VEC personnel
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Recruitment and training of senior election officials

In early 1998 the VEC undertook a large-scale recruitment program to develop its network of senior election officials (SEOs). This followed the retirement in 1997 of fifty-six SEOs. There were 108 new recruits selected through this process.

The VEC conducted extensive training of SEOs in preparation for the earliest possible election date (12 June 1999) and subsequent refresher training during August 1999 in order that SEOs were ready to conduct the State election when called.

SEOs were trained so that they could conduct the parliamentary election impartially and according to law. Manuals were developed to support all areas of training. The pool of 196 SEOs completed up to seven two-day training seminars at the VEC. The training covered election procedures and effective use of the VEC’s newly developed election management system (EMS 2000).

Support for the VEC’s returning officers

Parliamentary election officers

Three parliamentary election officers (PEOs) provided support for the VEC’s fifty-four returning officers during the course of the State election. The PEOs were located at the VEC’s Melbourne office and provided support to returning officers on procedural issues. Their communication with returning officers was via phone, email and fax.

In addition, three parliamentary liaison officers travelled across the State providing face-to-face support to returning officers as required in their offices.

Help desk

Six help desk operators provided first line support for returning officers in the operation of the VEC’s computerised EMS 2000. They assisted ROs with the operation of EMS 2000 and referred technical issues to the VEC’s technical support staff.

Employment of staff at returning officers’ offices

Returning officers were responsible for recruiting clerical staff to work in their offices. To assist them in this task the VEC developed job specifications to assess potential candidates and to ensure that equal employment opportunity (EEO) principles were considered in the selection of all staff. Many returning officers, in areas with large numbers of people from culturally diverse backgrounds, were able to employ multi-lingual staff. For example, the returning officer for Springvale employed three staff fluent in both Vietnamese and Chinese, as the Springvale electorate has large Vietnamese and Chinese speaking populations.

A recruitment company was engaged to provide returning officers with suitable staff if required. The company was provided with job specifications to ensure that staff recruited would meet the VEC’s requirements.

Employment of polling officials

Polling officials were recruited by returning officers for employment on election day in polling places throughout the returning officers’ electorates.

Returning officers recruited polling officials who had worked at previous elections and from applications received by the VEC. These applications were sorted by electoral District and distributed to the relevant returning officers.

Polling officials were assessed by polling place managers after election day for their suitability for future engagement.
Measures to ensure impartiality

In 1995, the VEC obtained an exemption under the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 to take into account whether those seeking employment hold political beliefs or views or engage in political activities. This enabled the VEC to advertise for and employ suitable, politically impartial people for its work. The exemption applies to the employment of all those involved in the ‘front line’ of State and Council elections conducted by the VEC, from returning officers to polling officials.

The VEC’s performance in this area has been exemplary. There have been no legal proceedings before the courts alleging bias by returning officers or election officials in the conduct of their duties in relation to parliamentary elections over the last ten year period. There has been no instance of the VEC, its returning officers or election officials being involved in any breach of the Equal Opportunity Act in relation to any employment matter over the last ten year period.

Payment of VEC personnel

The payroll system used for the payment of clerical staff and polling officials employed at the State election was administered by a payroll company using employee data provided through EMS 2000. The VEC maintained its centralised record system on EMS 2000 to ensure obligations regarding employment records were met and to assist the VEC in answering any enquiries it received from employees.

The payroll process provided payments to staff through direct banking. This was more efficient for staff and also eliminated the costs involved in cheque payments. This process ensured that approximately 16,000 casual employees and polling officials who worked at the State election were paid within a week of the payroll company receiving information extracted from EMS 2000.

The system also provided for the production of group certificates and special reports for the VEC.
The VEC's performance in preparing its key employees for the State election

As part of the review of its performance at the State election, the VEC conducts debriefing sessions with returning officers throughout the State in the period following the State election.

A survey of polling place managers was also conducted. A random sample of 300 polling place managers were sent a questionnaire to seek their assessment of the training, support and infrastructure provided by the VEC.

The results of the survey were very favourable, with the vast majority of polling place managers being very satisfied with the training programs and materials provided.

Polling place managers found the VEC's election advertising to be effective in informing voters about the election arrangements. The conduct of absent voting was an area identified for further training by returning officers in order to minimise the potential for polling official error.