This is generally a full time course based over a one to two year period depending on the course or programme type. This programme can provide young people with opportunities for basic education, personal development, vocational training and work experience (Youthreach 2013). It allows young people the opportunity to study core subjects, such as English, Maths and life skills and provides opportunities to improve on literacy and numeracy at all Youthreach centres. Upon successful completion of the basic training the learner would be awarded a Foundation Certification either from the Quality and
Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or the Junior Certificate, this in turn would allow progression towards further education or indeed a **pathway to apprenticeship** (Youthreach 2013). While Youthreach does indeed offer a pathway for many young people to further education and also apprenticeship, unless Government policy to increase apprenticeship numbers is forthcoming the pathway to apprenticeship is closed for many young people at this level.

2.7.3 **National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)**

Literacy traditionally was considered the ability to read and write, however, the meaning has to reflect changes in society and the skills needed by individuals to participate fully in society (NALA 2013). The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) survey was carried out in 1995; this was developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This survey found that one in four of Irish adults have literacy difficulties, which was very high compared to 3% in Sweden and 5% in Germany (NALA 2013). An article in the Daily Business Post (2013) has, according to an OECD study stated that *Ireland showed a “statistically significant” fall in students’ reading ability between 2000 and 2009. This indicates that there are still issues relating to literacy with young people in Irish society.*

2.7.4 **NALA Annual Reports 2007-2008-2009**

In NALA’s 2007 Annual Report it stated that it concluded a project looking at developing a tool which can be used by tutors delivering apprenticeships to identify literacy and numeracy issues early on in phase 2 of apprenticeship. As it states in the report (NALA Annual Report 2007) NALA will work with FÁS to develop a full scale pilot of the ‘tool and support mechanisms’. The purpose of this tool was to identify literacy and numeracy issues as early as possible, this to allow support mechanisms to be put in place as early as possible (NALA Annual Report 2008). NALA in its 2009 Annual Report states that it believes that workplace basic education (WBE) programmes play ‘a critical role in addressing the skills of workers with less than a FETAC level 4 qualification, the apprenticeship project was further progressed in 2009 (NALA Annual Report 2009). With entry requirements set at level 3 (Junior cert) into apprenticeship and the participation of two prominent organisations in this area, it can be clearly seen that literacy and numeracy is an issue for some within apprenticeship.
In an OECD review, Kis, V. (2010, p.15) states that ‘weak literacy and numeracy are serious problems among many learners but problems are often not identified in time or adequately addressed’. A number of strong points are made in this OECD review in relation to literacy and numeracy, in today’s modern society good literacy and numeracy skills are a requirement in order to gain employment, also support in this area improves learning outcomes, however, self declaration of literacy problems is in itself not sufficient (OECD 2010). FÁS do provide support, if we look at the ‘Learner Charter’ FÁS (2013 (d)) it clearly outlines that ‘Where appropriate, FÁS will discuss with the learner relevant supports to assist learner progression’, this on a practical level will depend on a number of factors, the tutor, the level of assistance required and the manager in charge of training in that area. Literacy is not regarded as a disability and support in this area as already stated depends on a number of factors. It should be noted that FÁS as a training provider have excellent measures in place to facilitate people with disabilities (FÁS 2013).

As is outlined above, the literature clearly highlights problems with some learners, particularly young early school leavers and some with certification below FETAC level 4. While entry into apprenticeship starts at FETAC level 3, there is a high percentage with leaving cert, around 65% in 2009 (OECD 2010) and 74% in 2012 (FÁS Intranet 2013), it is important that support as outlined by NALA and FÁS is available for those need it. The tool as mentioned above would be a valuable tool for both the tutor and also allow this cohort of apprentices to be more successful throughout their apprenticeship. The author of this research work has worked in FAS as a carpentry and joinery instructor since 2004 and has no knowledge of this project being piloted or implemented within any of the trades at Phase 2 level. Support when required is important, however the manner in which it is delivered is also important.

In a study in New Zealand by Sligo (2011) it found that tutors, due to their lack of knowledge on the terminology used in the trades they supported were unable to fully support the apprentices they tutored, this in turn did not allow full integration into a community of practice as defined by Lave and Wenger (Sligo, Tilley and Murray 2011). In a further study by Sligo (2012) this study clearly indicated that unless
properly resourced, literacy support programmes act as a support mechanism without allowing the desired progression that such programmes were meant to deliver.

2.7.5 OECD Review of Apprenticeship, Kis, V. (2010)
This review is worth a mention as it looks at the standards based apprenticeship in Ireland in some detail. It highlights good practice, makes recommendations and highlights changes that may be required to its current format. The review highlights the fact that as according to Kis, V. (OECD, 2010, p.5) ‘the apprenticeship system is well-structured with a systematic blend of on and off-the-job elements’ however it did regard it as ‘Limited to a narrow set of occupations’.

There are many elements of the apprenticeship system included in this review by the OECD, many of which are included in various paragraphs throughout this chapter.

One further important point relates to teacher qualifications. One point highlighted as stated by Kis, V. (2010, pp.45-46) is that ‘Different qualification requirements for the different VET sectors are difficult to justify in principle and inhibit staff mobility’.

One important point relating to this is as follows:

One potential justification for the difference in pedagogical requirements could be that the two sectors (vocational education vs. training) have different target groups in terms of age, but this is not the case. PLC courses are managed as part of the post-primary provision and pedagogical requirements for VET teachers in PLC courses are the same as second level teachers (12 to 18 age range). However, the age profile for PLC courses has radically changed over the past 15 years. In 2005/06 almost half PLC participants were 21 and over, 74% were 19 and over.

(Kis 2010, OECD Review)

The review goes on further to say that ‘converging pedagogical qualifications’ would make better use of resources and allow easier redeployment across the two sectors (Kis 2010). The question here is will this have any bearing on future redeployments with the establishment of the ETB’s in various regions, which is currently underway.

2.7.6 Apprentice Redundancies in Ireland:
Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme 2012
It is important to comment on unemployed apprentices and current Government policy relating to initiatives currently available to those who are short time to complete their apprenticeship and also those who are stuck between Phases. There are a number of schemes in place, one such scheme is ‘The Redundant Apprentice Placement Scheme 2012 (RAPS) (FÁS (c) 2013), this scheme was introduced in April of 2010 and will provide opportunities for unemployed apprentices to work with eligible employers approved by FÁS who have apprentices away on off-the-job phases, this initiative is sponsored by FÁS who pay an allowance to the apprentice during this period on-the-job. Certain criteria will need to be met by eligible employers and approved by a FÁS Senior Training Advisor.

It was in 2008 that the Government introduced the Employer Based Redundant Apprenticeship Rotation Scheme (OECD Review 2010); this scheme is primarily the same as the current RAPS. In one of its recommendations the OECD (2010) stated that this scheme should be reviewed ‘immediately, with a view to shifting the resources involved to more cost-effective across the board measures in support of redundant apprentices’, the review does indicate that those in the final phases of apprenticeship, depending on employment prospects should be supported to complete their training. Another scheme currently in operation is the ‘Competency Determination Mechanism’; this scheme caters for apprentices who are short time to complete the four year time served requirement.

2.7.7 Competency Determination Mechanism:
In order for redundant apprentices to be eligible for the Competency Determination Mechanism certain criteria must be met:
Be redundant as an apprentice as notified by their employer and be registered with FÁS Employment Services.
They will need to have successfully completed all phases 1-7 inclusive, reaching the minimum standard.
They have not completed the 4 years required to complete their trade.

FÁS have introduced this mechanism to enable eligible apprentices in the trades of Brick and Stonelaying, Carpentry and Joinery, Electrical, Plastering and Plumbing to complete their apprenticeship (FÁS Training Advisor 2013). This scheme has been
running throughout various centres since early 2012, it has been designed to incorporate all elements of each trade within a project to be completed by apprentices over a specified time in a FÁS training centre, upon successful completion of this project the apprentice is entitled to the National Craft Certificate (FÁS 2013 (c)). Instructors interviewed have commented on the high level of skill and knowledge required from apprentices in order to complete the ‘Competency Determination Mechanism’ successfully. It could be argued that this programme should be a prerequisite to successful completion of apprenticeship and recognised as such.

2.8 Dual Apprenticeship System in Germany

Ireland in a lot of ways has taken various elements from the German Dual Apprenticeship system. The German Dual system has been adopted by several European countries, some of which include France, Austria, Netherlands and also as already stated Ireland. One very important element of the dual system is the way in which it alternates the classroom and business, learning, working, theory and practice, this system is seen as a basic and highly effective model for vocational training. It should be noted that 70% of young school leavers who do not go into higher education go into apprenticeship, in 2007 there were over 1.5 million young German people in apprenticeship (Steedman 2010).

It was the German Vocational Act which was introduced in 1969, which covers a vast spectrum of apprenticeship training and is a unique feature of the German vocational training system (Tremblay and Le Bot 2003). This includes training in industry, craft apprenticeships, agriculture and other areas in the business world; however the public sector is excluded. This act brought about cohesion among social partners, namely the state, employers and the unions, Ireland followed suit and in 1991 with the “Programme for Economic and Social Progress” (PESP) which allowed collaboration between the Irish government, employers and indeed the unions (Nyhan 2009). It was with this PESP agreement that a commitment was made to introduce the new “standards based” apprenticeship into Ireland (Nyhan 2009).

It is necessary to briefly review the German dual system to draw comparisons between it and Ireland. The main commonalities between Ireland and Germany is how in Ireland it alternates between training off-the-job in FÁS training centres and Institutes of Technologies while also training on-the-job with employers (Harvey and
O’Connor 2001), whereas in Germany it alternates between vocational training in schools and practical training in firms (Tremblay and Le Bot 2003). In Germany the majority of apprentices spend two days per week studying in vocational schools, were subjects such as maths, drawing, language and theory which is trade specific is also taught. The remainder of the week is spent in the workplace with their employer, however in order to minimise disruption as according to Tremblay and Le Bot (2003, p.13) ‘more firms prefer that apprentices spend entire weeks or months in the school system, followed by periods in the workplace’. Apprentices in Ireland for the majority of the trades spend a total of forty to forty two weeks in off-the-job training, which is broken into twenty weeks in FÁS and two ten week’s periods in the Institutes of Technologies (FÁS (b) 2013).

Germany’s dual apprenticeship model has been hugely successful; this can be seen through its success and its current status within the European Union, indeed the President of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), Essen, (2012) went on to say in a recent press release that ‘Our goal in Germany is an integrated education system in which vocational and university education are on an equal footing and permeably interlinked’. When we talk about change in the Irish standards based apprenticeship, do we limit it to trade apprenticeship or like Germany should it be expanded to broaden the spectrum to include other areas that traditionally would not be the case. In an open letter in the Irish Times in February 2012 titled ‘What apprenticeship can teach us’ the author Barry Nyhan talks about Germany and the role apprenticeship has in relation to its success.

It is of interest to note that 60 per cent of young people in the EU’s strongest economy, Germany, do not aspire to follow a third–level education. Instead they go through a high quality, company-based professional education programme in the form of an apprenticeship. The German government considers this the best way to develop the required professional knowledge and skills of the majority of its citizens.

(Nyhan 2012, Irish Times)

The author in this case highlights two countries Australia and Switzerland that have followed the German model and have been successful in its application. He does also argue the point that maybe now is the time to consider the beneficial differences
between academic based learning against real life learning from experts in their field in the world of work (Nyhan 2012). As the author of this research work I would argue that a new policy needs to be introduced to allow more young people to join the workforce in the way of apprenticeship particularly those who have no clear pathway available to them in this area.

