



Shortage of skilled workers will hit mining

PAUL GARVEY

Australia's mining sector needs another 21,000 full-time jobs in the next few years as a host of new mines come into production, with some skills already in short supply.

Resources sector employer group AMMA will on Tuesday release what it says is the first comprehensive modelling of the jobs outlook for Australia's mining industry in a decade, projecting a rise in job numbers back towards boom levels thanks to a slew of new iron ore, coal, gold and lithium mines.

The new jobs, centred largely in the mining states of Western Australia and Queensland, stretch from diesel mechanics and electricians through to mine engi-

neers and geologists. AMMA's director of operations, Tara Diamond, told The Australian that the projections were conservative and the industry would need to move quickly to avoid being caught short.

"We are trying to give people a picture of the landscape so they can be far more efficient in knowing not just what they need, but what everyone else will need over that time," she said.

"We are very cautious in terms of the ability for us to turn around the numbers we will need in the next four years."

The downturn after the last boom, when tens of thousands of jobs were axed as mining companies scrambled to cut costs in the face of falling commodity prices, had left deep scars among

many potential future workers. Ms Diamond said university enrolments in some mining-related courses were "dire", having fallen into single digits in recent years.

Some of the biggest projected needs are in the Pilbara, where the likes of Rio Tinto, BHP and Fortescue Metals are all pumping billions of dollars into new mines.

Rio Tinto's iron ore chief executive, Chris Salisbury, who is

also the chairman of the Minerals

Council of Australia's workforce and innovation committee, said the labour market in WA was already tightening. "To date, we have been able to secure the skills we need by upskilling our own workforce, as well as accessing the already strong skills base across WA," he said.

"However, we do see challenges ahead, which reinforces how important it is for industry, government, and the education sector to work in close collaboration."

The mining giant earlier this year partnered with the WA government and TAFE to launch Australia's first nationally recognised qualifications in automation.

Fortescue Metals, meanwhile, has looked to defence veterans to

help fill the gaps in its workforce and has recruited more than 80 veterans to date.

"Providing training opportunities for the next generation of our workforce is crucial and we have award-winning programs in place to ensure a sustainable pipeline of talent and, importantly, to give our people long-term career opportunities," Fortescue chief executive Elizabeth Gaines said.

At Iluka Resources' Capel synthetic rutile plant south of Perth, 20-year-old James Whitehead is working as an apprentice mechanical fitter at a time when demand for those skills is starting to soar.

"Being from Bunbury, Iluka has provided me the chance to do my apprenticeship close to home, which is great," he said.

'Providing training opportunities for the next generation is crucial'

ELIZABETH GAINES
FORTESCUE METALS CEO



James Whitehead, 20, is working as an apprentice mechanical fitter at Iluka Resources' Capel plant near Bunbury in Western Australia

COLIN MURTY