

Quotas may not be the best way to attract women

Federal Government suggestions of quotas to encourage female participation at executive levels have drawn a mixed reaction from mining and resource industry recruiters, and those working in industry.



Skye Recruitment's Sophie Macdonald

Sophie Macdonald, principal of Skye Recruitment, specialises in matching job seeking professionals with employers in the mining and resources sector.

“We are on the rising wave of a resources boom in Australia and daily face the challenge of finding professional graduates to fill the positions,” said Macdonald.

“It would be impossible to specify a female quota.”

However prominent SKIRT member, Chamindri Samarakoon, a civil engineer with Watpac believes the proposed government quota may help in attracting more women into engineering.

“Having more women in engineering will help to make new graduates’ transitions easier, the sites are already female friendly, all that is missing is encouragement and guidance from women within the industry,” she said

“I think the government’s quota of having a minimum amount of female employees in certain industries will help to change the culture of the engineering profession so we can catch up to other professions.”

The QRC’s (Queensland Resources Council) chief executive Michael Roche is also behind their member companies in encouraging women into the resources sector, primarily through its Women in Resources Action Plan.

“From 2005-2009 the proportion of female engineers rose by 62 per cent and geologists by 59 per cent,” Roche said, adding that it’s particularly gratifying to see women taking up these so called ‘non-traditional’ roles.

But despite the top of the range salaries and conditions on offer for even new graduates, women are not being attracted into the sector in significant numbers, according to Sophie Macdonald.

“It’s not just women that are rare in the mining and infrastructure job market, but we also desperately need more men too.

“There is a global shortage of engineers and we are recruiting from everywhere over the world,” she said.

Skye has pioneered a graduate development program with a liaison officer whose role is to mentor graduates and undergraduates into the sector.

At the University of Queensland in 2004, 15 per cent of engineering students were women, rising only to 16 per cent in 2009. At the University of Western Australia in 2004, 17 per cent of engineering students were women, not rising at all in 2009 despite the mining boom in that state. Currently, at the Queensland University of Technology, only 11 per cent of students in engineering are women.

“This is despite the federal government’s ‘Year of Women in Engineering’ initiative where the

discipline was promoted in Universities and schools all over Australia” said Macdonald. There are a number of reasons why women are not attracted into this lucrative business, according to Skye Recruitment.

“Typically the thinking was women were not attracted to engineering because they are male dominated industries, often site based in remote areas,” said Macdonald. “But there are plenty of CBD based positions in civil consultancy, and that doesn’t seem to be attracting women either.”

“I believe it is no longer the off-site conditions deterring women from entering the field but rather engineering as a profession is failing to attract females at an undergraduate level.”

“This could be because low numbers of women in engineering in the past may have lead to women not considering engineering as they have no positive female role models within the industry.”

Macdonald’s personal opinion of the quota idea may raise some eyebrows considering she runs one of Australia’s top recruitment agencies specialising in the male-dominated resources sector.

“Quotas turn back the clock for women and assume we can’t compete in our own right,” she said.

“What needs to be addressed urgently is the shortage of undergraduates selecting mining, oil and gas, civil construction and civil engineering careers.

“Clearly for Generation Y it’s not just about the money or career path or no one would be studying anything other than engineering.”

(2010). *Quotas may not be the best way to attract women*. Available:
<http://www.globalironore.com.au/ajmnews/march/march-25-10/other-top-stories/quotas-may-not-be-the-best-way-to-attract-women>

Last accessed: Wednesday May 19, 2010