

# St Helens Chamber Limited

Independent learning provider

## Inspection dates

2–5 February 2016

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for learners	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Traineeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Strong leadership sets a culture of high expectations for staff, apprentices and learners and results in high standards.
- Outcomes for apprentices and learners are good; a very large proportion progress to employment and use the skills they have gained.
- As a result of good teaching, learning and assessment a large majority of apprentices successfully complete their framework.
- Training advisers are experienced and skilful; they provide apprentices and learners with good all round support and learners make good progress.
- Learners and apprentices demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning and very good behaviour in lessons and the workplace.
- Leaders and managers engage well in partnerships and respond particularly effectively to local, regional and national priorities; thus opening up good routes into employment for local people.

### It is not yet an outstanding provider

- The improvement strategy for teaching and learning lacks sufficient impact.
- Written feedback to apprentices and adult learners is not precise enough to help them improve their performance.
- Not all apprentices complete their qualifications within planned timescales.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- The St Helens Chamber Limited (the Chamber) is located in the centre of St Helens, which is one of the five boroughs of Merseyside. The Chamber has three main sites and provides training for approximately 500 apprentices, 1,000 adult learners, 70 learners on traineeships and a small group of around 20 learners on study programmes.
- The chief executive is a member of the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Recently the Chamber won a contract from the Skills Funding Agency to deliver a series of job fairs and to promote apprenticeships across England through the Chamber of Commerce network.
- St Helens has a population of 176,000 with an unemployment rate in line with the national average. Growth economic sectors in the area include business services, logistics, and science, technology and engineering skills across a range of sectors.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the approach used to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment quickly identifies and addresses any weaknesses by developing observation methods and interventions that are more directly focused on learners and their learning.
- Focus staff development on improving teaching methods that ensure:
  - the pace of learning is checked thoroughly with individual learners
  - teachers' questioning skills are developed to be more effective in checking learning
  - tutors' written feedback identifies what learners need to do to improve.
- Increase the proportion of apprentices who complete their framework within the planned time, by:
  - planning training programmes carefully with employers and apprentices
  - identifying clearly the elements in the programme and what learning and assessment is required at each stage
  - setting clear short-, medium- and long-term targets for learners
  - reviewing learners' and apprentices' progress regularly and thoroughly
  - taking swift action to support apprentices who are at risk of not achieving their targets on time.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The chief executive and senior managers have established very successfully a culture of high expectations with both staff and learners. Learners and apprentices demonstrate high standards of behaviour and very positive attitudes to learning. High-quality training and study programmes are delivered with good and improving outcomes for apprentices and learners.
- Staff are highly valued by the senior team at the Chamber for their work and they, in turn, appreciate the open and supportive management style. The Chamber has a clear vision, with targets and aims expressed clearly in the strategic plan that includes building on regional priorities and improving outcomes for its learners.
- Senior managers have accurately evaluated the provision overall, identifying areas for improvement that are presented in the comprehensive quality improvement plans. The collection, analysis and use of data informs judgements and provides a sound basis for planning and managing the provision.
- Performance management is effective and clearly links to key priorities and outcomes for learners. Senior managers set challenging performance targets and objectives for tutors, which include improving the quality of their teaching and maintaining and improving success rates. Good monitoring ensures that team leaders are clear about how staff perform against their targets.
- The process for improving teaching, learning and assessment has recently been revised with the introduction of an internal moderation process and a stronger focus on learning. The reported areas for improvement from observations of teaching, learning and assessment in the past did not always sufficiently address the impact on learners and learning. This has been recognised by the senior team and actions to strengthen the process are underway. Targeted staff development increasingly focuses on specific improvement areas for individuals.
- The provider invests significantly in high-quality resources, including a construction-training centre and the town centre based advice and careers guidance centre. These facilities contribute to creating positive learning environments to inspire learners. The development of staff resources has broadened the range of training offered. For example, higher-level qualifications in business management provide good opportunities for learners to progress.
- Senior managers respond well to the training requirements of local, regional and national employers. The Chamber works well with the LEP at a strategic and operational level. For example, the chief executive was involved in presenting the growth deal to government which led to significant investment in projects to support further education and skills in the borough. The Chamber successfully supports business start-up and works closely with the LEP on promoting enterprise.
- The Chamber works highly effectively with employers ensuring that the Chamber's strategic direction aligns with local employment priorities. Senior managers and staff have a comprehensive knowledge of the training requirements of employers in and around St Helens. Responding to the needs of a local construction company has led to the development of a new programme for 18- to 24-year-old learners to reduce skills shortages in this area. The Chamber's development of a new qualification in international trade came about directly in response to local employers' needs. In 2014/15, this innovative study programme was successful in providing employers with young people with the required skills and most learners progressed to related employment.
- As a key priority, senior managers have developed effective provision in English and mathematics to ensure that their learners develop these skills well.
- The Chamber has good capacity and experience in offering advice and careers guidance as a part of its core business, ensuring that learners are clear about how to progress to other qualifications or improve their future employment prospects.
- The Chamber takes very seriously its duties to promote equality and diversity. Staff training takes place to help staff become confident in re-enforcing with learners values including: democracy, tolerance of different cultures and religions, mutual respect, and individual liberty. A respect protocol between learners and the Chamber successfully re-enforces these values. Staff are well informed through regular communications providing information on key safeguarding, equality and diversity issues. Senior managers analyse learners' outcomes thoroughly and intervene well where they identify gaps in achievement for different groups of learners.