Vocational education in the Netherlands is similar to that of Germany, however 65 percent of all young people (age 12-16) attend what is referred to as Preparatory Vocational Education (Blokhuis and Onstenk 2007). There are two learning pathways, one is school based and one is worked based. The work based element is highly regarded as according to Onstenk (2003) as cited by Blokhuis and Onstenk (2007, p.491) ‘for motivation and for attaining objectives with regard to problem solving and work process knowledge’. Rules to workplace learning are quite specific, the companies were certified and obliged to fulfil formal requirements relating to the quality of work and guidance given, contractual agreements were in place to ensure that the required coaching and learning for the periods of on-the-job training were fulfilled (Blokhuis and Onstenk 2007).

In the Irish apprenticeship system on-the-job training requires that assessments take place during this time, with this being the responsibility of the employer. One of the perceived weak links in the apprenticeship system in Ireland is the lack of monitoring in relation to the standards of training in the workplace (O’Connor 2006). A relevant point made by O’Connor, L. (2006, p.36) is that ‘there is no doubt that some employers provide excellent work-based training but others simply use apprentices as additional labour and employ them on tasks of a repetitive nature’. This is an important point and unless on-the-job training is monitored closely to ensure all elements within all the phases are carried out correctly the apprentice will be unable to fulfil their full potential and fail to cover all elements within the curriculum of their apprenticeship. In an OECD report (2010) which looked upon a proposed initiative as a long term goal, it states that pedagogical training should be offered to supervisors of apprentices within companies. In a case study of three apprentice painters and how they experience their learning on the Irish Standards Based apprenticeship Bates, E. (2011, pp43-44) states that ‘Colm’s employer did not formally assess his work based learning which he should have done’, this applied to two of the three interviewed.
This does not imply that no learning takes place during on-the-job training, but that formal assessments by the employer did not take place in these instances.

In order for apprenticeship to be successful for the learner, all elements within all the phases need to be completed fully and correctly as required by FÁS, otherwise apprentices will not have exposure to all material throughout all phases. The Competency Determination Mechanism which is currently running to allow apprentices complete their time is seen by all instructors involved as being a very credible assessment which covers all elements within various trades. The CDM could be included as a pre-cursor to allow completion of apprenticeship.

2.9 The Australian Apprenticeship Model

Australia has gained prominence in how it has expanded its apprenticeship programme over recent years, proportionately it has as many apprentices as Germany with the main difference being that a high percentage of Australian participants are over 25 (Nyhan 2012). Australia has demonstrated this by its recent ‘Apprentice Kickstart Initiative’ (Evans 2012). As part of the overhaul of the apprenticeship programme this Kickstart Initiative is designed to increase apprenticeship numbers by 21,000 between the start of December 2012 and the 28th February 2013 in the construction trades were there are skills shortages. The key trades are carpenters, electricians, plumbers and other relevant trades. In a recent press release (Evans 2012) the Minister for Skills has stated that the ‘Government will double the incentive paid to employers for an additional 21,000 apprentices’ in order to deliver ‘the right skills, in the right areas, at the right time’. This initiative has been further expanded through a media release (Evans, 2013) to incorporate further trades, principally that of the engineering trades.

Also prominent in his initiative is the inclusion of adult apprentices and for this cohort of apprentices who are paid under the National Minimum Wage, they will receive additional direct support over two years (Evans 2012). It is important to note that apprenticeship is demand led and currently Ireland is in the mist of recession, however, no policy appears to be in place to improve the current low number of apprentice registration in certain trades. While the employment situation in Australia is different to Ireland, does it mean that the apprenticeship system in relation to new
entrants should not be supported in Ireland? Should it be allowed to diminish to such an extent that no opportunities exist for many young people in society today.

2.9.1 Pre-apprenticeship

Pre-apprenticeship courses have been in existence in Australia for many years, it is believed that they stem back to the early twentieth century and were used in an effort to stem unemployment at that time (Guthrie 2011). They are known by various titles, such as pre-vocational, pre-employment, but they all primarily do the same job. There are a number of arguments in favour of this approach, in a study carried out by Dumbrell and Smith (2007, p.8) where they argue ‘that pre-apprenticeship more effectively prepare young people for specific industries’ and also ‘provide educational preparation for apprenticeship study’. This type of course is also seen as a way to assist employers in filtering out unsuitable candidates (Guthrie 2011). In Ireland pre-apprenticeship courses are available; they are a requirement for potential apprentices and can be used as a pathway for those who may not have completed their Junior or Leaving Certificate (FÁS 2013 a).

Here we will look at a survey which looks at qualitative evidence in relation to the quality of pre-apprenticeship, both from the view point of the employer and that of the apprentice. This survey was carried out by Dumbrell and Smith (2007, p.9) with data being collected from a total of 225 questionnaires which were returned by 14 employers which between them employed 1600 apprentices nationally. The main findings are as follows. Ninety eight per cent of apprentices who undertook a pre-apprenticeship course agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned a lot on their course. Ninety three per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they had enjoyed their pre-apprenticeship. Eighty five per cent of apprentices said they intended to do further study relating to their apprenticeship after finishing and those who had done a pre-apprenticeship were significantly more likely to be planning further study than those who had not. Completion rates were high with over eighty per cent completing their pre-apprenticeship course.

In a report by Erica Smith (2007) she highlights how some of the bigger construction companies set out to improve the quality of their apprentices and train them to a higher standard. A relevant point is how this large construction company selected all
their apprentices from those who had completed a pre-apprenticeship course. The reason for this as stated by Smith, E. (2007, p.471) is because ‘of their initial skills as well as a good understanding of the industry’ also ‘the addition of an extra, higher-level, qualification during the apprenticeship period to improve skills as well as increase motivation’. It was found that those selected by this company were highly motivated, their on-the-job training was closely monitored by an appointed mentor, and exposure to all elements within their trade and regular updates and meetings on progress was done on an on-going basis (Smith 2007). There is only one issue with the process used above, that it may be regarded as being too selective. Pre-apprenticeship courses are currently run in Ireland; an example of one is Dun Laoghaire Community Training Centre, the main aim of this course is as according to Dun Laoghaire CTC (2013) is to enable young learners who have not achieved the required results to enter apprenticeship. The author of this research has worked with apprentices on Phase 2 of their apprenticeship who works with large construction companies; one in particular would work to a similar format as outlined above. All apprentices coming into Phase 2 from this company were found to be highly motivated, prepared well, got excellent on-the-job training and were on the road to becoming excellent trades persons. There are a lot of reasons why pre-apprenticeship courses are of benefit to learners, some of which are outlined above. If designed correctly and targeted towards specific learner groups it could enhance the learning experience and allow progression for some into the workplace.

2.10 Methods and Approaches to Learning

One of the major advances over the last decade is what is sometimes referred to as the pedagogy of abundance (Weller, 2011), this refers to the abundance of and readily free access on the internet to educational material. This, however, is pointed out by Weller (2011) that the extraction of relevant information will depend on the ‘individuals processing abilities’. It is these abilities that will determine how and effectively what information is used. A blended learning approach in some ways allows access to this abundance of information, however this approach does allow for interaction, guidance, and further interaction that generally is missing on a face to face environment. One very important point is that when and if material is incorporated into a blended learning approach, particularly at Phase 2 level of
apprenticeship is that the material used is relevant to the topic, easy to understand and that it is meaningful to the learner in the first place (Mayes 2002).

A very relevant and important report to the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) from the National Assessment Review Committee (NARC) (2009) which relates to assessments in FÁS apprenticeship programmes, this report recommends many changes that are relevant and indeed changes that need to take place to enhance the learning for the learner. This report is important in that it highlights issues surrounding training and assessments within apprenticeship and also makes recommendations in relation to same. One such area mentioned in this report is preparation for assessment and how support and resources can be provided for independent learning throughout the entire programme, both on and off-the-job phases. There are a number of possible arrangements which have been suggested by NARC (2009) to accommodate this process, one of which is after hours study groups using Moodle, access to local public libraries, and access to FÁS-established on-line libraries for individual trades. It would be the suggestion of the researcher in this instance to introduce a Blended learning approach at Phase 2 level, which would encompass all suggested recommendations on this issue.

On-the-job training has been mentioned in this report as an area of concern; the introduction of a portfolio to be completed by the apprentice throughout all Phases is seen as one way of keeping a record of achievements and work carried out. Some pedagogical training of training supervisors within companies is recommended for the undertaking of assessments for on-the-job Phases.
Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research statement and objectives are vitally important for a number of reasons; first it gives clarity to the research being carried out, it also sets about to discover if the research is important, worthwhile and in this case if change is required and what changes they may be. The research question in this case speaks for itself, the title is ‘Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland: Are Changes Required to Meet Current Economic and Social Needs?’ First of all the research has taken an in-depth look at the current Irish apprenticeship system, also what changes if any are required to meet Ireland’s needs and those within the whole of Irish Society. The reason this is so important is if current registrations within certain trades keep to such a low level, shortages will occur in the not too distant future. The current entry level required for apprenticeship is FETAC level 3 which is junior certificate level; in the recent survey of apprentices relating to this research project (2013) 15% of those surveyed entered the trade at junior cert level. This would indicate that the pathway into apprenticeship is quite narrow and unless changes are made to make apprenticeship more inclusive, many young people who would aspire to become a trade’s person will find the option no longer available to them.

3.2 Mixed Method Approach

It is important to look at various methods of research before deciding to combine them. A close look at each method and why they are combined in order to ensure that the research question is adequately answered. According to Sukamolson, S. (nd) ‘quantitative research generally focuses on measuring social reality’, or in other words searching for as stated by De Vaus, D. (2002, p.5) ‘hard evidence’, where factual and descriptive information is required. In the research conducted factual information was elicited through the use of a questionnaires to determine what level of education a certain cohort of apprentices had prior to starting their apprenticeship,
it is facts similar to this that are required to answer the research question asked. A good description as stated by De Vaus, D. (2001, p.2) ‘provokes the ‘why’ question of explanatory research’, it is important that in the research conducted, the researcher explores why in this instance change in apprenticeship is required and what changes they may be?

Qualitative research can incorporate a number of various methods; the techniques used range from ethnographic research, focus groups, visual methods and interviews. Interviews can be done in a number of different ways, the semi-structured approach was deemed the most appropriate for this research. As stated by Mason, J. (2006, p.22) ‘Qualitative research aims to understand and communicate its subjects’ experiences, interpretations and meanings’, it is through communicating the information gathered that this type of research is both meaningful and relevant to this current research. From a qualitative perspective the approach used is referred to as purposive sampling (Moran, L. 2012, Paper 3. P8), this in essence means that those who were selected for the interview process where handpicked due to their expertise and knowledge in relation to apprenticeship or as stated by Hammersley (2007, p.17) as cited by Moran (2012) that it is believed that it ‘will yield the most worthwhile data’, or as referred to by Marshall (1996) as a purposeful or judgement sample. It is this knowledge and expertise that will allow constructive and meaningful input by those interviewed during this research work.

There are a number of advantages and disadvantages using a mixed method approach, some of which are outlined:

**Advantages:**
One of the main advantages of a mixed method approach is the overall picture it generates to give a deeper and clearer picture which greatly enhances the study being carried out (Moran, L. 2012, Paper 5. P.7). This research required different sets of data, it needed factual information in order to draw comparisons from that perspective, and on the other hand it required access to the knowledge and experience of those interviewed in order to gather the data that greatly enhanced this study.

