



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1999

St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise



SUMMARY

St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise arranges training for young people and a small number of adult trainees. Training in engineering and manufacturing is good, and in construction, business administration, retailing & customer service, and hair & beauty is satisfactory. At the time of the first inspection, the quality of training and assessment in sport was unsatisfactory. In care, training was poorly planned and delivered and achievement rates were low. Training in care and sport has improved greatly since the first inspection and is now good. At the time of the first inspection, equal opportunities and management of training were both satisfactory, but trainee support and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Initial assessment was poor in most occupational areas and quality assurance arrangements were weak. Support for trainees is now satisfactory, with a high level of learning support, but improvements to the recording of progress reviews are still needed. The quality assurance arrangements are now very thorough and the training is very closely and extensively monitored with remedial action taken and evaluated.

As a result of the reinspection of St Helen's Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, the original published report text for leisure, sport and travel, health, care and public services, trainee support and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	2
Manufacturing	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Leisure, sport & travel	4
Hair & beauty	3
Health, care & public services	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	4
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	3
Quality assurance	2

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Leisure, sport & travel	2
Health, care & public services	2



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job-training facilities
- ◆ good working relationships among trainees, trainers and employers
- ◆ above-national-average achievement
- ◆ open and co-operative working relationships
- ◆ clear and comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ high levels of learning support
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of the effectiveness of training
- ◆ high quality portfolios in sport and care

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment in some areas
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job learning
- ◆ some poor key skills assessment and delivery
- ◆ little understanding of the appeals procedure by care trainees



INTRODUCTION

1. St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (St Helens Chamber) contracts with local employers for the training of young people and adults in business administration (including information technology and accounts), childcare and care for the elderly, retailing and customer service, engineering, travel services, laboratory operations, hair and beauty and construction. Trainees follow national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3. The number of trainees following travel qualifications, at the time of the inspection, was small; this area was not inspected. There are currently a total of 759 trainees across all occupational areas, with 30 following NVQs in care and 13 in sport.
2. Employers contract with one of St Helens Chamber's approved suppliers. St Helens Chamber's staff do no training themselves. Training advisors visit trainees at work to review progress. St Helens Chamber's role is then one of quality control of the training and of the trainee support. It also aims to ensure that all aspects of the approved supplier organisation meet the standards which it sets. In 1991, St Helens Chamber inherited a position where it was in the last 25 per cent of the TEC performance indicators for local providers, with an employed status figure of only 28 per cent in 1994.
3. St Helens has seen a steady decline in some of its traditional industries, such as glass manufacture, public administration and pharmaceuticals, and the total closure of other industries, such as coal mining. Unemployment in March 1998 stood at 6.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent. Unemployment in the south of the town is higher than that in the north.
4. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 43.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent, for 1999. This achievement level has historically been lower than the national average, but the difference has been consistently reduced over the last five years.



INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. St Helens Chamber produced its first self-assessment report for inspection in 1998. The report was compiled by the training manager and team leaders, in consultation with all staff. The report was clearly laid out. Some strengths quoted were found to be no more than normal practice, and several weaknesses were not identified. A new self-assessment was produced in January 1999. This was not updated for the reinspection. The post-inspection action plan is regularly updated and the current edition was supplied to inspectors. It includes clear details of the measurable improvements made to date.

6. During the first inspection, a team of 16 inspectors spent a total of 67 days at St Helens Chamber, during September and October 1998. All aspects of training were inspected, including tutorials, trainees' induction, reviews and assessments, together with a range of documents, trainees' records, portfolios, contract information, awarding body reports and company policies. Inspectors interviewed 307 trainees, 67 placement providers and 10 of St Helens Chamber's staff.

7. Reinspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors for a total of 12 days in December 1999. They interviewed 12 care and 6 sport trainees and 21 trainees in other occupational areas. They examined documents relating to trainees including portfolios, assessment records and quality assurance documents, and interviewed five of St Helens Chamber's staff and 10 employers. Inspectors observed three reviews of trainees' progress.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. There are 125 trainees in construction, following NVQs from level 1 to 3. There are 118 modern apprentices, three youth trainees (careership) and four adult trainees, all of whom are employed by a total of 72 employers, ranging from large national contractors to small local builders. Trainees take NVQs in carpentry and joinery, bricklaying, painting and decorating, electrical installation, mason paving and plumbing. Training and assessment for modern apprentices takes place at a local further education. Inspectors agreed with the grade identified in the self-assessment report.



STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees understand how they will be assessed and what is expected of them
- ◆ excellent resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ strong support from tutors provides a good learning environment
- ◆ trainees are motivated to achieve

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ missed opportunities for evidence collection in the workplace
- ◆ employers not given timely information on trainees' attendance and punctuality

9. Training and assessment at college are of a consistently high standard. Resources, including accommodation and equipment, are excellent. Staff are well qualified and experienced, demonstrating a great deal of commitment and enthusiasm for their trainees. The strong links between tutors and trainees lead to highly motivated trainees working in a supportive environment. The assessment process is clearly explained to trainees, who are able to articulate the rôles and responsibilities set out in the process. The subcontractors liaise with St Helens Chamber frequently.

10. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor. Subcontractors' liaison with employers is less frequent. Most trainees' reviews take place off the job, with little or no input from employers. In many cases, employers are not aware of trainees' progress and find it difficult to relate on-the-job training to their off-the-job activities. Tutorials are regularly carried out by college staff, but are not used to enhance reviews carried out by co-ordinators in the workplace. All assessments take place off the job. Opportunities are missed for assessment of real working activities and this restricts the development of work-based assessors. Attendance for off-the-job training is efficiently recorded, but is not passed on to employers.

