

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the JSCEM Committee. I am a concerned Australian Electoral Commission staff member and am offering my personal opinion.

I have for some time been involved as a staff member in a co-located and proposed amalgamated office. I am currently working in a four-division office and have been involved for many years (right from the beginning) in a proposed amalgamation for the same office.

We have currently undergone a huge refit of the office, after previously having worked in the four co-located divisions, which were working extremely well; the only problem being was a lack of staff.

We now have three cells, which include Enrolment, Administration and Elections. After no consultation with the current permanent staff, we have been placed into these cells. The staff having previously worked well and happily together, have found they are under stress, quite often at loggerheads with one another, not exactly sure what they should be doing or accomplishing (whether it belongs to their cell or another cell), continuous repetition in their job, no breaks apart from lunch and no scope for furthering their career. It is the unhappiest office I have ever set foot in during my working career, which is in excess of 40 years.

A call from a sitting Member of Parliament alerted me to the fact that there no longer was a Divisional Returning Officer for him to speak to, no longer the personal contact and it was thoroughly unsatisfactory speaking to someone who did not know the area/division. It was quite embarrassing and not a professional view for the MP.

There are no career opportunities within the office. In a one-division office and even the co-located office with separate divisions, employees are given every opportunity to broaden their knowledge and learn. In this situation it is quite impossible.

I feel we have lost the personal connection in the office, as it now appears more like a repetitious factory floor. It is impossible to further one's career in the situation we have been placed in. When originally employed with the AEC, a criteria was set for us to accomplish, unfortunately this no longer applies, as my particular job is data entry, which includes enrolment and data checking. I have acted as APS 3 for eight months, told I was doing a good job and have now been relegated back to data entry only. I am carrying out the work an APS 1 could do with their eyes shut, I have previously been involved with all aspects of electoral work – review work, was in charge of postal voting for four divisions for the last Federal Election which amounted to 18,000 votes being processed, special category electors, being involved with redistribution and EDGAR activities etc. I am now not allowed to do any of this because it is not in the job description of the cell.

Our permanent staff over the last 12 months has diminished as employees have left and not been replaced and we are still expected to get the work done, which I believe has been carried out in the best possible manner for electors and staff. Unfortunately electors are missing out on the expertise of the diminishing staff, as there is no longer the personal touch the AEC was so well known for.

Loss of local knowledge has resulted in an incorrect roll, something I was always pleased to be involved in making sure it was correct by investigations and thorough checking. I believe I had an excellent address register as I lived in the division and continuously watched the changes and was able to apply my knowledge to the register. With this knowledge one was able to give electors specialised help with their queries, knowing the area. This does not happen anymore because anyone and everyone can add an address, whether right or not or tell an elector anything they like. I was always happy to stop on the way home to check an address and have even personally checked addresses in neighbouring divisions.

Where divisions are out of their area, there has been a lack of education to schools as they are just too far away from that division, and there is a loss of temporary staff for elections etc. as they have to travel further through heavy traffic to get to the Chatswood office. We are losing the **expertise** and knowledge of election and temporary staff as they no longer want to work for the amalgamated office. It is impossible to expect OIC's after a heavy and tiring polling day to drive from Wiseman's Ferry to Chatswood or from West Pennant Hills to Chatswood.

Amalgamation has brought one cell coping with the staffing for four divisions for an election, one cell coping with four division's postal votes (which was decided after the last election, two divisions should cope with the postals, as there were far too many for one division). Not one of the present staff members who were there for the last Federal Election, have been asked their opinions as to how things worked and eventuated. One room has now been allocated for all materials for polling places for the four divisions and with 6 ton of council ballot papers, there does not appear to be space left for the papers, as they need to be evenly distributed around the entire floor owing to their weight. With the Prime Minister's seat promising to be close for the next election, there has been a lot of room left for errors and mistakes being made, as existing staff members can see and are aware of what can happen.

I started my working life in a typing pool, have been secretary to Managing Directors etc. and have now ended up in a typing pool again with no chance, as I will no longer be multi-skilled, as I have been in the past. Not getting the exposure to other activities or being involved, results in one forgetting other procedures. This applies to any staff member. I have always been proud of my work and had respect from bosses and work colleagues. It no longer exists in this environment.

My apologies for making this personal but I am a concerned member of the public and staff member and would not like to see this to happen to any other office. Thank you for reading my submission.

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Australian Electoral Commission