

Animal Control Officers' training and education

Jo Toia

ABSTRACT

An ever increasing number of local councils throughout Queensland are enrolling their Animal Control Officers in the Animal Control Officer Practices course offered through Ithaca College of TAFE. This was the first course of its kind in Australia and was developed in consultation with Brisbane City Council and Logan City Council as a direct result of the Urban Animal Symposium in 1983. The course is now due for review. The Queensland Local Government Industry Training Council is conducting an Australia wide skills analysis. It is considered that this skills list will provide the basis for a new upgraded training program. The aim of this paper is to look at current training provided in Queensland, the Draft Skills Identification Document produced by the Queensland Local Government Industry Training Council and the future direction of Animal Control Officer Training in Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The first course in Animal Control Officer Practices was offered at Ithaca College of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in 1985. This was the first training program of its kind in Australia. The program was designed to meet the training needs of Dog Impounders, Animal Ordinance Officers and Pound and Refuge Officers employed in the Brisbane and near Brisbane areas. This program met with considerable success and other councils throughout Queensland indicated that the program should be made available on a state wide basis. Therefore the program is now offered in a flexi-mode as well as internally through the college.

CURRENT COURSE CONTENT AND MODE OF OFFERING

The internal program is run on a part-time basis with participants attending the college one day a week for twenty weeks. The flexi-program is a combination of on and off campus study. Participants are provided with lecture notes and workshop materials.

Participants in the internal course attend practical sessions, tutorials and assessment for the program during their time at the college while the flexi-program group is required to attend a three day workshop to cover these areas.

All participants are required to complete assignment work associated with the lecture and practical content of the program. Both the internal and flexi-mode offerings cover the same subject areas which include:

- Public Relations
 - Communication
 - Confrontation
 - Dealing with difficult situations;
- Animal Identification;
- Animal Behaviour
 - Signs of Aggression
 - Fear Biters;

- Kennel Design and Maintenance
 - Hygiene
 - Nutrition and Water Requirements;
- Common Internal and External Parasites;
- Signs of ill health
 - Infectious Diseases
 - Vaccination Program; and
- Reports and records
 - Legal Requirements
 - Local By Laws.

The pilot flexi-mode program was offered in 1992 and met with considerable success. This year a second program has been run for North Queensland with the workshop held in Townsville. A second program for Central Queensland is currently running. The workshop for Central Queensland will be held in Bundaberg. The internal program continues to be run by Drs Gaille Perry and Susan Fowkes in the Animal Care Section at Ithaca. Feedback from both offerings continues to be positive and enthusiastic with calls for a further extension and upgrading of the program.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER TRAINING

A recurring opinion given by Animal Control Officers (ACOs) participating in the program is that there is no clear career structure in Animal Control. This appears to be borne out by the number of competent ACOs who complete the course but do not stay in the job.

A number of Environmental Health Officers have also requested further training as ACOs.

The current program is due for reaccreditation in 1994. Therefore in the light of the above requests and other feedback from course participants and councils, a meeting was called to decide on future directions for ACO training.

This meeting was chaired by Dr Gaille Perry with attendees from the following Councils:

- Redland Shire;
- Albert Shire;
- Redcliffe City;
- Gold Coast City;
- Brisbane City; and
- Moreton Shire.

Input was also received from these Councils:

- Beaudesert Shire;
- Maryborough Shire; and
- Pine Rivers Shire.

The meeting was convened by Dr Perry in conjunction with the Local Government Industry Training Council whose representative was Mr Terry Coman.

Discussion revealed that all present were satisfied with the present course for entry level employees but that there was a need for further expansion to provide a career path for those employees wishing to remain in this field within the council.

It was also indicated that there should be further expansion of the Public Relations and Legal Procedures Modules.

Dr Perry suggested that to address all the issues raised a program should be design and written In competency based terms with multiple entry/exit points. This received full support from the meeting.

As a result of the meeting the Local Government Industry Training Council has undertaken to conduct an Australia wide review of skills for ACOs. At the time of writing this paper the review document was not available, however this document will be available for discussion at this forthcoming conference.

Dr Perry is seeking to involve TAFE and local councils in the development of National Modules in Animal Control on completion of the Skills Identification Project.

CONCLUSION

Animal Control Officer Training in Queensland has proven to be highly successful. It is considered that this initial program will be built upon and will continue to meet the needs of local councils. The development of a national training program would be beneficial to councils throughout Australia. The development of other national training programs has led to a sharing of resources and ideas and has provided participants with qualifications which are recognised throughout Australia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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My first involvement in Urban Animal Management was through the National Urban Animal Integration Symposium convened by the Australian Veterinary Association in 1983. I presented a paper on a proposed course in animal control officer training. As a result of the symposium, the program is now offered through the Ithaca College of TAFE. My interest in Urban Animal Management has continued to grow. I have learned about the difficulties and stress ACOs meet implementing the by-laws designed in the interests of public and animal welfare. (adapted from the proceedings of the first national conference on Urban Animal Management 1992).

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