

## Is a virtual academy for Animal Management Officer training a reality?

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### Abstract

Following a challenge presented at the 2008 Australian Institute of Animal Management conference in Darwin by Peter Chandler, this paper explores the notion that Australia already has a National Animal Management Officer Training Academy – a virtual one. In this paper, a brief précis is given of how Animal Management Officer (AMO) training is delivered overseas and information is drawn together about the following issues; the value of training to the AMO and their employer; the qualifications available for career paths in animal management; an overview of the Registered Training Organisations (RTO) which currently have the scope to deliver these qualifications and an explanation of terms such as recognition of prior learning and traineeships. From this a conclusion will be drawn as to how the current delivery of these qualifications relates to the virtual academy concept.

### Background

At the 2008 AIAM Conference in Darwin, during his address and in subsequent discussion, Peter Chandler promoted the vision of there one day being a Virtual National Academy perhaps controlled by the Australian Institute of Animal Management that would be dedicated to the provision of an excellent uniform standard of Animal Management Officer training for Australia. Peter had recently completed his Churchill Fellowship study tour and had been impressed by the training presented by various Colleges in America and Great Britain and was enthused the notion that Australia could afford to follow suit, if the will to do so existed. I saw this as a worthy idea against which I could present some of the history and the current situation as regards the training of AMO's in Australia and whether we could aspire to Peter's ideal.

### AMO training overseas

In the United States of America (USA) there does not seem to be any over arching National Qualification for the Dog Control Officer (DCO). The National Animal Control Association (NACA) conducts training Academies throughout America at two levels and certifies each participant at each level.

John Mays of the NACA stated that while the NACA is recognised by most states in USA, additional training and or Certificates may be required by a state and or the individual employer. There are no federal mandates regarding the DCO training requirements. Any such requirements are the responsibility of each individual state. The topics covered in their Academy training cover exactly the same scope as our national certificates with emphasis on animal behaviour and handling, compliance issues, communication and conflict resolution. Level three provides training for the DCO at a team leader level/management level.

The NACA maintain that the DCO's make four times the contact with clients compared with other law enforcement officers. Hence their motto of "four times the exposure equals four times the liability". Their specialised training generates improved service, enhanced image, reduced liability and increased efficiency. In the USA some of the DCO'S duties have been expanded to include quasi police activities such as prisoner security, guarding court houses and investigating dog fighting and animal cruelty. In Australia these functions are generally carried out by the police, court officers and the RSPCA respectively.

In England they have established National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at Level 2 and 3 in the areas of Animal Care delivered for a range of animal careers. The College of Animal Welfare and other colleges throughout England deliver these qualifications as well as short courses for their Animal Wardens. Again the subjects covered are similar to those in the USA and Australia. In both England and the USA, I could not find any Qualifications that specifically met the needs of the AMO, instead they provided more generic qualifications in Animal Studies or Animal Care and ran specific workshops for the AMO.

In both countries and Australia, there are higher qualifications in Animal Welfare, Animal Law, Animal Science, Animal Behaviour and Justice Studies in which officers are encouraged to participate, if they require or desire higher level training.

### The benefits of training

What is the benefit and value of training to the employer and employee? Research has shown that productivity increases when training taken place. Staff who receive formal training can be 30% more productive than untrained colleagues who are working in the same role This in turn leads to improving products, services and reputation. (Smith A 2009). Evidence also indicates that training increases staff retention, which in turn provides a significant cost saving. Training can also increase the quality and flexibility of a business's service through better customer service, good OH&S practices and improved accuracy and efficiency (Smith A 2009)

Whilst affecting the areas mentioned above there is a flow on effect to other areas reducing costs by decreasing wastage of time and materials, maintenance costs, workplace audits, recruitment costs and absenteeism. Training allows an organisation to better adapt to changing technology, work practices and business strategies. Creating a training culture in an organisation will improve staff morale, communication skills, time management skills, and customer satisfaction.

Training also assists to an organisation in maintaining licensing and regulatory requirements. Evidence of staff OH&S training must be provided for investigations of workplace accidents. Staff who receive training are more likely to commit to their employers because of their ability to take on greater responsibility and higher paid work.

