

Accredited training for animal management staff

Gaille Perry

ABSTRACT

This paper contains a brief history of animal management staff training in Australia, examines the concept of competency based training, and explains how this has been applied to develop a nationally recognised two tier course for the training of local laws officers with a responsibility for animal management.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, animal management has become an important and emotive issue for local authorities. At no time in the past has the importance of animal ownership been as important to people as it is today, yet the social problems of the high level of ownership cannot be ignored. Local authorities are increasingly being expected to 'get it right' by pet owners and non-owners alike, and, to achieve this, require a team of dedicated, competent staff to service this sensitive area. The era of the *Dog Catcher* is over - councils need professionals, and professionals need training to develop and enhance their skills.

BACKGROUND

In the late eighties, Ithaca College of TAFE became the first educational institution in Australia to offer training to Animal Control Officers. The 120 hour program was developed in consultation with local authorities to supply their staff training needs, and the course has been very successful. Similar courses have since been developed in New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia. It has become apparent however that, as the role of the Animal Control Officer has changed, so too have their training needs. Generic courses are available in law enforcement in several states, but do not necessarily meet the needs of animal management.

In 1983, a meeting was held in Brisbane, attended by both senior staff and Animal Control Officers from several south-east Queensland local authorities. As a result, the Local Government Industry Training Board undertook to write a skills list for animal control, based on meetings with Brisbane City and Albert Shire Councils. This list was used in the development of a proposal to ACTRAC (Australian Committee for Training Curriculum), a standing committee of ANTA (Australian National Training Authority) for funding to develop a nationally accredited course for animal management. Funding was granted to the TAFE Queensland Applied Science Curriculum Co-ordination Unit late in 1994, and the project commenced in January 1995.

Concurrently, the national Local Government Industry Training Body had commissioned a skills analysis across all local authority departments, and a list of draft competencies had been developed. These were registered in 1995, and were used, along with those identified specifically for animal management, as the basis of the new course.

COMPETENCY BASED TRAINING

In an effort to become more internationally competitive, the Australian Government has determined that all vocational training must be based on actual competencies necessary to perform the job. Gone are the *airy-fairy nice-to-know* subjects which were previously present in some courses - all learning had to be directly related to the job done by the trainees. This course therefore has been written to address the competencies necessary in the workplace.

To assess competencies, examinations are clearly often not appropriate and, increasingly, on-the-job assessment in real situations is being used. While this is clearly an improvement, it requires competent assessors to be available in the workplace, and constant liaison between the training provider and the workplace assessors - thus a good competency based course, while it may require less formal classroom teaching, is time-consuming for teachers, trainees and supervisors. The end product of such a course, however, should be a competent work force.

THE AUSTRALIAN STANDARDS FRAMEWORK (ASF)

According to the National Training Body (1993):

The Australian Standards Framework is a set of 8 competency levels which serve as benchmarks for the development and recognition of competency standards in relation to work across the Australian economy. The framework provides a bridge between the competency requirements of work and work structures, and the vocational education and training and certification system.

The adoption of this framework has allowed national consistency to be achieved in the range, value and nomenclature of vocational qualifications.

The work of animal management staff covers a wide range and depth of skills. Discussions with a wide group of industry representatives has determined that the majority of tasks performed in this occupation fall from ASF Level 3 upwards (Level 3 tasks correspond to a competent, skilled, autonomous worker). ASF level descriptors for Levels 3-4 are contained in Appendix 1.

THE AUSTRALIAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (AQF)

State and Federal Ministers in 1993 approved the paper *National Qualifications Framework*. The Australian Qualifications Framework has been developed to:

provide a comprehensive, nationally consistent, yet flexible framework for all qualifications in post-compulsory education and training.

Before the development of the AQF, course titles were often loosely applied eg a certificate course could be a full-time course of 1 or more semesters or a short course with no or little assessment. Qualifications now are graded according to the complexity of the learning outcomes contained therein. Nominal hours are allocated to each module within the course, based on the time expected for an average learner to successfully complete the module. Competency based training is designed so that learners can proceed at their own pace through the learning materials. The AQF will enable learners to progress within a set of qualifications through a range of pathways.

