Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

Australian Electoral Commission

Australian National Audit Office

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

2

Canberra ACT
5 November 2014

Dear Mr President
Dear Madam Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken an independent performance audit in the Australian Electoral Commission titled *Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections.* The audit was conducted in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit to the Parliament.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's website—http://www.anao.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Ian McPhee
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

3

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ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

4

Contents

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

5

Tables

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

6

Figures

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

7

Abbreviations

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AECE	AEC Employment
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
BAC	Business Assurance Committee
CSS	Central Senate Scrutiny
DRO	Divisional Returning Officer
ELMS	Elections Management System
JSCEM	Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
OIC	Officer-in-Charge
ORS	Online Recruitment System
PPLO	Polling Place Liaison Officer
PPVC	Pre-Poll Voting Centre
TART	Training Assurance Reporting Tool
2IC	Second-In-Charge

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

8

Glossary

Declaration vote
: A vote that is sealed in an envelope and signed by the voter. Types of declaration votes include: absent votes, provisional votes, pre-poll votes and postal votes.

Election roles
: Roles filled by people employed under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. This includes the majority of temporary election roles, but excludes the roles of temporary assistant and trainer polling staff.

Fresh scrutiny
: The check and recount of ballot papers (that were counted in polling places on election night) after polling day by AEC staff.

Informal vote
: A ballot paper which has been incorrectly completed or not filled in at all. Informal votes are not counted towards any candidate but are set aside.

Issue of writ
: Writs for a federal election are issued within 10 days of the dissolution of the Parliament in accordance with the Australia's Constitution. This represents the formal commencement of the election process.

Mobile polling
: Mobile polling teams visit voters who are unable to reach static polling places (for example—patients in hospitals, electors in remote areas, or where there is insufficient population to justify a static polling place).

Officer-in-charge
: Role grouping of: officer-in-charge, mobile polling team leader, pre-poll voting centre officer-in-charge and interstate voting centres officer-in-charge. Where reference is made to election-day officer-in-charge roles, the pre-poll and mobile polling roles have been excluded.

Ordinary vote
: A vote cast at a polling place or pre-poll voting centre in the elector's home division.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

9

Pre-poll voting	A vote, recorded by a voter eligible to do so, at a divisional office or pre-poll voting centre in the lead up to polling day. Certain pre-poll voting centres also open on polling day for the casting of interstate votes only.
Secondary level role	Role grouping of secondary level senior roles including: polling place liaison officer, pre-poll second-in-charge and second-in-charge.
Standard role	All other election roles excluding temporary assistants and trainer polling staff.
Static polling place	Physical location, for example, community hall or school where votes can be cast on election day.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

10

Summary and Recommendations

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

11

Summary

Introduction

1. The Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC) responsibilities include conducting Federal elections in accordance with the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act). The AEC operates through a three tier structure of a national office in Canberra, state and territory offices, and divisional offices responsible for electoral administration across Australia's 150 electoral divisions. The AEC employed nearly 850 ongoing staff as at 30 June 2013. For each Federal election, the AEC recruits a large temporary workforce and operates a significant number of polling places.

2. In April 2010, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) tabled a performance audit report on the AEC's preparation for and conduct of the 2007 Federal election.[1] ANAO made nine recommendations, including four relating to the AEC improving the accuracy and completeness of the electoral roll. Other recommendations included the AEC improving its workforce planning, and enhancing the accessibility and suitability of polling booths and scrutiny centres. ANAO also recommended that the AEC identify and assess options that would provide greater physical security over the transport and security of completed ballot papers.

3. In this latter respect, during the conduct of the 7 September 2013 Federal election, 1370 Western Australian (WA) Senate ballot papers were lost. This situation led to:

- the voiding of the election of six Senators for WA and a new election for WA Senators being held on 5 April 2014, with a different political outcome when compared with the counting of votes lodged at the September 2013 election; and

- the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM or the Committee) writing to the Auditor-General requesting performance audit activity relating to the AEC's implementation of earlier recommendations made by the ANAO.

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1   ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, *The Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of the 2007 Federal General Election*, 21 April 2010.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

13

Audit objective and scope

4.   In view of the importance of the AEC's functions and responsibilities and the interest shown by JSCEM in the AEC's implementation of the ANAO's earlier recommendations, and to address the matters raised by the Committee in a timely manner, the Auditor-General decided to conduct three related performance audits.

5.   The report of the first audit was tabled in May 2014 (ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14). Its objective was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the AEC's implementation of the recommendation made in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 relating to physical security over the transport and storage of completed ballot papers. The follow-up of implementation of that recommendation was prioritised as it was an area of particular interest to the Committee.

6.   The objective of the second audit, which is the subject of this report, was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the Australian Electoral Commission's implementation of those recommendations made in Report No. 28 2009–10 relating to:

•   a more strategic approach to election workforce planning, with a particular focus on the selection, recruitment, training and performance evaluation of election officials (Recommendation Nos. 5 and 6);

•   the suitability and accessibility of polling booths and fresh scrutiny premises (Recommendation No. 7); and

•   the transport and storage of completed ballot papers (Recommendation No. 8(b)), in respect to matters not fully addressed in ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14. Specifically, compliance with new policies and procedures introduced to address the Keelty report[2] recommendations for the WA Senate election 2014.

7.   A third audit of the AEC's implementation of recommendations made in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 has been included in the ANAO's 2014–15 forward work program. The third audit is expected to focus on the

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2   In early November 2013, the AEC commissioned Mr Mick Keelty AO APM to undertake an inquiry into the circumstances of the missing ballot papers identified during the recount of Senate votes in WA.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

14

recommendations relating to the AEC improving the accuracy and completeness of the electoral roll.

Overall conclusion

8. Each Federal election is a complex logistical event, with a wide range of preparation tasks required to be completed before polling day. For the 2013 Federal election, this included the AEC employing 68 834 people to fill 72 224 election roles.[3] In addition, the AEC established 7697 static polling places for people to vote in person, on election day, and arranged scrutiny centres for vote counting across the 150 divisions, as well as central Senate scrutiny centres in each state.

9. ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 concluded that the AEC's planning and preparation for the 2007 election was effective, but there was evidence that elements of the existing approaches may be reaching their limit in terms of cost-effectiveness. This led ANAO to make three multi-part recommendations (Recommendation Nos. 5, 6 and 7[4]) in relation to election workforce planning, the selection, recruitment, training and performance assessment of election officials, and the suitability and accessibility of polling and scrutiny premises. By March 2012, the AEC had informed its audit committee that implementation of each recommendation had been completed.

10. Notwithstanding the advice provided to its audit committee, the AEC has not adequately and effectively implemented each element of Recommendation Nos. 5, 6 and 7 from ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10. Some improvement is evident in relation to aspects of those recommendations, in particular more timely recruitment of election officials, and improved approaches to their training. However:

- there was little change evident between the 2007 and 2013 elections in how the AEC selects premises for voting and vote counting purposes;

- the AEC has yet to develop a workforce plan to assist with addressing the challenges associated with retaining, recruiting and training a large

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3   With the inclusion of temporary assistants, and trainer polling staff, the AEC employed 73 434 people to fill 82 559 roles.

4   See paragraph 6 for a synopsis of those recommendations. A copy of the ANAO report is available from: <http://www.anao.gov.au/~/media/Uploads/Documents/2009%2010_audit_report_28.pdf>.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

15

number of temporary election officials, and responding to continuing high levels of temporary staff turnover between elections;

- records of the recruitment of polling place staff for the 2013 election demonstrate that 34 per cent of people appointed to those roles had not been assessed as to their suitability;

- it is relatively common for people employed as election officials to not complete some or all of the assigned training; and

- performance assessment ratings have not been recorded for all election officials at either the 2010 or 2013 elections (compliance with this requirement was 87 per cent and 80 per cent respectively).

11. ANAO has made a further five recommendations in relation to these matters. The first two recommendations are particularly important. They relate to improvements to existing approaches to the provision of polling and scrutiny premises, and the development of a temporary election workforce plan. Their implementation can be expected to improve the effectiveness of the AEC's conduct of future elections as well as deliver cost savings (as a result of needing to recruit and train fewer staff for static polling places). In turn, these savings could contribute significantly to the costs of implementing other reforms proposed following the 2013 election.[5]

12. Similar to the messages in ANAO Audit Report No.31 tabled earlier in 2014[6], to protect the integrity of Australia's electoral system and rebuild confidence in the AEC, it is important that the AEC's governance arrangements emphasise continuous improvement and provide assurance that the action taken in response to agreed recommendations effectively addresses the matters that lead to recommendations being made. In this context, although lacking rigour in certain respects, the arrangements adopted to monitor implementation of interim measures to respond to the Keelty report, and assess their effectiveness, demonstrate a greater commitment to organisational learning and improvement than has previously been evident. The challenge for the AEC is to sustain and build on this greater commitment so as to take advantage of the opportunities that are evident to re-engineer

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5   In July 2014, the AEC advised JSCEM that the ongoing implementation of reforms that were proposed following the 2013 election may present financial pressures, and that this is a matter that would be put before the Department of Finance.

6   See paragraph 5.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

16

long-standing election planning and preparation activities which can be expected to provide more efficient and cost-effective services to the electorate.

13. ANAO plans to undertake a follow-up audit following the next Federal election to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of the AEC's implementation of the five recommendations made in this audit report, as well as the three recommendations included in Audit Report No.31 2013–14.[7]

Key findings by chapter

Polling and Scrutiny Premises (Chapter 2)

14. The significant majority of Australians who vote do so in person either at a Pre-Poll Voting Centre (PPVC) prior to election day or on the Saturday of the election at a static polling place. At the 2013 election more than 91 per cent of the 14.7 million votes counted were received at either a PPVC (18.1 per cent) or static polling place (72.9 per cent). The provision of these voting facilities involved a considerable logistics workload for the AEC at divisional office level including:

- inspecting potential premises in advance of the election;

- making arrangements to access the premises and setting them up for polling purposes; and

- recruiting and training the temporary employees required to staff the static polling place premises and PPVCs.

15. ANAO's earlier audit of the 2007 election concluded that there was evidence that elements of existing election planning and preparation approaches may be reaching their limit in terms of cost-effectiveness. One area where this was the case related to the approach taken to polling and scrutiny premises, with one of ANAO's recommendations suggesting various ways the AEC could improve the suitability and accessibility of polling and scrutiny premises.

16. Notwithstanding that the AEC considered it had implemented the earlier ANAO recommendation it had agreed to, there was little change evident in how the AEC went about arranging premises for voting and vote

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7   This will be in addition to the planned performance audit activity in relation to the accuracy and completeness of the electoral roll (see paragraphs 4 to 7).

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

17

counting purposes at the 2013 election. Of particular note in this respect was that unless the premises used at the 2010 Federal election were not available for hire, the AEC has continued its practice of re-using the same premises at successive elections irrespective of whether those premises meet the needs of voters and/or election officials, and with little consideration given to the availability of more suitable premises (including community facilities funded by the Australian Government). As a result, for example, a significant proportion of polling place premises continue, on the basis of the AEC's own assessments, to not be fully accessible to voters.

17.   In addition, while the AEC has advised JSCEM that the trend towards early voting[8] needs to be assimilated as a critical element of the environment in which elections are delivered, the organisation has been quite inconsistent in its response to this trend. For example, the AEC has not consistently reflected this trend in its approach to securing polling premises. Specifically, while the number of PPVCs was significantly increased following the 2007 election reflecting the increasing popularity of early voting, there was no commensurate action to reduce the number of static polling place premises. Rather, the AEC has provided some 7700 static polling places at each of the last four elections, when it could have effectively serviced the declining proportion of the electorate that vote on Saturdays by employing significantly fewer polling place premises, with flow-on benefits in terms of reducing the number of polling place staff that need to be recruited and trained.[9]

18.   In addition, the AEC's staffing of polling premises has not reflected the continuing decline in the extent to which Australian's vote on election Saturday. At the 2010 election, static polling places received 10.8 million votes, or 82 per cent of all votes. For the 2013 election, the AEC's staffing of polling places was based on an aggregate estimate of these places receiving 11.47 million votes, an increase of nearly 630 000. This suggests that the AEC expected around 82 per cent of the population would continue to vote on the Saturday, which was at odds with a continuing trend towards early voting. As

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8   For example, more than 2.5 million ordinary and declaration votes were received at the 2013 election, an increase of 64 per cent on the number received at the 2010 election. This followed a 38 per cent increase in pre-poll voting between the 2007 and 2010 elections.

9   In metropolitan divisions alone, ANAO analysis indicates that abolishing polling places expected to receive relatively few votes and combining polling places located relatively close together into newer, larger premises (where available) could require the AEC to recruit and train 4600 fewer polling place staff.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

18

it eventuated, the AEC over-estimated by 1.39 million (13.8 per cent) the number of votes that would be received at static polling places, with fewer than 73 per cent of total votes counted being received at a static polling place. The AEC in applying its existing staffing allocation model, significantly over-estimated staffing requirements in static polling places nation-wide.[10]

Workforce Planning (Chapter 3)

19. For each Federal election, the AEC employs a large temporary workforce to assist with the preparation for, and conduct of, voting and vote scrutiny. Over the course of the last decade, agencies have been encouraged to adopt more disciplined approaches to workforce planning so as to ensure they have the capability to deliver on organisational objectives now and in the future. In this context, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 recommended that the AEC improve its workforce planning by critically examining its future election workforce needs and composition. The AEC had advised its audit committee that a workforce plan would be developed to implement the ANAO recommendation, but implementation action for this recommendation was recorded as having been completed without such a plan being developed.

20. The importance of a disciplined approach to workforce planning is evident from the size of the election workforce, with 68 834 people employed to fill 72 224 roles for the 2013 election.[11] In addition, the AEC experiences high turnover in temporary staff between elections.

21. Rather than develop a workforce plan for the temporary election workforce as the AEC had initially proposed in response to the recommendation, it has continued to focus on operational workforce matters, particularly in relation to the recruitment and training of election officials. This has resulted in the AEC missing opportunities, for example, to:

- adopt more efficient resourcing approaches in relation to static polling places that could have significantly reduced the number of election officials that needed to be recruited and trained, as outlined at paragraph 17; and

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10 ANAO analysis was that estimates of similar accuracy to those achieved at the time of the 2007 election would have reduced by more than 6000 the number of election officials allocated for the 2013 election.

11 With the inclusion of temporary assistants, and trainer polling staff, the AEC employed 73 434 people to fill 82 559 roles.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

19

- address risks to the delivery of future elections. In this respect, the composition of the AEC's 2013 election workforce was largely unchanged from the 2007 election, including an ageing workforce (an issue identified in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 as worthy of management attention). Notwithstanding that two elections have since been held, the AEC's submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election did not identify that strategies had already been developed but, rather:

> ...an aging workforce is an issue the AEC may need to address in coming years as part of workforce planning.

Recruiting Election Officials (Chapter 4)

22. Late recruitment, particularly of senior election officials, was a significant issue during the 2007 election. The AEC's recruitment of temporary employees to work on polling day for the 2013 election was significantly more timely. Of note was that the AEC has implemented a continuous recruitment model, supplemented by targeted recruitment activities to engage with selected sections of the community. These approaches assisted the AEC to fill more than 78 per cent of election day roles with people registered for temporary employment with the AEC prior to the issuing of the writ.

23. The AEC was particularly successful at prioritising the recruitment of senior election officials. In this respect, 95 per cent of polling place officers-in-charge (OICs) were recruited prior to the 2013 election being announced, and almost all of these roles had been filled within four weeks of the writ being issued.

24. A key aspect of the AEC's recruitment policies and procedures is that persons interested in working at an election be assessed as to their suitability. In addition to being consistent with recruitment based on the principle of merit, only appointing those people that the AEC has assessed as suitable for employment, in combination with the completion of appropriate training and the provision of adequate supervision, can be expected to increase the likelihood that officials will satisfactorily undertake their assigned role. However, for the 2013 election, 34 per cent of election roles were filled by people where there was no record of them having been assessed for suitability.

25. The retention of people with past election experience is valuable in maintaining the skills base of the election workforce, and is particularly

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

20

important for senior roles. In this context, ANAO's survey of a sample of the AEC's temporary election workforce for the 2013 election identified that overall satisfaction with the AEC is high, with 93 per cent of respondents indicating they would be prepared to work for the AEC at future election events.[12] However, indications of high satisfaction with the AEC have not been reflected in low turnover between election events, with only a slight improvement between the 2010 and 2013 elections. There would be benefit in the AEC seeking to understand the reasons for the continuing high turnover in the temporary election workforce and developing strategies that will enable it to reduce turnover at future elections (with particular emphasis given to more senior polling roles) in the context of a temporary election workforce plan.

Training Election Officials (Chapter 5)

26.   The training of people employed as election officials is a key part of the preparation for a Federal election. The AEC has established minimum training requirements, with a particular emphasis on more senior polling roles, including the OIC for each polling place. The AEC's policy position is that election officials must complete the required training if they are to have the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively perform their allocated role. There are three main training methods employed by the AEC.

Election Procedures Handbook

27.   The AEC produces nine roles based versions of the Election Procedures Handbook, that are provided to all election officials, after they accept an offer of temporary employment. It covers administrative and operational requirements, emergency and security procedures, workplace health and safety requirements, and other general information. Of the more than 4500 temporary employees who responded to an ANAO survey, 95 per cent recalled receiving a copy of the Handbook, with most respondents receiving the Handbook between two and four weeks in advance of the election. Further, 93 per cent of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied that the Handbook helped them to prepare to perform their assigned role.

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12   The ANAO sampled a total of 8500 temporary election officials employed during the 2013 election, consisting of two sub populations. The first was 2500 people who filled an OIC or equivalent pre-poll or mobile polling role. The second was 6000 people who were in other polling roles. The overall response rate for the survey was 55 per cent.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

21

Home-based training

28. The implementation of online modalities for the delivery of home-based training since the 2010 election has enhanced the AEC's ability to monitor the completion of this aspect of training. For the 2013 election, people filling 32 855 election roles were required to complete home-based training.

29. ANAO analysis of the AEC data revealed that online home-based training was completed by people filling 80 per cent of election roles with a training requirement. Of the remaining 20 per cent, 3 per cent had not been assigned to undertake the training, 5 per cent had only partially completed the training and 12 per cent had not completed the training.

30. Further, in relation to the important senior role of election day OIC, only 82.5 per cent of roles were filled by people who had completed the required home-based training. As a consequence, more than 1.2 million votes were received at 1141 static polling places for the 2013 election where the AEC had no central records of the responsible polling place OIC having completed all elements of the required home-based training.

Face-to-face training

31. Face-to-face training sessions are conducted for senior polling place roles and aim to provide additional information, particularly about areas of high risk or changes in procedure. The face-to-face training sessions are mostly delivered by the divisional returning officers (DROs) and can be customised to meet local training needs. Of the 2583 survey respondents who informed ANAO that they completed the face-to-face training, 82 per cent were satisfied with the training. While still a generally positive result, the result was a marked reduction when compared to the level of satisfaction with the AEC's other training modalities. In comparison to the AEC's other training, survey respondents did not feel that the face-to-face training as clearly explained AEC election procedures and requirements, or that the training gave them a good understanding of their role and responsibilities.

32. Participation in face-to-face training is mandatory for senior roles, but prior to the Griffith by-election in early 2014, records of attendance were held only by the divisions. In light of the Keelty report, the AEC implemented new business processes whereby completed records of attendance were required to be forwarded to the AEC National Office. This information has been subsequently entered into the Election Training System and transferred to a locally developed reporting tool. The training assurance process was time

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

22

consuming and labour intensive and, accordingly, is unlikely to be feasible for a general election. Further, the approaches were not fully effective in ensuring all mandatory training requirements were met. In this respect, ANAO analysis of training completion data was that nine per cent of officials for the WA Senate election did not complete all of the required training.

33. More broadly, in responding to various matters that arose concerning the conduct of the 2013 election, the AEC has emphasised the importance of improving its training of election officials. The AEC has also recently advised JSCEM that it has embarked on the largest review of learning and development in its history, covering both the content and delivery of training. This work is important, but as indicated by the key findings of this audit, it is also important that the AEC give greater attention to being satisfied that the people engaged to fill election roles complete the training that is expected of them.