Training allows an employee, through obtaining a wider range of skills, to become more flexible within the organisation. Employees become more self directed with improved communication skills, conscientiousness, creativity and professionalism. Staff who possess diverse skills are generally more positive and satisfied in their jobs and stress levels are reduced, improving productivity. (Blandy R 2000) The provision of training demonstrates to a staff member that they are a valued member of the team and that they are getting something more than their wages.

The end result is that the organisation develops a training culture where further training is desired and encouraged.

### Risks of not training

There are considerable risks for the employer if they do not provide training, keep records of training and provide regular updates to that training. Employers owe employees a General Duty of Care in relation to training and education. For instance, in the area of Occupational Health and Safety, if during the investigation of a workplace accident, an employer and employee cannot provide evidence of recent, relevant training, they may be held to be in breach of legislative requirements. For example, if an AMO was bitten by a dog and had not received training in animal behaviour, how to recognise the signs of an aggressive dog and what to do in the event of a dog attack, then the employer may be held liable.

In South Australia, pursuant to the Local Government Act, an individual AMO has protection from personal liability when performing functions or duties. A liability that is created by an employee would instead attach to the Council.

An employer could be held liable for a civil liability for the actions (an honest act or omission) of an AMO when undertaking duties and functions under the Local Government and other relevant Acts.

In many cases employers see training resulting in Qualifications, as a way of managing regulatory compliance risk. (Ridoutt 2005)

### Registered Training Organisations (RTO's)

In order to deliver and assess the National Qualifications a training organisation must pass a rigorous application process whereby they provide evidence that they have the financial backing, the human and physical resources to be able to deliver a particular Qualification. Staff must hold their Certificate IV in Training and Assessment to be able to deliver training and assess a person as competent. They must also have vocational qualifications or extensive experience to the same level or above those they are assessing.

Once registered, in order to maintain registration, the RTO is audited every 3 to 5 years against the Australian Quality Training Framework standards to ensure they are providing quality outcomes to their students.

A list of RTO's which currently deliver and assess the Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation can be found in Appendix 1. The list of providers offering the Certificate IV in Local Government is much larger and can be obtained by visiting the National Training Information Service Website.

### Qualifications available for AMOs in Australia

Knowing the benefits of and having a desire to increase the status and professionalism of the AMO was the vision of a group within the AIAM early in the year 2000, and led to the establishment of a specific qualification for (AMO) within the Animal Care and Management Training Package.

The Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation was specifically designed for the officer who had the majority of their compliance functions in the animal area, focusing mainly on dogs. At the same time other qualifications were developed within the Local Government Training Package, the Certificate III and IV in Local Government (regulatory services) which provided a Qualification for officers who had compliance duties across a wide range of local government areas, with a lower percentage of animal control functions.

The benefit of the Certificate IV Animal Control and Regulation was that it gave much more focus to topics such as animal behaviour, animal handling and pound management for a broader range of animals with more time allocated to the training. AMO's currently have a choice, and which they choose will depend on what proportion of their work is in the animal area. If an AMO is doing less than 30% of animal work then the Certificate IV in Local Government will probably be a better choice.

Another factor to consider is where the AMO sees their career progressing in the future. If they see themselves in local government and possibly progressing to management or into another area such as environment health then the local government qualification may be a better choice. Sometimes the deciding factor may be whether it is the qualification that a local RTO is providing.

One could also consider the possibilities of having dual qualifications. Many of the competencies in the two qualifications are similar and using a process known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) the AMO could quickly obtain the other qualification once they have obtained the first. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) takes into account the fact that if a person has been working in the industry for several years, they can use relevant knowledge, skills and life experiences to complete competencies which will build to a qualification. Existing qualifications and completion of other courses are also taken into account.

If there are any areas of knowledge or skills that they do not have, these can be acquired through further training until they have completed the qualification. Further information can be provided from an RTO to explore the possibilities this presents.

I have found that in many cases the AMO chooses to do the training rather than apply for RPL. Most AMO's seem to have a thirst for knowledge, enjoy the challenge of learning, and are very willing to listen to and consider new ideas. The benefits of training face to face are the social aspects, camaraderie and the sharing of knowledge that occurs in group learning. Information on the qualifications and how they are structured are presented in appendix 2.

As there are a many similarities between the two qualifications discussed above, a Certificate IV in Animal Welfare in Victoria and qualifications in the Justice Studies area, this group of Qualifications has been tagged for continuous improvement as part of a review process for the Animal Care and Management Training Package.

