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## Miners are widening their nets in the hunt for talent

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*Graduate numbers are rising in the resources sector, and they're not all mining engineers.*

Tim Boreham

**T**he intense competition to recruit and train graduates is being felt no more keenly than in the resources sector, where many raw newcomers can expect starting salaries well into the six figures.

However, opening the chequebook is just part of the picture in winning the fight for talent. The sector's top graduate employers report that candidates cite other factors as keys to their decision-making, such as ongoing training opportunities and stimulating projects, while ensuring their employer's values align with their own.

The resources sector has long faced a perception that recruitment is confined

to core roles such as mining engineers. In reality, there are plenty of jobs for the

likes of environmental and data scientists, cybersecurity specialists, medical and health professionals, and social investment and sustainability experts.

The world biggest miner with more than 80,000 people working in 90 locations, BHP naturally provides diverse opportunities for career progression.

It plans to recruit 160 graduates in 2023, a 15 per cent increase year on year, including mining, chemical and processing engineers, geologists and hydrogeologists.

BHP's graduate program includes formal workshops and coached activities as well as job rotations and "the opportunity to build strong relationships and develop a broad understanding of the business".

While the miner doesn't require prior

experience, it looks for graduates who show drive, curiosity and learning ability, and who are adaptable and can solve practical problems.

Surrounded by some of the sector's "best and brightest minds", BHP's second-year graduates work in teams to identify a business problem with a broad organisational impact – and then to find a solution.

"The problems that our graduates solve are real-life, meaty problems that fundamentally make a difference in our organisation," the company says.

Such challenges range from improving a mine's evacuation verification processes, addressing the lack of toilets in remote sites (to promote inclusion and safety) and



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accounting for unallocated magnetite losses.

In 2022, Rio Tinto welcomed 261 graduates – its biggest cohort yet – with 52 per cent of them female and 18 per cent Indigenous Australians.

The company plans to recruit 300 grads this year, half of them based in Australia.

The miner's most in-demand graduates include software and mining engineers, computer scientists and electrical engineers specialising in renewable energy.

Rio's graduate manager, Anita Lavelle, says with 50 operations across 14 countries, Rio offers numerous opportunities for graduates to develop and grow.

During their two-year development program, graduates are "inspired by futurists and external thought leaders from creative industries who spark their imagination and inspire them to look at things in a different way".

Rio's top graduate team from 2021 presented at the One Young World Summit in Manchester, with the idea of how to harness energy from lightning and store it in batteries.

"The summit was a great opportunity for graduates to contribute to the conversation around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals," Lavelle says.

This year, gold and copper miner Newcrest Mining is recruiting 45 graduates across 15 different disciplines – triple the intake of 2020.

"With Newcrest, graduates get the opportunity to channel their energy, ideas and enthusiasm towards achieving outcomes that help to shape the world we live in," says head of talent and capability Paul Stratford.

For example, three graduates have created a robotic platform, called the SmartHog Underground Inspection Vehicle, from scratch. The device has revolutionised operations in one of the company's underground mines.

The process involved designing and constructing the mechanical and electrical systems, writing the computer code and customising radar technology adapted from the automotive industry.

"Our accelerated graduate development program provides pragmatic, hands-on experience working on exciting real-life projects around the world," Stratford says.

"Add to this, we offer graduates long-term security by employing them on a permanent contract basis that provides immediate long-term security for their careers."

At Viva Energy, the secret to winning the talent war is to treat graduates not simply as a number. It took on nine graduates in 2022, with the intake growing to 14 this year and 20 planned for 2024.

"It's a really exciting time for graduates to join Viva Energy as the business transitions

to low carbon and future energy solutions," says Natasha Cuthbert, Viva's chief people and culture officer.

"Graduates play a key role in helping us deliver the solutions that keep our customers moving today and they will grow and evolve with the business as we build a cleaner energy future."

With a relatively small intake, Viva gets to know its graduates and understand their career aspirations.

Their progress involves in-house role rotations and tailored personal professional development based on graduates' individual feedback.

"We not only offer graduates amazing in-role experiences, but excellent professional development designed to provide them with the foundational competencies to set them up for successful careers," Cuthbert says.

