

Inspection of St Helens Chamber Limited

Inspection dates: 10 to 13 January 2023

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

Information about this provider

St Helens Chamber Limited is an independent learning provider with the aim of helping the business community create prosperity and opportunity in and around St Helens. It provides education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships. The provider does not work with any subcontractors.

At the time of the inspection, there were 291 apprentices studying levels 2 to 5 apprenticeship standards, including a very small number of apprentices who are on legacy apprenticeship frameworks. Most apprentices study at levels 2 and 3. The remainder study at levels 4 and 5. The largest apprenticeship areas are level 3 business administrator; level 4 children, young people and families practitioner; level 3 early years educator and level 2 customer service practitioner standards. There were 67 adults on levels 1 to 3 bookkeeping, construction and hairdressing courses. There were 50 learners on traineeship programmes for young people. Most study employability, business administration, customer service and construction.

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

Most learners and apprentices make good progress on their courses or apprenticeships. They enjoy their courses and are committed to their learning. They are respectful towards each other, provider staff, colleagues and customers at work. Attendance at most learning and coaching sessions is high. Most learners and apprentices submit their work on time. A few apprentices feel that their learning has been disrupted because of changes in staff, when staff have left the provider.

Learners and apprentices appreciate the support they get from staff and feel that they are treated fairly. Learners on traineeship programmes receive travel and food bursaries. Leaders offer learners free haircuts in their training salon. They provide young and adult learners with vouchers to buy clothes for work placements or interviews. Consequently, most learners and apprentices move closer to achieving their career goals and ambitions.

Learners and apprentices are well supported to develop their confidence. Young learners on industry placements work confidently with colleagues and customers. They answer queries quickly and efficiently. Level 3 business administrator apprentices learn about emotional intelligence and how to act professionally by confidently managing their emotions at work. Learners and apprentices become trusted members of their teams at work.

Young learners take part in a range of charitable events and community projects. For instance, they hold bake sales to raise money for specialised equipment for victims of knife crime and make food donations to local food banks. To raise community spirits, learners painted inspirational murals on buildings and replaced stolen planters at a local retirement village.

Most learners and apprentices know the options available to them once they complete their courses. For instance, they want to gain promotion, find employment, complete higher levels of learning or become self-employed. Adult learners are keen to learn bookkeeping so that they can apply these skills when they become self-employed.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They know who to go to if they need to report any concerns they have in relation to their own or someone else's safety. Most know the importance of recognising and reporting changes in others' behaviour. For instance, changes in a person's appearance or becoming quiet and withdrawn. Level 3 team leader or supervisor apprentices routinely apply this knowledge at work when monitoring the health and well-being of their staff.

Too many young learners struggle to recall previous learning about healthy relationships. This is because tutors do not consistently reinforce this topic.

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

Leaders have carefully considered their programmes for young people, adults and apprentices. They are ambitious to provide meaningful learning programmes so that learners and apprentices improve their future career prospects and their lives. Consequently, all adult learners and the large majority of young learners progress into employment, apprenticeships or further learning. Most apprentices remain in employment or progress to further learning.

Leaders order their curriculums so that learners and apprentices build their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. For instance, level 2 accounts or finance assistant apprentices begin by learning the basics of how to record receipts in a cash book. They then learn how to use a bank statement to balance their cash book.

Tutors, training, and careers advisers are suitably qualified. Leaders support most staff to maintain their vocational expertise. Training advisers and tutors update subject knowledge through membership of professional bodies and extended reading. They use this knowledge to teach learners and apprentices about current industry practices. For example, level 2 supply chain warehousing operative apprentices learn about recent changes in importing and exporting laws.

Most training advisers and tutors use a range of effective teaching and assessment strategies to teach learners and apprentices. They use skills tests, discussions and probing questions to identify gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge, consolidate learning and inform teaching. This helps most learners and apprentices to retain this knowledge in their long-term memories.

Most training advisers and tutors work closely with learners' and apprentices' line managers to identify opportunities at work for learners and apprentices to practise and hone their skills. Most learners and apprentices make good progress and are on target to complete their traineeships and apprenticeships on time. A few apprentices have not completed their apprenticeships on time. Leaders and training advisers have appropriate plans in place to ensure that apprentices swiftly complete these.

Most learners and apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Young learners develop vital employability skills in relation to punctuality, timekeeping and attendance. Level 4 children, young people and families practitioner apprentices learn how to effectively communicate with the police or emergency teams when children go missing from their care. Level 3 early years educator apprentices know the signs and symptoms of abuse. They accurately record accidents and incidents in the accident book in their nursery. Most learners and apprentices make at least their expected progress.

Training advisers and tutors ensure that learners and apprentices are well prepared for their final assessments and examinations. Learners and apprentices routinely complete practice assessments. Almost all learners and apprentices are successful at

their first attempt. The large majority of apprentices achieve merit or distinction grades.

Leaders have effective processes in place to monitor the quality of teaching. They use the outcomes of observations to inform professional development. For example, staff received recent training on how to effectively use information on starting points to plan a challenging curriculum. However, in a few instances, leaders do not closely monitor the actions set in observations. As a result, a few training advisers and tutors have not improved their teaching skills quickly enough. Very recently, leaders have implemented an improved process, but it is too soon to see the full impact.

Most staff are proud to work at St Helens Chamber. They appreciate that leaders are considerate of their workloads and well-being. Staff have access to counselling services and support from mental health first aiders. A few members of staff feel that leaders need to deal with excessive workloads more promptly when staff leave. Leaders and managers have not swiftly replaced the few staff who have left the business. This has impeded the progress of a few business administrator, accounting and health and social care apprentices.

Board members have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. They receive a range of useful information from senior leaders. Board members routinely challenge senior leaders to improve the quality of education, for example to reduce the numbers of apprentices who have not completed on time. As a result, this number has reduced significantly since the previous monitoring visit.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead and their deputies are appropriately trained to carry out their roles effectively. They have well-established links with a range of external agencies such as the St Helens safeguarding board for children and adults and a local self-harm and suicide working group. Leaders complete appropriate checks when appointing new staff to make sure they are suitable to work with learners and apprentices.

Apprentices and learners on traineeship programmes know how to keep themselves safe at work. Learners on construction sites wear appropriate personal protective equipment, such as safety boots and high-visibility jackets. Hairdressing learners know the importance of using protective gloves when applying colour treatments on clients' hair.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Tutors on traineeships should ensure that they consistently reinforce their teaching of healthy relationships so that all young learners retain this knowledge in their long-term memory and are able to readily recall it.

- Leaders should closely monitor the actions set in their new observation process so that tutors improve their teaching practice quickly.
- Leaders should put in place effective strategies to ensure that learners and apprentices are not disadvantaged on their courses and apprenticeships when staff leave.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54562
Address	Salisbury Street Off Chalon Way WA10 1FY
Contact number	01744 742000
Website	www.sthelenschamber.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Tracy Mawson
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	12–18 February 2020
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships and quality, 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 visiting 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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