Performance Assessment (Chapter 6)

34. A performance rating process for election officials was introduced by the AEC in 1997 with people to be assessed as meeting the required standard, being below it, or above it. The intention of the rating system was to measure the overall performance of election officials, especially those in key roles, with a view to assessing the effectiveness of training and ensuring that offers of future employment are directed to people with proven records of performance.

35. ANAO's audit of the conduct of the 2007 election had recommended that the AEC complete performance appraisals for election officials and record these in the relevant systems in order that this data could be used to inform and improve recruitment practices for future electoral events. Some of the process shortcomings that informed this recommendation have been addressed by the AEC through improved administrative arrangements. However:

- a significant proportion of election officials, including senior election officials, surveyed by ANAO indicated that they were not aware of the AEC's performance standards; and

- the extent to which performance ratings for staff were recorded declined between the 2010 and 2013 elections, with 20 per cent of roles at the 2013 election having no performance rating recorded.

36. Failure by the AEC to undertake performance assessments and record performance ratings against election roles, especially senior roles such as OICs,

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

23

has significantly reduced the business benefits expected to be derived from the performance appraisal process. In particular, the available data suggests that previous election performance is a useful indicator of how people who are re-employed will perform at a subsequent election.

The AEC's Interim Response to the Keelty Report (Chapter 7)

37. The arrangements adopted to monitor implementation of interim measures developed to respond to the Keelty report, and assess their effectiveness, demonstrate a greater commitment to organisational learning and improvement than was evident in the AEC's response to ANAO's earlier audit of the conduct of the 2007 election. However, by mid-September 2014 a detailed implementation plan for the 32 agreed recommendations had not yet been developed, some nine months after the Keelty report was received and the recommendations accepted. An implementation plan could also usefully incorporate action to be taken in response to the three recommendations made by ANAO concerning ballot paper transport and storage that were agreed to by the AEC in ANAO Audit Report No. 31 2013–14.

38. In addition, there were a number of aspects of the approach taken that reduced the assurance that can be provided about the extent to which the Keelty report recommendations were effectively implemented for the 2014 WA Senate election, and will be further progressed subsequently. Of particular note was that:

- the polling places and scrutiny facilities visited by the AEC were not selected in order to provide either a representative sample or to focus attention on areas of higher risk[13];

- not all planned visits were undertaken; and

- the checklists developed to collect data on the implementation of the improved processes that had been developed were not adequate for their intended purpose, and insufficient steps were taken to promote complete and consistent assessments.

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13 For example, the AEC planned to inspect fewer polling places in the Division of Pearce than any other division, notwithstanding that this was the division in respect to which the majority of WA Senate votes were lost following the September 2013 election as well as being the division where the Keelty report was particularly critical of ballot paper transport and storage practices.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

24

39. Further, in a number of respects, ANAO analysis of the records of the Keelty Implementation Team Extended (KITE)[14] does not support the high levels of implementation of the interim measures that has been reported by the AEC. For example:

- the AEC advised JSCEM in March 2014 that every polling place for the WA Senate election would have a ballot box guard allocated. However, seven of the polling places inspected by KITE teams did not have a ballot box guard as part of the staff allocation;

- analysis by the AEC suggested that 186 of the 203 polling places inspected met the interim ballot paper secure zone requirements. However, for 49 of the 203 polling places the inspection records did not demonstrate that this requirement had been met. Further, the AEC's summary report stated that 'most ballot paper secure zones were signposted' when ANAO analysis was that only 50 of the 203 inspection checklists specifically referred to ballot secure zone signage; and

- internal AEC reporting was that 92 per cent of polling place OICs were 'comfortable with the new procedures' relating to packaging and parcelling of election materials. However, ANAO's analysis of the KITE checklists was that the AEC had wrongly counted 18 per cent of OICs as being clear about the new procedures.

Summary of entity response

40. The AEC's summary response to the proposed report is provided below, with the full response at Appendix 1.

> Since the 2013 federal election, the AEC has been in a period of self-analysis, reflecting on existing operations in addition to the implementation of ANAO recommendations (Report No.31 2013–14 and Report No. 28 2009–10) and the recommendations from the Keelty Inquiry into the 2013 WA Senate Election. During this period, the AEC has also implemented recommendations, where possible, in the delivery of two highly scrutinised elections: the 2014 Griffith by-election and the 2014 WA half-Senate election.

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14 There were 17 two person KITE teams deployed during the 2014 WA Senate election to evaluate the implementation of the interim measures introduced by the AEC in response to the Keelty report.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

25

The AEC is continuing to rebuild its reputation with the community and its stakeholders, supported by work to ensure the fundamental principles of integrity, quality and transparency are integrated throughout all aspects of the AEC's operations. The AEC acknowledges that the issues identified in the ANAO report relate to areas of development for the AEC, particularly planning and implementation across the entire organisation. Implementation of the ANAO recommendations outlined in this report will support this process.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

26

Recommendations

Set out below are the ANAO's recommendations and the AEC's abbreviated responses. More detailed responses from the AEC are shown in the body of the report immediately after each recommendation.

Recommendation No. 1

Paragraph 2.52

To provide a greater organisational focus on improving its approach to the provision of polling and scrutiny premises, and to better manage the related task of recruiting and training temporary election employees, ANAO recommends that the AEC:

(a) abolish, replace or consolidate (as appropriate) static polling places that are expected to receive relatively few votes, or where the premises have been assessed as not suitable for voters and/or election officials; and

(b) review at a national level the reasonableness (in the context of identified and/or expected trends in voter behaviour) of divisional office estimates of the number of votes expected to be received at static polling places.

AEC response: Agreed.

Recommendation No. 2

Paragraph 3.20

To better position the organisation to efficiently and effectively deliver future election events, ANAO recommends that the AEC:

(a) develop a workforce plan for its temporary election workforce well in advance of the expected timing of the next election;

(b) periodically update this plan; and

(c) actively monitor, at a National Office level, the implementation of the strategies included in the plan, and evaluate their effectiveness.

AEC response: Agreed

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

27

Recommendation No. 3

Paragraph 4.32

To further improve the recruitment of election officials, ANAO recommends that the AEC implement appropriate controls that ensure persons interested in working in election roles have been assessed as suitable before any offer of employment is made.

AEC response: Agreed

Recommendation No. 4

Paragraph 5.28

To be assured that people employed to fill election roles possess the knowledge and skills to perform their assigned duties, ANAO recommends that the AEC implement an efficient means of tracking the completion of its various training requirements in the lead up to future elections.

AEC response: Agreed

Recommendation No. 5

Paragraph 6.36

Recognising the benefits that accrue to the AEC in re-employing election officials that have previously performed at or above the required standard, ANAO recommends that the AEC:

(a) more clearly and consistently outline to temporary election employees the performance standards of the role to which they have been assigned and will be assessed against; and

(b) implement controls that ensure the timely completion of performance assessments, including the recording of ratings in the relevant system and each temporary election official being advised of their rating.

AEC response: Agreed

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

28

Audit Findings

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

29

1.   Introduction

This chapter provides background to the request from the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters for ANAO audit activity to follow-up the Australian Electoral Commission's implementation of earlier ANAO recommendations. It also sets out the audit objective, criteria and methodology.

Background

1.1   The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is responsible for conducting federal elections, maintaining the Commonwealth electoral roll and administering the political funding and disclosure requirements in accordance with the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act). In addition, the AEC conducts referendums in accordance with the *Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act 1984*. The AEC also provides a range of electoral information and education programs in Australia, as well as in support of Australia's international interests. Its stated outcome is to:

> Maintain an impartial and independent electoral system for eligible voters through active electoral roll management, efficient delivery of polling services and targeted education and public awareness programs.

1.2   The AEC has a three-person Commission comprising the Chairperson, the Electoral Commissioner and a non-judicial member. It operates through a three tier structure of a national office in Canberra, State and Territory offices as well as divisional offices (both standalone and co-located in the form of larger work units) responsible for electoral administration across Australia's 150 electoral divisions. The AEC employed nearly 850 ongoing staff as at 30 June 2013. For each Federal election, the AEC recruits a large temporary workforce (for the 2013 election, 68 834 people were employed) and operates a significant number of polling places (7697 static polling places and 645 pre-poll voting centres were used for the 2013 election).

1.3   In April 2010, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) tabled a performance audit report on the AEC's preparation for and conduct of the 2007 Federal election.[15] ANAO made nine recommendations, including four

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15   ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, *The Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of the 2007 Federal General Election*, 21 April 2010.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

31

relating to the AEC improving the accuracy and completeness of the electoral roll. Other recommendations included the AEC improving its workforce planning, and enhancing the accessibility and suitability of polling booths and scrutiny centres. ANAO also recommended that the AEC identify and assess options that would provide greater physical security over the transport and security of completed ballot papers.

1.4   In this latter respect, during the conduct of the 2013 election, 1370 Western Australia (WA) Senate ballot papers were lost. This situation led to:

- the voiding of the election of six Senators for WA and a new election for WA Senators being held on 5 April 2014, with a different political outcome compared with the counting of votes lodged at the September 2013 election; and

- the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM or the Committee) writing to the Auditor-General requesting performance audit activity relating to the AEC's implementation of earlier recommendations made by ANAO.

Audit objective, scope and criteria

1.5   In view of the importance of the AEC's functions and responsibilities and the interest shown by JSCEM in the AEC's implementation of the ANAO's earlier recommendations, and to address the matters raised by the Committee in a timely manner, the Auditor-General decided to conduct three related performance audits.

1.6   The report of the first audit was tabled in May 2014 (ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14, *The Australian Electoral Commissions' Storage and Transport of Completed Ballot Papers at the September 2013 Federal General Election*). Its objective was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the AEC's implementation of the recommendation made in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 relating to physical security over the transport and storage of completed ballot papers. The follow-up of implementation of that recommendation was prioritised as it was an area of particular interest to the Committee.

1.7   The objective of the second audit, which is the subject of this report, was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the Australian Electoral

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

32

Commission's implementation of those recommendations made in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 relating to:

- a more strategic approach to election workforce planning, with a particular focus on the selection, recruitment, training and performance evaluation of election officials (Recommendation Nos. 5 and 6);

- the suitability and accessibility of polling booths and fresh scrutiny premises (Recommendation No. 7); and

- the transport and storage of completed ballot papers (Recommendation No. 8(b)), in respect to matters not fully addressed in ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14. Specifically, compliance with new policies and procedures introduced to address the Keelty report[16] recommendations for the WA Senate election 2014.

1.8 A third audit of the AEC's implementation of recommendations made in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 has been included in the ANAO's 2014–15 forward work program. The focus of the third audit is expected to be on the recommendations that relate to the AEC improving the accuracy and completeness of the electoral roll.

1.9 The remaining recommendation made in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 (Recommendation No. 9) related to the AEC developing comprehensive performance standards for the conduct of elections. The AEC advised the March 2012 meeting of its Business Assurance Committee (BAC) that implementation of that recommendation had been completed in February 2012.[17] However, advice provided by the AEC to JSCEM in July 2014 suggested that implementation of this recommendation was ongoing, as well as incorrectly advising JSCEM that implementation of this recommendation was within the scope of the second ANAO follow-up audit, which is the subject of this report.[18]

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16   In early November 2013, the AEC commissioned Mr Mick Keelty AO APM to undertake an inquiry into the circumstances of the missing ballot papers identified during the recount of Senate votes in WA.

17   The BAC was informed that: 'Performance standards are reviewed at each election as part of business as usual practices'.

18   In October 2014, the AEC advised ANAO that: 'The language around the development of performance standards in the AEC's submission to the JSCEM in July 2014 was not intentionally misleading. The AEC was merely seeking to note that it expected further commentary from ANAO on this matter in the second follow-up audit, and that the AEC would need to consider this in finalising its implementation of the original recommendation, noting that the AEC had earlier incorrectly concluded that work was completed on this item.'

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

33

Criteria and methodology

1.10   To form a conclusion against the objective for this audit, described in paragraph 1.6, the ANAO adopted high-level criteria relating to whether the AEC responded adequately and effectively to address the matters raised by ANAO that led to the recommendations being made.

1.11   The methodology employed for the audit has included:

- examining AEC documentation, such as guidelines, training materials, reports, contracts and briefing materials;

- examining and analysing relevant records, including from relevant information technology systems concerning the recruitment, training and payment of temporary employees engaged to assist with the conduct of the 2013 election;

- interviewing AEC staff and requesting relevant records;

- surveying a sample 8500 people employed by the AEC as election officials during the 2013 election. The survey focused on gauging people's views on the AEC's management of the temporary election workforce, and also sought information about their experiences during recruitment, training, pre-polling and on election day; and

- examining the establishment and activities of the teams tasked with assessing and inspecting compliance with the interim policies and procedures adopted for the April 2014 WA Senate election to address the Keelty report recommendations.

1.12   The audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO auditing standards at a cost to the ANAO of $607 000.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

34

Structure of the report

1.13   The structure of the report is outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1:   Report structure

Chapter	Overview
Polling and Scrutiny Premises	Examines the action taken by the AEC in response to ANAO's earlier recommendation concerning improved approaches to polling and scrutiny premises.
Workforce Planning	Analyses the response by the AEC to ANAO's earlier recommendation that it improve its election workforce planning by critically examining its future workforce needs and composition.
Recruiting Election Officials	Examines whether the AEC has strengthened its recruitment of election officials in order that suitable persons were recruited in a timely manner for the 2013 election, with priority given to senior polling roles.
Training Election Officials	Analyses the extent to which election officials were trained prior to the 2013 election, and how useful participants found their training.
Performance Assessment	Examines the extent to which the AEC completed performance appraisals of election officials employed for the 2013 election.
The Australian Electoral Commission's Interim Response to the Keelty Report	Examines the AEC's implementation of interim measures introduced during the 2014 WA Senate election to address the recommendations of the Keelty report, with a particular focus on matters relevant to ballot paper transport and storage.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

35

2.   Polling and Scrutiny Premises

This chapter examines the action taken by the AEC in response to ANAO's earlier recommendation concerning improved approaches to polling and scrutiny premises.

Introduction

2.1   The significant majority of Australians who vote do so in person either at a pre-poll voting centre (PPVC) prior to election day or on the Saturday of the election at a static polling place. For example, at the 2013 election more than 91 per cent of the 14.7 million votes counted were received at either a PPVC (18.1 per cent) or static polling place (72.9 per cent). The provision of these voting facilities involved a considerable logistics workload for the AEC at divisional office level including:

- inspecting potential premises in advance of the election;

- making arrangements to access the premises and setting them up for polling purposes; and

- recruiting and training the temporary employees required to staff the static polling place premises and PPVCs.

2.2   Divisional and state offices are also required to arrange premises for the fresh scrutiny count of votes received.

2.3   The seventh recommendation from ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 suggested various ways the AEC could improve the suitability and accessibility of polling and scrutiny premises. ANAO analysed the AEC's implementation of each part of that recommendation.

Pre-poll voting centres and fresh scrutiny premises

Early voting at pre-poll voting centres

2.4   PPVCs are established to allow voters who will not be able to visit a polling place on the day of the election to cast their vote in advance as an alternative to postal voting. This is known as 'pre-poll voting 'and, together with postal voting, is a type of early voting. The AEC's PPVC policy requires

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

36

that pre-poll voting facilities be provided at all divisional offices[19] and that each division will offer pre-poll voting services at a PPVC established in at least one other site within the division.

2.5   Eligible voters are increasingly seeking to vote early, particularly at PPVCs. In this respect, the AEC advised JSCEM in its submission to the Committee's inquiry into the 2010 election that the trend towards early voting:

> ...needs to be assimilated as a critical element of the environment in which elections must now be administered.

2.6   Consistent with this view, the AEC significantly increased the number of PPVCs for the 2010 election. Based on figures advised to JSCEM by the AEC, the number of PPVCs increased by nearly 59 per cent between the 2007 and 2010 elections. This assisted the AEC to accommodate a 38 per cent increase in the number of pre-poll votes between the two elections.

2.7   The number of PPVCs the AEC reported as having been employed for the 2013 election fell slightly from the 682 used at the 2010 election to 645 (a reduction of 5.3 per cent).[20] The AEC expected to receive, in aggregate, 1.77 million ordinary and declaration votes at those PPVCs and at pre-poll voting facilities provided by divisional offices.[21] This was an estimated 18 per cent increase on the number of votes received at PPVCs for the 2010 election, indicating the AEC expected the trend towards PPVC voting to increase, but less significantly than had occurred at the 2010 election (where nearly 34 per cent more votes were received at PPVCs than had been received at the 2007 election).

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19   PPVC facilities are required to be provided at divisional offices even in circumstances where the divisional office does not expect to receive any pre-poll votes. In this respect, for many divisions, the number of pre-poll votes expected to be received at the divisional office was quite low such that, in aggregate, divisional offices estimated that only 100 673 pre-poll votes would be received at divisional offices. Rather, the significant majority of pre-poll votes expected and actually received were at PPVCs other than divisional office premises.

20   The AEC's JSCEM submission reported that 645 PPVCs were used. This involved making arrangements to hire 118 premises (in addition to pre-poll voting services provided at divisional offices). The difference between the reported figure of 645 and the premises number (118) reflects that many of the PPVCs reported were Multi PPVCs, which involves a premise located in one division being used as a place at which pre-poll ordinary voting is available to persons enrolled for more than one division, rather than each division establishing separate PPVC premises. For the 2013 election, a single Multi PPVC premise served up to 11 divisions, with a figure of 11 included in the number of PPVCs reported to JSCEM in respect to the single pre-poll voting premise that was hired by the AEC.

21   There are two different types of pre-poll voting: pre-poll ordinary voting—for voters enrolled in the division in which they are casting their pre-poll vote; and pre-poll declaration voting—for all other voters.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

37

2.8   The AEC significantly under-estimated the number of votes that would be received at PPVCs. As it eventuated, more than 2.5 million ordinary and declaration votes were received at the 2013 election, an increase of 63.7 per cent on the number received at the 2010 election. The AEC's estimation of the number of pre-poll declaration votes was, in aggregate, within 10 per cent of the number of such votes received. However, the AEC's estimation of the number of ordinary pre-poll votes was quite inaccurate, with the aggregate estimate being 35 per cent lower than the actual number of such votes received. As a result, PPVCs collectively handled significantly more votes than had been estimated as part of election planning and preparations, as well as significantly more than had been accommodated at earlier elections.

Scrutiny premises

2.9   The initial scrutiny of all ordinary votes taken at polling places and PPVCs centres commences after the polls close. After election night, the results of the election night count are rechecked in the fresh scrutiny.[22] For House of Representatives votes, the fresh scrutinies are conducted at scrutiny centres arranged by the divisional office, which is followed by the full distribution of preferences (which determines the formal result of each election). For Senate votes the fresh scrutinies of above-the-line and obviously informal votes are completed at divisional office scrutiny centres. All other Senate ballot papers are sent to a Central Senate Scrutiny (CSS) location in each state and territory.

2.10   The AEC's scrutiny policy outlines that divisional returning officers (DROs) are responsible for determining when and where a scrutiny will be conducted, as well as for deciding on the number and types of scrutinies to be conducted. The CSS premises are organised by State Offices.

Use of Australian Government agency premises

2.11   In respect to the premises used as PPVCs and for fresh scrutinies, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 observed that the:

- difficulties being experienced with hiring suitable static polling place premises were compounded in relation to PPVCs. Among other factors,

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22   At the same time, declaration votes are returned from across Australia and from overseas posts to the home divisional office for preliminary scrutiny. The preliminary scrutiny process involves checking an elector's entitlement to vote before the declaration envelope is opened and the ballot papers are included in the count.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

38

this reflected that the AEC needed short-term leases for a three to four week period which was shorter than what the market wanted to offer; and

- the lease costs of PPVCs and fresh scrutiny centres varied markedly, with some considerable increases in the costs between the 2004 and 2007 elections.