The levels which the industry reference group has deemed appropriate for the courses developed for animal management are Certificates III and IV. It is proposed to later develop a Diploma (the level above Certificate IV), which will give animal management staff training to fulfil roles in management and provide an alternative means of entry to university courses.

THE PROJECT TEAM

It has been fortuitous for the success of the project that the team working on this curriculum has contained a blend of educational and industry specialists. Each state and territory is represented, and each state member has liaised with local interest groups in their own state. This has resulted in a truly national perspective to the courses that have been developed. The state representatives are listed in Appendix 2 - any questions regarding implementation of the courses in your state may be directed accordingly.

THE COMPETENCIES

Competencies identified as appropriate to animal management are contained in Appendices 3 and 4. The majority of the competencies are generic - they are common to all local laws officers in local government. There are also a number of animal related competencies

THE COURSE

The course consists of a framework of generic modules which, while appropriate to animal management, will also be relevant should the learner change career path within local government. Many of these were originally written in other national projects, notably National Communication modules and National Office Skills modules. These are widely used in a variety of other courses, so provide the bonus to the learner of credit in other courses they may later undertake.

Animal specific modules have been written such that they align with animal husbandry subjects in the Certificate in Veterinary Nursing course.

Both Certificates III and IV will contain core or elective modules. All states will have the core modules as an integral part of their course. States may vary in the choice of whether the modules designated as electives nationally are incorporated as core, elective or not offered if considered inappropriate in that state.

OVERSEAS ANIMAL MANAGEMENT STAFF TRAINING

It has often been stated that Australia leads the world in Urban Animal Management, and this is also true in education in that field. Both the United States and Great Britain have short courses and seminars produced by private providers and available to animal management staff, but neither has yet undertaken so ambitious a project as to develop a nationally accredited course with links both laterally to other similar courses, and upward to university courses.

THE FUTURE

Further funding has been sought to provide learning resources for the two courses already developed. It is considered that these courses should be available in flexible delivery mode, to facilitate the participation by a animal management officers throughout Australia, and so it is imperative that the high quality learning materials required by remote learners be available.

It is also intended, if funding is available, to develop a Diploma course which would build on the team management training begun in the Certificate IV course. Such training is important if animal management officers are required to perform higher level duties, such as providing advice to council and budgeting. National management generic modules have been written, and, if incorporated in such a course, could provide further varied career opportunities for animal management staff who later wished to enter other areas of government or the private sector.

CONCLUSION

This project has received wholehearted support from local government at all levels, and I thank all of those who have made the organisation of the project such a rewarding experience for me. In particular, I thank the project team, and Gillian Quinn and her support staff at the Applied Science Curriculum Co-ordination Unit, TAFE Queensland for their enthusiasm and hard work.

In an era when much is expected of animal management staff, it is vital that they have access to the training they need to perform their duties in a manner which enhances their profession, their employers and Urban Animal Management generally.

REFERENCES

National Training Board (1992). *National Competency Standards: policy and guidelines*, second edition.

Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee Working Party on the Recognition of Training, December 1993. *National Qualifications Framework*.

APPENDIX 1

ASF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

ASF 3

Competency at this level involves the application of knowledge with depth in some areas and a broad range of skills. There is a range of tasks and roles in a variety of contexts, with some complexity in the extent and choice of actions required.

Competencies are normally used within routines, methods and procedures where some discretion and judgment is required in selection of equipment, work organisation, services actions and achieving outcomes within time constraints.

Competencies are likely to be applied under limited guidance with checking related to overall progress, but may take the form of broad guidance and autonomy if working in teams. Responsibility for the work of others and/or team coordination may be required.

ASF 4

Competency at this level requires the application of knowledge with depth in some areas and a broad range of skills. There is a wide range of tasks and roles in a variety of contexts, with complexity in the range and choice of actions required.

Competencies are normal used within routines, methods and procedures where discretion and judgment is required for both self and others in planning and selection of equipment, work organisation, services actions and achieving outcomes within time constraints.

