

SALARY GUIDE



Civil & Structural Engineering JANUARY 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's civil and structural engineering market enters 2026 under sustained pressure. Demand for experienced engineers continues to exceed supply across consulting and project delivery, driven by infrastructure investment, population growth, energy transition, defence programs, and major urban development.

This is a structural shortage, not a short-term cycle. It is reshaping how engineers are hired, paid, promoted, and retained. While salaries are rising nationally, growth is uneven. The most acute shortages are concentrated among Site and Project Engineers in Queensland's urban development market, mid-to-senior delivery engineers in New South Wales and Victoria, and engineers willing to work in FIFO, DIDO, and regional environments.

Market pressure has also created unintended consequences. Premature promotion, title inflation, and wage compression are increasing costs without consistently improving capability, raising delivery risk and undermining long-term sustainability.

This guide provides clarity by breaking the market down by state and delivery context, separating consulting and project delivery roles, accounting for remote and FIFO dynamics, and focusing on total remuneration rather than base salary alone. It also examines structural workforce issues affecting future supply, including early-career pipelines, migrant engineer integration, and retention strategies beyond salary escalation.

This report is designed to support informed, sustainable decision-making for engineers, employers, and hiring leaders navigating the Australian engineering market in 2026 and beyond.

Disclaimer

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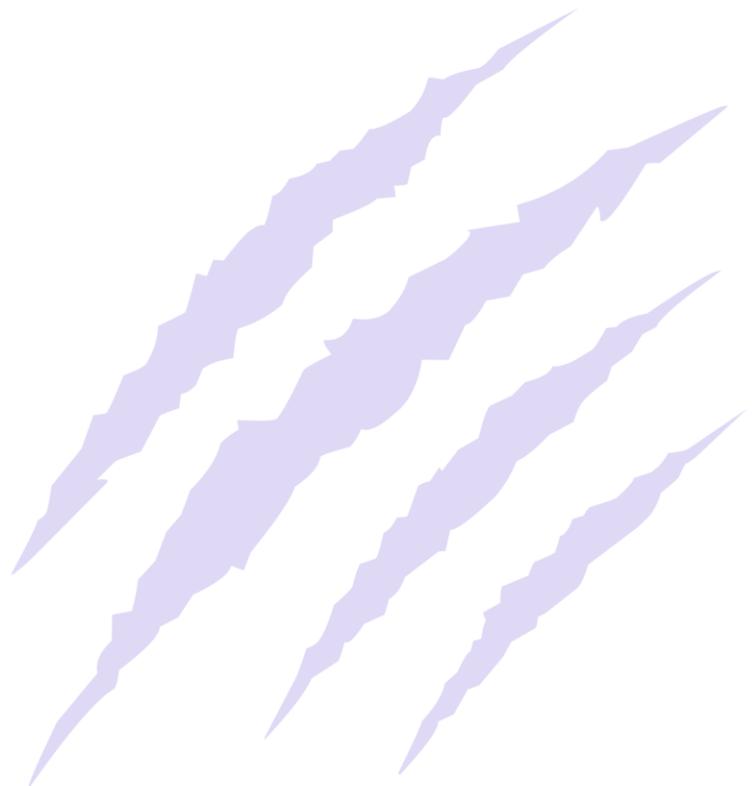
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Australia's civil and structural engineering sector is entering one of the most consequential periods in its modern history. Public and private infrastructure investment is accelerating across transport, energy, water, urban development, defence, and social infrastructure, while the supply of experienced engineering talent continues to tighten.

This salary guide has been developed to provide a **realistic view** of the Australian engineering employment market entering 2026. Rather than presenting isolated salary figures, the guide examines how remuneration is shaped by market forces, delivery environments, workforce behaviour, and long-term structural constraints.

The purpose of this report is not to encourage inflated salary expectations or reactive decision-making. Instead, it aims to support **sustainable outcomes** for both engineers and employers by aligning salary benchmarks with capability, responsibility, risk exposure, and long-term workforce planning.

1.1 WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

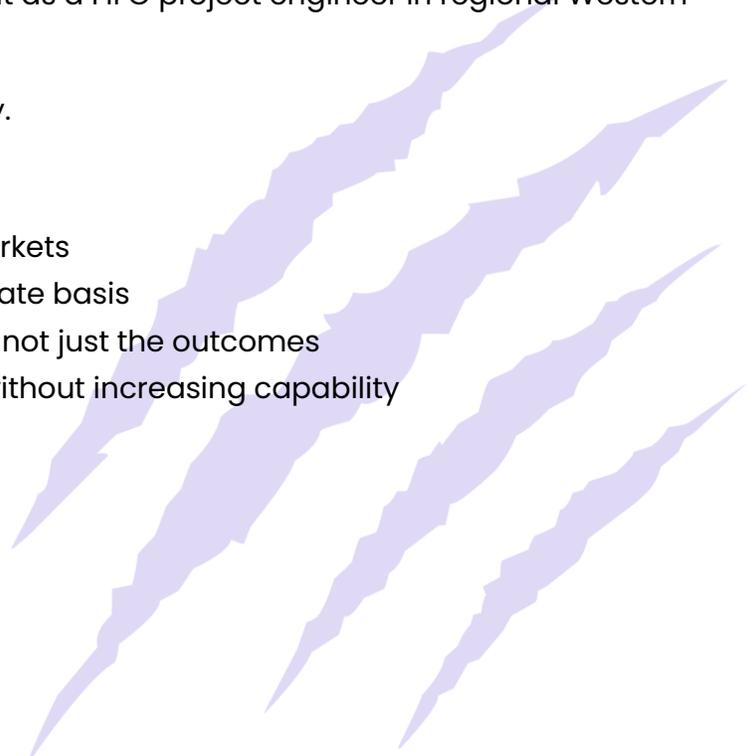
Most engineering salary guides fail for predictable reasons. They compress a complex national market into a single set of averages or publish headline figures without explaining the conditions attached to them.