**Disadvantages:**
There were a number of challenges faced during this research work. The time involved required using a mixed method rather than use a single approach meant that
it was very labour intensive and at times costly. What could be regarded as a disadvantage is that unless both sets of data are combined and analysed as one and drawn together in a general conclusion then they may be regarded as not being mixed at all (Bazeley 2002).

3.3 Research Design
The method chosen for this research project was a mixed method approach. The quantitative aspect of this research project is to gather factual information, while the qualitative aspect is required to understand and gain an insight into the thoughts and feelings of people interviewed for this research project in relation to standards based apprenticeship. It is important to note that on occasion, a singular approach on its own may not be enough to answer the research question (Klassen et al 2012), this as according to Klassen et al (2012, p.378) ‘is inadequate to develop multiple perspectives and a complete understanding about a research problem or question’. Another reason why a mixed method approach in this instance is required is that information from one method can be used to draw comparisons from the other, more importantly do the choice of methods used allow the question to be answered and at the same time maintain credibility (Howe and Eisenhardt, 1990) as cited by Bazeley et al (2002).

3.4 Choice of Method
There are a number of reasons why the mixed method approach was chosen. Firstly the quantitative approach allows the researcher to gather factual information in order to give an accurate description of the facts presented (De Vaus 2001). The quantitative element within the research suits the study because it allowed a survey to take place to gather current information on apprentices on Phase 2 of apprenticeship which is relevant to the research being conducted. A group of apprentices were surveyed in three FÁS training centres, across seven trades; this was done to cover a broad spectrum within the apprenticeship trades.

The qualitative approach was used to encapsulate the thoughts and feelings of those interviewed within FÁS who are familiar with and work within apprenticeship on a daily basis. Those interviewed cover a broad base within apprenticeship, in that they cover various trades within apprenticeship, also some input from the curriculum
department and from management in order to broaden the scope of the research and as according to Belzile and Oberg (2012, p.460) ‘to gain insights into the perpetual world of others’. The reason this approach suited this study is that it covered practically all areas within apprenticeship which are relevant to the research that was conducted. It helped the researcher as stated by Mason, J. (2006, p.9) to ‘think creatively and outside the box’, it is through innovation and hard work that the research aims and objectives of this research were achieved.

3.5 The Sampling Process

From a quantitative perspective the questionnaire was seen as the best way to gain input from the group of apprentices surveyed. All available apprenticeship classes in three FÁS centres were surveyed; these were Dundalk, Finglas and Tallaght. The total population available to survey was one hundred and twenty seven apprentices within the three centres, although only eighty five were deemed suitable to take part due to factors such as age and availability. It should be noted that a pilot questionnaire was distributed to a small group two weeks prior to the first survey being carried out, with any issues being resolved within this two week period. Permission was granted through the Manager from each training centre to conduct the survey, once agreement with the relevant instructors was reached.

The researcher in this instance decided to visit each centre at the specified time to hand out the questionnaires to each learner group, this being decided in order to gain maximum participation, while at the same time explain clearly the purpose of the research and clarify the content of the questionnaire to each learner group. This process was decided following the pilot questionnaire being distributed, when at that time clarity had been sought on some of the questions. These cohorts of learners were surveyed to gain information into various aspects of the standards based apprenticeship model. The participants who took part in this survey are clearly outlined in the graph as outlined on page 33.
After the pilot questionnaire took place it was decided that rather than post out the questionnaire, a better response would be gained through handing them out personally at agreed times with the centres involved in the survey. During the pilot some learners requested clarity on two of the questions, these questions were deemed too important to change or omit. This was another reason why the questionnaires were handed out personally by the researcher so that clarity could be given on all aspects of the survey being conducted.

The interview process took place in two geographical locations; eight out of the nine interviews took place in a local FÁS training centre with one taking place outside the north east region. The type of interview process used was the ‘semi-structured interview’. This method was chosen to allow the flexibility for the interviewees to answer questions asked in a way that is relevant and important to them (Bryman, 2012). An interview guide was present, with a specific list of questions prepared, depending on the area of expertise relating to the interviewee. Similar wording of questions were used with all interviewees, although new questions were introduced to allow the respondents the opportunity to enhance their point of view. Freedom of expression in this instance, being required to explore and allow the interviewees the opportunity to explain and describe their thoughts on the questions being asked. This
process was comprehensive and gathered a large amount of rich data relevant to the research question.

There were nine participants who took part in the interview process, seven of which are instructors within phase 2 of apprenticeship. Two of these instruct in carpentry and joinery, two in plumbing, one in electrical, one in wood manufacturing and finishing and one in tool making. An important point to note is that all these instructors came into FÁS from industry, all have at least ten years experience instructing on phase 2 of apprenticeship and all have obtained their degree through NUI Galway. It is with this expertise both at a craft skill level and academic level that their opinions are to be valued in relation to the research conducted. A viewpoint from a curriculum perspective was also sought to gain input in this area (one interviewee took part in this process). One member from management also took part to complete the interview process. All participants who took part were required in order to get a balanced and broad view of apprenticeship in its current format.

3.6 Questionnaires – Interviews
When designing a questionnaire it is important to ask whether the questions should be in an open or closed format, an open question can be answered whatever way the respondents decide, whereas with closed questions the respondent must choose from a set of pre-determined alternatives (Bryman, 2012). For this research twelve questions were asked. Two of the questions asked were open questions, question 2 asks what part of phase 1 and phase 2 is of most benefit to you and why? This question was asked to allow the apprentice the opportunity to comment on these elements within apprenticeship, which otherwise may have been missed. Question 12 is also an open question which asks the apprentice what changes they would make on year one of apprenticeship. These two questions were important to elicit further information that otherwise could be missed. The remaining ten questions were closed questions, however, question 5 and 6 if answered no, allowed further comment. The questions used were kept simple; however clarity was sought on two questions during the piloting phase. The two questions were deemed important enough to leave as they were, with the decision being made to distribute the questionnaires as described previously. This approach worked well which ensured there was no delay while maintaining as high a response as possible.
The interview process was very time consuming, both from the organisational viewpoint and also the amount of time required to transcribe and analyse the data presented. All but one interview took place within the training centre where the author of this research worked. Appointments were made with each interviewee to suit their work schedule and a room was booked in a quiet location within the training centre for the appropriate times, with a sign being placed on the door in order to minimise interruption. The remaining interview took place at a mutual agreed time and place with the interviewees’ manager’s permission. The relevance of each participant’s involvement and participation in the interview process was taken into account prior to their selection.

The data for the questionnaire was analysed using Excel, this being the simplest and quickest way to analyse the data. It was found that the open questions in the questionnaire were easily analysed as the majority of answers given by apprentices were quite narrow and similar in nature. A pilot interview did take place with an instructor who was not part of the target group but who still had experience in the area being studied. A number of important points came from this process, such as asking the right question, it was found that a small percentage of the questions asked during the pilot interview did not achieve the desired result. As the interview sessions progressed the questions asked and responses gained were relevant and added considerably to the research been conducted. It was found that some of the answers were clear and concise; however some were more detailed and produced rich data which was very relevant to the research work which was undertaken. While analysing the qualitative data common themes were sought to link the answers to the question from various perspectives.

3.7 Ethical Consideration
In order for the integrity of any research project to be maintained ethical issues have to be addressed. A number of considerations need to be taken into account. A number of issues need careful consideration, some of which are outlined by the Sociological Association Of Ireland (ND), that ‘they strive to protect the interests of research participants, their sensitivities and privacy, while recognising the difficulty of balancing potentially conflicting concerns’.
Participants: It is important that when participants are taking part in a research project that they do so by giving informed consent. This research project achieved this when circulating the questionnaire by informing verbally all participants fully what the research entailed, the fact that it was voluntary, and all those taking part would remain anonymous, also to re-enforce the fact that the information given would remain confidential (Moran 2012). The same method applied prior to the interview sessions taking place, it was also made clear to those taking part in the interview process that they would have there identities protected by the use of pseudonyms. It is important that the experience of participants assisting researchers is positive in nature; otherwise further participation if required may not take place. Ethical principles can usually be broken down into four areas according to Diener and Crandall (1997) as cited by Bryman et al (2012, p.135). These include ‘whether there is harm to participants’, ‘lack of informed consent’, ‘invasion of privacy’ and ‘deception’, all these components are clearly explained in Alan Bryman’s book Social Research Methods (2012).

3.8 Conclusion
The researcher in this instance feels that all appropriate steps were taken to ensure that ethical guidelines were followed as stated above, while at all times taking into account the importance of such guidelines. The mixed methods approach used in this instance were appropriate for the research conducted. All steps were taken to conduct the research in an open and honest way taking into account all parties concerned. It is felt that the strategy used has allowed all relevant information regarding the research question to be gathered. This has enabled the researcher to put forward a strong argument for change and make recommendations relating to the current standards based apprenticeship model. The methods used to answer the research question from the researcher’s point of view worked well.
4.1 Introduction

This chapter incorporates both findings and discussions. The author in this instance felt that combining both will facilitate the reader to draw conclusions from the information and data provided in this chapter. The findings throughout this research have shown that it relates to and supports the literature reviewed during the research process. The research process set out to elicit information from a number of parties who are involved in various aspects of standards based apprenticeship. This was done using a mixed approach. Questionnaires were used to obtain information from various apprentices who were near completion of Phase 2 of their apprenticeship, while interviews took place to gather opinions from various parties within FÁS, which included instructors, management and an instructor who is involved with the assessment process. For confidentiality reasons all those who took part in the interview process will be referred to by number, from number 1 to number 9. The questionnaire was analysed with the data presented and discussed in the first part of this chapter.

4.2 Questions 1 - 12

Question 1: In which of the following trades do you work?

This questionnaire was filled out by 85 apprentices who work in seven different trades; this survey took place in three different training centres, one in the North East Region and two in the Dublin region. The research question asks if change is required within the current apprenticeship system, the author believes the answer is yes. Does current Government policy allow for the introduction of more apprentices into trades that are at a low level? The answer is no, as no policy is currently in place to address this issue. See Table 1 for a list of trades surveyed, outlining the number of apprentices per trade, and also the location where the training has taken place. A list of trades as shown in Table 1 outlines the apprenticeship courses that were running in the three centres, when this survey took place (Jan – Feb, 2013).
Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dundalk</th>
<th>Finglas</th>
<th>Tallaght</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C + J</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Goods</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Mechanics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Making</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Manufacture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to draw comparisons between 2006 when registrations were near their peak and in 2012 when registrations were in decline, see Table 1a and Table 1b which show registrations in the seven apprenticeships trades surveyed. These numbers are taken from the FÁS Annual Report for the year 2006 and from the FÁS Intranet site.
for 2012. The link between these two sets of figures is the reduction in number in various trades surveyed.

\[\text{Table 1a.} \quad \text{Table 1b.}\]

It should be noted that wood machining and cabinet making were combined into one trade, this trade is now known as Wood Manufacturing and Finishing. As can be seen from the above table all but one trade has suffered a big decrease in registrations. Tool making appears to be stronger with the rest of the trades in decline. The wood trades appear to be taking the biggest drop in registrations. If we take a look at apprenticeship registrations over the last fifteen years, the figure in 1997 stood at 5,500, these numbers grew and peaked in 2005 and stood at 8,304 (FÁS Annual Report 2011). The numbers declined sharply from 2008 to date, with the last four years showing registrations sitting at between 1,200 and 1,400 registrations per year. As a further note of interest, it should be highlighted that four other trades in the construction sector were also badly hit with apprentice registrations for 2012, these are bricklaying (six), plastering (three), wall-tiling (1) and finally industrial insulation with one registration for 2012 (FÁS Intranet 2013). With some trades at such a critically low level it would seem that now is the time to act to maintain an acceptable level of registrations for all trades on a yearly basis.
Question 2: Please indicate what part of Phase 1 or Phase 2 is of most benefit to you and why?

