The temporary workforce

The Victorian Electoral Commission's workforce increased to over 20,000 people during the 2018 State election. The temporary election workforce included 24,375 separate roles, with many people performing multiple roles throughout the election period.

The management of the extraordinary recruitment and selection campaigns, the induction and training of appointees and casuals, and the health and safety of the VEC's workforce requires significant planning, coordination, monitoring and ongoing evaluation.

Roles at the election

The VEC operates two pools of people registered to work in election roles: the Senior Election Officials (SEO) Pool and the Election Staff Pool.

The SEOs go through a rigorous recruitment process, whereas there is a simple registration process for people wishing to join the general Election Staff Pool.

Election Management Teams

The VEC has a pool of approximately 300 SEOs who have been trained for management positions during election events. From this, 207 SEOs were appointed to work at the 2018 State election as Election Managers, Assistant Election Managers, SEO Consultants and Election Support Officers.

Eighty-eight Election Managers were appointed to conduct elections for the 88 members of the Legislative Assembly (see Appendix 13). Each Election Manager was responsible for one district – a change from the previous State election where most Election Managers in metropolitan areas were responsible for two districts.

Election Managers are responsible for:

- processing independent candidate nominations
- conducting the draw for the order of candidate names on the ballot papers
- appointing and training voting centre staff including early and mobile voting staff
Supporting the temporary workforce

The VEC establishes a number of support roles to assist the temporary workforce.

Election Support Officers

A team of 12 Election Support Officers (ESOs) supported the VEC’s Election Management Teams. The ESOs were the point of contact between the Election Management Teams, the Electoral Commissioner and other VEC staff. Ten ESOs worked at Head Office assisting Election Management Teams with procedural and other complex issues, including technical and administrative support with systems and processes. Two Field ESOs were mobile and could attend election offices to offer face-to-face operational support and guidance when required.

Helpdesk

Seven Helpdesk operators provided frontline support to Election Management Teams and Region Coordinators. They assisted with the operation of the VEC’s Election Management System (EMS), the Personnel System, and other technical matters.

Online training support

An additional ESO was assigned to lead a small team to assist election staff if they were experiencing technical difficulties, had queries, or required assistance with their online training. From Monday 19 to Friday 23 November the online training support team responded to more than 800 support calls and a further 800 emails. The VEC is reviewing the reasons people sought assistance with online training to determine what improvements can be made.

Personnel Helpline

Eight Personnel Helpline operators provided phone and email support to election staff from late September until early December 2018. Over 16,700 calls were answered during this time. The
Staffing the election

Personnel Helpline assisted election staff to:

- complete new online employment registrations
- access and navigate their Election Staff Self-service portal to update their contact details, enter financial details, accept offers of appointment and access pay advices
- complete electronic timesheets and resolve pay related queries.

The Personnel Helpline was also responsible for managing the review of political disclosures from people wishing to work (see Measures to ensure impartiality, below).

Training

Election Management Team training

Election Managers and Assistant Election Managers completed extensive training comprising home study, face-to-face training sessions at the VEC and in-election-office training in order to prepare for this complex role. Training at the VEC involved one four-day session in August and a one-day briefing in late October. Assistant Election Managers and SEO Consultants completed the same training program as Election Managers, apart from the one-day October briefing.

Election Managers then conducted three days of in-office training with their staff members prior to their election offices opening to the public.

Election Managers and Assistant Election Managers were provided with a comprehensive Election Manual describing their responsibilities and the processes involved. Election Managers were also provided with an Election Diary that sets out the timeline for key tasks and activities.

Election officials and casuals training

All election casuals and officials were required to complete online training, with the exception of counting officers and scrutiny assistants. The Learning Management System (LMS) used to deliver online training included content developed by the VEC for each role. Online training was completed by 98.50% of election staff, compared with 93% at the previous State election.

The VEC provided manuals for a range of roles, and additional training for the more complex roles for Voting Centre Managers, Assistant Voting Centre Managers, Election Liaison Officers, early voting and mobile voting staff.

Staff performance evaluation

Performance evaluation is conducted for all election staff, in order to inform future decisions regarding suitability for appointments.

Measures to ensure impartiality

The VEC is responsible for delivering an independent electoral service and therefore requires prospective appointees to disclose any political memberships and activities that could compromise the organisation’s perceived independence. Section 17A of the Electoral Act 2002 allows the VEC to discriminate against a person in relation to offering appointment on the basis of political belief or activity, and this discrimination is lawful under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

The VEC’s personnel system requires prospective staff to fill out an online Disclosure of Political Activities questionnaire at the time they are offered an appointment. Anyone who was ineligible for appointment after assessment of their questionnaire was notified within two business days. Of all the disclosures made, 211 prospective appointees were initially disqualified. An appeals process was available and the VEC received 41 requests for review, of which 18 decisions were overturned and offers of appointment subsequently made. A total of 193 prospective appointees were disqualified from being appointed as an election official or election casual under this provision.

Staffing challenges

Finding the right people to fill over 24,000 complex and temporary roles across the election presents a challenge for the VEC.
Country election offices have the added complexity of finding people willing to travel the long distances between the election office and outlying voting centres, and drive on dark country roads to return materials to the election office or other collection point after working a very long day – in many cases beginning before 7.00 am. The VEC will continue to work to ensure the safety of staff required to work long hours during an election.

