



Furness College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-sixteen

Published
January 2007

Provider reference
130633

Contents

Basic information about the college	3
Background of the organisation	4
Scope of the inspection	4
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Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Main findings	9

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Furness College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Anne Attwood
Address of college:	Channelside Barrow-in-Furness Cumbria LA14 2PJ
Telephone number:	01229 825017
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Chair of governors:	David Rhodes
Unique reference number:	130633
Name of lead inspector:	Patrick Geraghty, HMI
Dates of inspection:	30 October - 3 November 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Furness College is a general further education college situated in the industrial town of Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria. The college aims to “provide an exceptional environment for the people of Furness to reach their full potential by improving their knowledge, skills and vocation qualifications through the delivery of high quality courses in all curriculum areas”. The college offers a wide range of mainly vocational provision with opportunities for progression from entry level to level 4.
2. Nearly 4,850 funded students attended the college in 2004/05, 52% of which were male and approximately 2% were of minority ethnic origin. About 850 students were on full-time courses, 24% of whom were over 19 years. Around 195 work-based trainees were in training during the year. The college is a key partner with BAe Systems in the first national CoVE in marine engineering and shipbuilding.
3. Barrow has the highest level of deprivation in Cumbria with six wards falling within the top 10% most deprived wards nationally. Unemployment is above county and national averages. Barrow has been traditionally linked with manufacturing and even though manufacturing still accounts for 25% of all jobs in the area, it has contracted over recent years. GCSE pass rates in Barrow are variable.

Scope of the inspection

4. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college’s previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college’s most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits and data on enrolments and learners’ achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: grade 1
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

5. This is a good college with a number of outstanding aspects. Learners' achievements are good and above national averages. Pass rates in 2006 demonstrated significant improvement. However, retention has remained at national benchmarks over a period of time. Learners make good progress in developing their practical skills. There is good progression to higher level courses.
6. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned. There is a thorough lesson observation process which accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Key skills have been successfully embedded into the curriculum. The college has worked hard to raise learners' aspirations. A minority of lessons do not sufficiently stimulate learners' interests and oral competency.
7. The college offers a welcoming, well maintained and safe environment. Resources have improved significantly since the last inspection. Learners benefit from good information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. Improvements have been made to the e-learning resources in the college and the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) has been developed. Specialist resources for learners with disabilities have been updated.
8. The approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The curriculum is well matched to the needs of the community. A high proportion of provision is at level 1 and 2 with a strong focus on raising the aspirations of learners who have often been characterised by disaffection and underachievement. There is outstanding collaboration and partnership work with schools, local community organisations and groups, other colleges and employers. The 14-16 programmes have been successful in promoting progression and the college has increased 16-18 enrolments significantly since the last inspection. There is insufficient staff training in equality and diversity.
9. Learners benefit from good induction, guidance and support systems. A comprehensive range of support services are accessible. Initial assessment is effective in identifying learners who need additional learning support. Effective careers guidance aids progression and raises aspirations. Students show good respect and support for each other. Many individual learning plans lack sufficient detail to allow learners to understand their targets and rate of progress.
10. Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the principal and senior management team are highly effective. The inspectors largely agreed with the college self-assessment. The college has established highly effective

quality assurance systems which have been effective in raising standards. Financial management is robust. There is some lack of understanding by governors of their statutory responsibilities in respect of the Education Act (safeguarding children) 2002.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

11. Inspectors agreed with the college that its capacity to improve is outstanding. The college's key priorities and strategic direction are clear. College plans have a strong focus on raising aspirations, improving the quality of provision for learners and identifying and addressing areas for improvement. Success and pass rates have improved significantly. Collaborative partnerships to address local learning needs are outstanding. Quality assurance systems are highly effective. Management information systems are robust. Clear strategies and operational plans are in place to promote further and sustained improvement. Self-assessment is well established, self-critical and largely accurate. Performance is monitored thoroughly.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