2.12   Similarly in this latter respect, in its primary submission to JSCEM's inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election, the AEC stated that one of the factors that contributed to higher overall election costs was 'increased property and venue hire costs due to additional premises requirements for pre-polling'.

2.13   The Australian Government has a significant non-Defence domestic property portfolio, although there have been changes over time in the extent to which these properties are leased rather than owned. By way of context, in 2012 the Government's non-financial assets of land, buildings, investment property, plant and equipment was valued at approximately \$94 billion.[23] In addition, expenditure on property represents a considerable use of government resources: in 2011–12 operating lease rental expenses alone were over \$2.6 billion; with lease commitments of over \$9.8 billion for the five-year period to 2015–16.[24]

2.14   Notwithstanding the size of the Australian Government's domestic property portfolio, at the time of the 2007 election the AEC made little use of Australian Government owned or leased property to assist with pre-poll voting or the conduct of fresh scrutinies. Specifically:

- across Australia, only two Australian Government premises were used as a PPVC; and

- 40 Australian Government premises were used for fresh scrutiny across three states (no Australian Government premises were used in the remaining three states and two territories).

2.15   ANAO identified that there was an opportunity for the AEC to seek to make greater use of the Australian Government's domestic property portfolio

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23   ANAO Audit Report No.51 2012–13, *Management of the Australian Taxation Office's Property Portfolio*, 24 June 2013, p. 26.

24   ibid.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

39

for election purposes. Accordingly, the third element of Recommendation No.7 in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 was that the AEC:

> negotiate the use of suitable Commonwealth-agency venues, in particular as pre-poll voting centres and fresh-scrutiny centres.

2.16   Initially (in March 2011) the AEC advised the BAC that it would implement this part of the recommendation by approaching relevant agencies with a view to identifying and using suitable Australian Government premises for election period activities. Such an approach would have been consistent with the ANAO recommendation. In this context, ANAO sought advice from the AEC as to which agencies had been approached together with relevant supporting documentation (such as correspondence and records of meetings). The AEC's response did not identify that a range of agencies had been approached, but stated that:

> The primary agency that the AEC works with to assist with election period venue sharing is the Department of Human Services. Two major agreements were in place for the 2013 Federal election, relating to:
>
> •   the use of DHS premises to house election service centres; and
>
> •   the use of DHS facilities and infrastructure support to support remote mobile polling across Northern Australia.
>
> There was some consideration of also using DHS premises for early voting at pre-poll voting centres (PPVCs) however it became clear that Centrelink and Medicare offices are not suitable to reconfigure as early voting centres to service the volume of electors that pass through PPVCs. DHS offices hold stocks of AEC forms, such as enrolment forms, and provide access to the AEC website (for electors to enrol and apply for postal votes) via its online access terminal.
>
> The AEC and DHS jointly engage in ongoing dialogue via a formal Strategic Governance Committee which meets regularly to discuss, amongst other items, shared services. The ongoing existence of this group will facilitate ongoing identification of opportunities for collaboration in the delivery of election services.

2.17   ANAO's recommendation was explicitly focused on the greater use of Australian Government owned or leased premises as PPVCs and fresh scrutiny centres. The arrangement with DHS did not relate to PPVC or fresh scrutiny premises. Further, the AEC did not identify to ANAO that it had approached any other Australian Government agencies with a view to using premises

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

40

those agencies owned or leased as a PPVC or fresh scrutiny centre. In October 2014, the AEC advised ANAO that it:

> intends to use the success of this engagement and build on the approach for Election Service Centres with DHS at the next election, identifying opportunities for further cooperation.

2.18   By the November 2011 BAC meeting, the AEC was no longer proposing to approach relevant Australian Government agencies as had been indicated to the BAC in March 2011. Rather, the BAC was advised that:

> Securing of venues for voting and scrutinies is a divisional office responsibility. The recommendation has been referred to the Election Procedures Manual review team to build into policy materials as part of the 2011–12 review of the Election Procedures Manual.

2.19   In advising ANAO on the steps it had taken to implement Recommendation No. 7 from ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, the AEC did not identify what changes had been made to the Election Procedures Manual to assist divisional offices make greater use of Australian Government premises as PPVCs and fresh scrutiny centres. ANAO's analysis was that the Election Procedures Manual for the 2013 election did not seek to progress greater use of Australian Government agency premises as PPVCs or fresh scrutiny centres. This matter was also not addressed in the AEC's PPVC policy or the scrutiny policy, with the later simply stating:

> The DRO will make arrangements to hire suitable premises (if required) and to employ an adequate number of suitable staff.

2.20   ANAO also asked the AEC to identify the fresh scrutiny premises used in each of the 150 divisions, and provide ANAO with a copy of the agreement signed for the use of these premises. There were no instances where the information provided to ANAO by the AEC identified that Australian Government premises had been used for fresh scrutiny purposes. Rather, the information provided to ANAO identified that divisional offices typically sought to identify suitable premises that would be available for lease commercially.

2.21   For example, including the CSS premises, there were six scrutiny premises used in South Australia. The State Office records provided to ANAO

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

41

outlined that the approach taken in respect to premises[25] for the Central Election Tri (comprising the divisions of Adelaide, Hindmarsh and Sturt) did not include considering surplus space available in premises occupied by other Australian Government entities.[26] Rather:

> We have been searching for a suitable space for a period of 12 months. Whilst I looked at a number of different properties, across the centre of metropolitan Adelaide, over this time only three potential spaces were suitable. Two properties met our budget and other requirements and we obtained a quote from both of them. The third property was ultimately deemed unsuitable for a number of reasons. A number of owners were unwilling to negotiate a short term lease and the size and structure of many properties did not give us flexibility.

2.22   Key parameters of the premises sought for the Central Election Tri was at least 1500 square metres of space for a short term lease of two months, with options for a longer period. At this time, the Australian Taxation Office's (ATO[27]) Adelaide Central Business District premises had significant unused capacity, in excess of that required by the AEC. However, the AEC did not seek to engage with the ATO as to the potential practicalities of the AEC making use of the unused space. Similarly, three other ATO leased properties in locations close to those used by the AEC for fresh scrutiny centres[28] had significant unused capacity at the time of the 2013 election but the AEC similarly did not engage with the ATO in relation to the practicalities of unused space being used for vote counting purposes.

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25   These premises were used to prepare election materials for distribution to polling places, and then transition into a materials return and scrutiny area.

26   A similar approach was taken in respect to the Southern Election Tri (comprising the divisions of Boothby, Kingston and Mayo) and the Northern Election Tri (comprising the divisions of Makin, Port Adelaide and Wakefield).

27   The ATO has a large number of staff working in an extensive and geographically dispersed property portfolio. In this respect, as at 31 December 2012, this portfolio included 19 offices in central business districts, eight offices in suburban areas and nine in major regional centres with the ATO Location Plan for 2013–14 identifying that there was unused capacity of some 3233 work points as at August 2012, equating to 11.9 per cent of its capacity.

28   This included the ATO premises located at Northbridge, within the Western Australian electorate of Perth. Instead, the AEC had used the Ascot Racecourse in Perth as the scrutiny premises for six of the city divisions in the Perth metropolitan area notwithstanding (as noted in ANAO Audit Report No. 31 2013–14) that there was only one lockable room that was not large enough for the quantity of ballot papers.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

42

Static polling place premises

2.23 The provision of adequate voting facilities to any elector who wishes to attend a polling place is important to the effective delivery of elections. The AEC recognises that there would be significant consequences should there be insufficient facilities to support voters on election day. In this context, in October 2014 the AEC advised ANAO that:

> While the trend for voting on polling day is decreasing, the total number of eligible electors will increase over time. It is difficult to accurately project the impact of these trends on the need for available polling places, further complicated by the variable timing of federal elections and concomitant elector behaviour. Early voting patterns are impacted by a range of factors, including individual circumstances and other events external to the election (for example, school holidays), complicating the projection of early voting uptake and the number of premises required to support the Australian electorate.

Estimating the number of votes at static polling places

2.24 The number of ordinary votes estimated to be received at each polling place is an important factor in determining the number of staff the AEC allocates to a polling place and therefore needs to recruit and train. In this context, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 observed that the output of the AEC's predictive model of voter numbers agreed well with the actual number of ordinary voters who passed through polling booths at the 2007 election.

2.25 At the 2010 election, static polling places received 10.8 million votes, or 82 per cent of all votes. For the 2013 election, the AEC's staffing of polling places was based on an aggregate estimate of them receiving 11.47 million votes, an increase of nearly 630 000 on the number received at the 2010 election. In this context, there would have been benefit in the aggregate of these estimates being critically reviewed at a national level given they meant divisions were forecasting that, nation-wide, the trend away from voting on election day at static polling places towards early voting had ended. Specifically:

- the increase in the number of votes expected to be received at static polling places (629 925) was slightly more than the 624 539 increase in the number of persons enrolled to vote between the close of rolls for the 2010 election and the 2013 election, indicating little allowance was being made for newly enrolled voters to vote at PPVCs, or for voters

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

43

from the 2010 election who visited static polling places in 2010 to move to early voting;

- the percentage of votes expected to be received at static polling places, as a percentage of all votes received, was expected to remain at around the 82 per cent figure that occurred at the 2010 election, rather than reducing as voters increasingly vote early. As it eventuated, fewer than 73 per cent of total votes counted were received at static polling places; and

- the aggregate estimate was 2.4 per cent higher than the 10.08 million ordinary votes received at static polling places during the 2010 election.

2.26   In this context, it was unsurprising that the number of votes received at static polling places on 7 September 2013 was significantly less than the estimates used by the AEC to allocate staff to polling places. Specifically, the AEC over-estimated by 1.39 million (13.8 per cent) the number of votes that would be received at static polling places. The greatest number of over-estimated votes related to ordinary votes with the AEC over-estimating by 1.02 million (11 per cent) the number of such votes that would be received. In percentage terms the error was greater in relation to declaration votes, with the AEC over-estimating by 47.5 per cent the number of such votes that would be received at static polling places. ANAO analysis indicated that estimates with a similar level of accuracy to those at the time of the 2007 election (see paragraph 2.24) would have reduced by more than 6000 (or over 8 per cent) the number of polling staff allocated for the 2013 election.

Number, location and size of polling place premises

2.27   In its primary submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election, the AEC observed that it:

> ...experiences increased volumes at almost all of the logistical and operational pressure points during the election delivery period. This is consistent with experience of increasing volumes over the last four federal elections.[29]

2.28   However, one area where the AEC experienced a significant decline in volume related to the number of electors who voted on polling day at a static

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29   AEC primary submission to JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election and matters related thereto, 11 April 2014, p. 4.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

44

polling place. ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 outlined that the trend to early voting (through pre-poll, mobile or postal voting) has important effects on the number and location of static polling place premises, and the staff required to be recruited and trained to work at those polling places.

2.29   As outlined at paragraphs 2.5 to 2.8, the AEC responded to the trend towards greater early voting by increasing the number of PPVCs between the 2007 and 2010 elections. For the 2013 election, the number of PPVCs did not change significantly, but the number of votes received at PPVCs increased significantly meaning that, on average, PPVCs handled more votes than at the 2010 election.

2.30   Similarly, it would be reasonable to expect that the trend towards early voting, and the general expectation that Australian Public Service agencies will pursue efficiencies in delivery methods, would have caused the AEC to give management attention to the number, location and size of static polling places. However, the number of static polling places has remained largely unchanged across the last four elections, at around 7700 premises[30], with the same premises typically used at each successive election unless they are not available (see further at paragraph 2.37). In this context, although a key driver of the number of polling place staff that it needs to recruit and train, the AEC has no efficiency targets or measures for its polling places. Rather, the AEC's *Static Polling Place Policy* of March 2013 outlines that:

- commonality with State and Local Government polling places is an 'important consideration' when selecting polling places;

- as there are many different circumstances affecting polling places, there are no 'fixed rules' regarding the size and number of polling places in each division;

- the 'preferred maximum size' of a polling place is 4000 to 5000 votes, as polling places that exceed this size are difficult for one officer-in-charge (OIC) to manage; and

- there is no fixed voter figure for the appointment of a polling place, however a polling place serving fewer than 200 electors would be an 'exceptional case' and that:

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30   A total of 7729 at the 2004 election, 7723 at the 2007 election, 7760 at the 2010 election and 7697 at the 2013 election.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

45

in major urban areas, a benchmark figure of 1,000 to 1,200 votes should be considered as the minimum polling place size when appointing new polling places. However, no action should be taken on any existing polling place solely because it does not meet this minimum size.

2.31 There were relatively few polling places at the 2013 election where the AEC expected, or received, votes consistent with the 'preferred maximum size' of 4000 to 5000 votes. Particularly in metropolitan divisions, it was quite common for the AEC to use a large number of polling place premises, often located in close proximity to one another, with most of these polling places expected to receive a relatively small number of votes (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1   Votes estimated to be received in metropolitan division polling places at the 2013 election
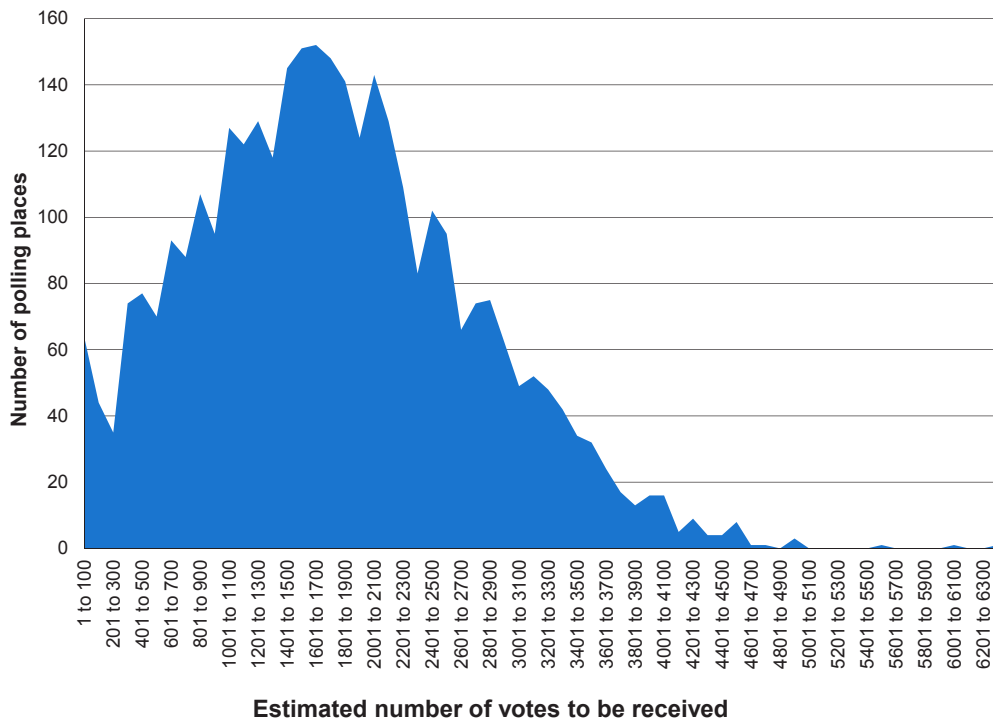
Source: ANAO analysis of AEC data.

2.32 This situation indicates that the AEC has not been sufficiently attuned to the opportunity it has had to significantly reduce the number of polling

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

46

place staff that need to be recruited and trained by employing fewer, and more suitable[31], polling places by:

- abolishing[32], replacing or remediating static polling place premises that are identified in the program of polling place inspections to not fully meet the needs of voters and/or election officials (along the lines previously recommended by ANAO); and

- rationalising the number of polling places, including by seeking to use newer, larger community facilities funded by the Australian Government (as previously recommended by ANAO, and discussed further at paragraphs 2.40 to 2.45).

2.33   For example, in metropolitan divisions alone, ANAO analysis indicates that abolishing polling places expected to receive relatively few votes and combining polling places located relatively close together could require the AEC to recruit and train up to 4600 fewer polling place staff. In this context, the AEC advised ANAO in October 2014 that it:

> will continue to examine its methodology in identifying smaller polling places that could be closed without compromising voter services, and acknowledges that cost savings may be achieved. However, it is important to note that there is unlikely to be a straight linear relationship between a reduction in polling places and a reduction in staff required. For example, there may be a 'displacement effect' where voters instead access services at nearby polling places, thereby changing the staffing mix at those venues.[33] The AEC is also mindful of the reputational damage that can result when a community feels that 'their' polling place has been closed or moved, regardless of the logical basis for such a move.

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31   ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 concluded (at paragraph 14) that some polling places were less than optimal, making voting more onerous for electors and officials alike, and that the AEC had experienced difficulties in recruiting and training polling place staff to a suitable standard. In this context, paragraphs 2.38 to 2.39 outline that AEC has not made significant progress in delivering upon its publicly stated aim to maximise the number of polling places at each election which have full or assisted wheelchair access.

32   Section 80 of the Electoral Act governs the appointment, declaration and abolition of polling places.

33   As outlined at paragraphs 2.24 to 2.26, ANAO's analysis of the potential benefits from employer fewer, more suitable, polling places premises was undertaken in the context of the AEC needing to improve the accuracy of its estimation of the number of votes expected to be received at those premises on polling day. The AEC has accepted the related ANAO recommendation in this regard (Recommendation 1(b)).

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

47

Polling place inspection program

2.34 Both static polling places and PPVCs are subject to an AEC inspection program. The AEC has advised JSCEM that the purpose of the inspection program is to ensure that each polling place:

- meets the AEC's legislative and operational requirements; and

- satisfies the requirements of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011*.

2.35 Similar to the situation identified at the time of the 2007 election in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, at a national level the AEC continues to not collect or analyse data on the results of the polling place inspection program. Such a situation did not place the AEC in a strong position to implement Recommendation No. 7(d) from the earlier audit report, which included systematic post-election evaluation of the polling place inspection program.

2.36 In the absence of national data, as part of this follow-up audit ANAO sought copies of polling place inspection reports for a sample of polling places used at the 2013 election, as well as (for comparative purposes) the reports of inspections conducted prior to the 2010 election where the premises were used at both elections. However, for:

- 19 per cent of the premises that were used at both elections, the AEC was unable to provide the ANAO with a copy of a completed report for an inspection undertaken prior to the 2010 election. In a number of instances, the AEC advised the ANAO that the reports had been destroyed after the 2013 election; and

- 11 per cent of the premises used at the 2013 election, the AEC was unable to provide the ANAO with a copy of a completed report for an inspection undertaken prior to the 2013 election.

2.37 Where reports were available, it was common for them to evidence that the inspection had identified that the polling place premises were less than fully satisfactory. Specifically, for 88 per cent of the sampled inspections undertaken prior to 2013 election where a report was able to be provided to ANAO, the inspection identified shortcomings with the premises. This was most often the case in relation to the provision of access for voters with a disability, and the provision of amenities for polling place staff. However, the AEC's policies and procedures are silent on the action, if any, that is to be

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

48

taken when a polling place inspection identifies that the premises are not fully satisfactory. In this respect:

- over 90 per cent of the premises used as a static polling place for the 2010 election were used again at the 2013 election, a situation similar to that observed by ANAO at the 2007 election; and

- in only 9 per cent of those instances sampled by ANAO where the inspection of the sampled polling place had identified shortcomings, did the division advise ANAO that it had considered alternative premises to those that had been identified as being deficient. Advice provided to ANAO by the sampled divisions outlined that, in the main, alternative premises are only considered when previously used premises are not available.

2.38 This situation helps to explain why the AEC has not made significant progress in delivering upon its publicly stated[34] aim to maximise the number of polling places at each election which have full or assisted wheelchair access. In this respect, the proportion of polling places assessed by the AEC as providing full access has fallen from 29.5 per cent at the 2007 election, to 16 per cent at the 2010 election[35] to 11.8 per cent at the 2013 election (noting that a new building accessibility standard[36] commenced operation on 1 May 2011).