Engineering

Grade 2

11. St Helens Chamber has 160 trainees studying for NVQs at levels 1 to 3. There are 142 modern apprentices and 18 youth trainees (careerships). There are 32 trainees on motor-vehicle programmes, 17 on electrical programmes and the remainder studying engineering production, fabrication and welding. Most training takes place at work, except for the engineering foundation courses run by the local further education college. The college is the major off-the-job engineering training subcontractor, responsible for 86 per cent of St Helens Chamber's engineering

training contracts. The remainder of the trainees is with another employer, which then arranges training with another subcontractor. Additional qualifications are offered to trainees to enhance their skills and career prospects. The inspection revealed several strengths not identified in the self-assessment report, and the grade given was higher than that proposed by St Helens Chamber.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ off-the-job training is well planned, documented and delivered
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ trainees are enthusiastic about their training
- ◆ trainees, workplace supervisors and assessors work as a team
- ◆ trainees have access to a wide range of facilities and equipment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some on-the-job training is poorly planned
- ◆ poor awareness of key skills and NVQs among some employers and trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are moved among companies if the range of work carried out by their employer is insufficient to achieve the NVQ. This co-operation among companies, which normally compete with one another for orders, adds greatly to the quality of the training of these young people.

12. The further education college delivers training to NVQ level 4, as well as many other academic and vocational courses in engineering. Off-the-job training is well organised, delivered and documented. The college has excellent resources and enthusiastic and experienced tutors. It has recently received a commendation in the Beacon award, a national competition run by the awarding body, in recognition of its work in the integration of key skills in the modern apprenticeship programme. In addition, it has introduced a 'vocational education project', known as VEC, allowing pupils from year 10 to 11, regardless of ability, the opportunity to broaden their school curriculum through access to college facilities during regular weekly sessions. Teaching is through assignments and projects, which maintain trainees' motivation to learn. Portfolios are good, and trainees are punctual and attentive during periods of instruction. There are productive working relationships among college tutors, assessors and employers. At one factory, the college assessor has been given contractor status, affording unhindered access without the usual visitor formalities. The scope of work undertaken by most firms is good.

13. In some areas, primarily in the smaller companies, there is no integration in the workplace of on- and off-the-job training. There is little knowledge of the qualification by employers and trainees, and opportunities are missed to plan trainees' workload to include evidence of their competence in the workplace. This could then be used towards accreditation of the NVQ. Often, trainees are left to drive their own training by asking supervisors to arrange suitable work programmes which will provide opportunities to gather evidence of their competence in the workplace. The co-operation from supervisors is good, but work deadlines take priority over the training programme, which affects the quality of training in the long term. In some cases, the reviews are used to document progress, but targets are



not reviewed in the light of assessment. The supervisors sign the review of progress form.

Manufacturing

Grade 2

14. There are 141 trainees in manufacturing training, including 30 on youth training programmes, 17 following national traineeships and 87 modern apprenticeships. There are also seven adult trainees. All trainees are employed, and the provision includes opportunities in laboratories, gas services, textiles and glass manufacturing. Training leads to NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in engineering and glass manufacture; level 2 in performing manufacturing operations (PMO) and manufacturing; levels 2 and 3 in laboratory operations. Glass manufacturing is a key industry in the local area, and statistics show that about 80 per cent of those currently employed in the sector are aged over 40. Some employers and a local further education college have formed a limited company which, as an approved provider, offers engineering and manufacturing training. Those trainees meeting the entry requirements spend a foundation year training full time in the training centre, whilst also being full time employees. This is followed by a further four years with an employer to gain an NVQ level 3 and a higher national certificate (HNC) or diploma (HND). Of the 16 trainees in laboratory operations, 75 per cent are with one major employer. Off-the-job training is provided by a local college of further education. The modern apprenticeship programme takes up to four years to complete. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified some in addition. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by St Helens Chamber.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement and retention rates
- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment and induction for manufacturing
- ◆ excellent off-the-job training resources
- ◆ good working relationships among St Helens chamber's staff, trainees and employers
- ◆ highly motivated and enthusiastic trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little monitoring of the training process
- ◆ ineffective use of review documentation
- ◆ no direct work-based assessment of competence in laboratory operations
- ◆ assessment of laboratory operations is not rigorous

15. In glass manufacture, off- and some on-the-job training is effectively planned, documented and delivered to meet employers' needs. This is reflected in the number of trainees in training and the high rate of achievement of NVQs. In 1997-98, 80 per cent of trainees achieved a qualification. Retention rates have remained constant in manufacturing, at 95 per cent, since 1995. There is a minimum entry requirement for the engineering foundation programme, and the selection process includes interviews and differential aptitude tests (DATs). Successful trainees then receive a comprehensive induction and, after approximately three months, work with an employer for 10 weeks to complete an induction project. Trainees in companies which offer PMO qualifications receive an appropriate induction from the employer. All training is delivered and assessed at work, with staff from a local subcontractor providing peripatetic internal verification. All trainees understand the NVQ process.

16. In laboratory operations, theoretical elements are provided through the ordinary national certificate (ONC) or HNC in science. This training is of a high standard. Key skills are well integrated in the off-the-job learning programme. Employers receive notification of their trainees' absence from off-the-job training, when it occurs. Employers also receive termly progress reports and reviews of each trainee's progress. The termly learner progress report forms, prepared by subject tutors for the ONC and HNC programmes, are written by staff, without involving the trainee in the process. St Helens Chamber does not hold copies of trainees' progress reviews. They are kept by employers.