## ■ The governance of the provider

- Governance arrangements are good, with very effective support and challenge by representatives of the main board in respect of the training provision at the Chamber with a good focus on quality and improvement.
- Financial and contractual oversight is thorough.
- Board members have a clear vision for the Chambers medium- and long-term future goals aligned to the wider strategic economic objectives for the area, and what they and the senior team need to do to achieve those goals.

## ■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- The Chamber meets its statutory safeguarding requirements and maintains an up-to-date record of all staff checks in relation to safeguarding concerns.
- Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place covering safeguarding and the protection of learners from radicalisation and extremism.
- Two designated safeguarding officers, together with the safeguarding and equality and diversity group, regularly review the company's policies.
- All staff and learners receive safeguarding and 'Prevent' training and have a clear understanding of how to report concerns or incidents.
- A senior manager of the Chamber is a member of the local safeguarding board.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good across all provision types. Training advisers are well qualified and have good knowledge and skills in their occupational areas. Training advisers have high expectations for the success of learners and this encourages a strong culture of enthusiasm and high levels of motivation. Staff ensure that learners make good progress from their starting positions and are well prepared for their next steps.
- In many examples, training advisers use their skills and experience effectively to plan productive learning activities to which learners and apprentices respond well. This ensures that learners make good progress in lessons and in the workplace. Teaching and assessment are usually well matched to learners' individual needs and interests. Training advisers assess the progress of their learners regularly and accurately, providing good verbal feedback mostly with advice and tips on the next steps for learners to take.
- In all types of provision, apprentices and learners produce work of a good standard. In a few cases, apprentices' work exceeds the expectations of employers who are impressed with the speed with which they learn, for example, to safely move equipment and check stock balances in a busy shop floor environment. Study programme learners develop highly effective work-related skills through work experience. They quickly learn to deal with customers in a professional manner, presenting themselves well at work, observing high standards of behaviour and adopting a can-do attitude in the workplace. Many apprentices and learners are resourceful, curious and use their initiative with increasing confidence.
- Staff have a good understanding of the needs and interests of individual learners and remain sensitive to their circumstances, keeping an eye on whether more intensive support is required. Learners who are identified as having additional needs receive particularly effective support. For example, learners with dyscalculia and dyslexia receive effective individual support for as long as they need it.
- The promotion of equality and appreciation of diversity in lessons and reviews are good. Training advisers make good use of planned activities and situations as they arise to introduce topics, which ensure that learners develop a good understanding of diversity and British values. As a result of this, learners develop a greater awareness of the world around them and a better understanding of the importance of tolerance, fairness and personal safety.
- Most learners and all apprentices who complete their framework make progress with developing their mathematical skills. Carefully planned and successful learning activities ensure that learners are challenged well and that they improve their skills, especially in the practical application of mathematics in the workplace. For example, an apprentice in marketing quickly learned how to calculate VAT inputs and outputs to help prepare financial estimates for events.
- Written feedback on work for apprentices and adult learners lacks sufficient detail to enable learners to reflect on their learning, make improvements and measure their own progress over time. In a minority of cases, apprentices and learners' writing skills are not assessed well enough to support improvement, particularly in their spelling, punctuation and use of grammar.
- In a few sessions, trainers' questioning and checking of learners understanding is too superficial and does not effectively check whether all learners have grasped or understood the key points. Occasionally,