Managing long working hours

Elections involve intensive periods of work on time-sensitive tasks, which can lead to working long hours. The VEC is mindful of this and in 2018 implemented a number of arrangements aimed at keeping staff working hours to reasonable limits. This included:

- increasing the number of staff working in voting centres in order to complete the counting and packing up of materials by 10.00 pm
- appointing additional staff to every election office
- encouraging Election Management Teams and office assistants to work shifts over the election weekend to reduce fatigue and possible stress.

While these strategies worked for some offices, the VEC’s debriefing process highlighted the need to continue to work on strategies to support Election Management Teams in order to reduce work hours and stress.

Despite these challenges, a staffing survey revealed 93% of election casuals and officials are interested in working at future elections.

Engaging young adults

Following the 2016 Local Government elections it was identified that less than 10% of the election workforce was under the age of 25. For the 2018 State election, the VEC used specific campaigns to increase the number of under-25 year olds registered on the election staff database, and increase the percentage of under 25 year olds appointed to election roles to at least 20%.
From June 2018 to January 2019, the percentage of under-25 year olds registered on the election staff database increased to 21%. The number of districts with less than 10% of the registered staff under the age of 25 was reduced from 31 to three. These three districts still increased the number of under-25 year olds registered for work: Mildura increased from 3.93% to 9.32%; Nepean increased from 4.70% to 8.44%; and Ripon increased from 6.99% to 9.01%.

Appointing more young adults

In most cases, Election Managers appoint staff for each district so it was critical that they were equipped with the knowledge, motivation and support to appoint a higher number of under-25 year olds than ever before. The VEC included the following in Election Manager training:

- discussion of the importance of diversity for high performing teams
- strategies and techniques to recruit staff under 25 years old
- a challenge to appoint under-25 year olds to at least 20% of election roles for their district, and to reflect on this challenge as part of their performance review.

Management teams rose to this challenge and under-25 year olds represented 22.70% of the total 2018 State election workforce (see Figure 11). In addition, many management teams developed new recruitment strategies relevant to the communities in their districts which the VEC can further investigate.

Supporting a diverse workforce

The VEC’s goal is to appoint an election workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities they serve. As part of this commitment, and in order to deliver on the VEC’s Reconciliation Action Plan and Disability Action Plan, initiatives that were implemented for the 2018 State election included:

Registering more young adults

At the start of the project, the VEC identified 31 target districts – predominantly in regional areas – where less than 10% of the staff on the database were under the age of 25. The VEC recorded interviews with four under-25 year olds who had worked at a recent election and created four 30-second videos to post as sponsored content on social media, specifically aimed at young people in the 31 target districts. Sponsored posts reached a weekly audience of 55,000, which resulted in 3,000 people visiting the employment page on the VEC website each week. In addition, the VEC posted on university job boards, encouraged existing election staff to refer a friend via an email campaign, and engaged directly with youth networks through education and community groups.
Staffing the election

- engaging Aldara Yenara, a consultancy focusing on improving the lives of Aboriginal and multicultural communities through education, mentoring and support

- the Be Heard! Democracy Ambassador Program which recruited, trained and supported a diverse range of election casuals who represented people with disabilities, those with a lived experience of homelessness, and those from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities

- training of Election Managers on the benefits of a diverse workforce and inclusive practices.

Many election staff were multi-lingual, with the top 10 additional languages being Hindi (spoken by 8.35% of the election workforce), Italian (8.13%), Mandarin (5.65%), Greek (5.54%), Cantonese (5.08%), French (4.87%), Vietnamese (4.02%), Arabic (2.92%), German (2.87%), and Spanish (2.71%).

Occupational Health and Safety

All Election Managers were briefed on Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) matters during training, covering topics such as hazard identification, incident reporting, managing workloads and breaks, and workplace assessments. These key messages were reinforced in the final briefing to Election Managers in October 2018, and detailed information about emergency management and OH&S was included in the Election Manual. Election Managers also had electronic access to further information regarding OH&S, including VEC policies and procedures.

Election Managers were required to place OH&S posters in election offices and complete Workplace Safety Checklists every time they reconfigured the layout of their election offices. Fatigue and manual handling were identified as the two biggest risks, and staff were provided with a fatigue self-assessment form and fatigue checklist, a manual handling Safe Work Procedure document, and 'heavy lift' labels for packages. Election Managers and Voting Centre Managers were issued with emergency instructions attached to lanyards. Managers were required to update their lanyards with information relevant to their specific venue, and to wear the lanyards at all times.

All staff completing online training were required to complete a module on Health and Safety Essentials. This module had a completion rate of 98.74%.

With the increased focus on incident reporting through the training programs, there was a correlating increase in incidents reported over the election period compared to the 2014 State Election. This is a sign that the VEC’s election workforce is listening to the focus on occupational health and safety, and taking appropriate action. Of the 198 incident reports lodged, 75 involved election staff, 91 involved members of the public and eight incidents involved VEC employees. There were 128 incidents that resulted in an injury, with four of these resulting in workers compensation claims. Of note, 38% of all incidents were slips, trips and falls – down by 12% on the 2014 State election period as a result of the corrective actions applied as mentioned above.

The Election Managers for the 2018 Victorian State election.
By the numbers:

Staffing the election

24,375 separate election roles

4,390 multi-lingual election staff

207 Senior Election Officials appointed

98.50% of all election staff completed online training

22.70% of election staff aged under-25 years

93.00% of election casuals want to work at future elections