

# St Helens Chamber Limited

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	54562
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Ruth Stammers, Her Majesty's Inspector
<b>Visit dates:</b>	1 to 2 December 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Address:</b>	Salisbury Street Off Chalon Way St Helens WA10 1FY

## Interim visit

### Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

### Information about the provider

St Helens Chamber Limited (the Chamber) is located in St Helens. The Chamber provides a range of training programmes and works closely with businesses from across the region to help meet their skills needs. At the time of the visit, there were 474 apprentices studying framework and standards-based apprenticeships between levels 2 and 5. The largest numbers of apprentices follow programmes in business administration and, health and social care. There were 129 learners aged 16 to 18 enrolled on traineeships and study programmes, with the largest numbers studying digital marketing and accountancy. The Chamber also provides training for adult learners to develop skills for work.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

Leaders adapted their delivery model as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Staff provided both online learning and paper-based resources to meet apprentices' and learners' needs. Most apprentices engaged with online learning. However, a few traineeship learners struggled to remember what they had learned when it was delivered online. Staff took paper-based resources to these learners' homes so that they could continue to learn.

Leaders decided not to furlough staff, but instead moved to a four-day working week. This reduced costs, while maintaining education for learners and apprentices. Although learner numbers had dropped, the need to continue teaching was leaders' main priority.

Leaders refreshed the courses they offered due to the changing labour market during the pandemic. For example, they removed the study programme in international trade and logistics, due to a lack of jobs in this sector. Leaders liaised with a local housing association to provide employability courses for their tenants. Leaders are confident that these changes meet the needs of employers and the local community.

Leaders have increased careers advice and guidance. Training advisors identify knowledge and skills that apprentices and learners have gained that are in demand in other industries. This has allowed learners and apprentices in hairdressing and international trade to study alternative courses in business administration and digital marketing where there are more opportunities to gain employment.

Training advisors are facing challenges in completing workplace observations of a few apprentices. For example, in childcare, they are unable to access indoor settings due to COVID-19 restrictions. To overcome this, they have carried out observations in the playground while adhering to social distancing guidelines. This has allowed apprentices to continue to progress on their programmes.

Employers speak highly of the support that their apprentices have received. They value the open communication and the way that staff have continued to teach and train apprentices throughout the pandemic.

### **What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?**

Leaders provide training for staff on how to deliver learning online. Staff take part in sessions on how to engage learners and questioning techniques. Staff produce 'how to' guides and videos on how to teach when using online platforms, to share with other staff. Those who are more proficient in using technology mentor other staff to improve their practice. Staff now feel more confident in using this technology to teach.

Staff have developed digital skills training for apprentices and learners. A few apprentices needed support to access online learning. Apprentices now use these skills in their jobs as well as for learning. For example, senior health and social care apprentices carry out online meetings with their teams.

Staff identify gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge and skills through frequent checks. Staff identified that a few learners and apprentices needed additional training on speaking to members of the public. To address this, apprentices in business administration, attend webinars on customer service skills. In traineeships, learners practise telephone and video calling with their career coaches.

Leaders have introduced additional topics into the curriculum, due to changes in job roles and the move to online learning. Manufacturing apprentices learned about and

used QR codes instead of paper-based documentation. When construction learners were unable to access the workshop, they learned about hazardous substances and working at height online. This has broadened apprentices' and learners' knowledge and skills.

Leaders explained the biggest challenge for learners was the development of practical skills. In joinery, career coaches delivered materials for learners to create a jewellery box at home by following a live online session. This enabled learners to continue to develop the skills required for employment.

### **How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?**

Leaders described how a few learners and apprentices felt overwhelmed and experienced increased anxiety during COVID-19 restrictions. They devised a specific referral form to identify the best way to support each individual. Leaders trained staff in mental health first aid to help them to give appropriate support. For learners and apprentices in need of counselling, leaders paid for an external counselling service.

Leaders reviewed various online safety training packages due to the increased use of technology. For younger learners, they chose a package that targeted a young adult audience. This has raised awareness of issues such as cyber-bullying and sharing inappropriate images of themselves or others online.

Learners identified as being at risk were supported by the safeguarding team. Regular welfare checks were carried out. Learners were given text message codes to contact the safeguarding team if they felt they were in danger. This alerted staff to contact external agencies immediately.

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