
Chasing talent a tough gig for start-ups

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Clean energy storage start-up [Endua](https://www.endua.com/) [https://www.endua.com/] might be quietly plotting a new path toward a greener Australia, but finding the talent for entrepreneurial journey hasn't been easy.

The company is building the next generation of hydrogen-powered storage solutions to power communities at the flick of a switch. These are not skills you can learn at the university.



Talent shortage could affect Australia's ability to meet its carbon reduction ambitions, says Endua CEO Paul Sernia.

CEO Paul Sernia [https://www.endua.com/team] acknowledges that forging new ground in an emerging industry comes with significant talent challenges. Right now, he needs a few more hands on deck, but they're not easy to come by, which is proving a significant drain on internal resources.

He's not alone. The Clean Energy Council warns

[<https://www.cleanenergycouncil.org.au/news/clean-energy-council-chief-executive-kane-thorntons-keynote-address-to-the-national-jobs-skills-summit>] that Australia runs the risk of being unable to meet its new climate targets unless the current and growing labour shortages and skills gaps across the clean energy industry are filled.

In Queensland alone, a vibrant green hydrogen industry exporting energy to the world could require more than 26,000 construction workers by 2050, the council's chief executive Kane Thornton told the recent National Jobs and Skills Summit. The need for talent presents an enormous opportunity at a time when even the current demand for clean energy workers is going unmet. This is the key decade to not just reduce emissions, but also to develop the workforce, and there's no time to waste, Thornton told the summit.

“The flow-on economic and employment benefits to regions reliant on low-cost energy for their global competitiveness is difficult to comprehend, not to mention the opportunity for Australia's critical minerals that will power the global clean energy revolution,” he said.

Reliable projections on job opportunities in the clean energy sector

[<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5bei4>] are hard to come by, but according to one report, [<https://www.racefor2030.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/RACE-E3-Opportunity-Assessment-FINAL-REPORT-October-2021.pdf>] a further 130,000 and 200,000 jobs could be created in the sector by 2030.

Catching unicorns

Endua [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p57yow>], for one, is searching for the talent to fill multiple roles in research, product development, business development and engineering teams. It has invested significant time and energy in forging relationships with a range of educational institutions in a bid to get the first pick when graduates spread their wings.

Sernia says: “As a start-up, we're doing things that are highly technical that have never been tried before, and doing it fast. So having the right people on the team at the right time is critical for success. You have to adapt to the circumstances.

“It means that pre-existing hydrogen experience is hard to come by, and largely concentrated overseas, so we’re having to cast a wide net to attract people.”

The sheer size of the talent pool required over the coming years means clean energy providers are competing against each other for the tiny pool of talent available, Sernia says.

Paying attention to processes means obsessing over job descriptions to really focus on the impact and mission-driven elements of the role to elevate what differentiates Endua from other companies.

“It’s about finding that small window of opportunity to get talent genuinely excited about what we can do. We are also looking at adjacent industries to understand what skill sets are transferrable for someone looking to make a change in their career. Most people can see that clean tech is the future, and want to put their experience to work on something that is going to leave a positive legacy,” he says.

Securing talent is also a challenge for thermal energy storage company, MGA Thermal, says human resources officer Jacqueline Gow.

The company has deployed new strategies to recruit, grow or promote talent from within.

“We’re finding low numbers of candidates applying for certain roles. The current labour market is an employees’ market, and employers need to adjust their strategies accordingly.

“Labour wastage can be exacerbated during periods of considerable labour market competition, and as such, employers must ensure that they are not only enticing new talent, but retaining their existing talent,” she says.

Gow denies that the talent shortage is hampering company growth, insisting that current strategies have been effective.

She has also engaged with recruiters who specialise in diversity – particularly in the Chinese and Aboriginal sector – to provide access to fresh talent pools.

“We’ve been working to reduce potential barriers for diverse talent, recognising that high-level talent is highly sought-after and therefore requires a competitive, strategic approach,” she says.

“We’re reassessing our approach to job design to ensure that we hire strategically, given the changing talent market and candidate expectations,” Gow says.

New heavy vehicle energy distributor Foton Mobility is also affected by the current

of the skills we utilise have not been specially required in the field of transport before, and thus we need support from the original manufacturer, based on their own years of experience with the new technologies,” Mike Levin, government and community liaison manager, says.

Foton is also employing technicians and engineers with experience in current technology and training them along the way, he says.

While labour is short, salary expectations are rising. But meeting those salary expectations is particularly challenging for cash-strapped start-ups.

Industry insiders [<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/long-list-of-high-paying-in-demand-jobs-in-energy-sector-20220620-p5av8k>] suggest that wages are rising faster than clean energy prices. In some cases, wages are rising by 20 per cent. Others suggest it’s closer to 50 per cent.

Levin says Foton requires skills not readily available, meaning there’s no set pay scale for the qualifications being sought.

Gow acknowledges MGA Thermal has limited availability to compete with market salary.

“This can further impact our ability to be an enticing option for top talent. We’ve just completed the hiring of six people, but due to the nature of the market, we’re taking time to reposition and reassess our strategies, making sure that we reduce the negative impact of this talent shortage as much as possible,” she says.