### **Funding arrangements for training AMOs**

Councils and corporations should be made aware of the various sources of funding available for training. The sources vary with government policies from year to year but should be utilised when available. The rules which apply to funding will differ between the states.

The most consistent source recently has been the traineeship system whereby a Certificate III and IV can be funded from Commonwealth and State funding by signing a contract of training. This is available for both new and existing workers and options should be explored through your Australian Apprenticeship Centre.

If approached, most RTO's will offer all training on a fee for service basis. This is usually the most expensive form of training as it receives no government subsidy. In some states the AMO qualifications may be funded by recurrent state appropriated funding but generally the qualifications need to be identified in the state training profile to receive this subsidy.

Since mid 2008 and continuing over the next 3-4 years the Commonwealth Government is funding training for job seekers and existing workers through their Productivity Places Program. For existing workers, RTO's in conjunction with industry groups can apply for funding for employees to complete their Certificate IV or Diploma Qualifications. The program encourages the use of Recognition of Prior Learning for existing skills and knowledge which is supplemented by gap training for the identified training deficiencies. Local Government Organisations might consider grouping several Councils together to make a combined application in conjunction with an RTO. Applications must have endorsement from Peak Industry bodies to be successful.

### **Another meaning of virtual**

There is another interpretation of virtual i.e "existing primarily on line". Over the last 10 years several large and small registered training organisations(RTO's) have offered a service to the public where by an intending student can enrol and engage in all of their education and training in an online format without physically setting foot in the RTO's building. All of the resources are downloaded and assessments are performed online or sent in by email. Contact with the lecturer is through email, phone, chat room or discussion forum.

In the current technological environment, all forms of communication including SMS, Facebook, twitter, blogs and wikis are being utilised to facilitate learning and training. This form of training provision sounds ideal and in certain areas of training has been found to be suitable. However other areas of training may not lend themselves to this training environment. For example where there is a high component of practical skills acquisition this is unlikely to be achieved online. The options would be for separate face to face sessions or the skills would need to be taught on the job. The skills in the area of animal handling could not be taught on line, it is even difficult to teach this in a simulated situation and often can only be taught in a supportive on the job environment. Another area for AMO's would be that of communication and conflict resolution where repeated face to face experiences are required to become competent.

In 2007-8 The Australian Bureau of Statistics stated that 67% of homes in Australia had internet access and 75% had computer. This makes the Virtual e-learning Campus an appealing option for the RTO and the student, but they also need to consider the options for those without computer and internet access. Often this method is not used because the expense of establishing interactive learning online is quite high. Where there is a large number of learners eg. information technology or business studies, this may be worth the investment but with an estimated 2100 animal management officers/rangers in Australia an RTO may not be able to justify the expense. In most cases the online material is blended with face to face and on the job training methodologies

### **Conclusion**

While Australia does (and probably will) not in the foreseeable future have enough interstate coordination, cooperation or resources available to realistically consider creating a single national AMO academy, it does in fact already have a National AMO Academy – a virtual one. This consists of our national Qualifications, a number of RTO's with qualified staff and scope to deliver the qualifications and a National Quality Framework to ensure that the training and assessment meet the standards and the requirements of the industry. It is unlikely that there could in fact ever be a single RTO (a literal national academy) providing the training for all AMO's under the current funding arrangements of the Federal Government's Skilling Australia for the Future policy. The current government's policy is to create a competitive training market whereby all RTO's compete for the training dollar. In many ways, the Federal Government's Skilling Australia for the Future Policy creates a *virtual* academy environment in preference to a literal one so that the same curriculum can be taught to the same standard anywhere that an RTO is available and that any RTO can access the funding to offer this training. It is an arrangement that has all the benefits of a single National Academy without the Academy.

I would encourage you to create a learning culture in your workplaces, to encourage and value learning and excellence in your job. We do have "Virtual Academy" in Australia and all of the ingredients and some funding opportunities are available for every AMO to obtain training

and qualifications. This is the challenge and opportunity the AIAM has created for you by ensuring these qualifications are available for you.

## References

Blandy R, Dockery M, Hawke A, Webster E (2000) 'Does training pay? Evidence from Australian Enterprises' National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Adelaide.