17. Good working relationships are maintained among St Helens Chamber's staff, trainees and the training provider in glass manufacturing. Here, on-the-job tutorial support is given each week to ensure that trainees' progress is effectively monitored. Good pastoral and vocational support is available in the workplace, properly recorded and visible in the trainees' portfolios. Employers are aware of key skills and integrate their development in the training programme. Trainees are encouraged to do research and give presentations to senior management. During the foundation year, trainees attend a one-week outward-bound course, focusing on personal development.

18. In manufacturing, there is little involvement in the delivery of the training process by St Helens Chamber's staff, some of whom are unaware of the arrangements for assessment and internal verification. Some trainees do not know the name of the training advisor allocated to their particular programme. Records of trainees' progress are held by training providers and are not sufficiently monitored by St Helens Chamber's staff. Reviews carried out by St Helens Chamber focus on attendance, and there are missed opportunities for action-planning and target-setting. In laboratory operations, trainees are given inadequate support at work. Employers do not understand the requirements of the NVQ. Trainees do not receive help to plan for assessment. Two workplace supervisors have insufficient knowledge of the content of the off-the-job training to be able to support trainees effectively. Trainees are encouraged and guided by the subcontractor to identify



evidence of their work skills, but suggestions for tasks are often not applicable to individuals' actual work. Opportunities for work-based assessment are frequently missed. In three work placements, employing a total of 15 trainees, all assessment takes place off the job. There is over-emphasis on the use of evidence sheets from the workplace; these are countersigned by supervisors who have no knowledge or understanding of the NVQ content or process. Three external verifier reports, since 1996, have requested action to improve work-based assessment. The action taken to date, by the training supplier, has not been effective. In three completed and assessed portfolios, there is no commentary giving advice to trainees or notes about the assessment activities by the assessor. Overall, there is insufficient integration of on- and off-the-job training and assessment.

Business administration

Grade 3

19. There are 181 trainees studying for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in business administration, 30 in information technology, at levels 2 and 3, and 19 for NVQ level 3 in accounting. These figures include 151 modern apprentices, 23 youth trainees (careerships) and five national trainees, as well as two adult trainees. Much of the training takes place in the workplace, with off-the-job training and assessment provided by one large and three small subcontractors. Around 80 per cent of trainees are with the large subcontractor; all are employed. Employers range from small and large companies to the local further education college, the health authority and local council. The accounting provision is very good, comprising 11 per cent of the total. Information technology training (17 per cent) demonstrates a flexible and industry-relevant approach. Inspectors found several weaknesses which were not included in the self-assessment report, but awarded the same grade as that of St Helens Chamber.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ some good workplace reviews and support for trainees
- ◆ flexible off-the-job arrangements to meet trainees' needs
- ◆ significant improvement in NVQ achievement levels
- ◆ good-quality training facilities at most subcontractors' premises
- ◆ well-motivated, attentive trainees in accounting
- ◆ excellent off-the-job provision and training support at work for accounting trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' progress not systematically examined
- ◆ varying levels of key skills delivery
- ◆ inconsistent attendance at off-the-job training

- ◆ slow completion of NVQ qualifications
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment
- ◆ variable quality of training from different subcontractors

20. The quality of training delivered varies from one subcontractor to another. In most cases, it is at least satisfactory, with accounting trainees receiving good-quality provision. The review of progress and support for trainees, by some suppliers, is thorough, interactive and stimulates learning. Ninety per cent of trainees have access to good-quality equipment, accommodation and facilities in their off-the-job training, helping them to learn effectively and reflecting current industry practice. Subcontractors ensure that information technology trainees have access to the appropriate workplace software which complements the off-the-job facility. Where this is not possible, alternative arrangements are made. Off-the-job information technology arrangements are designed to provide alternatives to day release, where this is a problem, by offering evening drop-in sessions. NVQ achievement among modern apprentices improves each year, reaching a high of 69 per cent in 1997-98.

21. Some trainees were overlooked, and their training did not start immediately. Opportunities were then missed to assess them effectively at work. Key skills are taught, but are insufficiently integrated in modern apprenticeship programmes. Most of the progress reviews and monitoring delegated to subcontractors are not carried out systematically. St Helens Chamber's staff are not examining the activity closely to improve the process consistently. In particular, they are often unaware of irregular attendance at reviews and off-the-job training.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

22. St Helens Chamber has 12 trainees in retail training, 38 in customer service, 60 in distribution & warehousing and 12 on fork-truck programmes. There are also two adult trainees. All trainees are employed. One hundred and two are youth trainees (careership) working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3, 14 are modern apprentices and six are national trainees. A wide range of size and type of employer is contracted by St Helens Chamber. Forty-three per cent of trainees are with one large warehousing employer, the remainder being in a variety of small- and medium-size enterprises, most with fewer than ten employees. In this sector, employers contract with five main subcontractors for the delivery of training and assessment services, including initial assessment. St Helens Chamber has increased the number of trainees in this area by 35 per cent over the last year. Most assessment takes place in the workplace, and more than 20 per cent of trainees attend day-release provision at a local further education college. Inspectors agreed with most strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The same grade was awarded as that proposed by St Helens Chamber.



STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of occupational competence by trainees
- ◆ well-managed and -operated health and safety practices
- ◆ well-planned and rigorous assessment in retailing and customer service
- ◆ good workplace training for fork-truck and distribution and warehousing trainees
- ◆ well-delivered theory training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ employers are not effectively involved in target-setting and reviews
- ◆ some trainees are ill-informed about the requirements of the NVQ programmes
- ◆ slow achievement on some NVQ programmes
- ◆ some warehouse trainees do not receive proper support or guidance

23. The quality of training in this sector varies widely. Employers provide good opportunities for trainees to gain their occupational skills. A good level of support is given to most trainees in training at work. A few employers and supervisory staff have NVQs and give a good level of support to trainees, with projects and assignments, for portfolio-building. These employers provide good role models for trainees, as they have progressed from youth training positions and are able to influence a positive training culture where the trainees work. St Helens Chamber's training advisors are experienced and well qualified to carry out their role. They have established close working relationships with all suppliers. Trainees within this sector display a good level of health and safety knowledge and are very well briefed on emergency evacuation procedures and accident-reporting.

24. Work-based assessment in retail and customer service is rigorous and occurs at least once a month or, for some of the trainees, every two weeks. Workplace assessment is of a high standard. Trainees' portfolios are of a good standard. Training sessions are well delivered. Training is well planned to enable trainees to progress at a pace appropriate to their level of competence.

25. Most trainees are not aware of the role which training advisors have in co-ordinating training. Many are not able to indicate any links with St Helens Chamber. Trainees only identify links with their assessors, who support the learning process. Some employers are not properly involved in setting goals for NVQ achievement, relying on training organisations to do so on their behalf. This lack of involvement and understanding of the implications of NVQ training and assessment has, in some cases, led to warehousing trainees not receiving proper guidance on which NVQ and level to select. Trainees choose which NVQ they wish to follow and are given no guidance on the standards to follow. Some trainees have not chosen the most suitable NVQ. Lack of support and guidance has also led to slow progress for some trainees. The initial assessment process is poor. Some trainees on youth training (careership) programmes are not clear about which units they have achieved, and

some have not been given information about selection of optional units. The quality of induction varies within this sector.

Leisure, sport and travel

Grade 2

26. The Chamber contracts with two local colleges for sport and recreation NVQ training. There are 13 trainees. Twelve are modern apprentices and one is on a programme of work-based training for young people. All the trainees are employed. They are following NVQs in sport and recreation. One is specialising in coaching adults, six in sport supervision, one in outdoor education and five in coaching children. Induction to the programme is carried out at the colleges at the beginning of the course. Most trainees have completed their NVQ level 2 and are now working towards NVQs at level 3. Six trainees have completed the programme to date, obtaining full modern apprenticeships. Induction for the trainees is thorough and covers all aspects of the NVQ and a general introduction to the college. All trainees work for supportive employers, who offer an excellent range of activities that more than cover the requirements of the NVQ. The trainees attend college for two half days a week for theoretical training and portfolio-building sessions. On-the-job training is carried out by well-qualified staff.

At the original inspection, the following weaknesses were identified.

- ◆ some trainees at one provider's are on inappropriate programmes
- ◆ documents recording trainees' progress and development are often incomplete
- ◆ some poor planning and structuring of training
- ◆ one provider lacks rigour in the assessment process and procedures
- ◆ one provider has little formal communication across the training team
- ◆ the level of understanding, among staff, of the NVQ processes and modern apprentice framework is poor at one provider's
- ◆ one provider's staff have no awareness of, and are not involved in, the delivery or assessment of key skills
- ◆ monitoring of trainees' progress is often informal and unsystematic
- ◆ one provider is not assessing trainees at work

27. An action plan was drawn up following inspection and was updated prior to reinspection. It included an outline of remedial action taken, and resulting outcomes.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ frequent personal contact to discuss progress

- ◆ opportunities to study for additional qualifications
- ◆ excellent assessment planning and systems for most trainees
- ◆ comprehensive portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ infrequent assessment and planning for some of the trainees
- ◆ some trainees' experience yet to be improved by some recent changes

GOOD PRACTICE

One employer takes all the modern apprentices away on an outdoor pursuits course which is used to provide evidence and information for key skills assessment. It is carefully planned by the supervisor, and every trainee writes a report detailing each of the key skills used and how and what has been learned. This evidence is also matched to the standards for the occupational NVQ.

28. There has been significant progress in sport and recreation since the original inspection. The standard of training between the two providers still varies but improvements have been made that have a major beneficial impact on the learning experience of most trainees on the programme. All trainees undergo a detailed induction which introduces them to the training and the NVQ for which they will be studying. With one training provider, the trainees go through the induction process themselves and they then pass on their knowledge to new trainees, confirming and reinforcing their own understanding of the policies and procedures.

29. Trainees' understanding of the NVQ and the modern apprenticeship programme has greatly improved since the last inspection. Trainees are highly motivated and recognise the value of the qualifications they are following. There are excellent links between the work that the trainees do with their employers and the college-based work. Trainees clearly relate tasks at work to producing evidence for the NVQ. They greatly benefit from the NVQ training undertaken at college. Assessments are well planned, effectively carried out and most trainees receive helpful feedback. Trainees are fully involved in the scheduling of assessments. Comprehensive records are produced that ensure trainees are fully aware of the areas that require further development. For some of the trainees, however, the assessments are not planned effectively and do not occur on a regular basis. For this smaller group, there is little recorded assessment planning, and records of progress after assessment are poor and do not give the trainees a clear picture of their achievements. These trainees have little understanding of the assessment process. They progress through the programme with the support of their new work supervisor who is currently working towards assessor qualifications.

