

Training of AMOs - Where are we now? what should be done to achieve the goal?

Steve Larsen

Currently there is no complete training package for AMOs as they have generally not been considered important in the scheme of Council and other employee groups. The employment and the professionalism displayed by a number of staff over the years have been unnoticed. Generally the AMOs are regarded as the 'bottom of the deck' when it comes to importance or training and financial reward until there is a major dog attack. Stock on the roads and Council may be vulnerable to litigation unless they do something and expedite the removal of the hazard.

The industry requires a substantial face-lift to ensure that the employers realise the benefit to the community in having qualified professional staff representing them in all aspects of animal management and enforcement of various State laws, guidelines, policy etc.

The move towards professionalism must be industry driven with the support and willingness of people in the industry to gain qualifications, knowledge and expertise.

What is in it for me? A common question. The answer seems simple although very complex with the individual the only one who can answer depending on their own expectations.

The simple answer is that all awards are competency and qualification based. Unless there are accredited competencies to which training and educational qualifications can be based the prospects of advancement in any award structure are minimal.

Most staff require various rewards for doing a good job including:

- self-esteem (knowing they are doing a good job);
- monetary reward for doing the good job;
- recognition by employer and community; and
- a career path should they wish to enhance their skills and/or utilise them in another field.

There are a number of questions needing to be asked to provide guidance to ensure competencies and training shall be utilised by the industry, by both employers and employees. Some of these questions may be answered at the conference and a number of other questions shall be raised for which the process of accreditation of competencies and training course may commence.

At last year's seminar in Hobart there were workshop discussions undertaken with the 'Courses for Animal Management Officers' part of the discussion. The results of the discussion are on the AVA web page with the results indicating that the AMOs specialise and deal with a number of issues throughout their daily duties. The expectations placed on them by employers and customers indicate there is more substance to the job than just an animal attendant paid to pick dogs and cats up and clean the facilities.

The job entails customer service, conflict resolution, court appearance, report writing, animal care and welfare, legislation knowledge (in many instances intimate knowledge), knowledge of Council functions, budgeting, education of public, promotions of the animal care and welfare being undertaken by your employer, cashier, etc. There are not many areas in Council that allow for this diversification and yet the AMO is not regarded highly this is mainly due to the age old adage 'you are only a dog catcher' that we have all heard.

The state wage awards for all positions in Council and other industries are competency based which places an emphasis on both the employer and employee to ensure that all staff receive relevant training to increase their level of skill. The increase in the level of skill has a number of benefits:

- increased value to the employer by having trained staff;
- increase in the customer service by trained staff carrying out their duties in an efficient and competent way using best practices;
- increased staff moral by staff being satisfied that they are doing a worthwhile job and being recognised for their efforts;
- Award structures are competency based — increase in re-numeration that related directly to the tasks undertaken competencies and training; and
- career path we all need to know that we can make a career out of our job and if we wish to move to another area we shall be rewarded with credit for prior work, studies and competencies.

HOBART CONFERENCE — WORKSHOP

During the workshop a number of issues and possible topics/subjects were highlighted and although the mixture of topics appear to be quite extensive many may be able to be condensed due to some of the topics directly relating to others in the listing.

Stress Management	Maintaining equipment
Dealing with difficult clients	Breed identification
Verbal judo	Confinement and restrain of animals
Mediation	Animal behaviour (barking and aggression)
Critical incident management	Understanding legislation
OH&S	Public/ personal/ Council liability
First aid (animals and people)	Marketing
Animal identification	Governance
Loading and handling of animals	Strategic pet planning
Disease (health, hygiene, zoonotics)	Microchips
Courtroom procedure	Filing
Legal procedure, taking of evidence, local laws, prosecution, process infringements, preparing a brief, interpretation of legislation)	Money handling
Working with others	Use, maintenance and cleaning care equipment
Principles of service delivery	Quarantine procedures
Registration and identification	Negotiation skills
Computer skills	Anti-discrimination/ cross culture
Phone answering	Understanding HCA bond
Vehicle driving	Enforcement
Passive self defence	Report writing
Customer service/interpersonal skills	Wildlife handling
Reading body language	Investigation techniques