trainers move onto the next phase of the activity too quickly and do not provide enough opportunities to consolidate learning. Trainers do not always direct their questions at individual learners, or ask searching supplementary questions or probe understanding in depth. As a result, the more capable learners are not always sufficiently challenged and the quieter, more reserved learners are often not as involved in the lesson as they could be.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

### **are outstanding**

- Learners and apprentices demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning and very good behaviour in lessons and in the workplace. They enjoy learning and make significant progress developing their self-confidence and readiness for work. Learners and apprentices present themselves very well in the workplace, showing a mature understanding of how to dress and conduct themselves. They show respect for the people they meet and pursue high standards in their work. This contributes very positively to the good progress they make and reflects well the professional culture, working atmosphere and high standards the Chamber sets for all its learners and apprentices.
- The Chamber seeks out and works with young people not involved in education or training and supports them effectively with a pre-entry preparation programme for traineeships. The development of appropriate employability skills and attitudes is the main aim of these programmes. With good clear direction, learners increasingly become more punctual and better prepared for learning and training as their course progresses and they realise the value and importance of reliability. Attendance figures on nearly all courses are high. Attendance is lower in the early stages of a course and quickly improves as staff are very adept at supporting learners to become more punctual and reliable.
- Unemployed learners and those on study programmes are encouraged to get involved and most do in the highly innovative and very effective approved candidate scheme. High employability standards are set for learners to attain and to demonstrate that they are work ready. Learners are coached well and employers participate in judging their achievement and progress. Learners present themselves to employers with job vacancies that match their skills and aspirations. This has proved exceptionally successful over the past 18 months and has contributed enormously to the very high rate of progress into employment for study programme learners, trainees, apprentices and many adult learners. Learners work hard and take very seriously the competition to become recognised as candidate of the week and this accolade enhances their job and apprenticeship prospects.
- Learners and apprentices all develop good practical and vocational skills. The apprenticeship programmes are particularly effective in developing learners' self-confidence and skills in the workplace. Unemployed learners make significant gains in preparing to find work and respond positively to the good support and advice from staff.
- The Chamber offers a lively and well-organised programme to broaden and enrich learning programmes which learners value and enjoy. The programme includes visiting speakers providing good role models, discussions about extremism and appreciation of different cultures. Study programme learners benefit from visits to St Helens' twin towns of Stuttgart and Chalon where they learn more about international trade and relations which complement their course work. All learners benefit from the extensive range of good, well-managed work experience which is well matched to their individual interests.
- Throughout their time at the Chamber, learners make good use of the highly effective careers guidance and good advice and information available. This ensures that learners are clear about their options and the opportunities available to help prepare them to make informed choices about their next steps.
- Apprentices and learners make very good use of opportunities to gain additional qualifications in subjects such as paediatric first aid, and health and safety. In addition, study programme learners receive driving tuition and support to gain their driving licence.
- Apprentices and learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and each other safe. They know how to get the right help and support if they need it. Adherence to health and safety requirements in the workplace is very good. Apprentices and learners demonstrate a good understanding of online safety when using social media and the internet.

## **Outcomes for learners**

### **are good**

- In 2014/15, the large majority of apprentices successfully completed their qualification and most achieved in the planned time. A small minority of apprentices did not complete within the planned time. The Chamber has taken appropriate action and records indicate that current apprentices are meeting their

targets and more are achieving on time.