Those who commented on Phase 1: 67%
Those who commented on Phase 2: 94%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C + J</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Goods</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Mechanics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Making</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Manufacture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>57/85</td>
<td>80/85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2 the majority of apprentices did comment on Phase 2, however those who commented on phase 1 were considerably less, which was 67%. The comments in most cases are similar in that issues commented on are predominately the same.

**Phase 1 comments:** One comment that sums it up relating to Phase 1 is ‘Working on site you can learn a lot about measurements, get to know tools etc which helps a lot in phase 2’. There are further comments that in phase 1 that ‘you get to know the job’. Phase 1 is seen as an introduction to the workplace; this on-the-job training takes place with the employer and provides the apprentice with training and practical experience in the working environment. Some apprentices did comment on the fact that the job entailed going to the shop and other such jobs without actually having much contact with the work they were supposed to be doing. The majority of instructors interviewed expressed an opinion that in some instances on-the-job training does not take place to the required level as specified by FÁS.

**Phase 2 comments:** The majority of comments relating to Phase 2 highlight the fact that learning which takes place on phase 1 are reinforced by the theory elements
within phase 2. It allows, according to the majority of apprentices surveyed that knowledge gained on phase 2 answers the theoretical aspects of the practical work which may have been done on both Phase 1 and 2. The majority of apprentices see all aspects of phase 2 as being beneficial to them, with the practical and theoretical aspects complimenting each other and preparing them for future phases. Numerous participants have commented that what has been learned on Phase 2 will certainly prepare them better for the Phase 3 on-the-job phase and future phases.

Question 3: In your opinion do you think a pre-course which relates to your trade would have been beneficial to you prior to the start of your Phase 2 off-the-job training?

Findings relating to this question are as follows:

Yes: 39%
No: 41%
Not Sure: 20%

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dundalk</th>
<th>C+J</th>
<th>Electrical</th>
<th>Plumbing</th>
<th>Motor Mechanics</th>
<th>Heavy goods</th>
<th>Wood Manufacture</th>
<th>Tool making</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dundalk/Finglas</td>
<td></td>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tallaght</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Heavy goods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finglas</td>
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<td>Motor Mechanics</td>
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<td>Dundalk/Finglas</td>
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<td>Dundalk</td>
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<td>Tool Making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dundalk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wood Manufacture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>
The findings with this question indicate that the number of apprentices who feel a pre-course would be beneficial to them would suggest that there is enough support to warrant further investigation on this matter, however there are plenty in favour as outlined in the literature reviewed. Pre-apprenticeship courses are common in Australia and have been since the 1950’s; they were then seen as a way to combat unemployment. This type of course in Australia come under a number of different headings, ‘pre-vocational’, ‘pre-employment’ and ‘pre-apprenticeship’, they all are primarily the same Guthrie (2011). There are a number of reasons why this type of course may be beneficial to some learners. One is that they focus on basic skills and knowledge, which helps to overcome any difficulties and issues students face before they undertake a higher level qualification Guthrie (2011). According to Evans and Kersh (2006) as cited by Guthrie (2011) they ‘argue that pre-vocational education may best be seen as an ‘orientation stage’, this type of course will allow learners with no clear direction the opportunity to build on various skills and encounter various options relating to vocational education and workplace employment Evans and Kersh (2006). In Australia they are seen as a pathway into various trades.

According to Dumbrell, T. & Smith, E. (2007, p.33) they state ‘that pre-apprenticeships provided employability skills for young people who were failing to acquire such skills at school’. This is an important point as many of the young unemployed people who leave school early in Ireland find it difficult to gain entry into an apprenticeship and pathways to apprenticeship are scarce to say the least. Government policy needs to change, first to provide more apprenticeship opportunities and also to provide trade specific type programmes that will allow young people from all backgrounds the opportunity to reach the required standard for entry into apprenticeship. Studies carried out by Dumbrell and Smith (2007) have found that employers have a preference to employ those who have completed their pre-apprenticeship successfully, the study has also found that pre-apprenticeship increase the supply and also the quality of potential apprentices (Dumbrell & Smith 2007). When interviewed in this 2013 survey all instructors were in favour of some type of pre-course once it incorporated elements such as maths, drawing and also a variety of practical type topics covering various trades to give participants contact with as close as possible to real life situations that they would find themselves in when they start their working lives. The benefit of pre-apprenticeship courses have
been clearly outlined above and in the literature reviewed. Some companies have a preference for those who have completed a pre-apprenticeship course and can be seen as a way to enhance their employability prospects. In Ireland pre-apprenticeship could be specially designed to allow weak learners enhance their prospects of gaining an apprenticeship.

**Question 4: In your opinion which of the following subjects should be included in a pre-course prior to the start of Phase 2?**

Findings relating to this question are as follows:

- **Craft Maths**: 54%
- **Drawing**: 19%
- **Craft Science**: 34%
- **Practical Application (trade specific)**: 48%

As can be by those who answered question 3, 39% indicated that they would be in favour of a pre-course prior to the start of Phase 2. It is important to note that 54% would like to see craft maths as part of such a pre-course if available as stated in Question 4. The percentages appear to be higher in trades were maths play an
intricate part within various modules of that trade. All instructors interviewed without exception have indicated clearly that maths is a problem with a large proportion of apprentices within current and past learner groups that they have tutored. Drawing has been highlighted by instructors interviewed, where drawing is relevant to their course that they would like to see drawing done in some form of pre-course if available, drawing has been highlighted in the NARC (2009) report as needing some attention. Outlined clearly in Table 4 are the numbers of those from various trades who would like to see the inclusion of different subjects in a pre-course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C + J</th>
<th>Craft+ Maths</th>
<th>Drawing</th>
<th>Craft Science</th>
<th>Practical application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Mechanics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Goods</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Manufacture</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Making</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

Pre-courses have been shown to be beneficial to both the learner and the employer. Learners gain a number of advantages from doing a pre-course, it gives the learner the opportunity to discover if a certain work environment may suit or match their expectations. One instructor interviewed was all in favour of pre-courses provided that they incorporate various trades at a practical level to allow the learner to experience working in a simulated work situation. All interviewed were in favour of this type of course under certain conditions. Some conditions outlined relate to the inclusion of various elements, such as maths, drawing and literacy to allow weak learners up-skill to the required level for entry into apprenticeship. As can be seen in Table 4, this clearly indicates the high number that would like to see practical applications as a subject that should be included in a pre-course.
Question 5: Have all aspects of Phase 2 contents been relevant to meet your work requirements?

Findings relating to this question are as follows:
Yes: 85%
No: 15%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C + J</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Manufacturing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Making</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Mechanics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Goods</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72/85</td>
<td>13/85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

The results relating to this question speaks for itself. Phase 2 is seen as setting the foundation for any apprentice moving forward to future phases. This has been the perception of instructors interviewed that indeed phase 2 of apprenticeship is the entry point for off-the-job training and the importance of laying a good foundation for current and future phases is high on their list of priorities. The purpose of phase 2 is to prepare apprentices for future phases, both on and off-the-job.
Question 6: In your opinion were you prepared for the theory elements within Phase 2 off-the-job training?

Findings relating to this question are as follows:
Yes: 70%
No: 30%

The number which said yes to this question is quite high although the 30% that said no can be considered a high enough figure to cause concern. The majority of those who said no were within apprenticeship groups that showed high level junior cert entrants and indicated that theory was an issue. While this does not mean that all those with junior cert level have problems with theory, it does highlight the fact that theory is an issue on phase 2 of apprenticeship. Programmes developed to aid weak learners in the area of literacy and numeracy should be easily available, as already stated, support and early interventions allow for greater learning outcomes (OECD, 2009). It should not matter if only a small proportion of learners require support; the point is support should be available for those who require it. Again this goes back to the question relating to the availability of pre-courses, particularly for those who are weak academically.

Question 7: In your opinion is the length of Phase 2 adequate to cover all the course content?

Findings relating to this question are as follows:
Yes: 85%
No: 15%

The majority of those surveyed have clearly indicated that the length of Phase 2 is long enough. The remaining 15% said no, with most of these stating the time spent
on theory is insufficient to meet their needs. Again extra support may be required for a small number of learners and as has already been stated, the earlier the better.

![Graph showing Yes and No responses](image)

**Question 8: Do you think an IT or blended learning approach on some parts of Phase 2 would benefit you in the future?**

Findings relating to this question are as follows:

Yes: 63.5%

No: 36.5%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C &amp; J</th>
<th>Wood Manufacture</th>
<th>Electrical</th>
<th>Tool Making</th>
<th>Plumbing</th>
<th>Motor Mechanics</th>
<th>Heavy Goods</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td><strong>No</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85</td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6**

There is clear evidence as outlined in table 6 that a large majority of those surveyed would like to see a blended learning approach taken. It is well documented that a blended learning approach works in a lot of cases. The views of instructors are mixed in that some would like to see it adopted, while others would not. Those in favour indicate that the abundance of material available for those using this format and the interaction it allows, can only enhance the learning process. A pilot should be introduced into a single module within one of the trades. The benefits of this approach could be assessed to determine if it is feasibility and if it would be regarded as good practice for future learners. In today’s society IT is part and parcel of everyday life. This response from a trade instructor (1) who has experience on the blended learning approach outlined his view as follows:
‘I think blended learning for apprenticeship is an excellent idea; I think it would be a bad idea to just introduce. Blended learning is an excellent tool; however, we first have to teach people how to learn in a blended learning environment.

Question 9: What level of education was obtained by you prior to starting your trade?

Findings relating to this question are as follows:

Junior Cert: 15%
Leaving Cert: 71%
Applied Leaving: 6%
Pre-Apprenticeship: 3%
Other: 5%

This question highlights the fact that within this learner group a relatively small number of learners entered apprenticeship with their junior cert. 5% came into apprenticeship with a higher qualification than the leaving; 71% had the leaving; 6% had the Applied Leaving; and, 3% came with a pre-apprenticeship. This would indicate that those with a lower level of education find it difficult to get an apprenticeship. The amount of early school leavers and those who finish at lower secondary is clearly indicated in the statistics outlined in the literature reviewed.
There is a significant point to mention, fifty per cent of new registrations had their leaving and this gradually rose to fifty six per cent in 2007, however over the next five years this took a dramatic rise to **seventy four per cent** (FÁS Intranet 2013). If this trend continues the pathway for some learners will certainly be closed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C + J</th>
<th>Wood Manufacture</th>
<th>Electrical</th>
<th>Plumbing</th>
<th>Tool Making</th>
<th>Motor Mechanics</th>
<th>Heavy Goods</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A leaving</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre App.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

**Question 10: How would you rate your learning experiences during Phase 1 of your apprenticeship?**

- Excellent 29%
- Very good 35%
- Good 26%
- Not too good 10%

Overall the learners in this case enjoyed the experience of working on phase 1 of their apprenticeship. Those who commented on their experience as ‘not to good’, gives the reason as not having enough contact with their trade as they felt they should have had.
Question 11: How would you rate your learning experiences during Phase 2 of your apprenticeship?

