Achieving Quality Training in Corrections

Michael Cuthbertson

Michael Cuthbertson is Program Development and Support Consultant
Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy
NSW Department of Corrective Services

Abstract
Correctional jurisdictions face many contradictory priorities; providing better services to offenders, creating a safer environment, constructing new correctional centres and satisfying budgetary constraints to name a few. Developing a highly skilled and professional workforce can contribute to meeting these challenges. Staff can be up-skilled by offering corrections specific quality training for all staff from new recruits through to senior management. Such qualifications can only be issued by registered training organisations, and are nationally recognised. In practice, achieving quality training requires strict adherence to the national standards, monitoring the quality of training and processes, implementing of improvement processes and commitment from staff.

Introduction
The corrections environment is subject to continued change. We are required to provide better welfare and educational opportunities for offenders, create a safer environment for staff and offenders, cater for increasing offender numbers, build new correctional centres and operate more efficiently within strict budgetary constraints. Such change requires a new culture, improved work practices, a high level of professionalism, up-skilled staff and change in attitude to mention just a few. Quality staff training is an important factor in facilitating this change.

In response to changing needs of industry, the national training scheme was implemented more than a decade ago to drive economic and social growth across industries. Quality training, compliance with standards and continuous improvement is mandatory. For Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), such as Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy (BFCSA), this means providing; quality training and assessment, quality client service and quality management systems.

This paper discusses what constitutes quality training, the Australian Quality Training Framework, Training Packages, achieving quality training and putting it into practice in the correctional environment.

What is Quality Training?
Quality training is training and assessment delivered by an RTO that:

- Offers a range of nationally recognised qualifications from appropriate training packages.
- Rigorously applies the training standards to training and assessment.
- Implements self-assessment and continuous improvement activities.
- Develops the expertise of training staff.
- Involves stakeholders in facilitating and evaluating training programs.
- Keeps staff informed, creates a positive work environment and encourages staff commitment.
- Implements quality management practices and accountability.
- Responds to changes in legislation, departmental policies and operational requirements.
- Provides a high level of support to learners.

The Australian Quality Training Framework
Quality training providers are required to comply with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), a national set of standards developed to ensure consistent quality training. Details are available in the documents AQTF 2007 Essential Standards for Registration and AQTF 2007 User’s Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration from the training.com Web site <http://www.training.com.au>
The AQTF is a component of the national training system introduced more than 10 years ago to provide industry with a skilled workforce thus contributing to economic and social growth. There are over 4,000 RTOs throughout Australia issuing industry developed and nationally recognised qualifications. Each RTO is required to comply with the AQTF standards as a condition of registration. Only RTOs can issue qualifications. The current version, AQTF 2007, became effective from 1 July 2007.

The key features of AQTF 2007 are:
- Outcomes focused – focuses on quality of services and outcomes rather than inputs.
- Nationally consistent – Qualifications and skills are consistent and recognised across Australia.
- Streamlined – Standards have been simplified to focus on quality training and assessment, client services and management systems.
- Transparent - Guidelines and handbooks are available on the Internet as is information about the RTOs.
- Quality driven – RTOs are required to continuously improve the quality of training and assessment.

The AQTF 2007 Essential Standards for Registration are:
- Standard 1 - The RTO provides quality training and assessment across all of its operations.
- Standard 2 - The RTO adheres to principles of access and equity and maximises outcomes for its clients.
- Standard 3 - Management systems are responsive to the needs of clients, staff and stakeholders, and the environment in which the RTO operates.

In summary, AQTF 2007 requires RTOs to provide quality training and assessment, quality client service and quality management systems underpinned by continuous improvement processes with the RTO responsible for how they achieve it.

Training Packages
Training providers are required to follow the appropriate training packages when developing and delivering training and assessment. Training packages are sets of nationally endorsed competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications for industry sectors. They define qualifications that can be awarded, units of competency required to be awarded a qualification and how the training may be delivered. Details on training packages are available from the National Training Information Service (NTIS) Web site <http://www.ntis.gov.au>.

Training and assessment using training packages can only be conducted by RTOs registered to deliver specific qualifications or units from the training packages. An RTO’s scope is the list of qualifications or units of competency it is registered to deliver. When new training packages are implemented, or RTOs wish to add a qualification, they must apply to their State registering body for a change in scope. RTOs cannot issue qualifications unless that qualification is on their scope. An RTO’s scope, registration and contact details can be viewed on the NTIS Web site.