- Apprentices in the current year make good progress, develop good employability and occupational skills and show confidence in applying them. The vast majority of apprentices who successfully complete their framework progress to employment where they use the skills and knowledge that they have gained.
- The proportion of adult learners who completed qualifications was high in 2014/15. The current adult learners make good progress, achieve their targets and develop good employability skills. Many adult learners move onto employment and further training. Of the very few adult learners taking English and mathematics qualifications at level 2 in 2014/15, most were successful.
- Trainees make good progress in developing employability skills and a large majority move successfully onto apprenticeships and continue developing their skills.
- Nearly all younger learners who took part in study programmes in 2014/15 went onto employment or further education and training. In two out of three study programmes, results were outstanding and one hundred per cent of learners passed their main qualification. The current learners on study programmes are progressing well.
- The training records held by the Chamber show that there were no significant gaps in achievement between different groups of learners.
- In 2014/15, very few learners on the accounting study programme achieved their qualification although they all moved into employment and continued with education and training. The low achievement of the small number of adult learners taking entry level and level 1 English and mathematics qualifications has improved in 2015/16.

## Types of provision

### Adult learning programmes

### are good

- The Chamber's adult provision, New Skills, focuses on enabling unemployed adults to seek and secure employment. The Chamber works effectively with a broad range of partners including Jobcentre Plus and the local authority to successfully engage large numbers of hard-to-reach adults in training. The provision includes employment skills, enterprise awareness, sector-specific short courses and a small number of functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics; it engages with approximately 1,000 adult learners per year. At the time of the inspection there are 71 adults formally engaged in learning programmes at the Chamber.
- Most learners make good progress and develop skills that enable them to become more employable. Well planned and delivered training sessions meet the individual needs of learners. Tutors use activities that engage learners and promote learning. Learners develop confidence, learn how to present themselves to employers and develop the disciplines required to gain and keep a job. They develop the specific skills required to meet the needs of the local job market such as working with databases and producing spreadsheets to support business development.
- Training programmes often include job-specific enhancements such as the nationally recognised certificate for working on construction sites. Learners develop mathematics skills effectively during, for example, practical construction sessions where they apply their understanding of geometry to set out the footings for a building. Adult learners engaged in starting up their own enterprise receive advice and guidance from specialist business mentors and they develop a good range of business skills through training and practical experience.
- Learners benefit from well organised and professional impartial individual careers advice prior to starting. Training options are carefully considered to ensure that they directly increase the individual's chances of gaining employment.
- Employers value the quality of training provided by the Chamber and the fact that staff there have a clear understanding of their skills requirements. The Chamber works closely with businesses to develop the curriculum to meet local employment needs and to design sector- and company-specific training in, for example, information and communications technologies and logistics.
- Training staff provide very good individual support and assessment in the form of verbal feedback which is effective in motivating learners and in helping them to understand how they can improve.
- In some sessions not all learners make sufficient progress and questioning skills used by training staff in a few cases are not always used effectively to engage or assess all learners in the group.
- Assessment in the form of written feedback on work is not always sufficient and, in particular, not effective in developing the written English skills of learners. Where tutors do address errors, they often correct the work without giving sufficient guidance on how to improve and, as a result, learners continue

to make the same errors.

## **Apprenticeships**

## **are good**

- The Chamber provides apprenticeships in: business administration; team leading and management; information and communications technology (ICT); customer service; warehousing and logistics; health and social care (adult and children); supporting teaching and learning in schools; manufacturing and business improvement techniques. Currently 483 apprentices are in training.
- Most apprentices make good progress and a high proportion of them successfully complete their framework and use their skills in their chosen employment. A small minority do not succeed or make sufficient progress but this number is decreasing.
- Leaders and managers are ambitious and have high expectations for apprentices and have a determined focus on improving and delivering high-quality provision. Training advisers and managers monitor apprentices' progress rigorously. Employers, assessors and apprentices work collaboratively to review progress, and to set targets for learning. As a result, learners make good progress and develop skills which they apply at work effectively.
- Training advisers have good occupational experience and subject knowledge that they use well in coaching and assessment sessions to increase apprentices' knowledge and understanding. They use technology such as photographic evidence and voice recording effectively in support of good assessment methods from which apprentices benefit and improve their skills. Apprentices benefit from detailed and helpful verbal feedback and are encouraged to explain and expand on their work to provide better and more substantial answers. In a small number of examples, apprentices do not get sufficient written feedback to help the improve work submitted for assessment.
- Training and coaching methods are used well by staff, both on- and off-the-job, to enable apprentices to develop their skills and knowledge to industry standards. In good sessions, apprentices participate actively and use problem-solving skills to determine solutions to work-related scenarios. On a very few occasions, sessions lack pace and apprentices do not get sufficient opportunities to become involved practically in the subject matter.
- The large majority of apprentices' work is of a good standard and meets or exceeds employers' expectations. Many apprentices engage in additional training to that required for their framework. For example, child development apprentices gain skills and knowledge in dealing with medical emergencies and accidents as well as learning how to give paediatric first aid. Apprentices in logistics gain skills in manual handling and achieve externally accredited certificates for operating fork lift trucks, side loaders, slings and cranes.
- Impartial information, advice and guidance prepare apprentices appropriately for their programmes. Apprentices and employers have a clear understanding of the requirements. Assessment of apprentices' skills in English and mathematics at the start of their programme is thorough. The development of apprentices' English, mathematics and ICT skills is effective and they make good progress.
- Apprentices demonstrate a good appreciation of diversity and how to work with different colleagues and customers. Apprentices know how to keep themselves and each other safe. Apprentices are increasingly getting to understand about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

