



12 FEB, 2024

Graduates seize opportunity as talent squeeze bites

Australian Financial Review, Australia

Page 1 of 3

MINING AND RESOURCES



Graduates seize opportunity as talent squeeze bites

Skills-hungry amid a bulging pipeline of resources and energy projects, companies are upping their grad intake – and starting salaries.

Tim Boreham

The intense competition to recruit and train graduates is being felt keenly in the resources sector, where raw newcomers can expect starting salaries well into the six figures.

The attractive stipends are most evident in the West Australian and Queensland markets, where the remuneration also reflects the likelihood of being sent to remote and inhospitable sites.

According to the 2023-24 salary guide from recruitment firm Hays, a graduate

mining engineer in Western Australia can expect an annual starting salary of \$105,000 to \$125,000, excluding superannuation and other benefits.

When fully qualified, they can quickly earn up to \$185,000. Mine geologists are especially in demand, with rookie salaries ranging between \$110,000 and \$130,000 in Western Australia and \$80,000 to \$100,000 in Queensland's hard-rock sector.

The graduate salary trends are consistent with the resources sector's overall experience, characterised by workers being more ready to change jobs and employers more willing to bolster pay to retain the right people.

According to the Australian Resources

and Energy Employers Association (AREEA), the talent squeeze does not look like ending soon.

AREEA points to 103 major resources and energy projects in Australia's investment pipeline, requiring 30,000 new production-related jobs.

"While that's a wonderful sign for our ever-evolving industry, persistent skills shortages mean it will be challenging filling those positions," says AREAA chief executive Steve Knott.

"Engineering and geology roles are two of the highest skills in demand, but we know that geoscience graduates are in major decline and reports have projected an



12 FEB, 2024

Graduates seize opportunity as talent squeeze bites

Australian Financial Review, Australia

MINING AND RESOURCES

engineering skills crisis by 2040.”

Utility Jemena reports that salary expectations have risen about 5 per cent from a year ago.

“This is especially true in areas of low supply such as electrical engineering, or when trying to source women in STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] fields,” says Craig Ypinazar, Jemena’s executive general manager of people, safety and resilience.

Jemena plans to recruit 20 graduates this year, compared with 16 last year, mainly in engineering or digital roles. It looks for grads who are able to demonstrate adaptability, communication and collaboration skills, problem solving and critical thinking.

“This can be demonstrated through work experience, internships, sports, community partnering or other activities,” Ypinazar says.

The world’s biggest miner, BHP, expects to recruit close to 200 graduates globally in 2024, a 20 per cent increase on its 2023 intake. The graduate program has been expanded to Canada and the US and now covers five countries.

BHP seeks graduates who are adept in the essential skills of mining engineering, mechatronics, geology, metallurgy, chemical/mechanical/process engineering and technology.

The company doesn’t require prior experience, but looks for graduates showing “drive, curiosity, adaptability and the ability to solve practical problems”.

For the newbies, salary is not the be-all and end-all.

“Graduates still expect to be well paid for the work they do,” the company says. “But one of the benefits of our FIFO [fly-in, fly-out] work is that our graduates only work six months of the year. This allows them to explore the world or focus on their hobbies and other interests outside of work.”

In 2024, Rio Tinto aims to hire 310 graduates globally, including 144 in Australia and New Zealand. The miner will also offer 180 internships.

The numbers compare with 296 graduates globally – 155 of them local – last year. Rio Tinto looks for “change makers with an ambition to play a critical role in solving the emerging challenges” of our time.

“Our graduate program fosters the next generation of future leaders,” says Isabelle Ferron, Rio’s acting manager for early talent.

Rio still values skills in engineering, sciences, technology, humanities and business, but roles are constantly evolving as the company transitions to a low-carbon world. It regularly fields questions from graduates about sustainability, decarbonisation, technology and development opportunities.

“We continue to see growth in future-focused disciplines including digital and



MOST POPULAR MINING & ENERGY EMPLOYER AWARD

Sponsored by CHANDLER MACLEOD

Finalists

Rio Tinto
bp
Ampol
Newmont
Viva Energy
Orica
Glencore
Woodside Energy
Evolution Mining



technology, automation, mechatronics, data science and decarbonisation,” Ferron says.

Viva Energy plans to recruit 20 “talented individuals” for its 2025 graduate program – double the size of its first cohort of nine graduates in 2022.

The company recruits from a broad range of disciplines including engineering, information technology, computer science, business and commerce, human resources and marketing.

“We play a key role in the Australian economy today by providing the fuels that keep people, businesses and our communities moving,” says Letitia Otto, Viva’s employee experience manager.

“Viva Energy will continue to provide those fuels, but our strategic agenda will see Viva Energy transition to lower carbon energy solutions while expanding its fuel retailing [convenience] footprint.

“These developments ... provide a hugely diverse range of career development opportunities for graduates and team members.”