The four pillars of UAM (regulation, education, information, facilitation)	Best Practices in UAM (governance, performance, indication, benchmarking)
Neighbourhood dispute resolution	Trauma post trauma counselling
Multicultural information and attitude	Specialist local government course
Conflict resolution	Public education
Communication (verbal, non-verbal)	Specialist euthanasia technicians course
Pound operations	Specialist animal behaviour/ training course
Understanding the habits of seven effective people	Specialist large animal handling course
Specialist capture guns course	Specialist Pound operations/ management course

Many of these topics are handled in existing accredited courses and may be summarised into several areas:

Education

Animal care and handling

Personal safety

Customer service

Enforcement

Legal proceedings

Equipment handling and maintenance

Working in local government

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The steps that should be considered are:

1. Establish a working party

Outline the tasks undertaken by animal management officers throughout Australia. This should involve a survey of all interested parties both local government and other organisations. The competencies should be a broad band of topics that are general in their fields outlining outcomes for the various competencies.

2. Competencies

Have a set of competencies accredited. The competencies may involve a number of animal management streams to allow for movement between positions and training relating to animal management issues, eg. a Council animal management person may not feel it necessary to know how to handle animals relating to zoos.

Therefore there may be a requirement for a number of competencies relating to animal management to be established. The competencies should be relevant to ensure they are meaningful to the end user.

3. Course standard? What level of certificate?

Part of the course design relates to the educational standard. This must be established from the outset. A number of the courses and modules that have been written and may be suitable for inclusion in the AMO course/s may be higher than certificate II which was discussed at the Hobart conference. It is quite possible that with the mixture of topics e.g. court, investigations, enforcement, animal welfare subjects the minimum certificate may be a certificate III or certificate IV.

4. Courses

Once the competencies have been established and the level of certificate has been established then the format of the courses ie. the aims, objectives, relevance to the competencies and the basic outline of the course is established. In many instances the TAFE (NSW) or similar bodies may have delegated authority to accredit courses in the various States.

The course should be established in modules to allow the flexibility in learning and to allow for people to achieve relevant training in modules/subjects to assist them in gaining qualifications using recognised prior learning.

The State accreditation generally is much faster than having courses nationally accredited. If all States and Territories have similar courses based on the same competencies then it is possible that the national accreditation may be fast tracked.

During the consultation process a number of objectives must be established and the course, to allow flexibility, should have several components including Compulsory General, Compulsory Functional, Electives and Enrichment.

Compulsory general refers to generalised subjects eg. participating in workplace change, Occupational Health and Safety etc.

Compulsory functional refers to more specific subjects eg. legislation, breaches, investigations etc.

Electives refer to generalised subjects that are optional to assist the participant flexibility to study relevant subjects to their chosen career path.

Enrichment courses are subjects that the students may undertake and are available to them should they wish to undertake these studies.

Any course designed must have a career path included to allow for the participants to change professions and/or enter other related fields, gaining credits for relevant studies that have already successfully been completed.

It is essential that relevant employer, employee and professional bodies be involved and consulted throughout to ensure widespread acceptance of the process and to assist in giving credibility to the course.

5. Recognised Prior Learning

Commonly known as RPL it is essential that a RPL program be established to recognise studies and work undertaken in relevant industry related training. This is essential to recognise prior learning both on and off the job as many officers have undertaken relevant studies and have carried out various tasks over a number of years which, provided the criteria for RPL has been achieved, necessary credits should be awarded. Where additional studies are required the course should be flexible enough to allow students to enrol and undertake studies by modules to enable flexibility.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Steve is employed as Chief Ranger at Pittwater Council and Hon Secretary of the Australian Institute of Local Government Law Enforcement Officers (Inc) which is a body of local Council 'Ranger'/'Law Enforcement Officers' responsible for the enforcing of various State Government Acts including the Local Government Act, Impounding Act, Roads Act, Protection of the Environment Operations Act and the Companion Animals Act. Steve has been involved in recommendations in relation to the Companion Animals Act and advising the Department of Local Government and in more recent times meeting with various members of Parliament to address the problems associated with the Companion Animals Act and Regulations. He is also currently involved in developing and delivering ranger courses with the Local Government and Shires Association.

[UAM 2001 Index Page](#)