30. All trainees have the opportunity to discuss their progress informally with their course tutors on a weekly basis. This support is not recorded but trainees value the contact and the help it provides. Regular, informative, scheduled reviews take place for most trainees. In a minority of cases, trainees are reviewed irregularly, with little depth to the discussions. Staff from all organisations involved in the training are in regular contact but there is little formal recording of the outcome of discussions.

31. There has been a significant improvement in the last three months and a little over a third of trainees have a new supervisor at work. This supervisor is now looking at providing training that will benefit the trainees should they not be successful in their aim to be professional sports people. One trainee is being given



the opportunity to study for an electrician qualification with a contractor that provides electrical support for the employer's premises. Other trainees participate in courses that will enhance their careers, such as lifeguard courses, manual handling and first aid. The experience of the trainees at the two colleges still varies. However, there have been significant changes brought about by the introduction of the new supervisor, whose knowledge of sports coaching is improving the training.

32. The portfolios of two thirds of the trainees are of a high standard. By carrying out their normal work duties, trainees are able to gather excellent assessment evidence.

33. All trainees have an individual training plan that outlines their training arrangements at the beginning of the programme but they have little knowledge of what it contains, and it is not used as part of the reviewing process. The St Helen's Chamber has produced a training matrix which analyses job tasks and breaks down what training the trainees will be doing. This matrix is used with the employer and the trainee to monitor progress. Trainees are involved in the development of this matrix and it helps them to understand their training and map their progress through the programme.

Hair & beauty

Grade 3

34. The hairdressing and beauty programmes have 58 modern apprentices, 17 youth trainees (careerships) and one national trainee – 76 in total. All apprentices and trainees are employed by 38 local employers. The off the job training and assessment is contracted to the local further education college. The modern apprentices take NVQs in hairdressing or beauty therapy at levels 2 and 3 over three years. The others take NVQ level 2 over two years. Most apprentices and all the trainees attend college one day each week during term time. Two employers send their apprentices to college for theory and key skills classes and are, themselves, responsible for the practical training and assessment in hairdressing. St Helens Chamber allocates a training advisor to each employer, who visits salons at least once every six months. The college co-ordinators carry out apprentices and trainees' reviews in the salons every two to three months. Strengths and weaknesses in the report were confirmed, and inspectors found further strengths and weaknesses. The same grade was awarded as that proposed by St Helens Chamber.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good working relationships among all those concerned with training
- ◆ additional support valued by trainees
- ◆ good hairdressing training and learning resources
- ◆ key skills integrated with hairdressing assessments

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ opportunities for work-based assessment are missed
- ◆ on- and off-the-job training activities are not related
- ◆ insufficiently demanding targets set for accreditation of each unit of NVQ

35. Employment is arranged between trainees and salon owners. The trainees view the college as being responsible for their hairdressing course and view their employers likewise for their hairdressing career. Trainees said that, if they had a problem, this is how they would decide whom to ask, if they needed help. They view St Helens Chamber as purely responsible for the financial paperwork. This implied that separation is unhelpful, as the two elements are not sufficiently integrated to make best use of their effectiveness. Thirty-seven per cent of training plans checked had inaccuracies in key skills information. Employers store paperwork, including completed trainees' review sheets, in the employer handbook. Trainees cannot gain ready access to them. Training advisors check health and safety provision and monitor the recording of trainees' reviews carried out by the college co-ordinators. The trainees' review information is rarely used by employers to relate salon training to skills learned at college or check where extra practice is needed. College co-ordinators do some assessments in the salons during review visits. Understanding of NVQs by employers and trainees is mixed, resulting in missed assessment opportunities at work. The college is currently in the process of changing the hairdressing NVQ, which has been updated. The new assessment record books system is easier to use. Assessment targets are insufficiently demanding and do not encourage trainees to complete whole NVQ units regularly. They have until the end of the college programme to complete practical assessments. There is a rush to finish assessments at the end of the NVQ programmes, rather than steadily throughout the programme.

36. Only seven of the 38 employers have qualified work-based assessors. Trainees in these salons progress well and can be assessed throughout the year, including during college holidays. College staff are well qualified, occupationally experienced and up to date with current skills and trends. The college is well equipped, with a good range of spacious salons, demonstration facilities and teaching and learning resource which include hairdressing theory packs. Videos are available to reinforce practical skills. Trainees have access to photographic facilities to record practical work. The college library is well stocked and has a wide selection of appropriate books, CD-ROMs and access to the Internet. Trainees choose from a range of additional related courses as part of the course: ear-piercing, specialist colouring courses and men's hairdressing. The college has a successful competition team which the trainees can join. One apprentice is a member of the Schwarzkopf junior hairdressing team and has very good-quality photographs in his NVQ level 3 portfolio. Salons and the college display trophies and photographs to celebrate competition successes.

37. The college's key skills unit opened in summer 1998, and staff now work closely with hairdressers to identify key skills evidence mostly from NVQ hairdressing assessments. This is now an integral part of the NVQ level 2 and 3 programmes, with a weekly session at the key skills unit. Initial key skills assessments are carried out in the first session which includes testing in basic literacy and numeracy for all trainees, regardless of prior achievements. Advice and guidance by college staff on the programme and level of NVQ are based on the results of initial assessments.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

38. There are 30 trainees in care and childcare. Twelve are national trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in care. Eighteen modern apprentices are working towards NVQs at level 3 in childcare and education, early years and education and pre-school childcare provision. All trainees are employed with 16 employers working in residential and nursing homes or children's nurseries. Training and assessment is subcontracted to five main approved suppliers. All on-the-job training is delivered at work by employers. Off-the-job training is delivered by subcontractors' staff in the workplace or at training centres where some trainees attend for half or one day a week. This training varies from one-to-one sessions at the end of the day to group training sessions. Most on-the-job training is by shadowing a senior member of staff. Employers and suppliers provide specialist training at which trainees attend approved training days in first aid, basic food hygiene and lifting and handling. Qualified work-based assessors provide assessment. Approved subcontractors carry out internal verification. All trainees working in residential and nursing homes work shifts. Induction into the workplace is given by employers with induction to the NVQ provided by the subcontractors' staff. St Helen's Chamber allocates a training advisor to each employer. The advisor visits the workplace at least once every three months to carry out progress reviews. In 1998-99, 21 per cent of modern apprentices left early with 79 per cent achieving their award. There were 33 per cent of trainees leaving early on the youth training programme with 67 per cent achieving their awards. At the first inspection, the weaknesses identified were as follows.