Excellent                                    34%
Very good                                  43%
Good                                          19%
Not too good                                4%

Overall the majority of apprentices enjoyed their time while on phase 2 of their apprenticeship. Many see it as a time for learning and preparation for future phases, both on and off-the-job.

Question 12: What changes if any would you make to year 1 of apprenticeship?
A number of important points were made by some of the apprentices on this question. The number who filled out this question was relatively small; however those who did made some valid points. A number of apprentices did comment on the type of work that their company specialised in, plumbing will be used as an example. You have industrial and domestic type plumbing (both within the same trade), the problem is that some apprentices did comment that they spend a lot of time doing industrial heating and don’t get the opportunity to work on domestic heating. Some electrical
apprentices highlighted the same issue. This can be a problem in some of the trades, take carpentry and joinery for example, you have joinery, 1st fixing, 2nd fixing and roofing. Some employers do endeavour to make sure that their apprentices are exposed to all elements relevant to their trade. A large Australian building company “Big Builders” reviewed in the literature would be regarded as working to best practice to ensure that all their apprentices are exposed to all elements relating to the curriculum and are closely monitored by their mentors to ensure high quality work is completed on an on-going basis (Smith 2007).

Instructors when interviewed have highlighted this issue as a matter of concern and have stated this while being interviewed. One of the instructors interviewed has worked with services to business and is familiar with the on-the-job processes and procedures. He has stated that ‘The theoretical element and assessment set out by FÁS for on the job training is excellent, in theory its comprehensive, it’s measurable and all round excellent’, the point is that if they don’t assign the apprentice to specific tasks within the curriculum it loses its value. It should be pointed out that some employers are very much focused and ensure all elements with on-the-job assessments are completed to the right standard.

Some have commented on the learning gained and appear appreciative of the experience gained within FÁS and have stated that no changes are required. A large proportion have indicated that more time would be required to complete the theory elements and incorporate more science into the theory, the majority of these linked to the electrical apprenticeship. Overall the respondents who answered this question have seen Phase 2 as being a very positive and fulfilling experience.
4.3 Interview Process, Questions 1 - 11

The interview process for this research project was carried out with the participation of eight instructors who deliver phase 2 of apprenticeship, also one high ranking member from management. These instructors work in five different trades, electrical, tool making, plumbing, carpentry and joinery and wood manufacturing and finishing. It should be mentioned that all instructors came into FÁS from industry and have pedagogical development to degree level, for that reason their opinion on the standards based apprenticeship should be valued. The reason why a semi-structured approach was used in this instance is clearly outlined in Chapter 3. All participants in this process are referred to as interviewee number 1 through to 9. Not all the same questions have been answered by all participants, but the core questions relating to the standards based model are included.

**Question 1**: Does the current curriculum prepare apprentices for current and future work practices in industry?

This question asked whether the current curriculum meets the needs of the apprentice and industry. The answers given have determined whether change in the current curriculum is required within the current model? This goes back to the Hunt report (2011) which indicated that a major review should take place. This review has been confirmed by the fact that interviewee (5) who is involved with assessment development has confirmed that the curriculum is being updated within all trades on a continual basis, also that assessments are in the process of being validated and introduced later this year (2013). Change in this respect is taking place on an ongoing basis.

The answers given for this question are as follows: with four of the instructors saying yes, three of the instructors saying no and one saying both yes and no.

Response: Interviewee (1) has answered as follows: ‘Speaking around phase 2, in its current format, I do think it prepares apprentices for industry as it currently stands with some gaps in it. It would in its main sense cover the main elements in it. The other two instructors simply answered yes. Interviewee (6) in relation to the
curriculum has stated that ‘the curriculum would need to be updated every twelve to eighteen months’; Interviewee (5) has stated that ‘the model at the moment is inherently good’, Interviewee (9) has referred to the current apprenticeship model as being ‘quite a robust model, which has several benefits, with phasing both on and off-the-job as being a very good aspect of it’.

Those who answered no were asked to explain why? The responses are outlined as follows:

Recent advances in technology have had an impact on certain industries. Interviewee (4) has stated that ‘Plumbing for example has seen the introduction of new technologies; renewable energy is one example which is constantly changing. It is this change within industry that needs to be monitored continuously, with the curriculum to reflect this change at a similar pace’. Engineering on the other hand requires change in some instances with more up to date modern equipment, again with the curriculum to reflect this. One Interviewee (1) commented that there are ‘new practices within industry all the time. For example there are a lot more different types material that are used in industry, metals, plastics etc, for example, hanging door sets, metal studding which are current practices within industry’, it is these new practices that are not included in the curriculum. Change is continuous; it is this change that needs to be incorporated into the curriculum on a continual basis. This instructor did go on to say that as it stands currently he believes that the current model satisfies both the needs of the apprentice and industry. The Interviewee (7) who said both yes and no, has indicated that the trade in which he instructs ‘has changed considerably over the last thirty years, however the curriculum does not reflect this’ he did, however go on to say that the course is very good and gives each apprentice a good grounding for future phases.

One or two main points emerge from this question, one is that there is a need for change; this change is currently on the way with the new curriculum and assessments being developed and validated on a continuous basis. It is anticipated that change is on the way, however information relating to this change is not being relayed back to instructors, not all instructors are aware of what change is taking place or when. It is this change which will lead to a more up-to-date curriculum and a more updated set of assessments that fulfil the requirements of FETAC which is now part of QQI. It could
be argued that change in this area has been slow; however future changes will enhance the learning experience for the learner.

**Question 2:** *In your opinion do you think there are any issues relating to theory or practical elements in Phases 2 of apprenticeship?*

A number of important points were made relating to this question. A lot of issues surrounding the theory elements have been commented on. In the literature reviewed, issues relating to literacy and numeracy have been clearly highlighted. The number of early school leavers and reports relating to this (CSO 2012), (NALA 2013), (OECD 2010 and 2012) have clearly indicated that literacy and numeracy has and is an ongoing problem with some adults, early school leavers and those below FETAC level 4. Apprenticeship has also showed to have problems in this area. Instructors interviewed during this research (2013) have indicated without exception, that maths is indeed an issue within all their learner groups. One important point to note is that on Phase 2 in carpentry and joinery that an apprentice can pass the theory assessments without attempting any maths questions. This was confirmed by Interviewee (9).

The most common answer in relation to maths by instructors is ‘Maths is always an issue’, practically all trades incorporate maths into the trade, some more than others, however it is an important element within all of the trades. In the questionnaire distributed to eighty five apprentices during this research (2013), 58% indicated that they would like to see craft maths included in a pre-course if available. In that questionnaire some learners indicated that theory was an issue also.

**Instructor comments:**

*Interviewee (4) ‘maths has always been a problem down through the years’,*

*Interviewee (7) ‘they can’t add simple numbers unless they use a calculator’ and*

*Interviewee (1) ‘once we are working on maths that are trade related we can relate them directly to the work we are doing’.* All instructors have stated that they incorporate maths that is trade related into the work on a continual basis. Maths is undertaken in the classroom and then re-enforced at a practical level relative to the practical work undertaken at that time. In a recent research study (Furlong 2010) based on a ‘project based learning approach’ with three Phase 6 plumbing apprenticeship groups, the researcher indicated that apprentices gained a better understanding of maths using this approach and were much happier with their learning outcomes (Furlong 2010). Instructors interviewed have clearly indicated that
maths incorporated at a practical level generally lead to better learning outcomes. **Interviewee (9)** made a valid point in relation to literacy, in that you have ‘two streams of learners, one are people who have historical difficulties, dyslexia and so on. These learners present themselves and FÁS as an organisation are very good in dealing with people in this situation’. This interviewee went on to say that ‘on the other hand, you are talking about people who don’t present themselves’. As indicated in the OECD (2010, p39) review ‘relying on self-declaration of literacy and numeracy skills is insufficient’.

Literacy and numeracy are not regarded as a disability and on that basis support required for weak learners will depend on a number of factors. While instructors within FÁS are highly skilled and committed to the learner, this became clear during the interview process (2013), the ‘tool and support mechanism’ (NALA 2009) as highlighted in the literature reviewed, should be incorporated into apprenticeship programmes with adequate support put in place for those who need it. As according to Kollo (2006) as cited by OECD (2010, p39) ‘most marketable competences are developed through basic skills closely tied to literacy’, as this states a good basic grounding on literacy and numeracy is vital for progression in everyday working life. This perhaps is an area that needs more attention at a lower level of education. **Interviewee (8)** is of the view that apprentices feel that when they start serving their time they are ‘finished with schooling, left all that behind, but what they don’t realise is that they are never finished learning’. Some instructors have commented that there is a perception that if you are not clever enough for college, a trade is fine. A interesting point in relation to the education levels of those going into apprenticeship from 2006 through to 2012, in 2006 those entering apprenticeship with leaving cert was 55%, gradually rising to 74% in 2012 (FÁS Intranet 2013). While this may indicate that literacy and numeracy may not be as big a problem as it once was, it is important that supports are in place for those that require it.

Question 3 and question 4 relate to questions asked to **Interviewee (5)** who has worked in developing the new curriculum and assessment programme in one of the trades. **Question 3**: Do you think some of the new elements brought into the curriculum will be based on the new common awards?
Interviewee comments:
Response: Apprenticeship is going into the common award structure, there will only be one award. They are introducing two new modules, communications and teamwork, at the end of four years when they get their National Craft, by default they will get a level 6 in communications and a level 5 in teamwork, they carry a value. As well as having a National Craft they will also have two generic awards as well. In its 2009 report NARC recommended that discreet Generic Skills modules on Communications and Team-working be introduced to the apprenticeship programme, in the main by the programme’s overall curriculum.

**Question 4:** What value do you think they will have to apprenticeship as a whole?
Response: FETAC have a standard requirement that the generic awards make up 15% of the total value of the award (NARC 2009). The craft will be of greater value.

**Arguments for or against (researcher)**
There is an argument that more up to date material should be incorporated into the curriculum on a continual basis to keep in line with new changes within industry. This I believe is currently being addressed by changes within the new curriculum and assessments being developed. In the OECD review (2010) it states that ‘there is abundant international evidence to show that workplace training in VET programmes is beneficial to students and employers’. It does also state that soft skills such as teamwork and communication are better learned in an authentic work environment (Aarkrog, 2005) as cited by the OECD (2010). A blended learning approach in some instances may allow project work undertaken to identify new developments in trade specific areas, which can be opened up for discussion as part of project work within a particular group.

**Question 5:** Do you think any type pre-course prior to Phase 2 or 1 that would be trade specific in areas of literacy, numeracy or drawing, would benefit the learner?

All instructors answered ‘Yes’ and believed it would be a good idea prior to the start of apprenticeship, however there were a variety of reasons given why this should be the case. The literature reviewed relating to this question (Dumbrell and Smith 2007) and (Guthrie 2011) have clearly outlined the advantages relative to pre-courses, as
have employers indicating their preference to employing apprentices who have done this type of course in Australia. It should be pointed out that pre-apprenticeship courses do exist in Ireland which can lead to apprenticeship, generally organised to accommodate those who have failed or not done their Junior Certificate (Dun Laoghaire CTC 2013).