2.39 Consistent with one of the action items under the AEC's *Disability Action Plan 2008–2011*, the new building accessibility standard was reflected in an update to the AEC's Polling Premises Suitability Inspection Tool. It was also reflected in the AEC's inspection of some polling places before the 2013 election involving a downgrade of the previous assessment of the extent

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34   AEC, *Issues Briefing Notes – Why Don't All Polling Places Have Wheelchair Access*, February 2012. Similarly, the targeted outcomes under the current *Disability Inclusion Strategy 2012–2020* included maximising the accessibility of permanent AEC premises and polling places, but with no specific targets specified. Further in this respect, the AEC's January 2012 *Polling Place Disability Access Policy* set out requirements for access to and within polling places by people with disabilities but this policy referenced the AEC's Disability Action Plan, although the timeframe for that plan was 2008 to 2011, rather than the AEC's *Disability Inclusion Strategy 2012–2020*.

35   The AEC's February 2012 publication *Issues Briefing Notes – Why Don't All Polling Places Have Wheelchair Access* stated that 84 per cent of polling places at the 2010 election had wheelchair access, indicating 16 per cent did not.

36   The *Disability (Access to premises – buildings) Standards 2010* was expected by the Australian Law Reform Commission to 'lead to widespread and important improvements in the accessibility and safety of all new and upgraded public buildings in Australia'. See: <www.humanrights.gov.au/guidelines-application-premises-standards> accessed on 11 September 2014.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

49

to which the premises were accessible. In this respect, for 18 per cent of the polling places in ANAO's sample, the AEC inspection had concluded the premises did not provide wheelchair access.[37] However, in none of these instances did the AEC seek to identify an alternative polling place premise that would provide improved accessibility or to engage with the premises owner about possible modifications, a situation that does not sit comfortably with the AEC's *Disability Inclusion Strategy*. In this context, in July 2013 the AEC advised JSCEM (in response to a 7 July 2013 letter from the Committee Chair) that:

> For the 2015 inspection program AEC staff have been asked to approach premises owners in cases where small modifications to a premises would allow a premises to be rated as fully accessible. For example, by opening up a staff car park for disabled electors where this is closer to the polling place entrance than the general parking facilities, a premises that may have been rated as not accessible in 2013 could be rated as accessible at the next election

Opportunities to benefit from Australian Government funding for community infrastructure

2.40 ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 outlined that it was common for community facilities used as polling places to have been constructed many years earlier, and that some polling places were less than optimal. Given the age of some polling place premises and the shortcomings often identified by polling place inspections, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 suggested that the AEC seek to secure improved facilities for elections. In this respect, the first element of Recommendation No. 7 of ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 was that the AEC work with Australian Government agencies that provide funding for the construction, upgrade and/or maintenance of community facilities that may be suitable for future use as polling places so as to identify opportunities to secure access to these facilities for electoral events.

2.41 When informing the BAC that implementation of ANAO Recommendation No. 7 had been completed, the AEC advised that it had held discussions with agencies. Accordingly, as part of this follow-up audit, ANAO sought advice from the AEC, and copies of any meeting records or related correspondence, as to which specific Australian Government agencies the AEC

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37   For the remaining 82 per cent of polling places in the audit sample where an assessment was completed and available to ANAO for analysis, the AEC inspection assessed that the premises provided partial (assisted) access.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

50

held discussions with in the context of Recommendation No.7(a). However, the AEC was unable to identify to ANAO any Australian Government agencies that it had engaged with.[38]

2.42   Since ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 was tabled, ANAO has audited a number of programs that have funded community infrastructure facilities of the type that have been used by the AEC as polling place premises. However, in only one instance was a project funded under one of those programs used by the AEC as a polling place for the 2013 election. This reflected the initiative of a DRO for one Victorian division who was aware of the new facilities that were being constructed with funds awarded under the Better Regions Program, rather than any systemic action on the part of the AEC. Specifically, having not engaged with the administering agency, the AEC National Office had not identified other projects funded under that program that would also have been worth being considered for use as polling place premises for the 2013 election.

2.43   Similarly, the AEC did not engage with the administering department of other programs audited by ANAO that were awarded funding for the construction or upgrade of community infrastructure of the type often used as polling place premises. As a result, for example, there were no instances where a project funded under the following programs was used by the AEC as a polling place premise for the 2013 election:

- the $550 million Strategic Projects Component of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. A significant proportion (35 or 26 per cent) of the 137 projects approved for funding were the types of community facilities that have been used by the AEC for electoral purposes (such as town halls and community centres); or

- the Regional Development Australia Fund (RDAF), which was the former government's flagship program to support regional

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38   The AEC drew ANAO's attention to work various State Offices had undertaken with state government agencies. However, State Offices had not engaged with any Australian Government agencies responsible for administering relevant funding programs. For example, the Victorian State Office advised in this respect that it had not been 'delegated responsibility for any engagement with Federal Government agencies. Victoria's engagement was at the level of State Government, and examples are more recent and relate to 2012 and 2013 rather than 2011' (ANAO had sought information from the AEC on discussions held in 2011 with relevant Australian Government agencies given the BAC had been advised in March 2011 that action in respect to this recommendation had been completed in 2011).

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

51

infrastructure projects. The first four rounds of RDAF were conducted between 2011 and 2013, with a total of $575.8 million being approved to fund 202 capital infrastructure projects across Australia, including town halls, community centres and cultural centres.

2.44 In a number of instances, premises funded under the Australian Government community infrastructure programs that were not considered for use at the 2013 election were located in close proximity to the premises that were used at the 2013 election. In a sample of such instances examined by ANAO, it was common for:

- the AEC's pre-election inspection of the premises used at the 2013 election to have identified that the facilities did not meet the needs of either AEC polling place staff or of voters (for example, in relation to accessibility); but

- DROs to advise ANAO that alternatives to those premises assessed by the AEC as not fully meeting its needs were not considered.

2.45 As the Australian Government continues to implement community infrastructure funding programs, there remain opportunities for the AEC to implement Recommendation No. 7(a) from ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 by its National Office engaging with the agencies that administer those programs. There would also be benefits in the AEC examining community infrastructure funded under past Australian Government programs so that explicit consideration might be given by divisional offices to using larger, more modern premises as static polling places.

Standing arrangements with venue owners

2.46 The second element of Recommendation No. 7 from ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 related to the AEC seeking to implement standing arrangements with venue owners, particularly state governments, to secure suitable and accessible polling booths. AEC's response to this recommendation outlined that it already had formal arrangements with some state government venue owners and informal arrangements with others, and acknowledged that there would be benefits in expanding the range of formal arrangements.

2.47 In relation to implementing this element of the recommendation, the BAC was advised in March 2011 that 'State managers will be tasked with identifying other opportunities for standing arrangements that would facilitate better access to suitable polling venues'. Accordingly, ANAO sought from the

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

52

AEC a copy of the instruction given to State Managers to undertake this work as well as copies of any standing arrangements entered into with venue owners.

2.48   The AEC was unable to provide ANAO with a copy of any records of the instruction given to State Managers.[39] Nevertheless, ANAO was provided with advice and information in respect to any standing arrangements entered into by the State Offices.

2.49   The agreements provided to ANAO typically involved extending an agreement that was in place prior to ANAO's recommendation being made, or agreements being entered into after the BAC had been informed that the recommendation had been implemented. Further, the agreements provided to ANAO were few in number and, in the main, related to state education departments and the use of school facilities as static polling places. This information did not indicate that there had been any significant expansion in the extent to which the AEC had implemented standing arrangements with venue owners. For example, for :

- Western Australia, the only agreement provided to ANAO was with the state Department of Education, and this was signed in December 2013, such that, there was no agreement evident as being in place prior to the September 2013 election let alone in 2011 prior to the BAC being informed that implementation of the recommendation had been completed;

- Victoria, the State Office advised that:

    ...there were mixed results. During 2012[40] the Victorian State Manager contacted the Victorian Education Department to attempt to set up a meeting to negotiate a consistent costing framework for the hiring of public school premises. This engagement was being sought as our divisional staff were being quoted vastly different amounts when approaching public schools to discuss the hire of premises as static

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39   The AEC advised ANAO that: 'Opportunities for standing arrangements that would facilitate better access to suitable polling venues was raised verbally in various National Program Manager and State Manager meetings. Those meetings are now minuted but weren't during the early stages of that group's existence so minutes could not be provided. Although the evidence was not minuted, the fact that States/Territory Offices have taken action to address the request provides assurance that the actual instructions were made by National Office'.

40   Noting that the BAC had been informed that implementation of this recommendation was completed in 2011.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

53

polling places. Unfortunately, the State Manager was not able to progress this arrangement as the Department was not responsive to requests for dialogue on this matter.

Conclusion

2.50   The AEC's approach to implementing ANAO's earlier recommendation concerning polling and scrutiny premises was inadequate. As a result, there was little change evident between the 2007 and 2013 elections in how the AEC goes about arranging premises for voting and vote counting purposes. Of particular note in this respect was that:

- unless the premises used at the 2010 election were not available for hire, the AEC has continued its practice of re-using the same premises at successive elections irrespective of whether those premises meet the needs of voters and/or election officials and with little consideration given to the availability of more suitable premises (including community facilities funded by the Australian Government);

- the number of static polling place premises has remained largely unchanged across the last four elections, notwithstanding the continuing trend towards early voting rather than voting on election Saturday. In metropolitan divisions alone, ANAO analysis indicates that abolishing polling places expected to receive relatively few votes and combining polling places located relatively close together into newer, larger premises (where available) could require the AEC to recruit and train 4600 fewer polling place staff; and

- the AEC staffed static polling places on the basis that the trend towards early voting had ended. More accurate estimates would have reduced by more than 6000 the number of election officials allocated for polling day for the 2013 election.

2.51   In July 2014, the AEC advised JSCEM that the ongoing implementation of reforms that were proposed following the 2013 election may present financial pressures, and that this is a matter that would be put before the Department of Finance. In this context, improvements to existing approaches to the provision of polling and scrutiny premises can be expected to not only improve the effectiveness of the AEC's conduct of future elections but also deliver cost savings particularly as a result of needing to recruit and train fewer staff for static polling places. Judgements will necessarily be required to

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

54

balance the various relevant considerations involved in appointing and abolishing polling premises, but there are real benefits in the AEC considering a wider range of options for premises.

Recommendation No.1

2.52   To provide a greater organisational focus on improving its approach to the provision of polling and scrutiny premises, and to better manage the related task of recruiting and training temporary election employees, ANAO recommends that the AEC:

(a)   abolish, replace or consolidate (as appropriate) static polling places that are expected to receive relatively few votes, or where the premises have been assessed as not suitable for voters and/or election officials; and

(b)   review at a national level the reasonableness (in the context of identified and/or expected trends in voter behaviour) of divisional office estimates of the number of votes expected to be received at static polling places.

AEC response: *Agreed*

2.53   *The AEC notes the benefits likely to occur in improving its approach to the provision of election premises. The AEC will strengthen its methodology in estimating and identifying the facilities required for each electoral event and agrees that the analysis and projection could benefit from consolidation at the national level. The AEC will always maintain an elector-centric approach to its services and considers it imperative that adequate polling facilities are provided to any elector who wishes to attend a polling place. Accordingly, there will always be a tension in achieving a balance between available resources and elector demand.*

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

55

3.   Workforce Planning

This chapter analyses the response by the AEC to ANAO's earlier recommendation that it improve its election workforce planning by critically examining its future workforce needs and composition.

Introduction

3.1   In an earlier audit report[41], ANAO outlined that workforce planning is a continuous process of shaping the workforce to ensure it has the capability to deliver on organisational objectives now and in the future. A 2003 report by the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee had recommended that all agencies undertake workforce planning.

3.2   The recruitment and training of the temporary workforce to support an election is a significant undertaking, and the AEC's understanding of future election workforce needs is a critical driver of workforce planning. The importance of a sound workforce plan, for the AEC's temporary election workforce[42], is evident from the size of that workforce, and its cost. In these respects:

- to conduct the 2010 and 2013 elections the AEC was required to fill 74 275 and 82 559 temporary election roles respectively.[43] Around 80 per cent of these roles were required to be filled for election day; and

- ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 observed (at paragraph 4.11) that estimated staffing costs are the largest single component of the election budget, and the costs of polling place staff represents the majority of overall election staffing costs. Figures provided by the AEC to JSCEM for the 2013 election also outline that employee expenses were the single largest cost item. The AEC estimated that this represented

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41   ANAO Audit Report No.55 2004–05, *Workforce Planning*. The AEC was not one of the agencies included in that audit.

42   For the purposes of conducting an election the AEC augments its existing workforce (employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*) with temporary staff in accordance with section 35 of the Electoral Act. This follow-up audit report, like ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, examined workforce planning in relation to the temporary election workforce. ANAO did not examine the AEC's approach to workforce planning in relation to its permanent workforce.

43   This includes all election related roles; election officials; temporary assistants; and trainer polling staff. During the 2010 and 2013 elections, 66 874 and 73 434 people filled these roles respectively.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

56

49 per cent of total expenses ($65.1 million), excluding public funding paid to candidates and political parties.

3.3 Against this background, the AEC's understanding of its future election workforce needs is a critical driver of any workforce planning. In this respect, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10:

- noted the difficulties the AEC had experienced in recruiting adequate numbers of election officials for the 2007 election;

- outlined that the AEC had yet to undertake any detailed analysis of the composition of its election workforce and observed that, in the absence of such analysis, the AEC was still to formulate plans to develop and secure its workforce for future electoral events;

- included ANAO analysis of the 2007 election workforce, which indicated there may be benefits from different approaches to attracting, training and retaining election officials; and

- recommended[44] that the AEC improve its election workforce planning, including by critically examining its election workforce needs and workforce composition, and setting goals for the training and retention of election officials.

3.4 ANAO examined the action taken by the AEC in response to the earlier recommendation, and also conducted further audit analysis of the AEC workforce (so as to assess the effectiveness of the AEC's response). ANAO also conducted a survey of 8500 people employed by the AEC during the 2013 election.

Development of an election workforce plan

3.5 The Australian Public Service Commission has described workforce planning as identifying the strategies required to 'deliver the right people—that is, those with the skills and capabilities necessary for the required work—in the right numbers, in the right place, at the right time.'[45] The Commission also considers that to be effective, workforce planning needs to be integrated into an agency's planning framework and incorporate strong governance mechanisms.

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44   Recommendation No. 5(a).

45   Australian Public Service Commission, *Leading and shaping a unified, high performing APS— 2. Workforce planning explained*. Available from <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/workforce-planning-guide/workforce-planning-explained>, accessed 24 July 2014.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

57

3.6   ANAO's 2004–05 audit of workforce planning[46] concluded that, while a number of APS agencies were undertaking workforce planning, few could claim to have successfully embedded workforce planning into their business processes. ANAO observed that there are significant management challenges in developing workforce planning expertise, identifying and addressing workforce risks, and implementing appropriate strategies, and made one recommendation directed at agencies' approach to workforce planning.

3.7   While there are clearly benefits in the AEC developing a workforce plan for its temporary election workforce, the AEC faces particular challenges, not experienced by many other public sector agencies. Approximately once every three years, the AEC is required to appoint and train a large number of people in a relatively short timeframe to deliver an election. Against this background, workforce planning and the resulting workforce plan for temporary election employees could be expected to:

- cover a period of three to five years and have regard to the election cycle;

- focus on the composition of the existing workforce and examine high-level trends that may affect future workforce availability;

- describe emerging workforce issues and strategies for managing these; and

- outline a suite of workforce strategies designed to support the recruitment, retention and training of a diverse election ready workforce for future elections.

The Australian Electoral Commission's approach

3.8   The AEC's June 2008 submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2007 election included a brief (just over one page) discussion of the scale of the recruitment task for that election. In this respect, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 outlined that:

- the AEC had informed JSCEM in June 2008 that it would conduct some internal analysis in an attempt to tackle some of the unique challenges it faced regarding staffing for an election; but

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46   ANAO Audit Report No.55 2004–05, *Workforce Planning*.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

58

- at the time of ANAO's audit (which was tabled in April 2010) the AEC had not yet undertaken any detailed analysis of the composition of its election workforce and that, in the absence of such analysis, the AEC had yet to formulate plans to develop and secure its workforce for future electoral events.

3.9 The AEC submissions to the JSCEM inquiries into the conduct of the 2010 and 2013 elections included a range of analysis about the composition of the AEC's temporary election workforce. Much of this analysis was similar in nature, but updated, to that included in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10. The submission in relation to the 2013 election also included comparative data from the 2010 election. The analysis included:

- recruitment trends (number of positions, offers made, acceptance of offers and positions filled);

- the proportion of temporary employees with previous election experience;

- the age profile and gender of temporary employees; and

- employee proficiency in a language other than English.

3.10 The ANAO recommendation was that the AEC critically examine its <u>future</u> election workforce needs, in order to improve its election workforce <u>planning</u>. In a workforce planning context, the analysis undertaken following the 2010 and 2013 elections, as reflected in the JSCEM submissions, represented a useful starting point in terms of the AEC outlining its <u>current</u> election workforce.

Recognition of the need for a workforce plan

3.11 The advice provided by the AEC to the BAC indicated that, at least initially, the organisation recognised that implementation of the ANAO recommendation required the development of a temporary election workforce plan. Specifically, AEC reported to the BAC that, as at August 2011, a national workforce plan for the next election was under development with a target date for completion of December 2011.

3.12 However, later (November 2011) advice to the BAC was that:

Specific workforce planning as set out in the recommendation not commenced. The AEC has however focussed more operationally on developing its contact strategy and assessing the interest of polling officials. The first 'soft contact'

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

59

process (i.e. the process to refresh the AEC's polling official workforce) will run in Nov/Dec 2011; assessment of that process will assist the AEC to identify locations needing further support. Work to further enhance the systems will continue through to first quarter 2012 accompanied by a refresh of employment policy for polling staff.

3.13   The development of a temporary election workforce plan did not subsequently commence. Notwithstanding this, the BAC was advised in March 2012 that implementation of the ANAO recommendation had been completed. In October 2014, the AEC commented to ANAO that:

> The inadequate reporting to the BAC reflects the diverse and complicated elements that form the AEC's overall election workforce planning processes. At the time of the AEC's reporting to the BAC in August 2011, the comments noted in the ANAO report may have reflected planning components, including improvements to online recruitment and training systems made immediately after the 2010 federal election, and the intention to build on those modernised approaches going forward.

Current situation

3.14   At the time of this current performance audit, a temporary election workforce plan had not been developed. Instead, the AEC has retained a focus on operational (rather than strategic) matters as reflected in its response to a request from ANAO for advice about the development of a national workforce plan for the 2013 election. Specifically, the AEC advised ANAO that:

> The staffing estimates in ELMS *[Election Management System]* and AECE [*AEC Employment system]* continue to provide the AEC's operational workforce plan (3 years out from next event). The system now provides rich and robust data for two federal events for doing such planning.

3.15   The estimation of staffing requirements for an election event is not a substitute for strategic workforce planning. Rather, the AEC's staffing forecast process is an operational imperative that can also contribute to the first part of workforce planning—identifying staffing needs. However, it does not, for example:

- identify the nature and key characteristics of the workforce the AEC is aiming to employ so as to efficiently and effectively deliver future election events. For example, notwithstanding that the organisation has recognised the benefits that come from employing people with previous election experience, and advice to ANAO in the context of the earlier

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

60

audit that some two-thirds of staff at any election event will have experience of at least one previous event, there are no targets for the proportion of the election workforce that the AEC is targeting to have recent, relevant election experience. Just over half of the employees at the 2010 and 2013 elections had worked at the previous election[47]; and

- encourage the organisation to focus on opportunities to improve upon past approaches. For example, the number and location of static polling places in the context of the trend away from people voting in person on election Saturday (as discussed in the prior chapter) is a matter that would have beneficially been addressed in a workforce planning context given the considerable potential benefits to the organisation in terms of reducing the number of polling place staff that would have needed to be recruited and trained for the 2013 election.

3.16   One consequence of the absence of a workforce plan was that the composition of the AEC's 2013 election workforce was largely unchanged from the 2007 election. This meant that significant issues remained unaddressed. For example, ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 outlined that the 2007 election workforce was, on average, older than Australia's part-time workforce. Notwithstanding that two elections had been held since attention was first drawn to the age of the election workforce, the AEC's submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election did not identify that strategies had already been developed but, rather:

> ... an aging workforce is an issue the AEC may need to address in coming years as part of workforce planning.