For all the companies, activities such as information sessions, attending trade fairs and forging university partnerships are key recruitment tools.

“Five years ago, paying a recruitment agency to source a graduate would have been unheard of,” Jemena’s Ypinazar says. “Now, the universities have internal recruitment functions that help organisations source

graduates from their student population.”

But given the ongoing tight market for talent, retaining bright graduates is just as important as wooing them in the first place.

BHP’s program includes formal workshops, on-the-job and on-demand learning, coached activities, regular job rotations and global networking opportunities.

The program emphasises “meaty” challenges for the graduates to solve. Examples are safely removing dump-truck batteries, strategically managing inventories and initiatives to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for people with disabilities.

Jemena ensures them more self-determination in their rotations, along with structured development paths and support.

Examples are a route to achieve chartered status with Engineers Australia, or a Certified Practising Accountant qualification.

“Our graduates also do meaningful work on real projects and make a real contribution to the organisation,” Ypinazar says.

“For instance, the graduates recently presented to the executive general managers as an opportunity to enhance their brand.”

He adds that the company is Goldilocks in size: big enough to have the right support, systems and structure, but small enough for employees to feel that they have a voice.

“We mean it when we say our graduates have an influence on their rotations and path during and after the program.”

“Qualifications are one thing but, when we search the market, we also prioritise attitude, curiosity, flexibility and the desire to learn new skills and diversify.”

Similarly, Viva Energy’s graduate program stresses a “personalised and engaging” approach – all the way from recruitment to completion.

“Graduates can join part-time through their final year of study so they can get to know us and develop foundational skills and competencies,” Otto says.

“We regularly engage with our graduates before the program begins, inviting them to attend a range of events including a graduate social night.”

In addition to on-the-job training, Rio graduates are provided the tools to invent and innovate across a global program.

The two-year program focuses on developing both foundational and future skills.

Ferron says this enables graduates to grow beyond technical capability, “helping them to challenge the way we do things and find better ways”.



12 FEB, 2024

Graduates seize opportunity as talent squeeze bites

Australian Financial Review, Australia



Brodie Harp (left) is a graduate chemist at Rio Tinto, while Emma Filipovski is a Viva Energy engineering graduate.

CASE STUDIES: BRODIE HARP AND EMMA FILIPOVSKI

Being resourceful, seeking opportunity

Rio Tinto graduate Brodie Harp's interest in the practical aspects of science emerged at a young age – and it well equipped her for her current role at the miner's Yarwun alumina refinery at Gladstone.

"My sister and I used to do science experiments such as making slime and paper mâché volcanoes during the school holidays and I always enjoyed science classes when I was at school," Harp says. "I loved the practical aspects of science."

After graduating from high school in 2017, Harp studied for a bachelor of advanced science at the University of Queensland and completed her honours year in 2021.

She applied for Rio's graduate program and started at Yarwun the following year.

"There is such a wealth of knowledge across the business," she says. "Being able to work with – and learn from – people with such a vast range of experience has definitely been the highlight of working at Rio Tinto."

As a graduate chemist, Harp is based at Rio's Queensland Research and Development Centre at the refinery.

"I work in the central processing building in the laboratory which is basically in the middle of the plant. We share a laboratory space with the shift lab and work closely

with the other teams on site."

Harp's advice to newcomers is to avail themselves of as many opportunities as they can.

"Approach new situations with an open mind because you never know where it may lead you," she says. "Every experience is a chance to learn and grow as a person and as a professional."

Out of hours, Harp plays netball and spends quality time with her chihuahua cross pug Indie and French bulldog cross pug, Pugsley.

"I love living regionally because there's no traffic and it's so peaceful, while the best part of Gladstone is the beach," she says.

Viva Energy engineering graduate Emma Filipovski advises candidates to apply for roles that align with their interests.

"In doing so, you naturally will be a good candidate and it will help to set you up for a fulfilling career."

Filipovski's interest in asset engineering was piqued during the company's graduate program, when she worked with electrical and instrumentation trades on a particular job.

"After this experience, I expressed interest in an asset engineering role and my line

manager helped to arrange for my next rotation to be in this role," she says.

"I was interested in asset engineering, in particular, as it is a really good opportunity to develop my technical skills while also offering exposure to other areas of the business."

After completing her Victorian Certificate of Education, Filipovski completed a diploma of engineering at Deakin College, followed by a bachelor of mechatronics engineering (honours) at Deakin University.

She successfully applied for Viva Energy's graduate program in 2022.

Filipovski says Viva Energy's selection process was "well structured", starting with the submission of a one-minute video resume.

"Once successful, I was invited to an assessment and interview day. I found that the assessment process was thoughtful and engaging, as well as being fun."

When she's not helping to keep Viva's assets in top shape, the Geelong-based Filipovski enjoys hiking and training in aerial arts (circus acrobatics and performances on aerial trapeze, hoop and silk).

"I always love to try new activities and experiences," she says.