Instructor comments:

**Interviewee (2)** believes that ‘a pre-apprenticeship course would allow the learner get a feel for different trades before finally making a decision, it should include a number of different trades, it would give them more of an idea what they would have a flair for and also allow the instructor to determine what they are good at’. This would guild future apprentices and allow them make an informed decision about their future.

**Interviewee (1)** believes ‘that a well designed course would be a good advantage. Perhaps tailored for those who have the practical skills but poor academic learning ability, this type of course would also be an advantage. We could hone or sharpen those skills in preparation for what is required for when they become full time apprentices’. This sentiment would reflect the need for those with less academic skills the opportunity to up-skill in areas of weakness and thus allow full integration into a community of practice.

**Interviewee (6)** has stated that it ‘would definitely benefit everyone, anyone going into any type of trade’, he goes on further to say that it would be ‘better suited if it was trade specific’, it would within a short duration allow the trainee to know if it was or was not ‘for me’. Exposure to this type of course would allow young people gain first hand experience in various trades and also the opportunity to up-skill on any weaknesses that they may have.

**Interviewee (5)** makes a very good point in relation to drawing, which is a key component in a lot of the trades, this was referred to in the NARC (2009) report where ‘assessments in the construction and engineering trade families tended to be more labour intensive than others and reflected the need of apprentices to refer to and to interpret drawings’. The interviewee stated that ‘one of the biggest issues we have
in carpentry and joinery is tech drawing. A lot of secondary schools are not doing it any more. It is a key component in the aircraft and engineering crafts as well’. A suggestion this instructors makes is to allow extra time to up-skill on maths and drawing at the beginning of Phase 2. Drawing is an important element in a number of trades, the simple fact of being able to read drawings is important, as drawing is the initial stage of development for many projects which are undertaken in various trades. If we take carpentry and joinery as an example, when drawing is used as a pre-cursor to many of the practical projects undertaken within various modules throughout the course, its importance can clearly be identified. Lack of focus on drawing within the curriculum within some trades as highlighted by some of the instructors interviewed was apparent; however it would not be prudent to highlight these separately.

Some important points have been made in favour of pre-course, pre-apprenticeship type courses. It should be noted that those instructors on the ground have a good understanding of what the problems or issues are faced by learners in apprenticeship on a day to day basis. Therefore recommendations made by this set of instructors should warrant some attention in relation to problems faced by apprentices during their training.

**Question 6: What are your views on on-the-job training, the employers role and on the job training as a whole?**

This point is highlighted in the literature reviewed. O’Connor (2006, p36) did say that ‘some employers provide excellent work based training, but others simply use apprentices on tasks of a repetitive nature’. In a dissertation by Bates (2011) he states that two out of the three interviewed did not do formal assessments during their on-the-job training. On-the-job Competence Assessment FÁS (2013), as written into the curriculum for carpentry and joinery states that the ‘The workplace assessment is carried out by the workplace supervisor/assessor. An assessment specification and a detailed workplace checklist are provided in each of the on-the-job phases’, this process applies to all trades and should be implemented as specified by FÁS.

**Interviewee (6)** when asked question six stated that ‘young people weren’t getting the training they were suppose to be getting, this was obvious when they came into do their off-the-job training in FÁS, they were a long way off the standard that they were suppose to be at’. This instructor make an important point that a lot may depend on
the company, its area of business and what work it would sub contract out. The work some companies do may be specialised and from an apprentices point of view quite narrow in the training that they receive. Another point made by this interviewee was that from his experience small companies with perhaps two trades’ men and two or even three apprentices tend to get very good training, this is clearly reflected by their knowledge of the trade upon entry into Phase 2. This point is further reinforced by comments made by interviewee (8) when he stated that ‘from my own experience, I took it very seriously as an employer in relation to the training given to my apprentices’

Interviewee (1) has stated that ‘the theoretical element and assessment set out by FÁS for on-the-job training is excellent, in theory, if done to the letter of the law’, this instructor goes on to say that in his experience as a senior training advisor, while monitoring companies and employees in their training element of it, he found that they simply don’t adhere to the practice. He does goes on to say that some employers are very focused on and very interested in the training element and do try to follow it to the letter of the law and that is very good. He does also add that if employers don’t assign the apprentices with the specific tasks within the curriculum it ‘loses its value’. Interviewee (3) response to this question was that for some ‘it would only be a tick box exercise’. Interviewee (4) has stated that ‘with some firms, there is a view that a trainee could serve his time putting up brackets, which is unacceptable’. Interviewee (2) response was that ‘the employers do very little with the apprentices’.

Interviewee (9) believes that employers do fulfil their obligations on on-the-job phases, his response to this question is as follows: ‘when the apprentice does on the-job training there is a tri-partite relationship, the apprentice, the employer and FÁS. If you take a look at the employer’s role, what they actually do in terms of training is good; it’s a matter of how we label it. There has been a debate on whether the term assessment is correct, because does the employer actually sit down and carry out an assessment, there are different views on that. My view is that it doesn’t happen, that when the employer actually completes the on-the-job schedule they are doing it from a holistic perspective, can this apprentice do the actual task? You have to ask is assessment the right word, the other word is; is it more formative assessment rather than a pure assessment. What the employer is actually doing is signing off on the
employee’s competence to do these particular set of tasks, I don’t think there is anything wrong with that.

In an influential report from the National Assessment Review Committee (NARC) (2009) it has defined Formative Assessment as ‘a process which uses feedback from learners to consolidate their attainments, to identify particular training needs, and to help instructors optimise the effectiveness of their training programmes’. The NARC (2009, p51) ‘recommends the adoption of a more formal approach to Formative Assessments in the Apprenticeship Programme’. While the formative approach is highly regarded for what it does, is a summative assessment approach also required for on-the-job training? I would say the answer is yes, however, to what extent is unclear as there are valid points made for and against as outlined above.

Interviewee (9) does go on to say that the employer’s main focus is fiscal sustainability and in addition to that they are actually training apprentices. Interviewee (1) on this point has stated that employers have a responsibility to the job, their employees and their clients.

Interviewee (5) has stated that ‘as part of the new curriculum, a portfolio will be produced and kept by each apprentice, the portfolio will be added to on a continual basis starting at Phase 1 right through to Phase 7’. Each Phase will be completed fully before progression to further Phases will be allowed; this should be checked before entry onto off-the-job Phases. A record of work produced will be included in this portfolio, which will include a record of required assessments to be done throughout all Phases. This will put the onus on both the apprentice and employer to ensure that all specified tasks are completed on an on-going basis as required by the awarding body, it will also allow FÁS as a training organisation to monitor closely the progress of apprentices on various phases. The NARC (2009, p45) report recommends that ‘Workplace Portfolios should be introduced in Phases 3, 5 and 7 to reinforce the existing assessments by workplace assessors’. NARC (2009, p46) also recommends a number of objectives for workplace portfolios, two of which are outlined as follows:

- To assist apprentices to understand better the interactions between knowledge and skills gained off-the-job and their on-the-job experiences;
To help apprentices gain clearer understandings of their individual contributions to their particular employers’ objectives;

There is a perception among instructors that on-the-job training in its current format has flaws. While it is believed among instructors that there are some very good employers who nurture and mentor their apprentice to a very high standard, this certainly would be seen as good practice. This should be encouraged in order to produce a highly qualified apprentice, however, all processes within the system will need to be adhered to and followed. In order for the apprenticeship system to work, as already stated a tri-partite approach is required, this in essence will allow the needs of all to be met. This will require commitment from all parties in relation to their duty of care and responsibilities placed on them.

**Question 7: Do you think companies should have trained personal to assess on-the-job assessments?**

This recommendation was made in an OECD report (2010) when it stated that as a long term goal pedagogical training should be offered to supervisors of VET students (apprentices) in companies. 

**Interviewee (1)** has responded by saying that ‘any company irrespective of size that have decided to take on the responsibility of taking on an apprentice must realise number one, that they are an apprentice and they are responsible for their training, that they themselves should be pedagogically trained, they should contractually sign to do the training, with evidence showing that they have done that. Should they not be willing to do that, they shouldn’t be allowed to take on an apprentice. The monitoring from the FÁS perspective should be much more stringent and should be done by subject matter experts’.

**Interviewee (5)** reply to this question states that ‘Going forward under FETAC’s mandate, all assessments have to be gradable, that includes on-the-jobs ones as well’.

Any other instructor who responded to this question indicated that all assessments both on and off-the-job should be done by qualified personnel. Moving forward this issue will need to be addressed as it is a requirement by FETAC, the monitoring of all assessments will need to be carried out by qualified personnel. The NARC (2009) report examined various options on how it could improve the effectiveness of on-the-
job assessments? One of the current requirements by FÁS is the ability of the employer to provide suitably qualified persons to act as workplace assessors (NARC 2009). A number of suggestions have been put forward by NARC in relation to improving the effectiveness of on-the-job assessments. This ranges from: extending the role of training advisors to informally train workplace assessors, or using training instructors and Institute of Technology Lecturers to act in an advisory capacity. Another recommendation is the use of a portfolio, the advantages of this method have already been highlighted, although on its own it may not be enough. This method could enhance the whole learning process for the learner and the need for formal assessments for on-the-job could be reduced to reflect this.

**Question 8: What is your view on the Competency Determination Mechanism (CDM) process?**

This process was introduced by FÁS as stated by Ciarán Cannon (2012) Minister for Education and Skills in order that it ‘will provide redundant apprentices with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge against the occupational standard for the specified trade in a FÁS training centre’. Four of the instructors interviewed have run the CDM programme with additional comments by interviewee (9) on this question, the trades involved were carpentry and joinery and electrical. **Interviewee (8)** has answered this question by saying that ‘It is an excellent measure of an apprentice’s ability at the end of his apprenticeship; any one that successfully completes it would be very competent in the workplace’. **Interviewee (1)** has stated ‘It’s a comprehensive assessment, covering all necessary elements of the trade, with some minor adjustments it could be used in a number of different ways within the current curriculum’. **Interviewee (2)** has stated that ‘CDM is a valuable tool in assessing an apprentice’s ability and highlight any weaknesses in the apprenticeship system. **Interviewee (6)** has stated that ‘I think it would give a good overall perception of apprentices craft ability on all modules assessed within the CDM. It does, however restrict certain apprentices due to time served in an individual field with the contractor, what I mean by that is, certain companies specialise in certain areas (trade specific) with the apprentices technical ability being quite narrow’.

The design and application of this assessment method would appear to test apprentice’s knowledge and competency in the related trades of those taking part to a
very high standard. Those interviewed would be of the opinion that it is an excellent assessment, with those who are successful well deserving of the reward that it brings. This process can highlight weaknesses as stated during the interview process, such as lack of experience, lack of knowledge in all elements within the trade. It should be noted that the content of this assessment should be covered on all on and off-the-job phases, this fact being specific to its design. One important point made by interviewee (6) relates to the learning experiences of some apprentices whose training would be regarded as quite narrow. This would appear to put some apprentices at a disadvantage due to the nature of their employers’ specialised areas of business. If we look at the German apprenticeship model and the way some apprenticeships are split into specialised segments. If we look at the ESB for example, the area of training required for their apprentices is quite specific, this could apply to many of the big companies depending on their area of business. This relates back to on-the-job training, with the training provided by some employers whose area of business is perhaps service specific which in turn means that the training the apprentice receives can be quite narrow in nature. Apprentices have the right to a full and comprehensive training both on and off-the-job to ensure that they reach the required standard at the end of their apprenticeship.