3.17   In October 2014, the AEC commented to ANAO that:

> The AEC will work to consolidate its approach in this important area and develop a workforce plan in advance of the expected timing of the next federal election.

Conclusion

3.18   In response to ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, following each of the 2010 and 2013 elections the AEC analysed the composition and key characteristics of the temporary employees it appointed. This analysis was

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47   See further at paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

61

included in the organisation's submissions to JSCEM inquiries into the conduct of each election, and highlighted the scale of the AEC's recruitment and training task. It could also have been used as a key consideration in developing a workforce plan for the AEC's temporary election workforce, noting that the AEC had agreed to an ANAO recommendation that it improve its workforce planning by critically examining its future temporary election workforce needs and composition.[48] Instead, the AEC focused on operational workforce matters, particularly in relation to the recruitment and training of election officials. This has resulted in the AEC missing opportunities, for example, to:

- adopt more efficient resourcing approaches in relation to static polling places that could have significantly reduced the number of election officials that needed to be recruited and trained;

- obtain benefits from increasing the retention rates for election officials, particularly senior election officials; and

- address risks to the delivery of future elections (such as the age of the election workforce).

3.19 In the context of the AEC's operating environment, workforce planning and the resulting plan for the retention, recruitment and training of a large number of temporary election officials could be expected to:

- cover a period of three to five years and be aligned to the election cycle;

- focus on the composition of the existing workforce and examine high-level trends that may affect future workforce availability;

- describe emerging workforce issues and strategies for managing these; and

- outline a suite of workforce strategies designed to support the recruitment, retention and training of a diverse election ready workforce for future elections.

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48   Initially, the AEC advised its audit committee that part of its response to one of the recommendations in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 would be the development of a temporary election workforce plan. This approach was consistent with the relevant ANAO recommendation but the AEC recorded its implementation of the recommendation as complete without a workforce plan having been developed.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

62

Recommendation No.2

3.20 To better position the organisation to efficiently and effectively deliver future election events, ANAO recommends that the AEC:

(a) develop a workforce plan for its temporary election workforce well in advance of the expected timing of the next election;

(b) periodically update this plan; and

(c) actively monitor, at a National Office level, the implementation of the strategies included in the plan, and evaluate their effectiveness.

AEC response: *Agreed*

3.21 *The AEC acknowledges that enhancing many elements of election workforce planning that it already undertakes is likely to complement the current work underway to modernise its capacity to engage a temporary workforce at each election (noting the difficulties inherent in planning for a temporary workforce of more than 70 000 employees engaged only once every three years on an unknown date). The AEC will consolidate its approach in this important area and develop an election workforce plan in advance of the expected timing of the next federal election, noting there will be elements that will be implemented in a staged approach over several electoral cycles.*

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

63

4. Recruiting Election Officials

This chapter examines whether the AEC has strengthened its recruitment of election officials in order that suitable persons were recruited in a timely manner for the 2013 election, with priority given to senior polling roles.

Introduction

4.1   A large, well-trained workforce is required for each Federal election. ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 outlined that obtaining sufficient suitable staff was one of the main challenges facing the AEC in the lead-up to the 2007 election. In this respect, a key finding was that in the last week before election day, the AEC was still to recruit, appoint and train more than 10 per cent of the final number of election officials, including 280 polling place OICs. This meant that a significant number of election officials were appointed with little time in which they could be trained, and for the AEC to be confident that they were competent in exercising their assigned duties.

4.2   Against this background, two of the recommendations made in Audit Report No.28 2009–10 addressed recruitment of people to fill polling positions, as well as the setting of goals in relation to the retention (and training) of election officials.[49] The BAC had been advised that implementation action in respect to these recommendations had been completed by March 2012. In this context, ANAO analysed whether the AEC employed approaches that allowed it to recruit, in a timely manner, persons that could reasonably be expected to effectively perform their assigned roles (with adequate training and supervision). ANAO also examined the AEC's performance in reducing turnover in the election workforce, and any goals or targets that have been set in this respect.

Australian Electoral Commission's recruitment approach

4.3   In support of the 2013 election, the AEC recruited 73 434 people to fill 82 559 election related roles. To establish a pool of people assessed as suitable for temporary employment during a federal election and to fill expected vacancies,

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49   Specifically: Recommendation No. 5(a) related to workforce planning, including the setting of goals for the training and retention of election officials; Recommendation No. 5(b) related to strengthening of national employment strategies for the recruitment of key election officials; and Recommendation No.6(a) involved the AEC increasing the priority given to the recruitment of OICs.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

64

the AEC has implemented a continuous recruitment model, supplemented by targeted recruitment activities to engage with selected sections of the community.

Retention of people with previous election experience

4.4   The retention of people with past election experience is valuable in maintaining the skills base of the election workforce, and is particularly important for senior roles. In this context, ANAO's survey of a sample of the AEC's temporary election workforce for the 2013 election identified that overall satisfaction with the AEC is high, with 93 per cent of respondents indicating they would be prepared to work for the AEC at future election events.[50] A similar trend was evident in the responses from people who had worked in OIC or equivalent pre-poll and mobile-polling roles with 93 per cent of people also interested in future employment with the AEC.

4.5   However, indications of high satisfaction with the AEC have not been reflected in low turnover between election events. In this respect, in the context of ANAO's earlier audit of the conduct of the 2007 election, the AEC advised ANAO that there was a drop-out rate of 30–50 per cent of election officials between elections. Similarly, for the 2010 election 51.5 per cent of election officials recruited had indicated to the AEC they had had previous election experience, with 45.7 per cent employed by the AEC at the 2007 election.

4.6   There was only moderate improvement in relation to the retention of people with previous experience for the 2013 election. Specifically, 52.9 per cent of election officials recruited indicated that they had previous election experience, with 47.2 per cent employed by the AEC at the 2010 election. In this context, ANAO analysis was that, for the 2013 election, people filling more senior roles were more likely to have worked for the AEC at the 2010 election, with 77 per cent of those employed as an OIC having worked at the 2010 election.

4.7   The reasons for turnover in the temporary election workforce are unclear, as the AEC has not routinely collected information about why people previously employed during an election may not wish to engage in future election events.

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50   The ANAO sampled a total of 8500 temporary election officials employed during the 2013 election, consisting of two sub populations. The first was 2500 people who filled an OIC or equivalent pre-poll or mobile polling role. The second was 6000 people who were in other polling roles. The overall response rate for the survey was 55 per cent.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

65

Collecting this information may provide the AEC with insights into why a person may not wish to engage in future election events, what the person liked or disliked about their temporary employment with the AEC, and areas they feel could be improved. There would also be benefit in the AEC developing strategies and, as previously recommended by ANAO, setting goals/targets, for the retention of election officials (with particular emphasis given to more senior polling roles). In October 2014, the AEC advised ANAO that:

> While the AEC has not set targets for the proportion of the election workforce to be re-engaged, it acknowledges that the strategies to facilitate increased levels of re-engagement are likely to be an important component of future workforce planning.

Promotion of employment opportunities

4.8 Temporary election official turnover between the 2010 and 2013 election events was 54 per cent for election official roles and 33 per cent for the roles of OIC.

4.9 The AEC's approach to continuous recruitment allows interested persons to record a registration of interest for temporary employment at any time between elections. The AEC advised ANAO that it promotes temporary employment opportunities through various means, including:

- online advertising on its own and job services websites;

- advertising in the media and selected publications such as senior magazines, NRMA magazines and industry specific publications;

- displaying posters in libraries, at TAFEs and universities; and

- attendance at careers expos, university events, cultural events and schools.

4.10 As part of the survey of election officials, ANAO asked people to advise how they found out about temporary employment opportunities with the AEC. The most frequent response was friends and family at 34 per cent followed by contacted by AEC at 23 per cent of respondents, as shown in Figure 4.1.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

66

Figure 4.1: **ANAO survey—how people found out about temporary employment opportunities with the Australian Electoral Commission**
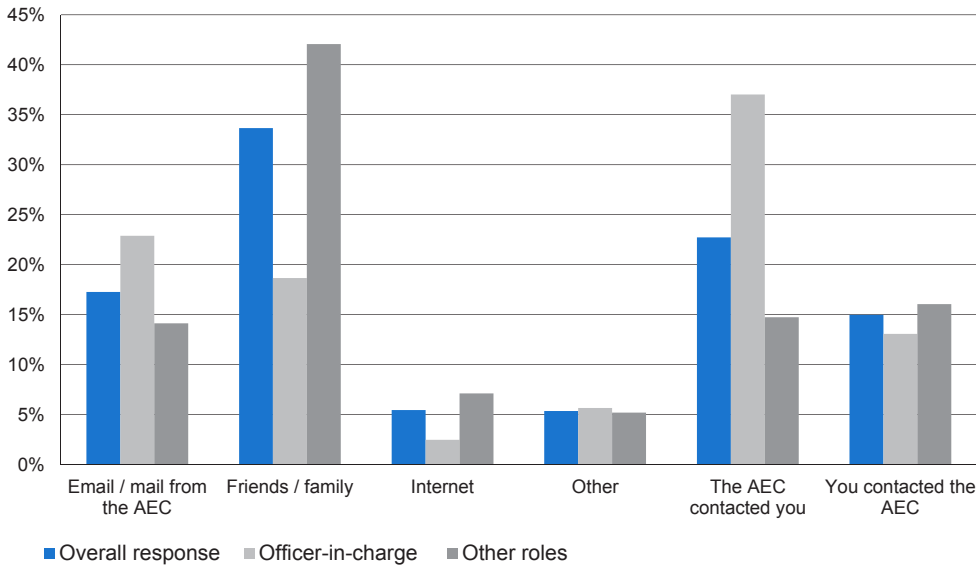
Source: ANAO analysis of AEC data.

4.11 The survey responses also indicate that the AEC's efforts to recruit people through community events, and university employment services and other university activities are yielding minimal results. Less than one per cent of survey respondents advised that they found out about temporary employment opportunities with the AEC through these mechanisms. Rather, the majority (72 per cent) of respondents under the age of 25 nominated friends and family as their main source of this information.

4.12 Indigenous Australians, and people from a non-English speaking background also answered friends and family as the most frequent response, although the frequencies were lower at 40 and 36 per cent respectively. This situation indicates that, in designing engagement strategies, there would be benefits in the AEC using a wider range of communication mechanisms to engage with and reach people who may be interested in joining the temporary election workforce.

4.13 The reason that people choose to work for the AEC also provides an insight into the nature of the AEC's temporary election workforce and may assist in guiding the AEC's future recruitment efforts. The most frequent response was that people had previously worked for the AEC at 60 per cent

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

67

followed by a close grouping of three other characteristics—remuneration, community service and interest in the political process. Respondents who nominated remuneration as a motivation for working for the AEC during the 2013 election were most frequently students or people who were unemployed. Students also frequently nominated interest in the political process as a motivator.

Registrations of interest

4.14   A key aspect of the AEC's continuous recruitment approach is the registration of interest process. AEC advised in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 that it was "developing an 'Online Recruitment System' (ORS) that will provide a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the selection, recruitment, training and evaluation of polling staff". The system has been designed to allow people to register their interest in working with the AEC via an online interface. These details are captured in the AEC Employment system, introduced prior to the 2010 election, and are to be used by the DROs in assessing an applicant's suitability.

Maintaining contact with persons interested in working as election officials

4.15   The AEC maintains contact with people who have an active registration of interest recorded in AEC Employment. Periodically, people are requested to update and/or confirm the accuracy of their details as recorded in AEC Employment including updating their contact details, confirming their ongoing interest in temporary employment with the AEC and their availability. This is now a largely online process, following enhancements to AEC Employment after the 2010 election.

4.16   In November and December 2011, the AEC commenced the first 'soft contact' mail-out where people who had an active registration of interest in AEC Employment were encouraged to update their details by accessing their online account through the AEC's website. A second mail-out was undertaken between February and April 2013. AEC advised ANAO that applicants that were not registered for online access were contacted by mail or telephone and asked if they would like to be given online access to maintain their own details. Information can also be updated by interested people completing and returning to the AEC a hard copy registration of interest form.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

68

Assessment of registrations of interest

4.17   As at 5 August 2013, 130 757 people had a registration of interest recorded in AEC Employment. The AEC's Temporary Employee Staffing Policy of January 2012 (page 5) required that registrations of interest be assessed and that:

> [o]nly those persons who meet the selection criteria should be considered suitable for temporary employment.

The AEC's Election procedures manual for the 2013 election similarly stated:

> [p]olling officials and temporary office staff should be recruited from persons who, on the basis of their ROIs, have been assessed as suitable for employment. … [and that] selection should always be based on merit.

4.18   ANAO analysis identified that, of the 130 757 people who had an active registration of interest recorded in AEC Employment as at the date of the issue of the writ for the 2013 election, 38 958 (29.8 per cent) had not, according to AEC Employment, been assessed for suitability for employment as election officials. Consequently, under the relevant AEC policies, there was an available pool of only 91 799 potential temporary employees to fill the 82 559 temporary roles at the time the writ was issued for the 2013 election. Between the issue of the writ and election day, an additional 30 134 registrations of interest were recorded in AEC Employment. Of these late registrations, only 5370 (17.8 per cent) had a record in AEC Employment of having been assessed.

4.19   The AEC did not restrict the employment of election roles to people identified in AEC Employment as having been assessed as suitable for employment. In aggregate, 68 834 people were employed for the 2013 election to fill 72 224 election roles. Of these roles, 34 per cent were filled by people for whom there was no record in AEC Employment of them having been assessed for suitability. In relation to election day roles:

- 53 397 roles were filled by people recruited before the issue of the writ, of whom 78 per cent were assessed for suitability for employment; and

- 14 546 roles were filled by people recruited after the issue of the writ, of whom only 21 per cent were assessed for suitability for employment.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

69

4.20 Also of note was that overall the AEC's performance in relation to appointing people that had been assessed for suitability declined between the 2010[51] and 2013 elections.

Offers of employment

4.21 The appointment of potential election officials is a key part of staffing polling facilities, whether PPVCs, mobile teams or static polling places. The AEC makes offers of employment to potential election officials, but until such time as the offer has been accepted and processed in AEC Employment, the role remains effectively vacant. ANAO examined both the timing of offers of employment and the confirmation of offers of employment. This analysis focused on static polling place election day roles.

4.22 In 2010 and 2013 respectively the AEC made 60 and 70 per cent of offers of employment within the first two weeks of the issue of the writ for the elections. By four weeks after the issue of writ for the elections, the AEC had made 89 per cent of offers in 2010 and 91 per cent of offers in 2013. Consequently, this left the AEC to make 7175 offers of employment in the last six days prior to the 2010 election and 5882 offers of employment in the last six days prior to the 2013 election.

4.23 For both elections, the bulk of late offers of employment for election day roles related to the role of polling assistant, a role with a minimal training requirement. However, as shown in Table 4.1, in 2010 offers were made to fill 217 OIC roles in the last six days prior to the election, on election day or after the election, with the number of late offers increasing to 430 when the other senior roles of polling place liaison officer (PPLO) and second-in-charge (2IC) are included. The results for 2013 showed improvement, with 100 late offers made for OIC roles and 376 offers made in total for senior roles in the last six days prior to the election, on election day or after the election.

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51   In 2010, 17 per cent of people did not have a record in AEC employment of having been assessed for suitability.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

70

Table 4.1: **Offers of employment—2010 and 2013 election day roles**

Roles	Within four weeks of writ being issued	Two to five days prior to the election	Day before election day	On election day	After election day
2010 election					
Officer-in-charge	7654	139	45	4	29
Secondary level senior	4525	134	40	7	32
Standard	43 156	4748	1129	221	647
Total	55 335	5021	1214	232	708
Per cent	88.52	8.03	1.94	0.37	1.13
2013 election					
Officer-in-charge	7794	75	15	2	8
Secondary level senior	4950	208	38	10	20
Standard	48 268	4566	971	327	388
Total	61 012	4325	911	299	347
Per cent	91.21	6.47	1.36	0.45	0.52

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

4.24   Analysis of confirmed offers in AEC Employment showed that there was some delay between offers of employment being made and the acceptance and confirmation of those offers in AEC Employment, but that the situation improved between the 2010 and 2013 elections.[52] By the end of the fourth week after the issue of the writ for the election in 2010, 83 per cent of offers had been confirmed with 88 per cent of offers confirmed in 2013 within the same period. Nevertheless, in the last six days prior to election day in 2013; the AEC was still to confirm the appointment of election officials to fill 7786 election day roles. The majority of these roles (4803, or nearly 62 per cent) were polling assistant roles, but there were also 186 OIC roles still to be confirmed.

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52   In relation to the 2013 election, 55 per cent of offers were confirmed in AEC Employment in the first two weeks following the writ being issued for the election. This was higher than for the 2010 election, where only 30 per cent of offers were confirmed in AEC Employment in first two weeks.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

71

Timeliness of recruitment

4.25   The AEC's recruitment of temporary employees to work on polling day for the 2013 election was significantly more timely than had occurred in relation to the 2007 election. Specifically, as illustrated by Table 4.2 (on page 73), more than 78 per cent of election day roles were filled by people registered for temporary employment with the AEC prior to the issuing of the writ.

4.26   Nevertheless, late and emergency recruitment continued to prove necessary, with 416 election day roles filled by people with a record of having been recruited either the day before the election, on election day or the day after. As noted in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, for people recruited close to election day, the AEC has limited time in which to assess their suitability, and deliver the required training. Of the 416 election day roles filled by people recruited either the day before the election, on election day or after election day, 43 of these roles required the person filling the role to complete home-based or face-to-face training.

4.27   In this context, more than 90 per cent of respondents to the ANAO's survey indicated that they considered that they had sufficient time to complete the required training. The exception was face-to-face training where 16 per cent of respondents would have preferred more time to complete the training. The groups who would have preferred more time to complete the face-to-face training were students, Indigenous Australians and people from a non-English speaking background. These were also the groups of people who tended not to have previous election experience.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

72

Table 4.2: **Recruitment following issue of the writ for the 2013 election—election day roles**

Role	Prior to issue of writ	Within two weeks of issue of writ	Within four weeks of issue of writ	Within two to five days of the election	Day before the election	Election day	After election day
Officer-in-charge	7222	218	93	9	0	0	1
Officer-in-charge Interstate Voting Centre	321	16	11	1	2	0	0
Second-in-charge	3979	185	73	11	1	0	1
Polling Place Liaison Officer	814	15	6	2	0	0	1
Declaration Vote Issuing Officer	10764	1248	896	136	23	1	5
Inquiry Officer	1464	164	151	28	7	1	0
Issuing Officer Interstate Voting Centre	833	105	69	25	4	0	2
Part Day Polling Assistant	1167	260	264	165	30	6	12
Polling Assistant	24656	4388	3718	1054	172	12	54
Scrutiny Assistant	812	271	337	240	26	12	11
Voter Information Officer	176	46	52	13	10	4	18
Total	52 208	6916	5670	1684	275	36	105
Progressive total	52 208	59 124	64 794	66 478	66 753	66 789	66 894
Per cent	78.05	10.34	8.48	2.52	0.41	0.05	0.16
Progressive per cent of total	78.05	88.38	96.86	99.38	99.79	99.84	100.00

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

Senior election officials

4.28   The roles of OIC and 2IC are key roles where having experienced, well-trained officials is of considerable benefit. During the 2007 election, the AEC filled almost 13 000 OIC and 2IC positions. At that time the recruitment of senior election officials was conducted in essentially the same way and at the

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

73

same time as for other staff. Consistent with ANAO's earlier recommendation, it has been evident that greater priority has been given to the earlier recruitment of OICs (as shown in Table 4.2 above and Figure 4.2 below). For example, within the last week prior to the 2007 election, the AEC was to appoint and train people to fill 280 election day OIC roles. By way of comparison, for the 2013 election:

- the AEC had recruited people to fill all but 13 election day OIC roles within four weeks of the election being announced; and

- overall, more than 95 per cent of election day OICs had been recruited by the AEC prior the 2013 election being announced.

