Section 14
Independent evaluation
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The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) engaged Colmar Brunton Social Research (CBSR) by tender to conduct research to evaluate the services at the 2010 Victorian State election. The research aimed to measure the effectiveness of voting services for a number of specific populations:

- Voters who are casting their vote inside and outside of their electorate
- People who needed to cast their vote in a language other than English
- Voters with a vision impairment
- Voters casting their vote from overseas (namely, the United Kingdom)
- Voters who were not on the electoral roll on Election Day
- Candidates who were standing for government
- Electoral Officials

The quality of services on Election Day such as the helpfulness of staff and effectiveness of signage was assessed, as well as services leading up to Election Day such as information campaigns, the VEC Hotline and the VEC website.

A full report of the research is available on the VEC website.

Satisfaction with voter services

Satisfaction with voter services was high amongst the great majority of voters at the 2010 Victorian State election. Election officials were praised for their helpfulness and assistance, and the layout and organisation of voting centres was also well perceived. These high ratings were given by voters using the range of different methods to vote, including on-the-day, postal and early voting.

In aggregate across all voter types (ordinary, absent, early and postal), over nine in ten voters (91%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the VEC’s services. Only 3% expressed dissatisfaction. These proportions are slightly higher than the overall satisfaction figures from 2006 of 88% satisfied, 5% dissatisfied (significantly greater at the 90% confidence level, though not at the 95% confidence level).

The one area that stood out as showing room for improvement on the day of the election was signage outside of voting centres, which generally received lower ratings than all other aspects of services and resources.

While still positive on the whole, voters typically gave less favourable ratings to information provided in the lead up to the election, compared with services and information on the day. In particular, voters called for a greater volume of advertising and information, specifically about where to vote, or when to vote for early voters.

Despite promotion of the VEC website for the 2010 election, recall and use of the website has not increased since 2006. While awareness of the website was relatively high for most voters, actual use of the website was low, in some cases lower than in 2006. This may be the result of the extra information and voting centre locations being included in the EasyVote Guide sent to all electors.

Opportunities also exist to improve information provided to people who wish to vote early. These voters gave substantially lower ratings to the quality of information compared with voters who voted on Election Day.

Satisfaction with services
to candidates

Candidates were typically quite positive about services provided by the VEC.

- All candidates were either extremely satisfied (73%) or satisfied (27%) with the managers in relation to arranging their nomination to stand within the electorate.
- Likewise, all candidates (Independents) were either extremely satisfied (55%) or satisfied (45%) in terms of processing how-to-vote cards for registration.
- Almost all candidates (97%) were either extremely satisfied (72%) or satisfied (25%) with how impartially the manager acted.
- Eight out of nine (91%) candidates were either extremely satisfied (56%) or satisfied (35%) with the manager’s response to their enquiries.
- Nine out of ten (90%) candidates were either extremely satisfied (64%) or satisfied (26%) with how the manager conducted the computerised draw for ballot paper positions.
- More than eight out of ten (86%) candidates were either extremely satisfied (46%) or satisfied (40%) that the information provided about election arrangements was accurate.
- Eight out of ten (80%) candidates were either extremely satisfied (38%) or satisfied (42%) with the arrangement of early votes.
- Eight out of ten (78%) candidates were either extremely satisfied (32%) or satisfied (46%) with the overall arrangements at voting centres on Election Day.
There were no significant differences between the ratings given by successful and unsuccessful candidates for the rating of the Election Manager, or for any other of the service rating or satisfaction measures.

Those candidates who expressed some dissatisfaction tended to relate the dissatisfaction not to the Election Manager so much as issues such as the centre facilities. For example, of those expressing dissatisfaction, the following issues arose: inconvenient voting centre locations (67%); a lack of contact form the VEC (50%); no shelter from the weather (33%); disorganised facilities (33%); lack of parking (33%); no access to public transport (33%); and that they felt uncomfortable with people handing out how-to-vote cards.

Six out of ten candidates (64%) received a copy of the Candidate’s Information Kit. Of those who received the Kit, 82% indicated that it was either extremely effective (30%) or effective (52%). Only three candidates rated the Kit extremely ineffective or ineffective due to the information being outdated/generic, the how to vote cards not being useful, poor instructions, they were already well informed, and that the information should be in a summary format for a quick guide.

Almost nine out of ten (89%) of candidates recalled seeing or hearing some form of communication from the VEC. Most commonly noticed were newspapers (81%), television (52%) and the EasyVote Guide (52%). Of the candidates who recalled the information, eight out of ten (78%) perceived the information they received to be either extremely effective (18%) or effective (60%).

Candidates rated their satisfaction across a range of VEC services:

- Postal voting services 73% (26% extremely satisfied, 47% satisfied)
- Early voting centres 78% (35%, 43%)
- Mobile voting services 65% (26%, 41%)
- Operation of voting centres 83% (26%, 57%)
- Suitability of voting centres 82% (39%, 43%)
- Vote counting process 69% (31%, 38%)
- VEC website 70% (38%, 32%)
- VEC election hotline 67% (21%, 46%)
- VEC communications 93% (30%, 63%)

Half (54%) of the candidates surveyed believed there is a need to improve services to voters with a disability. Two in ten (23%) did not see there was a need, and two in ten (23%) did not know if there was a need.

Candidates that believed there is a need to improve services to voters with a disability consistently indicated the following suggestions for improvement:

- Provide disability access at voting centres (29%)
- Provide the ability for voters with a disability to vote at home (16%)
- Improve the location of voting centres (16%)

Satisfaction with services to political parties

All interviewed representatives from political parties perceived very high levels of quality of VEC services during the 2010 State election. Services provided were seen to not only meet the needs of political parties and voters, but to go well beyond the baseline standard required.