12. The college has made good progress in addressing the key issues raised in the last inspection. Success and pass rates have improved. Management information and quality assurance systems are now highly effective. Lessons are rigorously monitored and there has been an increase in the percentage of good and better lessons. The monitoring of student progress is good. The college recognises that retention, although demonstrating improvement since the last inspection, has not kept pace with the improvement in pass rates. The provision of key skills has improved with pass rates well above national averages.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good pass rates on most courses
- significant improvements in success and pass rates in 2006
- much good teaching and learning
- thorough arrangements for the observation of the standards of teaching and learning
- effective arrangements for additional learning support
- outstanding collaboration and partnership arrangements
- effective initial advice, guidance and induction
- very effective leadership
- very good quality assurance systems.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- further improvement in retention rates
- a minority of weak teaching
- improvements in individual learning plans
- limited lifespan of some accommodation
- insufficient training on embedding equality and diversity
- improving governors' compliance with regard to aspects of the Education Act (safeguarding children) 2002.

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

13. Achievement and standards are good. Since the last inspection, success rates for learners aged 16-18 and 19+ at all levels have improved to above national averages for similar colleges. At level 3, much needed improvement was secured between 2004/5 and 2005/6 for 16-18 year olds. There were significant improvements in success and pass rates in 2006. Long course pass rates for 16-18 year old learners improved significantly to 86% and for 19+ learners to 92%. Success rates for short courses demonstrate significant improvement since the last inspection and are now well above the national average. This represents a strong trend of improvement with success rates increasing faster than the national rate. A well-developed in-house system of value added indicates that learners reach or exceed the standards predicted from their prior attainment. In an area where attainment at 16 is relatively low, learners make good progress at the college.
14. Retention rates for learners aged 16-18 and 19+ are around the national averages for similar colleges. Rates of retention have not kept pace with achievement rates, and continue to be of concern in a minority of areas.
15. Framework success rates for work-based learning declined between 2003/04 and 2004/05. However, the framework success rate between 2004/05 and 2005/06 increased significantly. In 2005/06, the framework success rate for apprentices was well above the national average but for advanced apprentices it was around the average.
16. Success rates for those with additional learning support are in line with the college average. Key skills pass rates in 2005/06 were significantly above national averages at 60%. The progress of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities is very good. Success rates for ethnic minority groups are good.
17. Learners make good progress in developing their practical and vocational skills. They work safely in studios and workshops. There is good progression to employment and to further and higher education courses. Assessment of learners' work is fair and accurate.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

18. The quality of provision is good. Inspectors agree with the college's own judgement that teaching and learning are good. The planning of lessons is strong. Schemes of work and lessons plans are comprehensive and thorough but in some instances learning objectives are not clear. Standards of teaching and learning for technology are very high. Technology teachers are very good at developing learners' work skills to a very high standard. In practical lessons,

teachers place a strong emphasis on the importance of health and safety. Assessment of student work is good with clear and constructive feedback. Internal verification systems are good.

19. In the better lessons, teachers motivate learners well. They are very effective at taking account of learners' individual learning needs and using learners' own experience to explain a learning topic. Learning materials and specialist resources to support learning are good, particularly for construction and hair and beauty. In engineering and for the CoVE, resources are of a very high standard. Many teachers make good use of ICT to maintain learners' interests. The college has clear arrangements for the provision of key skills.
20. In the less successful lessons, teachers' introductions to learning tasks are unclear. Some teachers do not take note of learners' individual learning needs. In other instances, tasks are too complex for the level of the learners' knowledge and understanding, learning does not challenge and stimulate learners' interest and in discussions, teachers dominate, not allowing learners to express their views.
21. The college has an effective lesson observation process which is comprehensively monitored. Observers are well trained and identify strengths and areas of weakness astutely. Staff development programmes ensure that identified weaknesses are addressed.
22. The college provides a good range of programmes and activities which effectively meet the needs of learners, the local community and employers. Programmes are available from entry to level 4. They are flexible, responsive and accessible for learners, employers and local communities. The college has effective progression routes for most learners to progress to higher level courses including those for higher education and work-based learning. Programmes are available on the college's main site, in the workplace, at a number of local community venues and in conjunction with local schools on their premises. The college has a growing number of work-based learners and has a contract for a substantial number of Train to Gain learners. The college has been particularly successful in raising learners' aspirations.
23. Collaboration and partnerships with local schools, the Sixth Form College, education organisations and other local agencies are outstanding. The college works closely and very successfully with schools and local agencies, to help widen the curriculum for 14-16 year olds and those from groups under-represented in education. The college is very good at providing provision which meets the needs of employers whether for small to medium enterprises or multi-national companies.
24. Learners receive very effective pre-course impartial advice and guidance. Staff are particularly pro-active in the promotion of college courses to local school students. Transition arrangements for students with learning difficulties and disabilities are good. Advice and guidance for part-time learners has improved