Figure 4.2: **Timing of recruitment for senior election roles— 2013 election**

	OIC 1-3 issuing points	OIC 4-6 issuing points	OIC 7-10 issuing points	OIC 11+ issuing points	OIC interstate voting centre	PPLO	2IC
Last week including post-election	6	2	2	0	3	3	13
Within 4 weeks of issue of writ	157	102	46	6	27	21	258
Prior to issue of writ	2591	2312	1934	385	321	814	3979

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

74

Conclusion

4.29   For the 2013 election, 68 834 people were employed to fill 72 224 election roles.[53] The AEC's recruitment of temporary employees to work on polling day for the 2013 election was significantly more timely than had been observed by ANAO in relation to the 2007 election. The AEC was particularly successful at prioritising the recruitment of senior election officials, with 95 per cent of OICs to work on election day having been recruited prior to the 2013 election being announced, and a further 4.8 per cent recruited within four weeks of the writ being issued.

4.30   The AEC has been less successful in reducing the turnover in temporary election employees, with only a slight improvement between the 2010 and 2013 elections. There would be benefit in the AEC seeking to understand the reasons for continuing high turnover in the temporary election workforce and developing strategies that will enable it to reduce the turnover at future elections (with particular emphasis given to more senior polling roles) in the context of a temporary election workforce plan (as discussed in Chapter 3 of this report).

4.31   A key aspect of the AEC's recruitment policies and procedures is that persons interested in working at an election be assessed as to their suitability. However, for the 2013 election, 34 per cent of election roles were filled by people for whom there was no record in AEC Employment of them having been assessed for suitability.

Recommendation No.3

4.32   To further improve the recruitment of election officials, ANAO recommends that the AEC implement appropriate controls that ensure persons interested in working in election roles have been assessed as suitable before any offer of employment is made.

AEC response: *Agreed*

4.33   *The AEC's current policy is that assessment of persons interested in temporary election employment be carried out before an offer of employment is made. The AEC will apply strict management controls to ensure that appropriate compliance with this policy supports election preparedness and identification of suitable staff. The AEC continues to explore improvements to its election recruitment and assessment processes.*

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53   With the inclusion of temporary assistants, and trainer polling staff, the AEC employed 73 434 people to fill 82 559 roles.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

75

5. Training Election Officials

This chapter analyses the extent to which election officials were trained prior to the 2013 election, and how useful participants found their training.

Introduction

5.1　The conclusions of ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10 included that the AEC had experienced difficulties in training election officials to a suitable standard. In this context, three parts of the recommendations made by ANAO referred to improved training of temporary election employees.[54] In terms of training, those recommendations referred to the setting of goals for the training of election officials, and election officials and OICs being adequately trained. By March 2012, the AEC had advised its BAC that implementation of these recommendations had been fully completed. However:

- the BAC was not informed what, if any, specific training goals had been set; and

- an assessment of the adequacy of staff training in the context of ANAO's earlier recommendations could not have been undertaken as of March 2012, given implementation of the recommendations did not commence prior to the 2010 election and training for the 2013 election had not yet been delivered.[55]

5.2　Training is delivered to the AEC's temporary workforce through three main methods and ANAO:

- analysed the extent to which it was evident that election officials had completed the required training; and

- surveyed a sample of election officials to gauge their satisfaction with the training they received.

54　Namely, Recommendation Nos. 5(a), 5(b) and 6(a).

55　In this latter respect, in the context of the current JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election, the AEC has referred to 'failures' in the effectiveness of its training in a number of respects and advised the Committee that it had: 'embarked on...the largest review of learning and development in the AEC's history. This covers the content and delivery of training to both permanent and temporary staff.' In October 2014, the AEC advised ANAO that it 'agrees that it had narrowly interpreted the recommendation when it reported its completion to the BAC'.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

76

Training requirements

5.3   The training of election officials is a key part of the election process, given the large number of people recruited to assist with the conduct of each Federal election. As outlined at paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6, around half of election officials engaged by the AEC will have worked at the previous Federal election (but not always in the same role). Nevertheless, given changes that occur between elections in relation to policies and procedures, it is important that all election officials, including those returning to work in the same role as they had at the previous election, receive sufficient and appropriate training.

5.4   In this context, minimum training requirements have been established by the AEC for each election official role. Implicit in this approach is a goal (or target) that persons employed in particular roles will complete all required training for that role.[56]

5.5   In this context, election official training for the 2013 election was separated into categories depending on the nature of the role (senior or standard roles) and polling type, namely, static polling, pre-poll voting, mobile polling and remote mobile polling. Roles classified by the AEC as senior include static and pre-poll OICs, 2IC, PPLO and remote mobile team leaders.

5.6   The AEC modified its training approach following the 2010 election in response to feedback from election officials and other staff. Some of the major changes included:

- content updates to reflect changed legislative or procedural requirements;

- improved user interface and experience in completing online training; and

- reductions in online training content with an increasing focus on face-to-face training sessions.

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56   For example, the Election Procedures Manual for divisional offices for the 2013 election stated that 'we must be able to assure ourselves that election officials have the skills and knowledge required to effectively perform their allocated job'.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

77

Election Procedures Handbook and DVD

5.7 The AEC produces nine role based versions of the Election Procedures Handbook for distribution to all election officials. Election Procedures Handbooks cover administrative and operational requirements; emergency and security procedures; workplace health and safety requirements; and other general information relevant to election officials. The divisions are responsible for their distribution, with the Handbooks to be provided to election officials after accepting an offer of temporary employment. A full copy of the Handbook is also to be provided to each polling location. A supplementary training DVD is to be sent to each election official with their Handbook. The DVD is designed to give election officials an insight into what to expect when working during an election and to demonstrate correct polling procedures and processes.

5.8 In surveying 8500 election officials, ANAO explored whether election officials: received the Handbook; read the Handbook; and the Handbook was considered to be useful in preparing them for their role. Of the survey respondents:

• 95 per cent recalled receiving a copy of the Handbook, with most respondents receiving the Handbook between two and four weeks in advance of the election; and

• satisfaction with the Handbook was strongly positive, with 93 per cent of respondents being very satisfied or satisfied that the Handbook helped them to prepare to perform their assigned role.

Home-based training

5.9 For the 2010 election, the AEC introduced home-based online training.[57] Home-based training is required to be completed by all election officials except ordinary issuing officers, ballot box guards and queue controllers.

5.10 The home-based training focuses on the processes staff need to understand during the election and incorporates an assessment process of election official's knowledge. The AEC's guidelines state that the assessments are 'designed to test that election officials know the most important processes

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57 Election officials who do not provide an email address, or whom indicate a preference for off-line training, are to be forwarded a printed training workbook.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

78

required to do their job'. The guidelines also state that election officials who do not pass the assessments should not be employed until they can prove their competency to the relevant DRO. Completion of online training is able to be monitored by the AEC through the Election Training System, while home-based workbooks were to be returned to the divisional offices for assessment. Prior to the Griffith by-election held on 8 February 2014, the AEC did not maintain a centralised record of the home-based training completions.

5.11 Respondents to the ANAO's survey were generally satisfied with the home-based training, whether completed online or offline. The survey results highlight that 90 per cent of respondents found the home-based training useful for preparing them for their role. Based on the survey results, the AEC may find benefit in making the training more role specific, and providing advice about where to source additional information when required.

Completion of home-based training

5.12 The implementation of online modalities for the delivery of home-based training since the 2010 election has enhanced the AEC's ability to monitor the completion of this aspect of training. During the 2013 election, 32 855 election roles were required to complete home-based training.

5.13 In respect to training completion, the AEC's primary submission to JSCEM's inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election stated that:

> 26 025, or 80.9 per cent, of senior polling officials completed the required training on-line. The remaining 6 159, or 19.1 per cent, completed manual workbooks with divisional staff monitoring completion.

5.14 The reporting of these results in this manner was not supported by data held by AEC National Office, and ran the risk of misleading the Committee. Specifically, the 6159 election officials reported as having completed manual workbooks with divisional staff monitoring completion, have a status in the AEC's Election Training System of 'in progress'. In progress is defined by the AEC as:

> The learner has partially completed the training—as they are not at the 'Completed' status no result has been achieved.

5.15 ANAO analysed records in the Election Training System of the completion by all required election officials of online home-based training (see Table 5.1). The data revealed that online home-based training was completed by people filling 80 per cent of election roles with a training

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

79

requirement. It also showed that there was a large proportion of people where the required training had:

- only been partially completed—1640 people (5 per cent);

- not been assigned to the training in the Election Training System— 926 people (nearly 3 per cent), including 354 senior roles (mobile team leaders, pre-poll OIC/2IC and static polling places OIC/2IC/PPLO); and

- not been completed—3992 people (more than 12 per cent).

Table 5.1: **Completion of home-based training by election officials— roles where training was required**

Roles	Completed	Partial completion	No record of completion	No record of being assigned to training	Total
Declaration Vote Issuing Officer	11 824	653	2014	397	14 888
Mobile Team Leader	335	25	76	21	457
Mobile Team Member	421	28	112	31	592
OIC/2IC/PPLO	10 612	510	1196	313	12 631
Pre-poll Issuing Officer	2460	301	479	141	3381
Pre-poll OIC	608	119	99	20	846
Remote Mobile Team Leader	30	2	11		43
Remote Mobile Team Member	7	2	5	3	17
Total	26 297	1640	3992	926	32 855
Per cent	80.0	5.0	12.2	2.8	100.0

Source: ANAO analysis of Election Training System data.

Static polling place officers-in-charge

5.16 In relation to the key role of static polling day OIC, the recorded completion rate for home-based training was 85 per cent, slightly above the overall recorded completion rate across all roles. However, as outlined in Table 5.2, this meant that, for this important position:

- there was no record of all required home-based training being completed by the election officials filling 1115 of these roles;

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

80

- 870 of these roles were filled by people where there is no record of completion of any of the required home-based training; and

- 185 of these roles were filled by people who were not assigned to the required home-based training in the Election Training System.

Table 5.2: **Completion of home-based training by role—static polling place officers-in-charge**

Roles	Completed	Partial completion	No record of completion	No record of being assigned to training	Total
OIC 1–3 issuing points	2278	88	278	110	2754
OIC 4–6 issuing points	2075	82	205	54	2416
OIC 7–10 issuing points	1734	62	168	18	1982
OIC 11+ issuing points	341	13	34	3	391
Total	6428	245	685	185	7543
Per cent	85.2	3.3	9.1	2.5	100.0

Source: ANAO analysis of Election Training System data.

5.17   Accordingly, there were a significant number of votes received at static polling places for the 2013 election where the AEC held no central records providing assurance that home-based training had been assigned to, and fully completed by, the relevant OIC. This meant that more than 1.2 million votes were received at 1141 static polling places for the 2013 election, where the AEC had no central records of the responsible OIC having completed all elements of the required home-based training.

Pre-poll voting centre officials

5.18   In its primary submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the conduct of the 2013 election, the AEC advised that:

> In preparation for the 2013 election the AEC implemented the recommendations from the Gray Report by increasing the training to be provided to pre-poll officers and ensuring that all pre-poll staff received training.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

81

5.19   However, it was not demonstrably the case that all pre-poll officers had undertaken the required home-based training. Specifically, as outlined in Table 5.1 above:

- 28 per cent of senior pre-poll officers (OIC/2IC) were not recorded in the Election Training System as having completed the required home-based training; and

- 27 per cent of pre-poll issuing officers were not recorded as having completed the required home-based training.

Face-to-face training

5.20   Face-to-face training sessions are conducted for senior polling place roles and aim to provide additional information, particularly about areas of high risk or changes in procedure. The face-to-face training sessions are mostly delivered by the DROs and can be customised to meet local training needs.

5.21   To support the delivery of face-to-face training, the AEC National Office developed a facilitator handbook, PowerPoint slides and trainee handouts. The content of the training material is extensive, and the AEC encourages its DROs to carefully plan the face-to-face training sessions to make greatest use of the available time.

5.22   Of the 2583 survey respondents who informed ANAO that they completed the face-to-face training, 82 per cent were satisfied with the training. While still a generally positive result, the result is a marked reduction when compared to the level of satisfaction with the AEC's other training modalities. The results of the survey questions in relation to face-to-face training are summarised in Table 5.3. In comparison to the AEC's other training, respondents did not feel that the face-to-face training as clearly explained AEC election procedures and requirements, or that the training gave them a good understanding of their role and responsibilities.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

82

Table 5.3: **Survey respondent's assessment of face-to-face training**

Subject area	All respondents %	OIC %	Other respondents %
Sufficient time was provided prior to the 2013 election to complete the face-to-face training. (Strongly agree/agree)	84	83	85
The training was easy to understand. (Strongly agree/agree)	85	83	86
The training clearly explained AEC election procedures and requirements. (Strongly agree/agree)	82	80	83
The training gave people a good understanding of their role and responsibilities. (Strongly agree/agree)	81	81	82
The person delivering the training had good knowledge of the subject area. (Strongly agree/agree)	86	85	87
There was a reasonable opportunity to seek help with any aspect/area people were not sure about. (Strongly agree/agree)	84	84	84
Satisfaction with the training in helping people to prepare for their temporary employment role. (Strongly agree/agree)	82	81	84

Source: ANAO survey of election officials.

5.23 Participation in face-to-face training is mandatory for senior roles, but prior to the Griffith by-election in early 2014, records of attendance were held only by the divisions. In light of the Keelty report, the AEC implemented new business processes whereby completed records of attendance were required to be forwarded to the AEC National Office. This information has been subsequently entered into the Election Training System and transferred to a locally developed reporting tool (referred to as the Training Assurance Reporting Tool, TART).

Western Australian Senate election

5.24 The AEC implemented an interim training assurance process in response to the Keelty report. The training assurance process was designed to support the monitoring of training completions, specially, at a polling place level. The training assurance process was time consuming and labour intensive. Accordingly, the approach is unlikely to be feasible for a general election.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

83

5.25 Further, the approaches were not fully effective in ensuring all mandatory training requirements were met. In this respect, ANAO analysis of training completion data for the WA Senate election was that 273 election officials (9 per cent) did not complete all of the required training.[58] Overall, 49 election officials for the 2014 WA Senate election did not complete either the required home-based or face-to-face training, with only one of these officials having been exempted from the training.[59] This figure included three people employed to fill senior polling roles.[60]

5.26 In October 2014, the AEC advised ANAO that:

> The AEC will implement measures to increase compliance with the requirement to complete training prior to the commencement of employment. The AEC is currently out for tender to procure the services of expert providers to assist the redevelopment of election training and workplace support.

Conclusion

5.27 There are three main training methods employed by the AEC. In respect to these, ANAO analysis was that:

- the Election Procedures Handbook has been provided to election officials in a timely manner and the significant majority of election officials were satisfied that the Handbook helped them to prepare to perform their assigned role;

- people filling up to 20 per cent of election roles with a home-based training requirement[61] had not completed this training. This included a significant proportion of people employed to fill senior polling roles; and

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58   By way of comparison, AEC internal reporting for the 2014 Griffith by-election indicated that 100 per cent of election officials completed the required home-based and/or face-to-face training.

59   A Notice of Training Exemption is a document where the DROs acknowledge that a senior polling official has not completed the mandatory training, but believes the senior polling official has the skills, knowledge and attitude to be employed. The reasons why training could not be completed, what measures that will be taken to mitigate any risk of error are also to be detailed. The Notice of Training Exemption was introduced following the 2013 election.

60   ANAO analysis of the Keelty Implementation Team Extended (KITE) polling place inspection checklists for the 2014 WA Senate election also identified that three OICs did not complete the required training. Overall, there were eight documented training related issues raised by the KITE teams.

61   For the 2010 election, the AEC introduced home-based online training. Home-based training is required to be completed by all polling officials except ordinary issuing officers, ballot box guards and queue controllers. It focuses on the processes staff need to understand during the election, and incorporates an assessment process of polling official's knowledge.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

84

- the majority of election officials were satisfied with the face-to-face training sessions[62], but less satisfied than with the AEC's other training modalities. In particular, election officials did not feel that the face-to-face training clearly explained AEC election procedures and requirements, or that the training gave them a good understanding of their role and responsibilities.

Recommendation No.4

5.28   To be assured that people employed to fill election roles possess the knowledge and skills to perform their assigned duties, ANAO recommends that the AEC implement an efficient means of tracking the completion of its various training requirements in the lead up to future elections.

AEC response: *Agreed*

5.29   *As acknowledged in this ANAO report, the AEC has made interim changes to arrangements towards addressing this priority. The AEC is now in the process of implementing a new Learning Management System with a comprehensive means to assign learning requirements to individuals and track their progress being a key goal. This system will be designed to cater for different learning components or modes and provides reporting capacity to consolidate those components into a holistic view of learning completion.*

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62   This training is provided for senior polling place roles and aims to provide additional information, particularly about areas of high risk or changes in procedure.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

85

6.   Performance Assessment

This chapter examines the extent to which the AEC completed performance appraisals of election officials employed for the 2013 election.

Introduction

6.1   A performance rating process for election officials was introduced by the AEC in 1997. Under this process, election officials are to be assessed as meeting the required standard, being below it, or above it. The polling place OIC assesses other polling place staff, with DROs assessing the performance of each OIC and PPLO in their division.

6.2   As outlined in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10, the intention of the rating system was to measure the overall performance of election officials, especially those in key roles (such as OICs), with a view to assessing the effectiveness of election officials training and ensuring that offers of future employment are directed to election officials with proven records of performance. However, the findings of that audit included that:

- prior to the 2007 election, all performance ratings were set to 'meets required standard', regardless of the actual assessment entered after the 2004 general election in order that the AEC could re-employ people assessed to have not met the required standard at the prior election; and

- the recording of performance ratings was inconsistent and no reliable view could be formed of employee performance for the 2007 election.

6.3   Consequently, the second part of ANAO's sixth recommendation was that the AEC enhance recruitment and training processes by, after each election, completing performance appraisals for staff and recording these in the relevant systems. In March 2012, the AEC advised the BAC that the relevant recommendation had been fully implemented.

6.4   Implementation of the AEC's performance appraisal policy for election officials is delegated to around 8000 people filling the role of OIC and DROs for the 150 electoral divisions. In this context, ANAO examined the extent to which performance appraisals were recorded as having been undertaken following the 2010 and 2013 elections. ANAO also analysed those performance ratings that were allocated, and surveyed 8500 election officials as to their perspectives on the performance assessment process.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

86

Election officials awareness and understanding of the Australian Electoral Commission's performance appraisal policy

6.5   Performance assessment is an ongoing process which commences at the time of engagement of people to fill available positions. Fundamental to achieving a high standard of performance is people understanding their role and performance expectations. The AEC, through its registration of interest process, makes available to applicants for temporary employment, information about the conditions of employment with the AEC for a Federal election as well as general information about the various roles that support the conduct of a Federal election. This information may assist applicants with self-assessing their suitability for the various election related roles. Further information about the expected standards of performance in relation to each role is also available from the AEC website.

6.6   As previously discussed, following the issue of the writ for a Federal election, the AEC commences allocating people to election roles and recruiting additional election officials as required. In making offers of temporary employment the AEC outlines the general conditions of employment including hours of work, remuneration and the requirement to comply with the Australian Public Service Values and Code of Conduct. ANAO considers that there would also have been benefit in the AEC explicitly advising people that:

- performance standards are to be applied in assessing an individual's performance;

- an individual's performance will be assessed during their period of temporary employment; and

- the rating assigned may be used in determining suitability for employment at future federal elections.

6.7   The AEC advised ANAO that the letter of offer and temporary employment booklet provided to election officials makes available in '*general terms*' guidance about suitable performance and that employment history is retained for future use. In this context, ANAO explored election officials' understanding of their role and selected conditions of employment as part of a survey of 8500 election officials employed during the 2013 election. Of the respondents, 91 per cent advised that they were made aware of their responsibilities in undertaking their assigned role in advance of commencing

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

87

temporary employment with AEC. The level of awareness was higher for people filling the roles of OIC.

