

Inspection of St Helens Chamber Limited

Inspection dates: 12–18 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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| The quality of education | Requires improvement |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Education programmes for young people | Good |
| Adult learning programmes | Good |
| Apprenticeships | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Information about this provider

St Helens Chamber Limited (the Chamber) is located at the heart of its community in St Helens. The Chamber provides a range of training programmes and works closely with businesses across the region to help meet their skills needs. The Chamber aims to prepare prospective labour market entrants to be skilled, professional and enterprising contributors to their future employers. There are currently 606 apprentices. Apprentices follow framework and standards-based apprenticeships at levels 2 to 5. The largest numbers of apprentices follow programmes in administration, business, health and social care, and child development and well-being. There are 81 learners who follow education programmes for young people. This includes 69 learners on traineeships and 12 on full-time study programmes in digital marketing and international trade and logistics. There are 142 learners enrolled on adult learning programmes. Most are on programmes that develop skills for work.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices and learners value and benefit from the support that the Chamber staff provide. Training advisers create a professional, business-like and positive environment for learning. This helps apprentices and learners to develop their skills.

Learners and most apprentices develop a wide range of knowledge and skills that they can readily recall and use when needed. They incrementally develop their long-term memory. For example, apprentices and adults use their hand as a visual aid to recall and explain the five fundamental British values. Accountancy learners complete double-entry bookkeeping with confidence, and at a good pace. Learners on construction programmes cut, paste and hang wallpaper effectively, including around external corners and light sockets.

Apprentices and learners gain the confidence, self-belief and resilience that they need to be successful. The adult learners that we spoke with say that they feel better prepared to apply for jobs. They are more confident about gaining the knowledge and skills that they need to move closer to the job market. Most young people who follow traineeships progress to apprenticeships because of their good-quality learning.

Learners benefit from a curriculum that focuses on the skills that they need for work. Managers and training advisers have strong links with business members of the Chamber. They use these links effectively to provide relevant work placements and projects for learners. Learners enjoy and benefit from their work placements.

Leaders and managers do not order the curriculum well enough, on most programmes, to meet the demands of apprentices and their employers. On- and off-the-job training activities are disjointed, which means that the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices need for the workplace are not always taught in the right order.

Conversely, where leaders and managers have developed new apprenticeship curricula, such as in childcare and health and social care level 3 programmes, on- and off-the-job training are skilfully coordinated and complement each other well. Consequently, apprentices on these programmes make strong progress towards their qualifications. They develop substantial new knowledge, and the skills and behaviours, that they need to apply in the workplace.

Apprentices and learners feel safe in their learning and work environments. They follow the correct health and safety practices in training and at work.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Board members, leaders and managers have an ambitious vision to improve the lives of the residents of St Helens. Leaders work well with employers from across the region to shape the content of the curriculum. They ensure that the curriculum

meets the needs of learners, employers and the local community and economy. Except for apprentices, leaders have implemented purposeful, well-designed programmes. These programmes target those furthest from the job market. Leaders have planned the curriculum to meet the specific skill priorities for the region.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the quality of education in traineeships and adult learning programmes. However, board members and senior leaders do not have sufficient oversight of apprenticeship provision. They have been too slow to identify and rectify a decline in the quality of training that apprentices receive.

Leaders and managers rightly recognise that they still have much work to do to improve the planning and coordination of the curriculum for apprentices. The new management team has recently put into place appropriate plans to improve the apprenticeship programmes. The management team is working diligently towards short-term targets so that all apprentices can access the new curricula that they have implemented.

Leaders and managers promote high standards of teaching and learning on education programmes for young people and adult learning programmes. Staff benefit from well-planned staff development activities to improve their teaching practice.

Training advisers have appropriate knowledge and experience that they use well to improve and enhance learners' existing knowledge and skills. They complete assessments at the start of the programme and plan learning effectively for young people and adults. Training advisers use assessment successfully to check learners' understanding throughout the course. Training advisers identify gaps in learners' knowledge and correct mistakes and misconceptions. They challenge learners to achieve their potential.

Managers have been too slow in working with, and providing staff development activities for, training advisers. This means that training advisers have found it difficult to make the transition from apprenticeship frameworks to standards-based apprenticeships. Training advisers do not use information about what apprentices already know and can do to plan meaningful learning. Too often, they merely assess apprentices' knowledge and skills without any learning taking place. At other times, training advisers provide too much help for apprentices. Consequently, apprentices are not challenged well enough to work independently and solve problems for themselves.

Staff have high expectations for apprentices' and learners' behaviour and conduct. This reflects the business nature of the Chamber. Apprentices and learners behave well, attend regularly and are punctual. They are courteous and well-mannered. Apprentices and learners show respect for their peers, employers and the Chamber staff. They can explain articulately the importance of these key attributes in readying themselves for the workplace.

Apprentices and learners receive effective careers information, advice and guidance from their training advisers before and during their programme. As a result, they understand their career options and next steps.

Training advisers plan learners' programmes around their career goals. For example, learners on traineeships who wish to progress into digital marketing take a digital marketing short course as part of the programme. In construction, learners self-assess their development in plastering or joinery to inform their work experience placement and final career goals. Adult learners benefit from visits from employers who give them information and support about their next steps and the jobs available in their chosen industry.

Learners benefit from a broad range of extra activities that help extend their understanding and experience of the world. For example, traineeship learners go to London to visit the Houses of Parliament. This helps them understand the role of politics in the United Kingdom. Learners on study programmes visit Stuttgart trade events as part of their programme on international trade and logistics. This gives them an insight into how their learning works in practice.

Apprentices and learners benefit from a wide range of additional programmes that the Chamber offers to enhance their learning. For example, the Chamber includes digital literacy in all their programmes at the request of employers. Leaders and managers recognise the need for a digitally literate workforce. They ensure that apprentices and learners improve their digital skills throughout their programme.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is well trained and highly experienced in keeping apprentices and learners safe. The safeguarding team works effectively with local safeguarding groups and refers apprentices and learners swiftly when required.

Apprentices and learners feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. Staff receive frequent training and updates on safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and emerging local issues, including knife crime, suicide prevention and mental health issues. They follow clear procedures to report any concerns.

Leaders and managers carry out appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff to work with apprentices, learners and vulnerable adults.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that leaders and managers have an accurate oversight of apprenticeship provision and take swift actions to improve the quality of education and training that apprentices receive.
- Improve how training advisers use the information that they collect about what apprentices already know and can do at the start of the programme to plan and deliver a relevant curriculum for all apprentices.

- Leaders and managers must rapidly improve the planning and coordination of on- and off-the-job training for apprentices. They need to align the knowledge and skills that apprentices develop as part of their training with the demands of their job.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 54562 |
| Address | Salisbury Street Off Chalon Way WA10 1FY |
| Contact number | 01744 742000 |
| Website | www.sthelenschamber.com |
| Principal/CEO | Mrs Kath Boullen |
| Provider type | Independent learning provider |
| Date of previous inspection | 2–5 February 2016 |
| Main subcontractors | None |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of training services, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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