**Question 9:** Do you think CDM should be part of the assessment process within apprenticeship?

**Interviewee (8)** answered: ‘Yes, as a final assessment, because it encompasses a wide range of learning involved in apprenticeship, some of which is only measured through theory questions at present’. **Interviewee (1)** answer was ‘Yes, it would be very useful at the end of the current process, it could replace Phase 7’. **Interviewee (2)** answered ‘Yes, it should be a final assessment, which should be undertaken before achieving the National Craft Certificate, ensuring the integrity of the trade’. **Interviewee (6)** has answered yes and no to this question, his response was ‘The multi national companies are streamlining an apprentice to their own industrial technical needs. Examples of which are industrial fitters, mechanical plant and electrical maintenance. It restricts certain apprentices from participating in the CDM due to technical and craft ability depending on who they have served their time with’. **Interviewee (9)** replied by saying ‘Yes, very much so, I think there are advantages and qualitative reasons why doing some kind of terminal test, ultimately at the end of apprenticeship could be very
valuable in terms of ensuring that the standards are met and is a good feedback mechanism for the actual delivery of apprenticeship as well’.

It is quite clear from the responses by those who answered questions 8 and question 9 that CDM achieves a number of important points. It allows the apprentice to be assessed to a high level of competency, thus ensuring the integrity of the trade while at the same time ensuring trades persons are produced to a very high standard. While there are proposed changes with apprenticeship, this may be an opportune time for the integration of CDM into apprenticeship as part of the assessment process. It has also highlighted the fact the some apprentices training can be quite narrow due to the nature of their employers business.

**Question 10: Do you think a blended learning approach within apprenticeship would be beneficial to the student and the tutor?**

It is what Weller (2011) refers to as the ‘pedagogy of abundance’ that many would see this as an aid to learning that should not be overlooked, with free open access to such a broad range of educational content seen as a way to enhance the learning process. The viewpoint of the researcher is that a blended learning approach should be introduced as a pilot in one module as an element within that module. As indicated in the literature reviewed the learning tasks should be set as according to Mayes, T. (2002, p2) at the ‘right level of difficulty’ to match the learners.

**Interviewee (1)** is in favour of a blended learning approach, provided ‘once everything is in place, once the learner themselves are aware of how to learn using a blended environment, the tool and commitment involved, because there is much more self-disciplined learning than traditional classroom learning’.

**Interviewee (6)** felt that a blended learning approach would benefit the learners on his course; however, in his opinion he thought that it may not suit every apprenticeship trade. The remainder of instructors who answered this question indicated that a blended approach would not suit all learners and would not be in favour of it. Some felt that the skills required, would not be in place, some learners would not be mature enough for the commitment required and one interviewee (3) felt that the course he tutored in, was too practical in nature to benefit the learners involved.
A blended learning approach is widely used in many training organisations, its use has proved to be beneficial in many instances, however unless it is piloted in apprenticeship on a variety of courses the benefits it may achieve may not be realised. The primary objective of a blended approach in apprenticeship would be to enhance the learning experience for the learner; it may allow better integration by learners who may otherwise not participate. From a positive perspective it allows for better interaction, abundance of learning material and so on. If we look at the NARC (2009) report in relation to preparation for assessment, it highlights a number of points to aid the learner towards the use of Moodle, libraries and various aids to prepare for assessment. A blended learning approach may incorporate many of these elements with interaction taking place with learners, tutors and a variety of other processes available using that format. As already stated the benefits this approach could generate will not be forthcoming unless it is piloted, this could be simply done on one small element within a module of a given trade to determine if the potential benefits warrant further investment.

**Question 11:** Do you think apprenticeship will stay where it is at the moment or transferred to the Educational Training Boards or the Institute of Technology, what is your view on this point?

This is a relevant point at the moment, however the future of apprenticeship is undecided (April 2013) in relation to who will deliver it in the future. As already stated it will stay the responsibility of SOLAS for the time being. All instructors believe that apprenticeship should stay in the training centres as part of the newly established ETB’s. A number of interesting points were made by interviewee (9) when asked this question, his response was as follows: ‘I think there is quite a significant change going on in the education area currently in Ireland and it’s a policy decision that the Government wants three prongs in the education system. The first is Primary and Secondary, the second is Further Education and Training and the third is Higher Education level 7 and upwards. I think apprenticeship is very much in the Further Education Training area, this is really the remit of SOLAS and delivery of which is the Educational Training Boards. I think it is an anomaly that apprenticeship is currently in the Institutes of Technology, I think that needs to be assessed. Is that the best place for it? Because that’s not their core product, their core product is higher education and our core product when we move into the ETB’s
is further education training. I would like to see personally, that the ETB’s take fully 
the responsibility for the apprenticeship programme and they look at expanding the 
model to other areas. This is a valid point; expansion of apprenticeship could be 
based on the German or Australian model with some traineeships changed to the 
apprenticeship model.
Chapter 5
Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion:
Going back to the Research Statement: ‘Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland: Are Changes Required to Meet Current Economic and Social Needs?’ I as a researcher set out to investigate the current apprenticeship model and determine what changes if any were required. It is believed that this question has clearly been answered and changes are required to the current apprenticeship system. This research has highlighted a number of important points that need to be addressed by those in charge of apprenticeship. There are many changes currently taking place which are in the public domain, these changes are being introduced on a continual basis and would be seen as continual improvement to the current system. There are other changes proposed, however, due to the uncertainty and lack of public knowledge surrounding these changes, comments cannot be made on those proposed changes at this moment in time. This research is based on available up-to-date information and has concluded that several changes if made, would only enhance the apprenticeship system as a whole, with the needs and welfare of the learner central to these proposed changes. Standards based apprenticeship was introduced in 1991, since then there has been change to the curriculum on a number of occasions, this change to reflect the change within industry. Whether that change is sufficient to meet current demands has been answered. Having worked within the construction industry and also the role of instructor over a forty year period has prompted this research to take place. It is important that needs of apprentices and indeed young people who would aspire to take this path are availed the opportunity to do so. This research has looked at various elements within the current model to determine what and if any changes are required for now and in the future. The question could be asked why do research? this according to Bryman, A. (2012, p5) sums it up ‘there is an aspect of our understanding of what goes on in our society that is to some extent unresolved’, at this moment in time it is hard to understand why apprenticeship is so restrictive in that the pathway for many appears to be closed.
Recommendations

5.2 Recommendations: There are a number of recommendations to be made in light of the work done on the research that has been conducted.

5.2.1 Literacy and Numeracy in the Workplace

Literacy and Numeracy has clearly been identified as a problem among young and adults alike. Apprenticeship has also been highlighted as an area of concern, this was clearly highlighted by NALA through the development of the ‘Tool and support mechanism’ (NALA, 2007 -2009) programme. It was also highlighted in the OECD (2010) review of VET programmes. With the literature reviewed it can be concluded that in relation to apprenticeship this issue, needs to be identified and supports put in place if required. It has also been shown that if intervention is lacking, it could affect the performance of some at a later stage in their apprenticeship.

Challenges faced:

Weak literacy and numeracy are serious problems for some learners when entering apprenticeship, but these problems are not often identified, which means that they cannot be addressed at an early stage of apprenticeship. Strong literacy and numeracy as outlined in the OECD (2010) review clearly indicate that these skills are associated with better performance in the labour market.

Recommendations:

The first recommendation is that a screening process needs to be put in place to identify those who may need support in this area. This could be achieved by the introduction of the ‘tool and support mechanism’ designed in conjunction with FÁS and NALA. This would be seen as an initial step in identifying the problem and allow supports to be put in place for learners. Supports should be put in place that are easily available to the learner, designed to meet their needs by literacy tutors who are familiar with the terminology used in the trade to be supported. This should be tactfully done to avoid any undue pressure to the learner.

Although instructors within FÁS are highly skilled and generally are aware of those who need support at an early stage during phase 2 courses, a number of factors will
determine what support can be given. Phase 2 is carried out over a twenty week period, with a set curriculum to follow, the content and delivery of the curriculum does not allow for one to one support on a continual basis. The wellbeing of the group as a whole is paramount and inclusion by all is encouraged to ensure no learner remains on the periphery. There are many supports currently available through adult education programmes within local VEC’s, although unless tutors used have trade backgrounds the desired results may not be achieved, particularly within apprenticeship.

5.2.2 On-the-job Training

This element within apprenticeship if run correctly will aid positive progression to off-the-job Phases. This has been highlighted in the past as a weak link in the standards based apprenticeship system (O’Connor 2006) and would appear to still be an issue. All instructors interviewed have in their opinion indicated that on-the-job training and assessments lack in some instances the commitment and experience of some employers to successfully fulfil their obligations in this area. Failure to comply fully with FÁS rules and regulations in this area of training will put the learner at a disadvantage throughout various Phases of their apprenticeship.

Challenges faced:

Many challenges are faced in this area of training, with the responsibility of on-the-job training and assessments currently with employers.

Recommendations:

A number of important points have been highlighted by instructors who have been interviewed during this research process. Instructor (1) has referred to on-the-job assessments as ‘excellent’, this point is not disputed, however, it is important that this process is completed fully on all the relevant Phases. Instructor (5) indicated that Portfolios are to be introduced into apprenticeship in an effort to document progress on various phases.

The main recommendation on this issue is that Workplace Portfolios are included throughout all the Phases, with the emphasis on on-the-job Phases. The introduction of a Portfolio would benefit all concerned in a number of ways:
First of all it would allow the apprentice the opportunity to accumulate a complete list of activities and accomplishments throughout all Phases of their apprenticeship, particularly on-the-job Phases.

Visual evidence could be included for assessments undertaken throughout on-the-job Phases, which would provide confirmation of achievements during these phases.

The portfolio would allow instructors to assess work undertaken during on-the-job training, also to provide guidance and assist apprentices with weaknesses if required.

It would allow instructors the opportunity to provide constructive feedback to apprentices on their progress and review progress relative to their craft.

Monitoring should take place to ensure that all processes are being followed correctly.

Above are some recommendations which could enhance the learning experience for the learner, and allow a comprehensive account of each learner's progress at any stage of their apprenticeship. The onus should be on the apprentice to maintain and keep up to date records within the Portfolio at all times. Some pedagogical training of workplace supervisors should be a requirement moving forward and should be gradually introduced to allow full compliance of on-the-job requirements within a timetable agreed by all parties.

5.2.3 Low Apprenticeship Registrations and Entry Requirements:
Apprentice registrations over the past four years have been very low, this fact being highlighted in the FÁS Annual Reports 2008 through to 2011 and also figures highlighted for 2012. Apprenticeship is demand led; currently demand is very low due to the collapse of the construction industry. Junior cert level will allow entry into apprenticeship. As an alternative to the junior cert, a review by the OECD (2010, p24) stated that ‘apprenticeships could maintain a limited general content, require that apprentices hold a Leaving Certificate, and shift some of the costs of more practical training from the public budget to companies’. As already shown there is an increasingly high percentage of leaving cert students entering apprenticeship every year, there are a number of reasons why apprenticeship should not be exclusive to
leaving cert students, it would exclude a large number of young people who may be less academic and may want to take a different pathway to apprenticeship.

On-the-job training, as has already been shown has issues that need to be addressed. While it is recognised that some companies have expertise to allow this training to take place, it is unclear whether all would be in a position to deliver the training to meet the requirements set out by FETAC. Maths at leaving cert standard in certain trades could be a requirement, but this should only apply to a small number of trades where maths is an integral part of that trade.