Overall, key themes emerging from the interviews were:
- Solid performance
- Above and beyond — VEC gets more than just a pass-mark
- Excellent: responsive, timely and accurate

Representatives from five political parties took part in a semi-structured interview regarding their satisfaction with services provided by the Victorian Electoral Commission. The parties involved were:
- The Australian Labor Party (Victorian Division)
- The Liberal Party of Australia (Victorian Division)
- The Australian Greens (Victoria)
- Australian Sex Party (Victoria)
- Country Alliance

All political party representatives perceived very high levels of quality of services provided by the VEC in managing the 2010 State election. Services provided were seen to not only meet the needs of political parties and voters, but to go well beyond the baseline standard required. It was also noted that the services provided by the VEC are uniformly high election to election, and that services at the 2010 election continued a long-standing tradition of high quality.
Some other findings included:

- The enrolment and nomination process was perceived to be relatively seamless, though complex and involved, particularly for large political parties with many candidates. The USB software keys provided for nominations were seen to be particularly innovative and an effective strategy to expedite the process.

- The generation of the how-to-vote cards caused some confusion and frustration for some representatives, especially for those from larger parties with many candidates who described the process as a ‘bureaucratic nightmare’. However, despite some technical and timing issues, the how-to-vote card system was perceived to have ‘worked in the end’. The major issue identified by all representatives was the timing and availability of the finalised cards.

- Those representatives who attended early voting centres described them as ‘generally sensible and well run’. Many representatives were curious about the unusually high number of early votes. This was not seen as an issue in 2010 in terms of capacity or quality of services. However, one representative described this trend as requiring “…a shift from the notion of ‘Election Day’ to a ‘ballot period’… parties and VEC need to think about how to accommodate this change”.

- The majority of representatives indicated that they were not able to have a presence at mobile voting centres, but commented on the timing of mobile voting services in relation to the availability of how-to-vote cards.

- In general, representatives felt that the “VEC kept on top of the process” in relation to the postal voting process. However one representative perceived that the procedures for postal voting were inflexible and that some VEC staff demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the process leading to some confusion.

- VEC services on election day were perceived to be “well prepared and organised”. All representatives praised the responsiveness and availability of VEC staff on the day of the election and the way in which VEC staff responded promptly and effectively to all enquiries and issues raised.

- The issue of shelter or rather the lack of it at many voting centres was raised as an ongoing issue from party perspectives. Two representatives suggested that the lack of shelter, coupled with the weather, could have had a negative impact on voter turnout.

- The communications provided by the VEC to political parties were perceived to be of high quality, clear and provided when needed. The responsiveness of VEC staff to issues, and queries, no matter how minor, was particularly well received. The impartial and decisive nature of advice and information given was also recognised. Further, representatives were impressed by the balance and quality of information provided to voters.

- Representatives perceived that the VEC “did the best job they could” in providing results to parties. It was acknowledged that the results process was always (and unavoidably) frustrating. Particular praise was given to the swiftness with which individual results were available and the accessibility of results to political parties on the night.

- The majority of representatives did not attend the tally room on election night, preferring to stay at their own parties’ headquarters or another event. The one representative that did attend the tally room was very positive about the experience, but questioned the relevance of the tally room in years to come. Another representative echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the tally room represented unnecessary expenditure on the part of the VEC, which should be reduced in future elections.
Satisfaction with services to election officials

Almost all officials surveyed (98%) reported receiving a manual from the VEC to help them prepare for their role. Of those that received a manual, nine out of ten (92%) were either extremely satisfied (44%) or satisfied (48%) that the manual helped them prepare for their role.

Eight out of ten (84%) officials surveyed completed online training before Election Day. Of those that completed the online training, eight out of ten (79%) felt the training was either extremely effective (31%) or effective (48%) in helping them prepare for their role.

Nine out of ten (91%) officials received a training DVD from the VEC. Of those that received the DVD, eight out of ten (82%) used the DVD to help them prepare for their role; two out of ten (18%) did not use the DVD.

Of those officials that gave high ratings for the support they received from Voting Centre Managers and Election Liaison Officers and voting centres, half (48%) felt that everything went well. Two in ten (20%) felt the Voting Centre Managers, Election Liaison Officers and voting centres were well prepared, approachable and professional. Other reasons included the staff were well informed, supportive and worked together (13%), it was a good atmosphere (7%), the staff managed issues well (4%), and there was special support for those who needed it (4%).

Of those officials that gave low ratings for the support they received from Voting Centre Managers, Election Liaison Officers and voting centres, two in ten (7%) felt the venue was overcrowded, too small, unsuitable, disorganised (7%). Other reasons included weather issues (6%), poor organisation and planning (5%), problems with equipment (5%) and not enough palm pilots (2%).

Of those that attended a face to face training session, nine out of ten (91%) felt that the training was either extremely effective (32%) or effective (59%) in preparing them for their role.

Response to evaluation

The VEC is generally satisfied with the findings of the research, and believes that it provided excellent electoral services to all stakeholder groups. A small proportion of the figures is not statistically significant due to the number of respondents, and may need additional follow-up to assist with future election planning.

The VEC will further analyse the results of the formal research in conjunction with internal evaluation, staff debriefing, complaints and any subsequent parliamentary recommendations. Findings will assist the VEC when planning the delivery of future election services.