Competencies are likely to be with only general guidance on progress and outcomes sought. The work of others may be supervised or teams guided or facilitated. Responsibility for and limited organisation of the work of others may be involved.

STATE REPRESENTATIVES

Gaille Perry
 Brisbane Institute of TAFE
 Ithaca Campus
 Fulcher Rd
 Red Hill Q 4059
 Phone 07 2599151

Di Clarke
 Local Government Training Board
 GPO Box 2818
 DARWIN NT 0801
 Phone 089 467176

Peter Guest
 Launceston City Council
 GPO Box 396
 LAUNCESTON TAS 7250
 Phone 003 371117

Jo Kennedy
 Torrens Valley Institute
 Gilles Plains Campus
 Blacks Road
 GILLES PLAINS SA 5086
 Phone 08 2071218

Queensland Industry Representatives

Allen Fredrickson
 Logan City Council
 213 Queens Street
 KINGSTON Q 4114

Clinton Hickling
 Metropolitan Health
 Community Health Branch
 Brisbane City Council
 GPO Box 1434
 BRISBANE Q 4001

Steve McGill
 Sydney Institute of Technology
 Ultimo Campus
 Maryann Street
 ULTIMO NSW 2007
 Phone 02 2173275

Graham Raine
 Nedlands City Council
 71 Stirling Highway
 NEDLANDS WA 6009
 Phone 09 4423534

Ian Robertson
 Animal Studies Department
 Box Hill College of TAFE
 PO Box 2014
 BOX HILL VIC 3128
 Phone 03 2869674

Judy Wilson
 Canberra Institute of Technology
 School of Applied Science
 GPO Box 826
 CANBERRA ACT 2601
 Phone 06 2074139

Peter Lumsdale
 Animal Control
 Redlands Shire Council
 PO Box 21
 CLEVELAND Q 4165

Caroline Ovens
 ACTU
 Floor 5
 16 Peel Street
 SOUTH BRISBANE Q 4101

Competencies at ASF3

CU03007 Provide effective service to customers

CU07021 Follow defined OHS policies and procedures

CU09025 Work effectively in the local government context

CU09026 Undertake workplace learning

AF25002 File and retrieve documents from records system

AF250003 Update information in records system

AF25004 Process information to facilitate communication flow

AF25008 Maintain information records system to ensure integrity of system

AF25009 Produce document

AF33003 Provide animal care and control

AF33004 Operate and maintain pound facilities

AF33005 Monitor areas under council jurisdiction

TEC102 Access and retrieve computer data using keyboard skills

TEC203 Produce simple documents using keyboard skills

ASO(1-4) Unit 4 Interact with people

ACO1 Demonstrate the prevention, identification and management of an emergency that threatens a person's life

ACO2 Respond to public health emergencies

ACO3 Develop and implement education strategies

ACO4 Follow proscribed procedures on wildlife and exotic species

ACO5 Control vertebrate pest species

Competencies at ASF4

CU07011 Implement and monitor the organisation's Occupational Health and Safety policies, procedures and programs

CU11021 Lead a team

CU11030 Contribute to the selection of staff

AF25011 Arrange meetings to ensure that procedures run efficiently

AF25012 Compose correspondence and reports

AF33001 Issue permits

AF33002 Process infringement notices

AF33005 Monitor areas under council jurisdiction

AF33006 Administer relevant legislation

AF33008 Represent council at court hearings

ACO6 Use firearms, restricted agents and devices

ACO3 Develop and implement education strategies

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gaille Perry
Brisbane Institute of TAFE
Ithaca College of TAFE
Fulcher Rd
Red Hill, Qld 4059

Gaille is a veterinarian and a Principal Teacher in the Animal and Veterinary Services Section at Brisbane Institute of TAFE. The college offers a wide range of animal related courses, and Gaille is particularly interested in Urban Animal Management and animal behaviour. She is currently enrolled as a PhD student at the University of Queensland researching the training of pet dogs and cat ownership.

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