6.8   Of all survey respondents, 63 per cent answered that, in advance of accepting temporary employment with the AEC, they were made aware that their performance would be assessed and that the results would be recorded for future use in assessing their suitability for employment at further election events. This result was higher for OICs at 85 per cent and respondents with previous election experience at 70 per cent. Understanding of this condition of employment was lowest for respondents who were students, unemployed or of a non-English speaking background.

6.9   A key aspect of an effective performance assessment process is notifying employees of the agency's performance expectations. Election officials should be advised in advance of their engagement that their performance will be assessed and that the assessment may be used in determining suitability for future temporary employment opportunities. The survey results indicate that this condition of employment is not well understood across all groups of potential election officials, and should be more clearly articulated in letters of offer and/or the AEC employment booklet.

6.10   Where the AEC allocates a rating to a temporary election official, the AEC also has a general obligation to advise the person of the rating and to have a course of redress, where the person disagrees with the rating allocated. However, AEC policy in place at the time of the 2013 election specifically stated that 'temporary employees will not be advised of performance ratings'. The updated policy dated March 2014 is silent on whether election officials should be advised of the performance rating allocated, or made available on request[63], but the AEC advised ANAO in May 2014 that OICs are not required to report the rating allocated to other election officials.

6.11   The ANAO's survey of election officials indicates that understanding of performance assessment requirements is variable. In particular, notwithstanding the AEC's May 2014 advice to ANAO that temporary election employees were not required to be informed of their performance rating, 41 per cent of OICs that

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63   Assessing the performance of election officials was discussed at a meeting of the State and Territory Electoral Commissioners in September 2011. At that time it was acknowledged that there is 'concern that appointees are not always told that they will be assessed and what they will be assessed against in the letter of offer'. The participants of this meeting also agreed that 'assessments should be available to officials on request as a minimum'.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

88

responded to ANAO's survey outlined that they had advised the temporary officers they managed during the 2013 election of their performance rating.

Consistency in the application of the performance assessment process

6.12   Well-defined and clearly documented policies and procedures that are accessible to all relevant parties help to ensure consistency, transparency and accountability in administrative processes and decision making. Achieving consistency in process and decision-making is difficult given the size of the AEC temporary election workforce, and the number of OICs and DROs involved in assessing the performance of election officials.

6.13   To develop an understanding of how the AEC has implemented the performance appraisal policy for temporary election officials, ANAO examined guidance material provided to and the content of the online and face-to-face training delivered by the AEC to OICs and other senior election officials. ANAO also sought additional information from the AEC about the coverage of performance appraisal during face-to-face training delivered by DROs.

6.14   The OIC 2013 Election Procedures Handbook makes several references to monitoring staff during polling hours and performance appraisal requirements. This material included a prompt to remind OICs that, when completing the OIC return for the polling place, they are required to assess the performance of the staff and record a rating against each staff member using the supplied rating scale. However, the Handbook did not provide specific guidance about how to apply the ratings to each role or what characteristics would be an indicator of each level of performance.

6.15   Prior to attending face-to-face training, OICs are required to complete online training or an equivalent home-based training workbook. This training provides some further guidance by including a statement that 'if a rating of 3 is given a comment must be included to support the score. The comment is designed to allow divisional staff to make an informed decision regarding future employment'.

6.16   Face-to-face training is delivered by DROs. A Facilitator's Handbook, PowerPoint slides and trainee handouts are provided by the AEC National Office to assist with achieving consistency in messaging. The PowerPoint slides and trainee handouts cover in some detail the completion of the 'OIC

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

89

Return' and post polling procedures, but the performance appraisal of staff is not covered in these training materials. Consequently, there may be benefit in the AEC standardising messaging across its training material to provide assurance that all supervisory responsibilities of the OIC are sufficiently covered in either the home-based or face-to-face training.

6.17 Performance standards are published by the AEC on its website but these are not provided to the OICs as part of their training material. In this respect, when responding to ANAO's survey:

- 62 per cent of OICs stated that they were fully aware of the AEC's performance standards and a further 28 per cent advised that they were partially aware; and

- 48 per cent of all respondents advised that they were fully aware, with 29 per cent advising that they were partially aware.

6.18 Respondents stated that information on performance standards was most frequently provided as part of an AEC training package. This was the predominant response at 76 per cent, with very few respondents independently sourcing the performance standards.

Extent to which assessments are undertaken

6.19 The AEC's Performance Appraisal of Temporary Staff Policy dated December 2012[64], in place at the time of the 2013 election, stated that:

> the work performance of temporary employees is assessed at the end of a period of employment in an electoral event [and that] … a performance rating must be recorded for a temporary employee at the end of each employment period.

6.20 In this context, for the 2007 election, there was no reliable evidence as to the extent to which performance assessments were being undertaken. This was a consequence of the following administrative approach outlined in ANAO Audit Report No.28 2009–10:

> To save time in the week after polling day, at the time employment offers are accepted, AEC systems automatically assign each temporary employee with an 'initial' rating of 'Meets required standard'. At the end of the period of

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64   The policy was subsequently updated and reissued in March 2014.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections
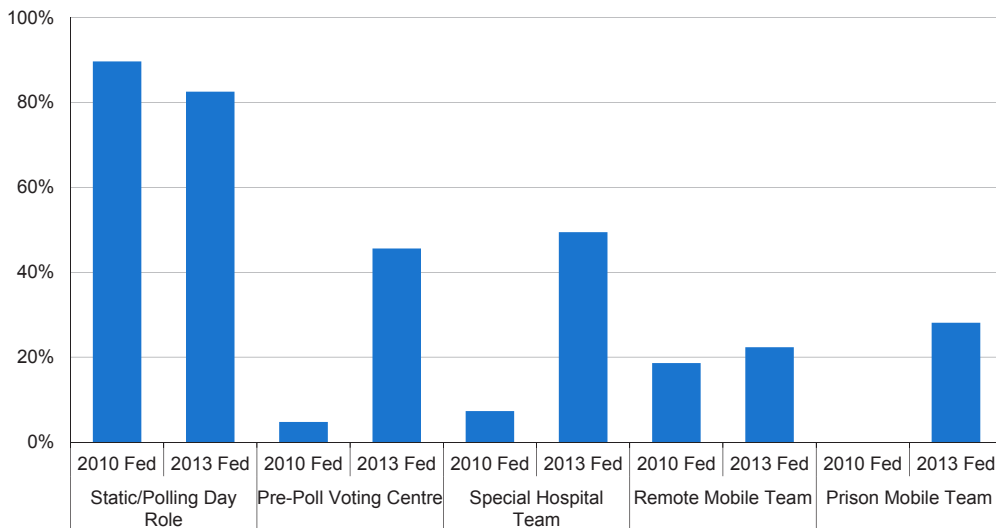
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temporary employment, only 'exception' ratings are required to be re-entered (that is, those employees rated as 'Above required standard' or 'Below required standard').

6.21   The AEC has improved upon this approach, such that system records now identify the extent to which performance assessments have been undertaken. In this respect, whilst AEC advice to the BAC suggested that, by May 2011, performance appraisals for election officials who worked during the 2010 election were completed and recorded in AEC Employment, this was not the case. Rather, ANAO analysis of March 2014 data revealed that:

- 13 per cent of roles at the 2010 election had no performance rating recorded; and

- 20 per cent of roles at the 2013 election had no performance rating recorded.

6.22   While the recording of performance ratings for election roles between the 2010 and 2013 elections deteriorated overall, an increase was evident in the number of ratings recorded for PPVCs and mobile polling facilities as illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1:   Percentage of performance ratings recorded in AEC Employment by polling centre/facility type

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

91

6.23 ANAO completed further analysis of AEC Employment data to identify any patterns or trends that may explain the reduction in the recording of performance ratings for election officials. Analysis by division identified that six divisions recorded ratings for all election officials in 2013, which was an increase from the 2010 election where no divisions recorded performance ratings in AEC Employment for all election officials. However, only 67 divisions recorded ratings for in excess of 90 per cent of election officials during the 2013 election, a reduction from 84 divisions in 2010. Around, one third of divisions recorded a performance rating for 95 per cent or more of temporary election officials for both the 2010 and 2013 elections.

6.24 In relation to the 2013 election, four divisions did not record any performance rating in AEC Employment against election roles, and collectively nine divisions recorded performance ratings for less than two per cent of election roles. Compliance with the requirement to record a performance rating for temporary officials was generally higher in 2010, although well below the AEC's expectation that a performance rating is recorded at the end of each employment period. In relation to the 2010 election, all divisions recorded performance ratings in AEC Employment against at least 64 per cent of election roles. The result for 2013 was significantly lower, with 14 divisions recording no performance rating or performance ratings against less than 50 per cent of election roles.

Officers-in-charge

6.25 One of the most significant decreases in the recording of performance ratings related to the key OIC role[65], as shown in Table 6.1. The recording by DROs of ratings for OICs decreased by 14 per cent between the 2010 and 2013 elections. Further analysis demonstrates that the recording of performance ratings for OICs of larger polling locations has remained largely constant at around 70 per cent, but the recording of performance rating for other static OIC roles has decreased by between 12 and 21 per cent to a level of between 46 and 60 per cent of these roles. By way of comparison, improvement was evident in relation to the recording of performance ratings for pre-poll OICs, which rose by 39 per cent, such around half of these roles had a rating recorded against them in respect to the 2013 election.

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65   For analysis purposes ANAO has grouped the roles of OIC, mobile polling team leader, PPVC OIC and interstate voting centres OIC and collectively referred to them as OIC roles. Where reference is made to election day OIC roles, the senior pre-poll and mobile polling roles have been excluded.
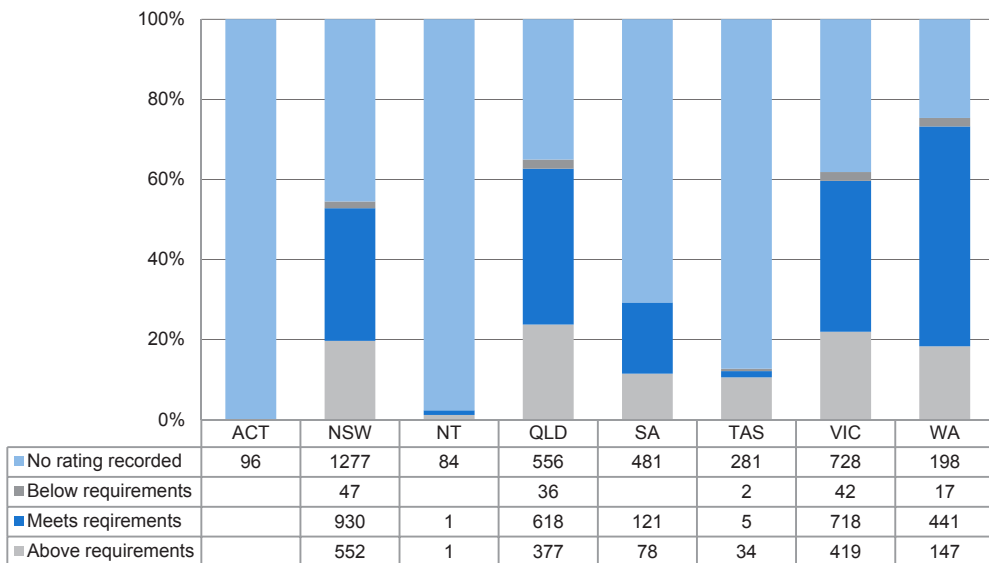
ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

92

Table 6.1: **Performance ratings allocated by classification—2010 and 2013 elections**

Role category	2010 %	2013 %	Change %
Officer-in-charge	69	56	-13
Secondary level	89	81	-8
Standard	88	83	-5
All roles	86	80	-6

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

Performance assessment results

6.26 Analysis by state and territory identified that there was significant variability in the recording of ratings in AEC Employment for the 2013 election. The Australian Capital Territory had not recorded any performance ratings in AEC Employment for any OIC role, the Northern Territory had recorded performance ratings against only two OIC roles from a total of 86 roles, while Tasmania had a performance rating recorded against 41 OIC roles, which equated to less than 13 per cent of these roles. This information is presented in summary form in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2: **Performance ratings recorded in AEC Employment for the role grouping of officers-in-charge**

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA
■ No rating recorded	96	1277	84	556	481	281	728	198
■ Below requirements		47		36		2	42	17
■ Meets reqirements		930	1	618	121	5	718	441
■ Above requirements		552	1	377	78	34	419	147

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

93

6.27   Figure 6.2 also illustrates that overall 54 per cent of OICs were allocated a rating for the 2013 election. Very few (3.1 per cent) OICs with a rating had been assessed as performing below the AEC's requirements. This situation is quite significant in that it stands in contrast to the extent to which the AEC has identified a need to improve the training of election officials.

6.28   In this respect, the information used to inform the performance assessments of OICs does not directly relate to performance of the allocated roles. For example, the AEC advised ANAO that DROs in allocating a performance rating to OICs rely on the quality of the 'OIC Return', feedback from PPLOs[66], complaints and comments received from voters and discussions with OICs during the election period. This information may identity OICs who are administratively effective, but provides limited insight into whether the person has demonstrated sound leadership, supervisory, communication and/or customer service skills; which are key attributes required for a role of this nature.

How performance ratings allocated influences future temporary employment opportunities

6.29   The AEC performance appraisal system is designed to support the assessment of suitability for employment at future election events. As a result, only employees rated as meeting the required standard or being above the required standard should be employed in an equivalent role at a subsequent federal election. ANAO examined how the AEC used performance ratings allocated during the 2010 election to inform employment decisions for the 2013 election.

6.30   The high rate of turnover between election events[67] diminishes the value of the AEC's performance appraisal system. Of the 66 894 static election day roles filled for the 2013 election, 31 472 people (47 per cent) filling these roles worked during the 2010 election and, of these people, 28 059 (89.2 per cent) had a performance rating allocated.

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66   PPLOs are appointed to act with the authority of the DROs and visit polling places on election day to observe and advise on proceedings. However, not all polling places are visited by a PPLO on election day.

67   ANAO analysis of AEC data was that temporary election official turnover between the 2010 and 2013 election events was 54 per cent for election official roles and 33 per cent for the OIC roles. Collectively for the senior roles of OIC, 2IC and PPLO, turnover was 24 per cent.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

94

6.31 The usefulness of the performance appraisal system is further constrained when the number of people filling equivalent roles between election events is considered. As shown in Table 6.2 in 2013, 22 193 election roles were filled by the same person or a person with equivalent previous experience during the 2010 election. This equates to around 30 per cent of roles being filled by either the same person or a person who previously worked in an equivalent role. Of these 21 639 people, only 71 per cent had a performance rating recorded in AEC Employment for both the 2010 and 2013 elections.

Table 6.2:   Filing of equivalent roles across Federal elections

Description	Number
Same role type filled by the same person between elections (count of roles)	22 193
Same role type filled by the same person between elections (count of people)	21 639
Persons with a performance rating recorded for both elections	15 765

Source: ANAO analysis of AEC Employment data.

6.32 Where performance ratings have been recorded in AEC Employment for roles filled by the same person during the 2010 and 2013 elections, and a rating of above or meets the required standard was recorded in 2010, there is about an 80 per cent chance that the person will again be rated as either meeting or being above the required standard. While the degree of reliance that can be placed on this data is limited, it demonstrates that previous election experience may be an indicator of future likely performance. This is particularly evident when considering roles where a rating of below the required standard was allocated in 2010. Specifically, people rated as being below the required standard in 2010, were around 10 times more likely to receive a similar rating in 2013, when compared to people rated as being above the required standard in 2010.

6.33 However, the AEC's centralised records of the performance assessment process do not outline:

- why below standard performance at the 2010 election did not prevent the person being employed again for the 2013 election; or

- the extent of training or other actions taken to address the performance shortcomings that had been identified at the 2010 election in order for the person to be employed again for the 2013 election.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

95

Conclusion

6.34 ANAO's audit of the conduct of the 2007 election had recommended that the AEC complete performance appraisals for election officials and record these in the relevant systems in order that this data could be used to inform and improve the recruitment practices for future electoral events. Some of the process shortcomings that informed this recommendation have been addressed by the AEC through improved administrative arrangements. However:

- a significant proportion of election officials, including senior election officials, surveyed by ANAO indicated that they were not aware of the AEC's performance standards for them; and

- the extent to which performance ratings for staff were recorded declined between the 2010 and 2013 elections, with 20 per cent of roles at the 2013 election having no performance rating recorded.[68]

6.35 Failure by the AEC to consistently record performance ratings against election roles, especially senior roles such as OICs, has significantly reduced the business benefits expected to be derived from the performance appraisal process. In particular, the available data suggests that previous election performance is a useful indicator of how people who are re-employed will perform at a subsequent election. For example, while the degree of reliance that can be placed on performance ratings data is limited, people rated as being below the required standard in 2010, were around 10 times more likely to receive a similar rating in 2013, when compared to people rated as being above the required standard in 2010.

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68 The results for more senior roles where DROs have been required to allocate a performance rating were particularly poor. In this respect, the proportion of relevant staff where a rating was allocated was 66 per cent for the 2010 election reducing to 54 per cent for the 2013 election. Therefore, for the 2013 election, 3701 OIC roles did not have a performance rating recorded in AEC Employment.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

96

Recommendation No.5

6.36   Recognising the benefits that accrue to the AEC in re-employing election officials that have previously performed at or above the required standard, ANAO recommends that the AEC:

(a)   more clearly and consistently outline to temporary election employees the performance standards of the role to which they have been assigned and will be assessed against; and

(b)   implement controls that ensure the timely completion of performance assessments, including the recording of ratings in the relevant system and each temporary election official being advised of their rating.

AEC response: *Agreed*

6.37   *The AEC notes the significant benefits to election outcomes that can be achieved in re-engaging a capable workforce with relevant experience, and will address this recommendation following our current exploration of recruitment and assessment improvements.*

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

97

7. The Australian Electoral Commission's Interim Response to the Keelty Report

This chapter examines the AEC's implementation of interim measures introduced during the 2014 WA Senate election to address the recommendations of the Keelty report, with a particular focus on matters relevant to ballot paper transport and storage.

Introduction

7.1 ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14 was tabled on 8 May 2014, shortly after the outcome from the 5 April 2014 WA Senate election was announced by the AEC (on 29 April 2014). That audit was completed in a compressed timeframe, in response to a request from JSCEM that the ANAO give priority to the AEC's response and performance in implementing ANAO's earlier recommendation relating to the physical security of completed ballot papers. Accordingly:

- it was not possible in the conduct of that audit, for ANAO to examine the actions taken by the AEC to implement, for the WA Senate election, recommendations made in the Keelty report concerning ballot paper transport and storage; and

- the objective of this current ANAO audit included assessing any matters relating to the transport and storage of completed ballot papers not examined in ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14, with implementation of relevant recommendations from the Keelty report expected to be of particular relevance.

7.2 Accordingly, ANAO examined the AEC's implementation of interim measures introduced during the 2014 WA Senate election to address the recommendations of the Keelty report, with a particular focus on matters relevant to ballot paper transport and storage.[69] In this context, in October 2014 the AEC commented to ANAO that:

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69 The AEC also developed additional forms, labels, policies and procedures to address the Keelty Report recommendations, which were not examined as part of this audit.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

98

The preparation for the Griffith by-election and WA half-Senate election placed enormous emphasis on implementation of the Keelty recommendations and interim measures as they related to sanctity, security, storage and transport of ballot papers.

In a very short period of time between the formation of the Keelty Implementation Taskforce (KIT) and the issue of writ for the Griffith by-election, and then later the WA Senate election, KIT facilitated significant improvements in ballot paper security and tracking, material segregation and control, and a greater level of accountability and transparency in AEC practices for both events.