The CSC07 Correctional Service Training Package describes the qualifications required for the supervision and management of offenders in correctional centres and community offender services throughout Australian States and Territories. It was developed in consultation with a wide range of national correctional stakeholders. The training package has seven qualifications ranging from the Certificate II in Justice Services to the Advanced Diploma of Correctional Management. Each state selects which qualifications they will deliver from the package. NSW has chosen four. Each qualification has a different clientele, and can have different modes of delivery.

As an example, the CSC30207 Certificate III in Correctional Practice (Custodial) is the entry-level training program for trainee custodial officers as from 2008. Trainees are required to complete 16 units; 5 core, 5 special core and 6 electives. At BFCSA the mode of delivery is mixed. Trainees spend the first 11 weeks studying full-time at the Academy and then...
38 weeks in a correctional centre where they are required to complete workplace assessments. Once all of the competencies have been achieved they complete the Certificate III and their probation as Correctional Officers (12 months).

The CSC40107 Certificate IV in Correctional Practice is for more experienced custodial officers with 3 to 5 years experience interested in promotion to higher ranks. Learners are required to complete 18 units; 5 core and 13 electives. At BFCSA the mode of delivery is by recognition. That is, learners attend a brief information session then have 12 months to submit a portfolio of evidence demonstrating competency in each of the units. Evidence can take different forms and might even require the completion of other courses. This qualification is also the entry level qualification for trainee Probation and Parole Officers. Mode of delivery is mixed with learners spending the first 9 weeks at BFCSA and then the remaining 10 months of the 12 month traineeship in the workplace.

Achieving Quality
There are three main elements to achieving quality. Firstly, RTOs must comply with the AQTF 2007 - how training is delivered and assessed. Secondly, RTOs must follow the training package - what is developed and delivered. Thirdly, underpinning both is continuous improvement - consistent, methodical, common sense and cyclical approach to improvement. That is, identify issues for improvement, work out a simple solution, implement solution and review regularly.

An extensive set of explanatory notes for all three AQTF 2007 standards and their elements is available in the document AQTF 2007 User's Guide to the Essential Standards for Registration from the training.com Web site http://www.training.com.au>. As an illustration below is a brief list of improvement activities that an RTO could implement for AQTF 2007 Element 1.1:

Element 1.1: The RTO collects, analyses and acts on relevant data for continuous improvement of training and assessment.
- Regularly hold learner, trainer and other stakeholder evaluations.
- Base improvements on data analysis and document them as evidence for audits.
- Regularly review the evaluation process and its relevance.
- Provide feedback to contributors.
- Provide reasonable adjustment for learners with special needs.
- Regularly validate assessments and processes.

In addition, BFCSA is also certified to ISO 9001:2000, an International standard for Quality Management Systems (QMS). This ensures that BFCSA has an ongoing commitment to quality and continues to build every aspect of its business systems through continuous improvement. This is achieved through monitoring, evaluating and improving programs and services on an ongoing basis by regular audits conducted against the following QMS requirements:
- Quality management system - processes and documentation.
- Management responsibility - commitment, client focus, planning and responsibility.
- Resource management - human, infrastructure and environment.
- Product realisation - planning, customers, design, development, production, control and monitoring.
- Measurement, analysis and improvement - monitoring, audit, analysis and improvement.


The ISO 9001:2000 (the standard for QMS) and AQTF 2007 (the standard for quality training) complement each other because they have much in common. The net effect for BFCSA is to increase the scope and depth of improvement activities thus providing quality and consistent service to clients.
**Audits**

RTOs are accountable for how they conduct training and assessment. They are required to conduct a self-assessment (internal audit) every year and every 5 years have an external re-registration audit by their State registering body. Audits measure how well RTOs comply with the AQTF 2007 standards. They are a rigorous review of every aspect of an RTO's operations and should be looked upon as a positive improvement process. RTOs are also subject to audit at any time if the State registering body receives complaints from stakeholders. Details are available in the document AQTF 2007 Audit Handbook from the training.com Web site [http://www.training.com.au](http://www.training.com.au).

Regular audits are an important ISO requirement. Monitoring, evaluating and improving programs and services depend on regular internal and external audits conducted against the QMS requirements. More information on ISO audits is available in the documents ISO 9000 Essentials and Quality Management Principles from the ISO Web site [http://www.iso.org/iso/home.htm](http://www.iso.org/iso/home.htm).

**Putting it into Practice**

To implement quality training RTOs must:

- Develop and implement policies and procedures that comply with AQTF 2007 standards and define how training is delivered and assessed, the level of service provided to learners and the quality of management systems.

