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Skills key to resource future

Kalgoorlie Miner, Kalgoorlie

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CME COMMENT PAUL EVERINGHAM

I've been fortunate enough to visit the Goldfields several times during the past year and one of the key issues people always raise with me is the skills squeeze.

To put it plainly, there is so much positive activity in the mining and resources sector — both right now and in the years to come — but not the human resources to take advantage of all the opportunities on offer.

A skills report published this week, commissioned by CME and prepared by independent workforce market specialists Pit Crew Consulting, backs up what member companies and other stakeholders in the Goldfields have been telling us.

The headline figures resonate very strongly: across the next two years our sector in WA is forecast to have demand for up to 40,000 additional skilled workers, with a peak shortfall that could reach 33,000 unless the situation is addressed.

There are myriad factors influencing this challenge. One is that we are in the relatively rare position of needing increased construction, shutdown and operational workers right now and into the near future.

We are also dealing with some of the obvious impacts of COVID-19 — such as uncertainty over State borders and a halt to international migration — and some of the perhaps lesser-known on-flow effects.

With big-scale infrastructure and construction projects booming across the country as part of COVID-19 recovery measures, workers who might once have headed to WA to work in our sector are instead finding jobs they can do in their home States.

Of course, it is one thing to

recognise an issue and another actually to address it.

Certainly training is one avenue and CME member companies have a long-standing commitment to recruiting and

providing skills to West Australians.

Our sector actively works with education providers, with the aim of turning out graduates equipped with skills needed by operations across the State. But we can always do more in that space.

CME research makes it clear that many of the roles required right now are highly skilled and require not just training or study but years — in some cases decades — of subsequent on-site experience to be fully and safely up to speed.

We cannot suddenly come up with thousands of experienced machine fitters, diesel fitters, metallurgists, drillers or geologists, which I know are all needed in the Goldfields.

Given market conditions in the east, it may not be possible to attract the numbers required from interstate either and there are additional pressures around factors such as the availability of housing and child care.

The ability to think outside the box — and, with vaccination roll-outs ramping up, to think outside Australia — is going to be crucial to tackling this challenge.

In part that is why the McGowan Government has initiated a Skills Summit later this month. Our sector, and variety of other industries will be involved, reflecting the fact the current skills shortage is a Statewide issue and not just a matter for mining and resources.

Everyone who will attend the summit realises that finding real solutions will help unlock many

opportunities for WA.

A good number of those opportunities are in the Goldfields. Projects such as the expansion of the Super Pit and Norton Goldfields' Paddington

operations, the planned Lynas processing plant in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, and, further down the track, even the potential for iron ore to be mined in the region.

Acting now to secure the right people with the right skills at the risk time will be crucial to locking in these future opportunities.

To see some of the jobs available in the WA mining and resources sector, go to jobsinresources.com.au.

Paul Everingham is the chief executive of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA.



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CME WA chief executive Paul Everingham. Picture: Tom Zaubmayr