Governance arrangements

7.3 On 6 December 2013, the then Electoral Commissioner appointed the then Deputy Commissioner (now Acting Electoral Commissioner) as the head of the AEC Taskforce to oversee the implementation team responsible for ensuring that all the Keelty recommendations are implemented. The Taskforce consisted of the:

- Keelty Implementation Reference Group (KIRG)—established to oversee the implementation of the program and provide representation of state/territory and divisional networks. Members were to consult with a wider group of their own staff, contribute a broad range of opinions and views, and assist in encouraging ownership of actions throughout the agency; and

- Keelty Implementation Taskforce (KIT)—a smaller team, responsible for putting into operation the high level principles approved by the KIRG. This included the development of sub-project plans and consultations with affected business units and leading implementation tasks.[70]

7.4 As part of the establishment of the Taskforce, the AEC developed a KIT project plan, which outlined key dates for the establishment and membership of the KIRG and KIT, as well as the overall objective and process for the implementation to the Keelty report recommendations. The Taskforce also prioritised the recommendations and established a staged approach to

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70 Within a month of the formation of the Taskforce, the Speaker of the House of Representatives issued a writ for the Griffith by-election to be held on 8 February 2014.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

99

implementing interim measures at the Griffith by-election and 2014 WA Senate election, while planning for longer-term implementation of all 32 Keelty report recommendations.

7.5   The Taskforce was expected to operate until all of the Keelty report recommendations had been implemented, or a project plan had been developed and implemented. The December 2013 Project Plan stated that the KIRG was to meet at a minimum every fortnight, or more regularly if needed, while the KIT was to meet, at a minimum, once a week to discuss the tasks needed to be undertaken and allocate responsibilities. The KIRG met on three occasions (7 February 2014, 20 March 2014 and 2 April 2014). The KIT held formal meetings on 11 occasions throughout December 2013 and May 2014 (generally spanning two days).

Detailed implementation plan

7.6   In a February 2014 submission to the JSCEM, the AEC stated that it was developing a detailed implementation plan that would cover all the Keelty recommendations. In August 2014, the ANAO requested a copy of the detailed implementation plan. However, the AEC advised the ANAO that

> The detailed plan referred to on 4 February 2014 has not been finalised as the Griffith by-election was called immediately after this submission went to JSCEM and was followed by the WA half Senate Election. Both these events are being thoroughly evaluated and the issues of legislative requirements and costings will be dealt with.

7.7   The evaluation reports in relation to the Griffith by-election and 2014 WA Senate election were provided to JSCEM on 2 April 2014 and 25 July 2014 respectively. During this time the AEC also provided status updates to JSCEM on the implementation of Keelty recommendations and outlined the additional costs associated with addressing some of the Keelty recommendations. Nevertheless, as at mid-September 2014 the AEC had not yet finalised a detailed implementation plan for the 32 Keelty recommendations, some nine months after the report was publicly released.

7.8   The completion of a detailed implementation plan would better position the AEC to effectively manage the implementation of the 32 agreed recommendations. There would also be benefits in such a plan incorporating the three recommendations concerning ballot paper transport and storage

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

100

agreed to by the AEC in ANAO Audit Report No. 31 2013–14. In this context, in October 2014 the AEC advised ANAO that:

> The Keelty Implementation Taskforce was developed and implemented in a very short timeframe. This temporary taskforce and its processes have now evolved, and the taskforce has been embedded as the Reform Team within the Elections Branch. In addition, the Team has taken responsibility for implementation of the recommendations made in ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14, as suggested by ANAO. The report, quite rightly, notes that the AEC did not have a documented implementation plan, although it regularly reported to the JSCEM on implementation progress. The AEC has now formalised a detailed implementation plan, including estimated costings and indicative deadlines, bringing together the pre-existing, albeit implicit, elements of implementation planning.

Evaluation teams

7.9 During the Griffith by-election, evaluation of the implementation of interim measures introduced in response to the Keelty report had been undertaken by KIT members. This approach was not considered possible for WA due to the size and scale of the election event. Instead, 17 two-person Keelty Implementation Team Extended (KITE teams) were deployed during the 2014 WA Senate election. The four key responsibilities of the KITE teams were:

- fact gathering for evaluation;

- assurance that policy and procedures were being followed;

- early exposure of a wide range of staff to the new procedures so that they could understand them and assist in implementation in their home state/territory; and

- on-the-ground assistance and advice at polling places in the event that it was deemed necessary.

7.10 In addition to visits to selected polling places, KITE teams were expected to be available:

- on-site for return of materials on polling night;

- at the Sunday scrutiny activities; and

- at out-posted scrutiny centres for commencement of the fresh scrutiny.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

101

7.11 KITE teams were to prepare a written report based on their observations through the use of a standard pro-forma checklist developed by KIT. The pro-forma templates cover the assessment of polling places, return of materials, and scrutiny site inspections. All reports were to be completed by 18 April 2014, with the aim of providing feedback on the procedures and processes implemented, including scalability for future electoral events.

7.12 However, there were some important shortcomings in the approaches adopted, which reduce the reliance that can be placed on the work that was undertaken. In particular, the AEC did not adopt a risk-based approach to selecting the number or identity of the polling and scrutiny facilities to be visited by the KITE teams. In this respect, the AEC planned to visit 14 polling places in 11 of the 15 WA divisions.[71] Two KITE teams were deployed to inspect the large rural divisions of Durack and O'Connor, where 24 and 25 polling place inspections were undertaken respectively. Coverage of polling places was least in the divisions of Forrest and Pearce, where Senate ballot papers were lost following the 2013 election.

7.13 The AEC planned to visit only 13 of the 74 polling places in the rural division of Forrest and just 10 of the 69 polling places in the metropolitan division of Pearce.[72] The low level of coverage planned for Pearce was not proportionate to the level of risk, given the Keelty report observed that the practices adopted in that division during the 2013 election, were 'not in line with' AEC expectations. Of particular note is that:

- the packing and marking of boxes containing ballots papers was 'well below standard';

- refuse and 'live' ballots were stored in proximity to each other, an approach that 'is strongly advised against in the AEC's guidelines'; and

- the transport of ballot papers involving loads being divided in a way that was 'contrary to all of the controls applied elsewhere to maintain some idea of the location of goods'.

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71   This number did not vary notwithstanding that the total number of polling places in each division varied quite considerably.

72   Of the 10 planned inspections, two were not undertaken.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

102

7.14   In addition, ANAO analysis identified that 23 of the 226 planned polling place visits were not undertaken. Further, in respect of the methodology that was applied:

- the inspection checklists were not adequate as a data collection tool;

- insufficient steps were taken to promote complete[73] and consistent assessments; and

- the format of the checklists did not encourage teams to be fulsome in their commentary.[74]

7.15   These matters were discussed with the AEC during the course of the audit, and ANAO also sought advice from the AEC as to why all planned polling place inspections were not completed by the KITE teams. The AEC provided a variety of reasons, ranging from: the physical distance between locations; level of assistance required at some polling places; redirection of staff to other duties; and a KITE team member injury. A further reason provided by the AEC was that:

> conversely travel times in some divisions may have been quite short however parking was not convenient. This resulted in time being wasted searching for a park and then a subsequent walk back to the polling place.

7.16   This point raises questions about the suitability of the polling places (a matter addressed at paragraphs 2.34 to 2.39). Specifically, if parking was an issue for the KITE teams, it would also have been an issue for voters.

7.17   ANAO sought to further test the reasoning provided by the AEC, by undertaking additional mapping and analysis of the distances between the polling places. However, the AEC was unable to provide the evidence to complete the analysis, and instead advised that:

> while the KITE teams were required to map out the order in which they conducted their visits, this detail was not required to be submitted for review, it was about ensuring the KITE team didn't waste valuable time mapping out their visits on polling day. Therefore the level of detail requested is not available.

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73   For example, the checklist had 13 questions containing multiple parts, but with a preferred single answer of yes or no to cover all parts of a question.

74   Although the checklists provided a comments section, the section was labelled 'details if not meeting requirements'. This had the effect of limiting the responses by the KITE teams. For example, in relation to the question about ballot box guards, there was no commentary provided for a total of 127 of the 203 checklists completed.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

103

7.18   In this respect, analysis completed by ANAO was that:

- for the rural/remote KITE teams covering the divisions of Durack and O'Connor, where the physical distance would seem to be most pertinent, these teams completed 100 per cent and 93 per cent of their allocated polling place inspections respectively;

- the KITE team where one member sustained an injury on the day, which contributed to a reduction in the number of polling places the team could inspect, still completed a total of 13 of the 14 allocated polling places inspections; but

- the two teams that failed to complete the largest number of inspections were the teams that the AEC advised were redirected for other purposes. One team escorted state electoral officers and the other, was mainly in Perth for a logistics exercise. In this latter respect, the AEC advised ANAO in October 2014 that:

> The last KITE team was conducting an escorted visit with the AEC's contracted logistics consultants to assess the AEC's logistics processes during the WA Senate election, with a view to providing recommendations for reform in the future. This escorted visit was fundamental to the subsequent report provided by the consultants, and relates directly to the ability of the AEC to successfully address some of the key recommendations in the Keelty report, especially as it relates to Recommendations 1 and 2, as well as others relating to the secure transport of ballot papers.

Inspection results

7.19   The 17 KITE teams completed 203 polling place inspections. ANAO compared the AEC's consolidation of the records of the inspection results, which formed the basis of AEC reporting to the JSCEM, with the underlying checklists, including any commentary made by the KITE teams. This analysis indicated that the AEC's reporting of compliance levels was in a number of respects higher than can be supported by the KITE team records. The AEC advised ANAO in October 2014 that it:

> Accepts that a more rigorous methodology could have been applied to data collection efforts by the KITE teams, and notes that KITE members had a dual role which in hindsight may have limited their ability to focus fully on observation activities and reporting, ultimately resulting in more of a 'spot check' approach than a comprehensive evaluation. The decision to deploy KITE was also taken at relatively short notice, after the issue of the writs for

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

104

the WA Senate election, and guidance and support materials for the team were prepared quite quickly as a consequence.

The AEC agrees the checklists could have been better designed and that directions to staff could have been clearer, and that checklists may not have always captured the work that was done. The AEC's interpretation of the results may also have been more generous–in hindsight where the KITE forms were not fully or comprehensively completed the assessment should have erred on the side of caution.

The AEC would, however, like to emphasise the lengths it went to in order to ensure that all temporary and permanent staff were aware of the ballot paper principles and all new procedures associated with the Keelty report.

Ballot box guards

7.20   The AEC advised JSCEM at the 12 March 2014 hearing that every polling place for the WA Senate election would have a ballot box guard allocated, involving an additional 200 staff. However, seven of the polling places inspected by KITE teams did not have a ballot box guard as part of the staff allocation.

Ballot paper secure zone

7.21   Analysis by the AEC suggested that 186 of the 203 polling places inspected met the interim ballot paper secure zone requirements. However, no comments were recorded by the relevant KITE team for 49 of the 203 polling places inspected, making it difficult to be confident that all aspects of the ballot paper secure zone requirements had been met. Further, the AEC's summary report stated that 'most ballot paper secure zones were signposted'. However, ANAO analysis was that only 50 of the 203 inspection checklists specifically referred to the signage at the ballot paper secure zone.[75]

Election official briefing

7.22   The AEC recorded 92 per cent compliance with the requirement that OICs brief election officials on the interim measures and new policies and

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75   KITE teams were required to photograph polling places, although it is unclear whether the AEC examined the photos to ascertain whether the polling places were fully compliant with the ballot paper secure zone requirements.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

105

procedures. However, the KITE polling place inspection summary report recognised that the:

> compliance rate may be lower than recorded as KITE members could only witness this taking place at one polling place per team.

7.23 In this respect, on 21 occasions, KITE teams relied upon assurance from the OICs that the briefings were completed. A more robust approach would have been to also seek assurance from other election officials that were supposed to have received the briefing. For those occasions where this was done, there were instances where the KITE team was advised that the briefing had not been provided by the OIC.

7.24 Against this background, ANAO analysis suggests the level of compliance to be lower than that recorded by the AEC. Specifically:

- 38 polling places that had been assessed as meeting the requirements, did not;

- only 26 of the 203 polling place inspection checklists included comments on both aspects of this question, being that the briefing was completed and staff were receptive[76]; and

- only 25 of the 203 polling place inspection records (12 per cent) supported a conclusion that the briefing checklist provided to OICs had been used.

Storage and supervision of ballot papers

7.25 In respect to the storage and supervision of ballot papers at issuing points, KITE teams were to assess whether issuing officers had been given a 'sensible' allocation of ballot papers. AEC's analysis was that, at 93 per cent of the polling places inspected, issuing officers were allocated a sensible quantity of ballot papers. However, there was no guidance to assessors as to what a 'sensible' allocation is with the AEC's own summary recognising that:

> there was a wide variety in the number of ballot papers in the first allocation, ranging from 100 to 600 and everything in between. A few polling places had

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76 No comments were provided for 100 of the 203 polling places inspected making it difficult to ascertain what part of the question was being answered. Where comments were recorded by the KITE teams, the comments included that the OIC had completed the briefing, but that had done so 'off the cuff' or 'knew it off by heart', 'did it in own words', or that the 'OIC assured us that they had completed the briefing'.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

106

allocated all of their ballot papers in the first allocation. When questioned by KITE they advised that this had been suggested by the DRO.

7.26 The OIC handbook outlined that a 'reasonable' number of ballot papers (up to 200 in smaller polling places, up to 500 in larger polling places) were to be provided to each issuing point initially.[77] In this context, ANAO analysis of the KITE teams' checklist data in relation to the issuing of ballot papers highlighted that 28 per cent of polling places visited had allocated 300 or more ballot papers at one time, with some allocating all ballot papers at the commencement of the day.

Packaging and parcelling requirements

7.27 The KIT reported to the AEC Executive that 92 per cent of OICs were 'comfortable with the new procedures' relating to packaging and parcelling of Senate ballot papers. However, the KITE teams repeatedly documented OICs being confused about the new parcelling requirements. ANAO's analysis indicates that:

- 74 per cent of OICs were assessed by the KITE teams to have understood the new procedures for parcelling and packaging; and

- the AEC had wrongly counted 37 OICs (18 per cent) as being clear with the new procedures relating to parcelling of ballot papers, even though the comments recorded on the checklists indicated this was not the case.

7.28 No comments were provided on a total of 85 (41 per cent) of all KITE team checklists in relation to packaging and parcelling of material, making it difficult to determine whether OICs understanding of the new procedures reflected the KITE teams providing assistance, or whether it was based on the OICs own level of clarity around these requirements. Further in this respect, the checklists indicate that a total of 65 polling places (32 per cent) required additional KITE assistance especially in relation to the new packaging and parcelling requirements. Gaining an appreciation of how OICs came to understand the new requirements would have been of value in assessing whether training and other materials required improvement, or not.

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77 The training Power Point included an additional eight slides outlining new measures resulting from the Keelty report and delivered as part of face-to-face training.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

107

Return of materials

7.29 A total of 65 of the 203 polling places inspected were also inspected during the return of materials (ROM). The AEC advised ANAO that

> the AEC plan was to observe the return of materials for as many polling places as possible at the off-site centres. Each KITE team was assigned a particular Division and observed each OIC returning materials. It was not deemed necessary to single out particular polling places as the teams were observing each polling place coming in.

7.30 The AEC did not use a risk-based approach to determine the number or location of ROM facilities to inspect.

7.31 The ROM checklists included a range of questions relating to: ballot secure zones; waste management; election official bibs; and packaging and parcelling. The checklists also included a general comments section. Unlike the KITE team summary completed for the polling place inspections, the AEC did not complete a summary report for ROM.

7.32 A total of 12 ROM checklists were completed. The KITE teams completed one checklist per division for each ROM site, and a second part for each individual polling place. The main issues identified related to compliance with the rubbish and recycling policy and whether the OIC's had packaged the ballot papers correctly. The majority of divisions were assessed to have complied with the new requirements, but five divisions were assessed to be non-compliant and five as partially compliant.

7.33 The second element of the checklist was used by the KITE teams to record the time materials were returned and to provide a packaging rating score for each individual polling place. The KITE teams observed 113 polling places returning materials, with the time recorded on the checklists for 93 polling places. A package rating score of 1 (bad) to 10 (good) was to be recorded on the ROM checklist for each polling place. ANAO sought advice from AEC as to the guidance provided to KITE team members in applying a packaging rating The AEC advised ANAO that:

> KITE teams were briefed on what to look for and to apply a <u>common sense</u> approach in making ratings, eg. If all material was perfectly packed, labels were all correctly applied and all paper work was in order then a high rating was to apply. Lower ratings were to apply for subsequent deficiencies in the parcelling and packaging.

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

108

7.34 ANAO observed a lack of consistency in the application of packaging rating scores for individual polling places, as well as a disconnect between the scores given and the comments recorded across all teams. Variability was also evident in the scores given to polling places by the same KITE team. For example, one polling place with the boxes correctly numbered and labelled received a packaging rating score of nine, but a polling place with boxes splitting and incorrect use of the relevant label, received the same rating.

Scrutiny site inspections

7.35 The KITE teams assessed three scrutiny centres with a total of 11 scrutiny site inspection checklists completed. The checklists were completed more consistently than for polling places inspections and ROM, and the KITE teams recorded a broader range of answers. More detailed information was also recorded on areas that were requiring improvement. At the time ANAO audit fieldwork was completed, the results had not been summarised or reported to the KIRG or the AEC Executive.

Conclusion

7.36 The arrangements adopted to monitor implementation of interim measures developed to respond to the Keelty report, and assess their effectiveness, demonstrate a greater commitment to organisational learning and improvement than was evident in the AEC's response to ANAO's earlier audit of the conduct of the 2007 election. However, there were a number of aspects of the approach taken that reduced the assurance that can be provided about the extent to which Keelty recommendations were effectively implemented for the 2014 WA Senate election, and will be further progressed subsequently. In particular:

- by mid-September 2014 a detailed implementation plan for the 32 agreed recommendations had not yet been developed, some nine months after the Keelty report was received and the recommendations accepted. This plan could also usefully incorporate implementation of the three recommendations made by ANAO concerning ballot paper transport and storage agreed to by the AEC in ANAO Audit Report No.31 2013–14;

- the coverage of polling places and return of materials by the KITE teams was not planned in a way that was risk-based, and not all planned inspections were undertaken; and

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

109

- the design of the data collection approach was not sufficiently robust, meaning that the results should be treated with some caution.

7.37 Further in a number of respects, ANAO analysis of the records of the evaluation teams does not support the high levels of implementation of the interim measures that has been reported by the AEC.

Ian McPhee

Auditor-General

Canberra ACT

5 November 2014

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

110

Appendices

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

111

Appendix 1: Entity's response

Electoral Commissioner

Our Ref: 14/890

Mr Ian McPhee, PSM
Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
PO Box 707
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr McPhee,

Re: Proposed audit report second follow-up audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's preparation for and conduct of federal elections

Thank you for your letter of 23 September 2014 providing the AEC with a copy of the proposed audit report, *The Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and conduct of federal elections.* The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) accepts all five Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) recommendations.

As has been publicly (and frequently) stated, the AEC acknowledges the issues identified at the 2013 federal election and is now in the complex process of responding to these ongoing challenges.

Since the 2013 federal election, the AEC has been in a period of self-analysis, reflecting on existing operations in addition to the implementation of ANAO recommendations (Report No. 31 2013-2014 and Report No. 28 2009-10) and the recommendations from the Keelty Inquiry into the 2013 WA Senate Election. During this period, the AEC has also implemented recommendations, where possible, in the delivery of two highly scrutinised elections: the 2014 Griffith by-election and the 2014 WA half-Senate election.

The AEC is continuing to rebuild its reputation with the community and its stakeholders, supported by work to ensure the fundamental principles of integrity, quality and transparency are integrated throughout all aspects of the AEC's operations. The AEC acknowledges that the issues identified in the ANAO report relate to areas of development for the AEC, particularly planning and implementation across the entire organisation. Implementation of the ANAO recommendations outlined in this report will support this process.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Rogers
Acting Electoral Commissioner

2(October 2014

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ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

113

Index

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

114

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of
Federal Elections

115

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ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections
Australian Electoral Commission

ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

116

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Business Continuity Management: Building resilience in public sector entities	June 2009
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ANAO Report No.4 2014–15
Second Follow-up Audit into the Australian Electoral Commission's Preparation for and Conduct of Federal Elections

117