- ◆ ineffectively planned, documented and delivered training
- ◆ very low achievement rates
- ◆ assessment procedure do not meet the requirements of the awarding body
- ◆ poorly documented assessment procedures

39. An action plan was drawn up following inspection and was updated prior to reinspection. It included an outline of remedial action taken, and resulting outcomes.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement rates
- ◆ good workplace resources
- ◆ good ratio of assessors to trainees in each workplace
- ◆ good portfolio evidence
- ◆ well-planned off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practices for one third of the trainees
- ◆ little understanding of the appeals procedure by trainees

40. Achievement rates have significantly improved since the last inspection, with 79 per cent achievement on the modern apprentice programme and 67 per cent on the youth training programme. This is a considerable improvement on the previous achievement rates for all trainees of 18 per cent in 1996-97 and 31 per cent in 1997-98. The introduction of a training matrix and job evaluation has matched tasks carried out in the workplace with the NVQ and key skills requirements of the training framework. This directs trainees to gather evidence while undertaking normal work activities.

41. Most workplaces have a wide range of equipment for trainees to use, or to learn how to teach those in their care to use, allowing trainees to build a full and comprehensive knowledge base. Trainees shadow experienced and qualified staff who are able to show them good working practices. Employers have good reference books to help develop trainees' knowledge. Work-based assessors and supervisors take pride in helping trainees to achieve their NVQs. In most workplaces, many work-based assessors work co-ordinated shifts, which ensures that trainees have access to assessment opportunities on each shift. The ratio of trainees to assessors is good. In one home for the elderly, there are 11 qualified assessors to six trainees and in one nursery, two assessors to three trainees.

42. The planning, recording and delivery of training has significantly improved since the last inspection. Planning of training is now required by St Helens Chamber and it receives copies of written training plans which it then monitors. All off-the-job training relates directly to work-based activity, NVQ requirements and occupational knowledge requirements. Trainees enjoy these training sessions. All trainees have a detailed workbook, which explains ways to generate evidence that covers the requirements of the NVQ. Portfolios are well structured with good cross-referencing of evidence. A wide range of diverse and naturally occurring evidence is used. The quality of this evidence is good. Portfolios are verified regularly when trainees attend off-the-job-training sessions. Internal verifiers are required to complete a schedule, which is returned to St Helens Chamber, giving a breakdown



of units achieved for each trainee and their records of the monitoring of assessors. The assessment procedures are satisfactory.

43. One subcontractor, who has 33 per cent of the care trainees, encourages trainees to write up their own observations. Assessors then read and sign the trainee's account. There is no comment on the confirmation by the assessor and no cross-referencing to performance criteria. It is not possible to verify internally the evidence from their records.

44. Although discussed at induction, trainees have little or no recollection of the NVQ appeals procedure and are unaware of the process they should follow in the event of dispute or dissatisfaction with assessment. Neither St Helens Chamber nor subcontractors reinforce the appeals procedure at any other time during the training.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

45. St Helens Chamber has a clear and comprehensive equal opportunities policy which it disseminates to other organisations to which it is linked by contract. It monitors the ethnicity, gender, age and disability of staff and trainees on entry and records and analyses information gathered. The number of trainees from minority ethnic groups is very low, as the population in the catchment area is less than one per cent. The gender mix on all programmes is appropriate. There are 19 modern apprentices, two national trainees and one youth trainee (careership) with disabilities. This is slightly above the national average, at 2.4 per cent. One strength was confirmed from the self-assessment report, and inspectors found a further weakness. The self-assessment grade is the same as that awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ policy and procedures promoted by most subcontractors and employers
- ◆ active equal opportunities committee

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ complaints from trainees not effectively monitored
- ◆ negligible impact on employed trainees with disabilities

46. St Helens Chamber has an active equal opportunities committee which has developed an agenda for establishing partnerships with groups, including the Prince's Trust volunteers programme. The committee also carries out initiatives to prevent gender stereotyping and to improve access for women and one-parent

families. The equal opportunities committee is active in disseminating information about programmes. There is a programme to target and help eight local areas with disadvantaged minority ethnic groups. If contracted employers have not developed their own equal opportunities policy, St Helens Chamber insists that its policy system be implemented. There is a good level of awareness among trainees of equal opportunities harassment issues. This year, St Helens Chamber accepted as a recognised target, closing the gap between the percentage of those young trainees with and without disabilities, completing their NVQ training. Comparing the position at the start of the year with the current position, achievement of those trainees with disabilities has increased from 36 to 73 per cent. The recruitment of all trainees takes place without the involvement of St Helens Chamber. There is no positive action to encourage applicants with disabilities or to identify sympathetic employers who would be willing to take trainees with disabilities.