Challenges faced:
The challenges faced will depend on how Government form policy in this area. There is no apparent policy in place to allow a reasonable number of young people take up an apprenticeship across the trades. FÁS as an organisation is to be disbanded, this in itself has implications for apprenticeship and how it is to be dealt with by Government. Over the last four years numbers averaged around one thousand four hundred registrations per year. This has been commented on by all those interviewed as being too low.

Recommendations:
It would seem prudent that a minimum number of registrations take place on a yearly basis, with a set number per trade, even trades where demand is weak. Equal opportunities should be made available to all young people with supports in place to allow all the opportunity to take up an apprenticeship provided set standards are reached. Various type courses need to be put in place to allow weak learners reach the required standard to gain entry into apprenticeship. Pre-courses or pre-apprenticeship courses are highly regarded internationally (Australia) and all instructors interviewed (2013) see it as an advantage for a variety of reasons which have been outlined in chapter 4. Up-skilling in basic education for many would appear to be the key for progression in a lot of cases, with further supports in place if required for those who have gained entry into apprenticeship.

5.2.4 Competency Determination Mechanism
The role of CDM has been clearly highlighted in the literature as a tool to allow apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeship once certain requirements are
met. It has been shown that this CDM process has merit, both for the apprentice, the employer and indeed the reputation Ireland has for producing quality trades people.

**Challenges faced:**
The CDM takes place over a number of weeks depending on the trade. The cost of running this programme on a large scale could be an issue; however, it could be redesigned to reduce the content and time involved, without diluting the integrity of the assessment.

**Recommendations:**
Apprentices who qualify to take part in the CDM process have already passed all the required standards, but have not fulfilled the time-served requirement; in essence the CDM is an assessment which has to be passed successfully by those who take part. There is a question mark over whether this is fair as those who take part have already passed all assessments, although this process is highly regarded by many as a way of assessing the ability of apprentices to allow certification of the National Craft Certificate. The CDM could be used as a final assessment to test the competency of the apprentice in order to qualify for the National Craft Certificate. Phase 4 and Phase 6 could be amalgamated into a single Phase and done at an earlier stage of apprenticeship, with the CDM used to test the competencies of future trades people. As already stated it could be redesigned to reduce costs to an acceptable level.

**5.2.5 Blended Learning Approach**
IT to some degree is present within apprenticeship although a blended learning approach does not currently exist in this area. Technology in some trades is increasing all the time, electrical is one example with the introduction of new technologies on a continual basis, plumbing is another example with solar energy constantly evolving all the time.

**Challenges faced:**
There are a number of challenges faced with the possible introduction of a blended learning approach to any apprenticeship course. All learners involved in this approach would need to be computer literate to a certain level; access to the internet and a PC would also be a requirement. There would have to be full buy-in by management and instructors who would have to tutor using this approach to learning.
Recommendations:
A pilot should take place in a specific trade at a designated location with suitable facilities to assess the potential benefits of a blended learning approach. It is important that FÁS as an organisation utilize fully smart technology in the delivery of apprenticeship learning. Unless this approach is pilot tested, the potential benefits or indeed lack of will never be known.

5.2.6 The Future of Apprenticeship in Ireland
With FÁS in the process of being disbanded, the future of apprenticeship is unclear.

Challenges faced:
There are a number of challenges currently faced within apprenticeship. If the entry requirements were raised to leaving cert standard for example, it would certainly close the pathway for many into apprenticeship. It should be acknowledged that a higher standard in certain subjects (maths) within certain trades should be achieved due to the high academic requirements needed to be successful in that trade, this point highlighted by the OECD (2010) review when employers raised concerns about some apprentices inability to pass off-the-job assessments due to the high academic level required to complete theory assessments successfully.

The OECD (2010) review has referred to apprenticeship as being too narrow in relation to its set of occupations. Further trades should be introduced to broaden the scope in this area, however as highlighted in the OECD (2010, p20) review ‘the procedure to create an apprenticeship in a new trade is extremely lengthy and difficult as it requires the agreement of all relevant stakeholders’.

Recommendations:
This process should be assessed in order to address the skills need of the current and future labour markets. Some of the trades could be split, an example of one is plumbing, which could be split into industrial and domestic, however it should be noted that Irish trades people have excellent reputations as highly skilled and competent trades people abroad, this due to the fact that they are very versatile and knowledgeable in all aspects of their trade. It is the broad knowledge acquired during training and the versatility that this allows would appear to place such a demand on Irish trades people, this being clearly demonstrated by the demand sought from
various Countries looking to export this skill set from our country. This skill set will not exist unless the training of apprentices is as comprehensive as it should be.

5.2.7 Who Will Deliver Apprenticeship?
The future of apprenticeship is unclear, outlined are a number of points relating to this matter.

Challenges faced:
The uncertainties surrounding apprenticeship are apparent, the question is? Who is best suited to deliver it and why?

Recommendations: it is recommended that the soon to formed ETB’s avail of the expertise that is currently available within FÁS. It has been shown in the literature that the current bank of instructors within FÁS are highly skilled, educated and very much committed to the welfare and responsibilities to the apprentices they tutor.
Reference List:


Appendices
Appendix 1

Employer Consent Form
Date: 6th January 2013

To Whom It May Concern

I wish to confirm that Mr Terry O’Hare, Assistant Training Standards Officer, has been given permission to carry out a research project on Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland: Are Changes Required to Meet Current Economic Needs?

I understand that this project is part of the Year 2 Masters Programme in Training and Education for N.U.I. Galway.

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Manager, FÁS
Dundalk Training Centre
Appendix 2

Questionnaire Consent Form
Dear Sir/Madam,

This research is being conducted in part fulfilment of the requirements for a MA in Adult Training and Education with the Open Learning Centre N.U.I. Galway. My project supervisor is Marie Morrissey.

For my project, I have chosen to look at Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland. Study findings should show if there a need for change within the current Standards Based Apprenticeship and also to see if the needs of all apprentices are being met.

I am seeking your assistance in completing the attached questionnaire. I realise you are busy, but your response is of great value and importance to me in researching this topic. The questionnaire should only take about five to ten minutes to complete.

All participation is voluntary and respondents shall remain anonymous with no traceability of results gathered. This research shall only be seen by me and an assessor with N.U.I. Galway.

If you have any questions or comments, you call me at 086-6037615. I appreciate your assistance with this survey and thank you, in anticipation, for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

By ticking the below box, I hereby give permission for the use of the information for the reasons stated above.

☐

Sincerely

Terry O’Hare.
Appendix 3

Questionnaire
Research Title: *Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland: Are Changes Required to Meet Current Economic Needs?*

Researcher: Terry O’Hare

Apprentice Questionnaire February 2013

This Questionnaire contains 12 questions relating to Year 1 of the current Standards Based Apprenticeship.

The questionnaire should be completed by apprentices who are currently nearing completion on Phase 2 of their apprenticeship.

The information gathered, will be used as part of a MA research project to determine if the current standards based apprenticeship meet current market requirements, or if there is a need for change to its current format. Apprentices will be asked to consider a number of options relating to their trade, training courses prior to the start of their apprenticeship, also what their views are on the current standard based apprenticeship.

No names are required and all information will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Please answer questions as accurately as possible and return with the statement of Informed Consent in the envelope provided. Please return by said date to:

Terry O’Hare

Fás, Training Centre,
Dundalk
Co. Louth.
Apprentice Questionnaire February 2013
Phase 1 & 2 of Apprenticeship
Questionnaire

Survey Questions: Please place a clear tick in the appropriate box and include your own comments or suggestions if necessary.

1. In which of the following trades do you work?
   - Carpenter & Joinery
   - Electrical
   - Motor Mechanic
   - Tool Making
   - Other
   If other, please specify:
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

2. Please indicate what part of Phase 1 or Phase 2 is of most benefit to you and why?
   Phase 1
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   Phase 2
   ___________________________________________________________

3. In your opinion do you think a pre-course which relates to your trade would have been beneficial to you prior to the start of your Phase 2 off-the-job training?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not Sure
4. In your opinion which of the following subjects should be included in a pre-course prior to the start of Phase 2?

- Craft Maths
- Drawing
- Craft Science
- Practical Application (trade specific)
- Other

If other, please specify:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

5. Have all aspects of Phase 2 contents been relevant to meet your work requirements?

- Yes
- No

If no please comment

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

6. In your opinion were you prepared for the theory based elements within Phase 2 off-the-job training?

- Yes
- No

If no please comment:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
7. In your opinion is the length of Phase 2 adequate to cover all the course content?
   - Yes
   - No

If no please comment:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

8. Do you think an IT or blended learning approach on some parts of Phase 2 would benefit you in the future?
   - Yes
   - No

9. What level of education was obtained by you prior to starting your trade?
   - Junior Cert
   - Leaving Cert
   - Applied Leaving
   - Pre-Apprenticeship
   - Other

If other, please specify:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

10. How would you rate your learning experiences during Phase 1 one of your apprenticeship?
    - Excellent
    - Very good
    - Good
    - Not to good
11. How would you rate your learning experiences during Phase 2 of your apprenticeship?

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Not to good

12. What changes if any would you make to year 1 of apprenticeship/

Please comment

___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
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Any Additional Comments

________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

End of Questionnaire

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you require any clarification about any of the questions please feel free to contact me. Thank You.
Appendix 4

Interview consent form
Dear Sir/Madam,

This research is being conducted in part fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters in Training and Education with the Open Learning Centre N.U.I. Galway. My project supervisor is Marie Morrissey.

For my project, I have chosen to look at Standards Based Apprenticeship in Ireland. Study findings should show if there a need for change within the current Standards Based Apprenticeship and also to see if the needs of all learners are met.

I am seeking your assistance in taking part in this interview. I realise you are busy, but your response is of great value and importance to me in researching this topic. The interview should only take about ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

All participation is voluntary and respondents shall remain anonymous with no traceability of results gathered. This research shall only be seen by me and an assessor with N.U.I. Galway.

If you have any questions or comments, you can call me at 086-6037615. I appreciate your assistance with this survey and thank you, in anticipation, for taking the time to take part in this interview process.

Signature of Participant: ……………………… Date: …………………

Signature of Researcher: ……………………… Date: …………………
Appendix 5

Interview questions
Interview: Standards Based Apprenticeship

Standardised open-ended interview
Instructor, manager, curriculum officer: interview questions.

Question 1: Does the current curriculum prepare apprentices for current and future work practices in industry?

Question 2: In your opinion do you think there are any issues relating to theory or practical elements in Phases 2 of apprenticeship?

Question 3: Do you think some of the new elements brought in the curriculum will be based on the new common awards?

Question 4: What value do you think they will have to apprenticeship as a whole?

Question 5: Do you think any type of pre-course prior to Phase 2 or 1 that would be trade specific in areas of literacy, numeracy or drawing, would benefit the learner?

Question 6: What are your views on on-the-job training, the employers role and on the job training as a whole?

Question 7: Do you think companies should have trained personal to assess on-the-job assessments?

Question 8: What is your view on the Competency Determination Mechanism (CDM) process?

Question 9: Do you think CDM should be part of the assessment process within apprenticeship?

Question 10: Do you think a blended learning approach within apprenticeship would be beneficial to the student and the tutor?

Question 11: Do you think apprenticeship will stay where it is at the moment or transferred to the ETB’s or the IoT’s, what is your view on this point?