since the last inspection and are comprehensive. All full-time students take part in a very effective induction programme and great care is taken to ensure that students have made the right choice. There are particularly good measures in place for the support and induction of apprentices.

25. The arrangements to identify the support needs of full-time learners are thorough. Learners value the wide range of support services available and speak very positively about how this has helped them learn. The additional support unit offers very effective services including those to support students with dyslexia, physical difficulties, and sensory impairment. The recently appointed enrichment co-ordinator has made significant improvements to the opportunities available to students. Learners participate in a variety of voluntary activities including sponsored walks and charitable appeals. The college has embraced the principles of Every Child Matters and this is reflected in its tutorial programme and mission.
26. Tutors use the management information system to closely monitor full-time students and identify students who are not making the expected level of progress. Measures to improve progress levels are effective. Most learners value tutorials and the support they receive. Tutorials cover such issues as stress, mental health and the importance of healthy lifestyles. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored using electronic registers. The tutorial curriculum has been enhanced and improved; however, it is too early to judge what effect this will have on rates of retention. The systems used to set targets, recognise previous experience and develop potential enrichment activities are incomplete. Many individual learning plans lack sufficient detail to allow learners to understand their targets and rate of progress.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

27. The principal and senior managers provide very clear and effective leadership. Following a period of financial instability, the college has successfully restructured. Performance management has been introduced, and is closely linked to business targets. There is very good communication between senior managers and staff. Success and pass rates have improved significantly. Improvements in retention rates have not kept pace with pass rates and are at the national averages for similar colleges.
28. Collaboration with other agencies is outstanding. The college has successfully refocused the curriculum in line with national and local priorities. Employer engagement is good. The college has a positive image as a training provider in the local community, particularly in engineering and increasingly in health and social care.
29. Quality assurance arrangements have improved significantly and are very good. Staff find information timely, accessible and helpful. Rigorous termly curriculum audits are carried out by course teams. A start has been made to implement the recognition and recording of progress and achievement in non-

accredited learning (RARPA), but more needs to be done to ensure the moderation is effective.