47. Although St Helens Chamber has complaints and grievance procedures, these do not immediately apply to employed trainees because, under St Helens Chamber's employer contract terms, the employing company's complaints procedures must first be exhausted before complaints can be brought to the attention of St Helens Chamber. Individual meetings in private, between training advisors and trainees, are rare. Most trainees do not recognise St Helens Chamber's training advisors by name or sight or even understand the link between their training and the responsibility of St Helens Chamber. Trainees do not understand how to complain to St Helens Chamber about unfair treatment.

Trainee support

Grade 3

48. Sixty per cent of entrants to the programme are newly recruited by employers. The remainder are existing employees for whom training needs have been identified. Once a new trainee has been identified, St Helens Chamber's training advisors liaise with the employer to identify the most appropriate training supplier to deliver the off-the-job part of the programme. Seventy-five per cent of trainees attend one of the colleges of further education for their off-the-job training. New arrangements for initial assessment were introduced in March 1999. An initial assessment of trainees' occupational skills is carried out by employers. The training suppliers carry out basic and key skills assessment, as appropriate. The results of initial assessment are then used by St Helens Chamber's staff to prepare the individual training plan. Trainees have an induction to their training programme delivered by their training supplier. In addition, St Helens Chamber's staff ensure that an induction into the workplace is provided by the employer.

49. Trainees' progress is reviewed in two ways. St Helens Chamber's training advisors visit trainees at work and conduct a review of the whole programme at least once every 12 weeks. The training supplier also provides a separate review of progress towards the qualifications being undertaken. This also occurs at least once every 12 weeks. Each training supplier operates a personal tutor system, in which



each trainee is allocated to a named staff member for support and guidance.

At the original inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified.

- ◆ poor initial assessment
- ◆ initial assessment is not systematic or used to inform individual training plans
- ◆ trainees' progress reviews do not encourage private discussion
- ◆ limited support for trainees in laboratory operations

50. An action plan was drawn up following inspection and was updated prior to reinspection. It included an outline of remedial action taken, and resulting outcomes.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and thorough induction programme
- ◆ high levels of learning support
- ◆ good-quality guidance on progression opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor recording of progress reviews
- ◆ some trainees lack awareness of the full content of their programme

51. All trainees undertake an initial induction to their off-the-job-training programme and receive a training book to accompany the programme, which they keep for future reference. The induction is comprehensive, covering a wide range of topics such as health and safety, equal opportunities and a guide to the available learning facilities. There is an opportunity for trainees to meet a variety of staff involved in their programme. This is particularly valuable in the college, where each trainee meets several members of staff during the course of their training day. St Helens Chamber's training advisors ensure that trainees also receive an induction carried out by their employers, in conjunction with the training advisor. A checklist of content is used to ensure that no important topics are missed. Most trainees, even those that started more than a year ago, have a good recollection of the topics covered during induction.

52. The training supplier allocates each trainee a personal tutor. This person is available to provide individual training, guidance and support. The system works well and applies to all, including those in laboratory operations for whom support was poor at the last inspection. Trainees make full use of the support offered and readily contact their tutors for help. The range of support varies, and can include individual coaching, guidance on completing logbooks, help with assignments and remedial work. In addition to their personal tutor, trainees are very clear about which of St Helens Chamber's training advisors they should contact if the need

arises. There is also a named member of staff responsible for guiding trainees at work.

53. When trainees are nearing the end of their programme, training advisors provide valuable guidance on progression opportunities. This occurs during the progress review interviews. For modern apprentices, detailed information on further qualifications that may enhance their performance at work and prepare them for promotion is given. For the adults in the care sector on fixed 12-month contracts, the guidance includes information on opportunities for both further training and employment.

54. Initial assessment arrangements are now satisfactory, with systematic assessment of trainees' competence in basic or key skills on entry to the programme. In the case of the major college supplier, trainees do not receive detailed feedback on their performance in such tests, but are notified if additional support is considered necessary. This is recorded on the trainees' individual training plans.

55. St Helens Chamber has developed and improved its system for carrying out and recording progress review interviews. With the exception of one supplier in the sport sector, reviews are taking place regularly every 12 weeks. Trainees understand the differing purposes of the reviews carried out by their training supplier and St Helens Chamber's staff. In response to the previous inspection report, employers and trainees are now consulted separately, to encourage openness and honesty. In many cases, reviews are clearly recorded, providing plenty of valuable information. In others, however, the recording of reviews is superficial and the information recorded is of little value in progressing trainees through their programmes. These inadequate review records often lack action points and specific targets. There are some instances where additional support needs identified on the individual training plans are not reviewed, omitting an important part of the programme. St Helens Chamber has recognised that some reviews are poorly recorded, and has provided training sessions for staff. While this has led to some improvement in the quality and content of reviews, further improvements are still needed.

56. Some trainees are not wholly aware of the content of their individual training plans. There is a particular lack of clarity in relation to key skills. While trainees are clear on the NVQ they are undertaking, some are unsure which key skills units are included in their programme, and at what level.

Management of training

Grade 3

57. The direct contract team is carefully managed to underpin the overall objectives of St Helens Chamber, including the aim to increase training in, and the involvement of, companies and organisations throughout the town. This has some effect on the experience of individual trainees, but is not sufficient to meet all



trainees' needs. The self-assessment report identified strengths which no more than normal practice and did not identify any weaknesses. Inspectors identified other strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management of health and safety
- ◆ open debate among staff and recognition of individuals and teams' efforts
- ◆ effective working relationships between employers and subcontractors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient management information
- ◆ poorly managed training
- ◆ some employers are insufficiently involved in the training process
- ◆ St Helens Chamber's managers do not take responsibility for on-the-job training

58. Comprehensive checks of employers' health and safety arrangements are carried out on a six-monthly basis across all occupational sectors. Trainees have a clear understanding of health and safety arrangements in the workplace. In the engineering and manufacturing programmes, St Helens Chamber holds open-evenings for employers to discuss training issues. The style of management is open and encourages debate among staff. Lines of communication and accountability are clear. Working relationships between the organisation and approved training providers are good.