## **Traineeships**

## **are good**

- The Chamber provides traineeships for 42 learners: 20 are aged 16 to 18 and 22 are aged 19 to 24. Trainees attend training sessions for approximately 5 weeks and move into work experience placements for a further 7 weeks while continuing with sessions to develop English, mathematics and work-related skills. A large majority of trainees complete their traineeship successfully and progress into apprenticeships, employment with training or further education.
- Managers and highly experienced trainers set high standards for all trainees on very well-organised courses which meet individual learners' needs well. A few elements of the more recently introduced course for older trainees still require development so that, for example, trainees can receive written feedback on their English skills and put together a portfolio of achievement.
- Well-coordinated and high-quality teaching by all staff on both programmes means that trainees are able to make substantial progress and prepare well for their next steps. Many learners, with no qualifications, low self-confidence, and lacking in direction have made rapid progress into work placements where they work well and employers value their contribution in the workplace.
- Trainers collaborate particularly well with employers to ensure that trainees are well-matched to work experience and gain a wide array of highly relevant vocational and employability skills. Employers

participate earnestly in reviewing learners' progress and agreeing realistic, challenging goals for them. During a review of several learners' work experience progress the employer described significant improvements in learners' time-keeping and productivity.

- Staff accurately summarise learners' prior achievements and starting points so that together they can formulate personalised learning plans. Learners not yet ready for traineeships are placed on an intensive 8-week pre-traineeship course to improve their readiness. The vast majority progress to a traineeship.
- Trainees' achievements during the class-based teaching encompass a very broad and relevant range of work-related subjects including the culture of the world of work, succeeding at interviews and how to work well with others. Learners' levels of confidence and self-belief are significantly boosted. In a few sessions, less confident trainees do not participate enough because trainers do not use suitable strategies to engage them.
- The vast majority of younger trainees gain qualifications in subjects such as first aid, health and safety and preparation for work. Trainees undertake learning that is specific to different types of workplaces such as working with children, construction and customer service. Trainees benefit significantly from attending courses at the Chamber's premises where they meet high standards of dress and behaviour.
- Trainees' English and mathematics learning needs are addressed well in training sessions. Good individual support helps trainees make progress in gaining functional skills but only a small minority achieve the qualification before progressing or leaving. English and mathematics skills are developed less effectively outside of formal sessions. Trainers do not develop trainees English and mathematics skills well enough during work experience.
- Younger trainees develop a very secure understanding of how to stay safe at work, in their communities and online, including the risks of radicalisation. Older trainees understand how to keep themselves and others safe in work but have a less well developed knowledge of wider aspects of safeguarding. Staff are aware of this and plans are well developed to introduce additional opportunities to re-enforce learners' knowledge and understanding.



## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16–18/19+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	2,269
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Kath Boullen
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.sthelenschamber.com">www.sthelenschamber.com</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	29	66	17	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	108	221	7	126	N/A		21	
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total			
	20		22		42			
<b>Number of learners aged 14–16</b>	NA							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ N/A</li> </ul>							

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Derrick Spragg, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Miller	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dan Grant	Ofsted Inspector
Dilys Taylor	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah McGrath	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Sharpe	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the workforce development manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and quality improvement plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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