VEC personnel
The VEC’s election managers

The VEC has on standby approximately 200 senior election officials (SEOs), who have been recruited and trained for engagement as election managers during State and local government elections.

In 2001-2002 the VEC conducted a recruitment program across the State to ensure that sufficient SEOs would be available for the management of the 2002 State election and local government elections in March 2003.

All SEOs, including the 96 recruited in 2001-2002, undertook training. The training comprised home study in conjunction with three two-day seminars at the VEC.

The VEC appointed 53 election managers to conduct the 2002 State election. They conducted elections for 88 members of the Legislative Assembly, 22 members of the Legislative Council, as well as two additional members of the Legislative Council where simultaneous by-elections were held.

Two assistant election managers from the VEC’s pool of senior election officials were employed to assist each election manager. The assistant election managers had also completed the VEC’s training program.

Prior to the 1996 State election, each election manager (then called a returning officer) was allocated responsibility for only one electorate. Election managers may now conduct elections in up to two districts and one province. The reduction in the number of election managers conducting elections has proved to be an efficient and effective innovation in Victoria’s electoral practice. (Appendix 1 lists the election managers).

In the period prior to an election, election managers establish temporary offices and employ casual staff to facilitate the smooth running of the election for their electorates. They issue early votes, process candidates’ nominations and organise the draw for the order of the candidates’ names on the ballot papers, register how-to-vote cards, and organise staff and voting centres for election day. On election day, the election manager is responsible for the conduct of the election and the counting of votes for those electorates for which he/she has responsibility.

Support for the VEC’s election managers

Principal election officers

Five principal election officers (PEOs) provided support to the VEC’s election managers throughout the election.

Located at the VEC’s Melbourne office, the PEOs were the central point of contact between the election managers and the Electoral Commissioner and other VEC staff, and they assisted election managers with procedural and other complex issues.

In addition, three liaison officers travelled across the State providing support to election managers in their offices as required. The liaison officers’ primary role was to provide assistance in electorates where a preference distribution or recount was required.

Help desk

Six help desk operators provided IT support to election managers. Principally they assisted the election managers with the operation of the VEC’s election management system and other technical issues.
Employment of staff at election managers’ offices

Election managers were responsible for recruiting administrative 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 principles were considered in the selection of all staff. Many election managers in areas with large numbers of people from culturally diverse backgrounds employed multi-lingual staff where possible.

Staff were employed on short contracts, and a recruitment company was engaged to assist with the recruitment of suitable staff if required. The company was provided with job specifications to ensure that staff recruited met the VEC’s requirements.

Election managers also employed a 163 election liaison officers (ELOs) during the election. The ELOs assisted the election managers on election day by visiting voting centres to provide support to the centre manager. The ELOs also distributed additional material to voting centres where required on election day.

Employment of election officials

Election managers were also required to recruit some 14,000 election officials to staff voting centres on election day.

Election managers recruited election officials who had worked at previous elections and from applications received by the VEC prior to the election.

The work performance of all election officials was evaluated by voting centre managers and election liaison officers after election day to assess the suitability of staff for future employment. The VEC maintains a database of staff employed at elections from which to draw election officials.
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 engage in political activities.

This enabled the VEC to advertise and employ suitable, politically impartial staff. The exemption applies to the employment of people working at the ‘front line’ during State and local government elections, including election managers and election officials.

There have been no legal proceedings before the courts alleging bias by election managers or election officials in the conduct of their duties in relation to parliamentary elections during the last twelve years.

There has been no instance of the VEC, its election managers or election officials being involved in any breach of the *Equal Opportunity Act* in relation to any employment matter in the last twelve years.

Payment of VEC personnel

The payroll system used for the payment of all election staff, including election officials employed at the State election, was administered by the VEC’s Finance and Budget Branch using employee data contained in the election management system.

The VEC maintained records in the election management system to ensure that obligations regarding employment records were met and to assist with any enquiries received from employees.

The payroll systems ensured that the 14,000 casual employees and election officials who worked at the State election were paid within twelve working days of the election.

This was the first time that election payroll services had been conducted in-house, which proved superior to the previous arrangement.

The system also provided for the production of group certificates and special reports for the VEC.

Feedback from VEC personnel

As part of the evaluation of the State election the VEC conducts debriefing sessions with election managers throughout the State.

The feedback received from election managers provides a useful perspective on the VEC’s delivery of election services and often lead to improvements in election services.

The feedback received following the 2002 election was wide-ranging and has been included in the recommendations in each of the preceding chapters where appropriate.