59. Management information is not held in a format which can be used to inform decision-making and action-planning easily. The organisation manages its overall work to comply with its contracts and financial targets. St Helens Chamber does not monitor or influence the content or delivery of training programmes provided by its subcontractors. All training, assessment and internal verification is carried out by the subcontractors and, without effective monitoring, it varies in quality. The subcontractors also hold additional contracts with St Helens Chamber for the training of non-employed trainees. These contracts are closely managed, and considerable improvements in achievement rates have been seen. The contracts for the training of employed trainees are not managed to this level. Several employers take little interest in their employees' training.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

60. Since the inspection in October 1998, St Helens Chamber has worked hard to rectify the major deficiencies identified in its quality assurance system. A new quality assurance policy has been introduced and a full review of systems and



policies is complete. At the time of re-inspection, a system to quality assure all aspects of the training, including the work delegated to subcontractors, has been introduced. Action plans for improvement follow the regular monitoring of subcontractors' work. Questionnaires are used to obtain feedback from trainees at the start, middle and end of their training. Questionnaires are also sent to employers every six months.

The main weaknesses identified by the first inspection were as follows.

- ◆ subcontractors and employers do not understand the purpose of quality assurance
- ◆ inconsistent quality of training across occupational areas and subcontractors
- ◆ no measures for monitoring the quality of the trainees' learning experience
- ◆ insufficiently analysed achievement rates/destinations to further continuous improvement
- ◆ inconsistent implementation of quality assurance systems by training advisors

61. The grade awarded to quality assurance at the first inspection was grade 4. In the self-assessment report produced in January 1999, St Helens Chamber awarded itself a grade 3. Reinspection took place before the due date for the annual self-assessment report. The post-inspection action plan is regularly updated and the latest edition was supplied to the inspectors. It includes clear details of the measurable improvements made to date.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and clearly recorded quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of the quality of subcontracted work
- ◆ successful actions taken to improve training
- ◆ effective use of achievement and destination data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unestablished arrangements too new to monitor any consistent effect

62. Considerable effort, time and resources have been provided for the improvement of training and support. St Helens Chamber's appreciation of the value of self-assessment and continuous improvement is excellent. New systems have been introduced that are understood and applied by staff. Measurable improvements are now evident. The action plan produced following the first inspection and the January 1999 self-assessment are both self-critical and thorough. Remedial action is carried out successfully and its impact on trainees' experience is evaluated.

63. Since the last inspection, the quality assurance policy has been reviewed and now very clearly sets out instructions for both St Helens Chamber and subcontractor's staff. These arrangements cover the major areas of training. The policy is supported by 13 working procedures, covering employers' responsibilities, the youth and adult programmes, the New Deal work, initial assessment and reviews of trainees' progress. Responsibilities are clearly identified, and everyone is made aware that all members of staff are responsible for quality. The new quality assurance measures are fully understood and supported by staff.

64. There is a systematic review process through which each subcontractor's major quality assurance procedures are reviewed jointly by St Helens Chamber and the subcontractors' staff. Subcontractors' systems are evaluated, and completed documents are analysed for effectiveness and suitability. Trainees' are interviewed to determine their knowledge and understanding of processes such as induction and progress reviews. Trainees' understanding of areas such as health and safety and equal opportunities are monitored and their levels of satisfaction with the programme are also checked. A system to ensure that staff monitor the quality of training sessions has been introduced. Subcontractors are required to submit an evaluation report to St Helens Chamber within an agreed timescale, setting out identified strengths and weaknesses of training and any remedial action needed. St Helens Chamber has a timetable for observing training sessions and checking subcontractors' reports. Well-constructed questionnaires are sent to trainees at the start, middle and end of their training. Similar questionnaires are sent to employers every six months. Responses are closely monitored and analysed. Trends are identified and acted upon. Findings are shared with individual subcontractors and employers to improve the quality of training, support and trainees' experience. There have been recent training sessions for St Helens Chamber's staff and training staff to address issues arising from the evaluation process. The effect of this training is currently being measured.

65. There are meetings of St Helens Chamber's teams, both with groups of subcontractors and on an individual team basis. These are minuted and action plans are produced. Quality assurance is an agenda item at all such meetings. The Chamber operates an open forum at team meetings and good practice is shared. Developing quality assurance issues are formally reported to St Helens Chamber's senior management team.

66. A comprehensive database is maintained, providing accurate achievement and destination data for each subcontractor. These data are rigorously analysed and discussed with all relevant parties. For example, the numbers of previous years' early leavers are held for individual subcontractors. Current levels are monitored against last year's figures and reviewed with the subcontractor each month. Destinations of trainees who leave the programme are recorded and closely monitored. The results of the analysis are used to identify areas for improvement. St Helens Chamber is now aware of the destination of those modern apprentices leaving early in all but 5 per cent of cases.



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67. The new quality assurance procedures provide a comprehensive and well-planned framework for St Helens Chamber and its subcontractors to use to monitor and improve training. These arrangements are new and, although tangible improvements have been achieved already, there has not yet been sufficient time for them to become firmly established or for their effects to be measured through monitoring emerging trends.