Chandler PG. (2008) Churchill Fellowship Research: 'An Urban Animal Management Journey Outside the Square' Proceedings AIAM Conference Darwin October 2008.

Smith A, Oczkowski E, Hill M. (2009) 'Reasons for Training: Why Australian employers train their workers' NCVER. Adelaide.

Ridoutt L, Selby Smith C, Hummel K, Cheang C. (2005) 'What value do employers give to qualifications' NCVER. Adelaide.

Rudd K PM, Swan W, Smith S, Wong P (2007): 'Skilling Australia for the Future - Policy Document' Australian Labour Party. Canberra.

## Other information available

Productivity Places Program Information:  
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Skills/ProductivityPlaces/Pages/default.aspx>

Traineeship information:  
<http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>

National Training Information Website:  
<http://www.ntis.gov.au/>

## About the author

Dr David Jones BVSC (Hons), Grad Dip adult Ed, Dip Bus Man, Cert IV in Training and Assessment. After spending 20 years in Veterinary Practice in rural SA, David is now Principal Lecturer of the TAFESA Veterinary and Applied Science Centre Gilles Plains SA and has been lecturing for TAFESA for 22 years. The Veterinary and Applied Centre provides training for the Animal, Racing and Laboratory Technology Industries in South Australia. He has been involved with the writing and implementation of the Animal Care and Management Training Package at a national and state level and the coordination and delivery of the Certificate IV in Animal Control and Management and short courses for Animal Management Officers in South Australia. In 2004 David coordinated the Pre conference training sessions for Animal Management officers when the UAM conference was held in Adelaide. He is currently involved in a joint project developing an induction package for newly employed Animal Management Officers for the Dog and Cat Management Board in SA. He is currently the Educators representative on the National Industry Advisory Group for Veterinary Nurse training.

## Appendix 1

*Registered Training Organisations who have the scope to deliver the Certificate IV in Animal Control and Regulation.*

*The scope of their registration is indicated in brackets after the name.*

Provet Pty Ltd Trading as Animal Industries Resource Centre (National)  
<http://www.provetlearning.com.au>

Em-Four Pty Ltd. Rouse Hill NSW (National)  
<http://www.emfour.com.au>

Victoria university (Victoria only)  
<https://vuwebapps01.vu.edu.au/handbook/Search.aspx?CourseID=30586>

Warner Group. Pty Ltd trading as Warner institute of Business (Victoria only)  
<http://www.warnergroupp.com.au/wiob3.html>

North Melbourne Institute of Technology (Victoria only)  
[http://www.nmit.vic.edu.au/courses/certificate\\_iv\\_in\\_animal\\_control\\_and\\_regulation](http://www.nmit.vic.edu.au/courses/certificate_iv_in_animal_control_and_regulation)

TAFESA Veterinary and Applied Science Centre (South Australia Only)  
Contact [david.jones@tafesa.edu.au](mailto:david.jones@tafesa.edu.au)

University of Queensland (Gatton Campus) (Queensland Only)

## Appendix 2

### LGA30404 – Certificate III in Local Government (Regulatory Services)

Total number of units required: 12

#### Common Pool Units

Select a minimum of five units from the common pool.

It is recommended that LGACORE102B and LGACORE104B be included in the selection if they have not been previously undertaken.

Unit Code	Unit Title
LGACORE101B	Access learning and career development opportunities
LGACORE102B	Follow defined OHS policies and procedures
LGACORE103B	Provide service to local government customers
LGACORE104B	Work effectively in local government
LGACORE105B	Work with others in local government
LGAGOVA303B	Coordinate production of communication materials
LGACOMP007A	Participate in policy development
LGACOMP008A	Apply conflict resolution strategies
LGACOMP009A	Implement effective communication techniques

#### Plus...

Select a minimum of four units from this specialist regulatory services pool.

Unit Code	Unit Title
LGAREGS301A	Implement parking controls
LGAREGS302A	Operate and maintain council parking facilities
LGAREGS303A	Enforce legislation to achieve compliance
LGAREGS304A	Apply regulatory powers
LGAREGS305A	Undertake animal or reptile control duties

#### Plus...

Select a maximum of three elective units from any section of the Local Government Training Package or from any other endorsed Training Package, while ensuring the integrity of the AQF level. No more than two elective units may be imported.

No more than one elective unit may be drawn from an AQF level below or above the AQF level of this qualification.