With graduates holding the negotiating whip hand, the interviews are not the one-way process they used to be.

BHP says graduates ask about – and are often surprised by – the miner's focus on climate change, emissions reduction, net zero goals and a sustainable energy transition.

Also, they ask about the pluses and negatives of being a fly-in, fly-out or residential worker in remote locations.

"Many candidates want to know what this work is really like – the pluses and the minuses," the company says. "For example, what is the community like, how do you stay connected to family and friends, how do you manage your wellbeing and how do you manage 12-hour days on site."

Viva Energy says graduate recruitment is very much a two-way process, with the candidates keen to understand the roles and work activities they will be undertaking – and how they align with their skills and capabilities.

The company says that most applicants had multiple offers "and were far more discerning in deciding which company and role was going to be right for them". For example, graduates were especially interested in understanding Viva's plans to transition its business to lower carbon energy.

The very active efforts of the sector to fete and retain graduates are underscored by Australian Resources and Energy Employers Association chief executive Steve Knott, who says the industry faces a "critically low" intake of graduates and apprentices.

"Industry must act now if we are to avoid future hardship," he says.

Knott says that at any one time in 2022, there were about 1000 open vacancies for

mining and petroleum engineers across the country.

"With future demand remaining very strong, it is no wonder industry, universities and governments are focused on working together to lift graduate numbers."

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### MOST POPULAR MINING & ENERGY EMPLOYER AWARD

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#### Finalists

BP	<div style="background-color: #0070C0; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <b>WINNER</b>  <b>Rio Tinto</b> </div>
BHP	
Origin	
Newcrest Mining	
Ampal	
Viva Energy	
Chevron Australia	
Glencore	
Evolution Mining	



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### CASE STUDY: KAREN GUTIERREZ RENDON AND JINAL VORA

#### *Big country, global reach*

For Rio Tinto graduate employee Jinal Vora, pursuing a specialty in cybersecurity could not have been better timed given the well-publicised hacking breaches affecting other high-profile organisations.

As a member of Rio's global cybersecurity incident response team, Vora plays a key role in ensuring the miner's global operations are safe from attacks.

Having obtained a bachelor's degree in electronics and telecommunications in her hometown of Mumbai and then a cybersecurity master's qualification at Queensland's Griffith University, Vora started at Rio in a 12-week vacation role in 2021.

She was meant to have joined the March 2022 graduate intake, but personal circumstances meant she had to return to India. "As a vacation student, I wasn't sure if I would be continuing as a grad, but things just happened, and I landed in a good spot," she says.

Vora was attracted to Rio partly because of the company's global reach and training opportunities in both technical and "soft" skills.

Her current role investigates any alerts

or incidents to determine whether they are real, or false alarms.

"We work on introducing advanced detection controls to continually monitor our systems and proactively notify us if it detects anything suspicious in the system."

Aptly for a keen hobby calligraphist, Vora has clearly outlined her short-term career progression in writing.

"The graduate program offers the flexibility to rotate into different areas of our business," she says. "As graduates at Rio, we get a lot of options for training and developing the skills we want to improve in."

For Newcrest Mining engineering graduate Karen Gutierrez Rendon, a key benefit of being with the global gold giant is the ability to work in disparate locations, ranging from Melbourne HQ to the remote Telfer mine in WA.

A specialist in instrumentation, control systems and automation, Gutierrez Rendon already has had a stint at Telfer, while she is currently at the Cadia mine close to the bustling NSW town of Orange.

"At Cadia, you go home every night while Telfer is fly-in, fly-out," she says. "It's a great experience as a graduate to do both."

Gutierrez Rendon obtained an industrial engineering degree in Bogota, Colombia,

and then a master's qualification at Perth's Edith Cowan University.

She joined Newcrest's vacation program in 2020 and was then offered a permanent graduate role in the control systems team.

Gutierrez Rendon says every day is different. For example, she was recently involved in optimising a recovery cell to get more gold and copper yield from a given amount of ore.

"You really get to understand how the process works and each part of the plant," she says. "You can work with the smallest equipment, but also the biggest ones such as conveyors and mills."

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Newcrest Mining's Karen Gutierrez Rendon (left) and Rio's Jinal Vora are thriving amid wide-ranging and challenging experiences.