- Use the appropriate training package descriptions of competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications to determine what learning materials are developed and delivered to learners.

- Implement continuous improvement activities; identify issues for improvement, work out simple solutions, implement them and review regularly.

Following are some important considerations for putting quality training into practice at both strategic and operational levels:

- **Organisational focus:** It is important that quality training be specifically included in an RTO's strategic and business plans to provide the essential organisational focus required for it to be implemented.

- **Staff developments and information sessions:** RTO's should provide the opportunities and encourage staff to develop their skills and keep them informed on important issues. This creates a collaborative professional atmosphere where staff better develop their skills, hence, are more likely to enable and improve quality training systems.

- **Staff involvement in decision making:** Giving staff responsibility for decisions involving problem solving and implementing solutions gives them ownership of these systems hence encourages commitment to change.

- **Client service:** RTO's must be committed to engage learners, meet their needs, providing support, provide quality training and assessment, continually improve service, monitor performance and provide means of appeal.

- **Documentation:** All day to day activities and improvement activities must be fully documented and easily accessible. Documentation is important evidence of how an RTO complies with AQTF 2007 in an audit.

- **Learner records:** Learner records are to be kept up to date and made available to learners upon request - transparency.

- **Assessment:** Learners should be provided with assessments tools in writing at the beginning of units with marking criteria, due date and resources they require. The assessment process should be transparent with learners receiving meaningful and timely...
feedback. They have the right of appeal if they disagree with an assessment and should be made aware of the appeal process.

- Continuous improvement: Continuous improvement activities should be implemented to streamline procedures and systems and solve problems. This is done by monitoring, evaluating, fixing and reviewing systems and procedures. Problems can be overwhelming and are best solved by breaking them down into small manageable pieces. Solving a number of small problems can result in the solution of a large problem not easily solvable.

RTOs achieve quality training and assessment, quality client service and quality management systems by implementing many continuous improvement processes to address issues or solve problems when they occur. The simpler more streamlined solutions usually give the best results and are easier to implement.

**Conclusion**

Achieving quality training in corrections is not rocket science! It is a lot of hard work backed up by a methodical, proactive and common sense approach to solving problems, and the commitment to make it work. In spite of the overheads involved in achieving and then maintaining AQTF (and ISO) certification, there are significant rewards for RTOs committed to quality:

- They can be confident in offering quality training to their clients, and the client can be confident they are receiving quality training.
- They can enhance their reputation in the marketplace, both here in Australia and overseas, hence be more attractive to business partnerships with other jurisdictions.
- Their reputation can be enhanced by recognition by their State registering body as Quality Committed or Outstanding.
- The RTO’s staff benefit from a much happier and satisfying collaborative work environment where staff are committed to achieving quality and achieve higher productivity.
- Learners will be happier and more engaged in their studies hence achieving better outcomes (indicator of quality) because of the higher level of relevance of training to the workplace and the higher level of support they are receiving.

Human factors are of paramount importance in achieving quality training. People affect change in an organisation, solve problems, introduce improvement processes and make them work. Obviously trainers have a direct impact on how learners feel about their training, how they feel about themselves, how well they achieve outcomes and if they complete the course. But, every RTO staff member has an important contribution to make in the area of client service. It is critical to provide opportunities for trainers, assessors, course developers, educational consultants, administration and workplace staff to develop their skills. They should be also recognised for their efforts and initiative, and rewarded for their achievements.

Quality training is achievable in corrections, BFCSA is proof of that. Quality training and assessment has been achieved through compliance with standards, continuous improvement and determination to make it work. As vocational education and training continues to evolve; standards, training requirements and organisational requirements will continue to change in the future. Correctional staff will need to be more professional and highly skilled. Therefore, quality training will became even more important and require continued compliance with standards, continuous improvement processes and determination to make it work. The success of quality training hinges on continuous improvement.

**References**

Michael Cuthbertson is employed at Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy (BFCSA), NSW Department of Corrective Services as the Program Development and Support Consultant, Curriculum and Systems Advice Unit. This is an internal consultancy unit advising training units on standards, compliance, curriculum development, continuous improvement and other related areas.

Prior to working at Brush Farm Academy Michael was employed as a teacher by the NSW Department of Education and Training, and before that by TAFE NSW. He has also worked in Information Technology, health and mapping.

He holds qualifications in Education, Information Technology, Mathematics and Training and Assessment.

Email: Michael.cuthbertson@dcs.nsw.gov.au