

Resourceful thinking

How do women fare in the resources industry and what efforts are in place to increase their representation?

Despite considerable efforts to boost the ranks of women in resources, progress can sometimes seem slow. For example, maternity uniforms for pregnant workers only became available last year, despite the fact women have been allowed underground since the 1980s.

More of these types of changes will need to take place if mining, oil and gas operations want to attract more women and reach targets set by the resource industry's head body, the Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA). It aims to raise the number of women in mining, energy and allied construction sectors from 15.5 per cent to 25 per cent by 2020.

But the issue is complex and requires multiple actions, says AMMA's director of group services Tara Diamond. "We won't get there just through companies working on their own cultures. It's also a matter of improving the perception of the industry in the minds of women," says Diamond. She says HR professionals are key facilitators and need to be equipped with the tools to engage women in leadership roles and assist in cultural changes within the organisations, such as flexible working conditions, having an inclusive environment and being aware of unconscious bias, particularly when hiring.

According to AMMA's latest Jobseeker Index, 30 per cent of the industry's applicants are female. To encourage more women to consider a role in resources, AMMA launched a series of workshops across Australia at the end of last year to help companies attract and hire more women as well as its Skill Connect drive, which offers women a backdoor entry into resources through hospitality training. Its recently founded Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) has also launched a mentoring scheme to support women, often in remote locations, to

connect with professionals in resources and other industries and develop their careers.

Shauna Martin, a geological database administrator for base metals company MMG, and her mentor Scott Pope, a commercial manager in retail markets at Origin Energy, were among 90 pairs to take part in the nine-month initiative last year.

Shauna was happy to be connected with a male mentor who gave honest and impartial advice about her personal skills and career.

"There are not a huge amount of women here so it would have been hard to find an internal mentor who could give an unbiased opinion and if you talk to friends and family they are often wrapped up in how you are going to feel," says Martin, 31, who has been in the industry for seven years and wanted to work on her confidence levels.

"Scott has been working in the corporate environment longer than I have and he came from a different perspective. He said I have become clearer and more confident and I think I have developed more than if I hadn't

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TARA DIAMOND, DIRECTOR OF GROUP SERVICES, AUSTRALIAN MINES AND METALS ASSOCIATION

done it," she says. "The only difference I would have had with a female mentor is finding out how she forged her way through," says Martin, whose employer has also launched a career progression program called Success Through Every Person (STEP) and embraces flexible working arrangements. "Companies are realising that they have got some really good workers and if they want to keep them they have to offer these things," says Martin.

Looking to the future, mining and energy companies are revving up their gender diversity initiatives. The bigger companies such as BHP Billiton offer incentives to graduates, while Newmont's Boddington gold mine in Western Australia developed a long day care centre for employees' toddlers and babies and encouraged local mums to use the five hours their children were at school to learn to drive trucks.

A review of gender balance performance and reporting in the ASX200 by Women on Boards last year praised Atlas Iron for achieving 30 per cent women in senior executive roles and 22 per cent on its board. Meanwhile oil and gas giant Santos, which has thriving networking, coaching and mentoring programs, has a strong gender agenda having conducted a review to remove bias from recruitment practices and made efforts to attract women into trade and technical roles.

However, not one resources company was singled out as having exemplary gender diversity practices in the Women On Boards report. Neither are they represented in the Male Champions of Change group. Diamond says the industry faces skills shortages in tough economic times and needs to look to women as they rethink hiring strategies. "They have just been poaching staff from one another. We have to innovate now to assist us through these difficult times," she says.