

Recruitment push for Gen-Z

Australia's buoyant mining industry is in desperate need of mid-tier employees such as engineers and geologists, according to recruitment specialists.

Acacia founder and director Abbi Vermey has been warning employers of this skill shortage for over a year now.

She said the number of university graduates moving directly to work in the mines has been shrinking.

"The numbers have been declining and it's quite scary," Vermey told **Paydirt**.

While Acacia specialises in filling managerial positions for mining companies, Vermey can't ignore what she's seeing below board level.

"I get managing directors [coming into my office], they just raised a bunch of cash, they're all really excited, want to be able to build their mine, but how are you going to find the people?," she said.

"What is your actual workforce strategy plan? Because the best employers in the industry at the moment are struggling to get people... it is really tight out there".

Australia's resources sector was a lifeline for the country during the heat of 2020's health pandemic, boosted by healthy iron ore prices. Western Australia's decision to keep mining an essential industry helped prop up the rest of the country.

The resources industry's momentum has barely slowed since March 2020 and Acacia has been working overtime to meet clients' needs with the flow of recruitment opportunities.

But Vermey believes the country isn't doing enough to excite the new generation for growing opportunities in clean future commodities.

"When you think about copper, nickel, and lithium, being such high commodity prices right now and what they can do for the world, now is the time to really start that being a huge PR play to get people more engaged and wanting to be professional in the industry," she said.

Recruitment company Hays also suggested a post-pandemic Australia was the perfect opportunity for companies to target Generation Z to fill job positions – regardless of which industry.

"Taking on apprentices or graduates might not be high on some HR teams' to-do lists," Institute of Student Employers chief executive Stephen Isherwood said. "But this could be something businesses live to regret. Employers need to think about how they will build a pipeline of talent coming through the organisation – talent



Abbi Vermey

they'll need when the economy recovers".

Hays also indicated in its report that some of the most in-demand job skills were in construction, engineering, facility management, manufacturing, resources and mining, trades and labour.

"Now is the time [to change the conversation] because of the nickel, graphite, and lithium prices, now is the time to change the way people think about the industry," Vermey said.

"There's a lot of miseducation around why we mine and that we do it to make the world a better place. There's a new wave coming in that I think is really exciting."

The recent Federal Budget drew criticism for failing to mention clean energy commodities.

Clean Energy Council chief executive Kane Thornton described it as a "missed opportunity".

"The lack of transmission investment is now one of the most critical challenges facing Australia's energy industry," Thornton said.

"It's disappointing that in a 'nation-building' infrastructure budget, upgrades that will enable the access and security of clean, low-cost power have not been prioritised".

In the aftermath of budget reveal, the Federal Government announced more than \$2 billion would be invested in the country's last remaining oil refineries in Geelong and Brisbane. This saved 1,250 jobs.

However, Thornton claimed a clean energy-focused budget could have delivered over \$50 billion in investment and 50,000 new jobs.

"This is the way we get Australia's eco-

nomie engine to roar back to life and how we build a more resilient and secure Australia," he said.

Jumpstarting the country's economy and workforce was a clear focus of Treasurer Josh Frydenberg's Budget speech to Parliament in early May. More than \$4 billion in funding will go towards job-skilling schemes such as "Job Trainer" and subsidies for apprenticeships. Another \$2 billion was pledged for further training opportunities, including those in remote communities.

The Federal Government also recently passed legislation to mutually recognise job qualifications across states, which will help put boots on the ground without any red tape.

Minerals Council of Australia chief executive Tania Constable said the move was a "big win" for the mining workforce and could increase the GDP by \$2.4 billion over 10 years.

"This reform will enhance productivity by automatically deeming tradespeople and other workers who hold an occupational licence in their home state or territory and who want to do the same work in another state or territory to have the necessary licence without additional fees," Constable said.

"This means an electrician working on a mine in Moranbah [Queensland] can relocate to the Pilbara [WA] and begin working immediately, or a diesel mechanic can move from the Hunter Valley [New South Wales] to a mine in Bendigo [Victoria] to go to the next level in their career or get experience in other commodities without having to get a new licence for the same work".

Vermey said the legislation was the right move, but also stressed the missed opportunity for "exciting" new and young recruits to fill mid-tier positions in the mining industry.

"There's still movement around the management level, but the biggest challenge will be that these mines can't operate without the blue-collar workers," she said.

"I think there needs to be way more talk around the generations coming in through high school around what they want to do for work and mining being such a dirty word [for them]. So, there needs to be way more education around why we mine... why they have their phone, why we have electric vehicles."

– Fraser Palamara