

# Guiding young careers with AWRA e-Mentoring

Image courtesy of Downer Ed

With gender diversity now recognised as a staple of successful workplace culture, attracting more women to the nation's mining, oil and gas sectors has become a top priority. The Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) is overcoming some of the challenges involved in recruiting women with its innovative AWRA e-Mentoring program.

**T**he changing economic environment has certainly placed new operating and commercial pressures on resource organisations, but employment opportunities across Australia's many mining, oil and gas operations are still plentiful.

The investment pipeline holds more than \$260 billion worth of committed projects, and another \$240 billion in projects awaiting final approval. With ongoing skills shortages a very real possibility, employers are looking for new ways to recruit talent to their organisations.

After competing with a decade of record employment growth, resource employers are well versed on the challenges and priorities of skilled

recruitment. Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA) Director of Group Services Tara Diamond says gender diversity is at the top of the agenda.

'When it comes to unlocking new doors to highly engaged, skilled and motivated employees, women are an absolutely critical stakeholder group, and resource employers are quickly facilitating workforce practices to better accommodate women in their organisations,' Ms Diamond says.

'From generous paid parental leave schemes to on-site childcare facilities, the industry is becoming an advocate for gender-diverse workplaces.'

As women comprise just 16 per cent of the resource industry's workforce, the



AMMA's Director of Group Services, Tara Diamond.

journey ahead will be long and exciting, and AWRA is helping to pave the way.

'Funded in partnership with the Australian Government, AWRA is helping our members to develop and implement diversity strategies that will contribute to an industry-wide goal of increasing women's participation in the resource, construction and allied services industries to 25 per cent by 2020,' Ms Diamond says.

'Despite boundless career opportunities and benefits on offer in



the resource industry, the challenge most employers face is attracting women to the mining, oil and gas sectors.'

One of the many pathways acknowledged for trouncing this recruitment challenge is mentoring. A recent study by Sweeney Research revealed that 94 per cent of professional women wish they had access to an experienced role model to offer guidance as their career progresses.

'Offering women a supportive platform in a male-dominated industry like resources is not just an effective recruitment tactic; it's also a business imperative,' Ms Diamond says.

'Beyond developing professional bonds between employees and creating a reputable workplace culture, studies have found that mentoring leads to motivated staff who are more productive overall.'

While Ms Diamond describes mentoring as a constructive recruitment and business tactic, she also notes that

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the transient nature of the resource workforce makes face-to-face mentoring an almost unworkable practice.

'Transient work arrangements, remote locations and flexible working hours mean a resource career, while rewarding, can also be quite challenging, as can balancing those commitments with a traditional mentoring program,' Ms Diamond says.

On this premise, the AWRA e-Mentoring Program was developed as an industry-first initiative to connect women to mentors, regardless of location.

The unique and flexible program matches women in the early stages of their careers with an experienced male or female mentor to guide them through a nine-month web-based program.



Image courtesy of OZ Minerals

'It's a niche solution for women who have found it difficult to access mentoring opportunities as a result of progressive industry practices, ensuring that they can reap the benefits of a mentor-mentee relationship in a fashion that meets their unique needs.'

MMG Limited's Ms Shauna Martin, and Mr Scott Pope of Origin Energy, are two candidates who have been with the AWRA e-Mentoring program since its February launch. Despite being 4000 kilometres apart, both say that the distance has gone unnoticed in their professional relationship.

a work in progress, but Ms Martin's mentor, Mr Pope, says it's a vision he is eager to assist with.

Based in Sydney as Origin Energy's commercial manager for retail markets, Mr Pope says AWRA e-Mentoring breaks down the barrier of remoteness, which prevents women in the resource industry from finding dedicated and professional support.

'I've worked in a number of different organisations and have a lot of experience in the energy sector, so I have a sense of different workplace cultures and the dynamics of a

and draws on structured training webinars to support the mentor-mentee relationship throughout its development.

'As we've progressed through the program, the issues we deal with have broadened, so it's an evolving relationship in that context,' Mr Pope says.

'However, I didn't come into this having all the answers. I just probably have more in my kit bag to draw upon as I reflect on my own career and compare it to the challenges Shauna faces.'

Both Ms Martin and Mr Pope laud the AWRA e-Mentoring Program for having no geographical limitations. Ms Martin, in particular, considers it a pathway to broader career opportunities.

Similar sentiments have resounded across all 80 of the mentor-mentee relationships developed in line with the AWRA e-Mentoring program, now into its seventh round; however, AWRA e-Mentoring represents just one initiative of many, together contributing to greater diversity in the resource sector.

Ms Diamond says another initiative, the recently launched AWRA Way Forward Guides, provides information manuals and guidance for companies that are looking to invest in diversity strategies, benchmarking them against international best practice.

'We are also beginning to assess employers under the AWRA Recognised Program, which is an industry-first accreditation program to highlight an organisation's commitment to workforce policies and performance in women's workforce participation,' Ms Diamond says.

Raising women's representation in the resource industry is a multifaceted outcome serving not only to fill crucial skills shortages in the future, and to develop more employers of choice, but also to strengthen Australia's position on the world stage as a globally competitive investment destination.

Together, AMMA and AWRA will continue to help resource industry employers to keep gender diversity at the top of the recruitment agenda.

**“AWRA e-Mentoring utilises tools easily accessible to resource employees, including telephones, Skype and email, and draws on structured training webinars to support the mentor-mentee relationship throughout its development.”**

A geological database administrator on MMG Limited's Golden Grove site in Western Australia, Ms Martin believes e-Mentoring has opened new doors in her career journey.

'There is always some informal mentoring in the workplace, but I've never had a formal opportunity like this before,' Ms Martin says.

'I was apprehensive at first, but the program struck a chord with me, and I decided to put myself forward and see exactly what I could get out of it.'

'Reflecting on the past eight months that I've spent under Scott's guidance, I am pleased I took the plunge, and often think how different my professional development might have been if I had not signed up as a mentee.'

As women still occupy just 10.5 per cent of managerial positions and two per cent of chief executive officer positions, the availability of female mentors is still

generally male-dominated industry,' Mr Pope says.

'When you are not bound to the same occupational category, you can assess a situation without being locked into a certain perspective.'

Ms Martin says that despite initial expectations of being paired with an experienced woman, Mr Pope's perspective has been invaluable.

'It's been interesting to get a male perspective on different challenges in the workplace, and Scott has helped build my confidence in managing those challenges,' she says.

'He also has lots of little tips around time management and prioritising that I can instantly apply to my work, which is immensely helpful on a day-to-day basis.'

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