30. The scheme to observe teaching and learning is effective and the grading is rigorously moderated. The self-assessment process is rigorous. Inspectors found the self-assessment process results in largely accurate identification of strengths and areas for improvement.
31. Since the previous inspection, significant improvements have been made to the e-learning resources in the college and the college's VLE is developing. Specialist resources for learners with disabilities have been updated. Teaching staff are well qualified. Managers undergo appropriate management training and staff development is closely related to the college's strategic planning and to the performance management scheme. The college makes the best of a campus that is in need of significant upgrading. Some of the buildings have a limited lifespan and there are no sports facilities.
32. The college's response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Education Act (safeguarding children) 2002 and the Children Act 2004 are satisfactory. However, although policy documents are now satisfactory, governors do not routinely receive participation and achievement data relating to ethnicity. A thorough disability equality policy is in draft. The college recognises that although progress has been made, more needs to be done to embed equality and diversity issues. The college has developed its policy and procedures for safeguarding in line with requirements; however, despite recent information provided, not all governors are clear about their statutory responsibilities.
33. Financial management is very effective. Governors have significant business experience and monitor business aspects of the college very well. The college provides good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	02/03	359	62	55	7	481	58	53	5
	03/04	300	67	59	8	453	75	59	16
	04/05	389	63	62	1	537	67	61	6
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	4	25.0	56.1	-31.1				
	03/04	11	72.7	63.3	9.4	1	100.0	53.5	46.5
	04/05	15	80.0	63.9	16.1				
NVQs	02/03	120	54.2	57.6	-3.4	41	36.6	60.2	-23.6
	03/04	82	68.3	60.9	7.4	20	55.0	66.1	-11.1
	04/05	153	64.1	65.4	-1.3	43	79.1	70.8	8.3
Other	02/03	235	67.2	55.2	12.0	440	59.5	52.5	7.0
	03/04	207	66.7	58.6	8.1	436	75.9	58.3	17.6
	04/05	221	62.0	61.2	0.8	494	65.8	60.6	5.2

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	02/03	481	54	51	3	565	55	49	6
	03/04	350	60	56	4	433	56	54	2
	04/05	321	66	60	6	321	62	59	3
GCSEs	02/03	32	53.1	57.9	-4.8	106	53.8	53.8	0
	03/04	35	60.0	63.7	-3.7	55	52.7	57.4	-4.7
	04/05	39	51.3	65.2	-13.9	54	61.1	63.3	-2.2
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	40	72.5	54.0	18.5	3	33.3	47.4	-14.1
	03/04	9	77.8	59.5	18.3	2	50.0	56.0	-6.0
	04/05	8	50.0	65.6	-15.6				
NVQs	02/03	212	57.1	41.6	15.5	184	45.7	49.5	-3.8
	03/04	141	62.4	50.5	11.9	123	63.4	54.3	9.1
	04/05	112	74.1	56.1	18.0	77	55.8	62.2	-6.4
Other	02/03	197	46.2	48.1	-1.9	272	62.1	48.7	13.4
	03/04	165	57.6	52.9	4.7	253	53.8	52.7	1.1
	04/05	162	65.4	58.3	7.1	190	64.7	57.4	7.3

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	02/03	188	46	59	-13	743	65	50	15
	03/04	228	50	61	-11	422	52	52	0
	04/05	226	62	65	-3	312	63	56	7
A/A2 Levels	02/03	0				0			
	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
AS Levels	02/03	0				0			
	03/04	0				0			
	04/05	0				0			
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	95	57.9	46.7	11.2	53	58.5	44.5	14.0
	03/04	33	54.5	50.3	4.2	52	53.8	42.6	11.2
	04/05	4	50.0	59.4	-9.4	5	40.0	51.4	-11.4
NVQs	02/03	17	23.5	49.9	-26.4	149	51.7	42.8	8.9
	03/04	14	50.0	50.5	-0.5	108	56.5	48.1	8.4
	04/05	13	69.2	53.1	16.1	114	79.8	54.1	25.7
Other	02/03	76	35.5	52.0	-16.5	541	68.9	51.0	17.9
	03/04	181	49.7	51.3	-1.6	262	50.4	53.6	-3.2
	04/05	209	61.7	56.0	5.7	193	53.9	56.3	-2.4

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2003 to 2005.

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	28	43	32	61	47
	Advanced	28	39	31	68	48
2004/05	Apprenticeship	58	31	39	47	50
	Advanced	44	27	34	43	48

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship programme	Number of learners*	Timely Framework	National rate**	College NVQ rate**	National rate**
2003/04	Apprenticeship	28	18%	16%	25%	24%
	Advanced	24	17%	19%	46%	30%
2004/05	Apprenticeship	44	25%	22%	22%	29%
	Advanced	44	25%	21%	32%	31%

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in a given year.

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'