Australia does not have one engineering market. It has multiple overlapping markets that differ by state, sector, delivery model, project scale, and employer maturity. A consulting engineer in Brisbane does not operate in the same environment as a FIFO project engineer in regional Western Australia, even if their titles appear similar.

This guide exists to address that complexity directly.

It has been structured to:

- Separate consulting and project delivery markets
- Present salary benchmarks on a state-by-state basis
- Explain the drivers behind salary movement, not just the outcomes
- Highlight structural risks that inflate wages without increasing capability





By doing so, the guide helps readers understand not only **what engineers are being paid**, but **why those figures exist** and whether they are sustainable.

1.2 WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This report has been written to serve multiple audiences without favouring one over another.

For engineers

The guide helps engineers:

- Benchmark remuneration against market reality
- Understand the difference between base salary and total package
- Recognise the long-term risks of premature promotion or role inflation
- Make informed career decisions based on capability development, not short-term pay

For hiring managers

The guide supports hiring managers by:

- Providing realistic benchmarks for offers and counteroffers
- Explaining why certain roles are increasingly difficult to fill
- Identifying where retention pressure is structural rather than individual
- Highlighting common mistakes that inflate cost without improving outcomes

For directors and business leaders

At an executive level, the guide is designed to:

- Support workforce planning during a prolonged skills shortage
- Distinguish market-driven salary pressure from self-inflicted inflation
- Inform retention, succession, and early-career pipeline strategy
- Align remuneration decisions with long-term business sustainability

2.0 NATIONAL MARKET OUTLOOK (2026)

Why the Engineering Shortage Is Structural, Not Cyclical



2.1 A Prolonged Supply Constraint, Not a Temporary Spike

Australia's civil and structural engineering market is entering 2026 under conditions that point clearly to a long-term supply constraint rather than a short-lived skills shortage. Unlike previous boom cycles that were driven by isolated resource projects or short infrastructure bursts, the current environment is shaped by multiple overlapping demand drivers operating simultaneously across states and sectors.

Transport infrastructure, water security, urban development, energy transition projects, defence facilities, and social infrastructure are all drawing from the same finite pool of engineering talent. These projects are not sequential. They are concurrent. As a result, even when one program slows, others continue to absorb capability at pace.

This overlap means salary pressure does not reset between cycles. Instead, it compounds. Engineers move between sectors, employers compete across state boundaries, and wage expectations are carried forward rather than corrected. This is a defining feature of a structural shortage.

2.2 Why the Brisbane 2032 Olympics Accelerates Demand

The Brisbane 2032 Olympics is frequently described as the cause of Queensland's heated engineering market. In practice, it acts as an accelerator rather than a root driver. Queensland already faced rising demand due to population growth, transport upgrades, land development, flood resilience works, and water infrastructure investment. Olympic-related projects compress timelines, bring forward capital expenditure, and increase competition for experienced engineers earlier than initially forecast.

The key implication is that Olympic-driven demand does not disappear once venues are delivered. The supporting transport, housing, utilities, and urban regeneration projects extend well beyond the event itself. This makes salary pressure in Queensland persistent rather than temporary.

For employers, this means retention and pipeline planning matter more than short-term project resourcing. For engineers, it means opportunities will remain abundant, but competition for high-quality roles will also intensify.



2.3 NSW and Victoria as Mature, High-Risk Delivery Markets

New South Wales and Victoria represent the most mature engineering labour markets in Australia. These states are characterised by complex governance frameworks, high public scrutiny, and long-running mega-projects that demand strong commercial and stakeholder capability.

In these environments, salary inflation is driven as much by risk management as it is by scarcity. Employers are willing to pay premiums for engineers who have demonstrated an ability to operate under pressure, manage interfaces, handle claims exposure, and deliver within highly regulated frameworks.

This has two important consequences. First, senior and principal salaries in NSW and Victoria often exceed those in emerging markets even when project volumes are similar. Second, employers in these states are increasingly cautious about premature promotion, as the cost of underperformance is significantly higher.

These markets reward depth of experience more than speed of progression. Engineers who develop strong foundations tend to achieve more sustainable long-term outcomes than those who advance rapidly without sufficient exposure.

2.4 Western Australia and Remote Markets as Salary Distorters

Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and parts of regional Queensland introduce a fundamentally different market dynamic. In these regions, remoteness amplifies scarcity and reshapes how salaries are structured.

FIFO and DIDO delivery models introduce allowances, uplifts, accommodation, and travel components that inflate total remuneration well beyond metropolitan equivalents. This does not necessarily reflect higher role complexity, but rather compensation for roster intensity, fatigue, isolation, and retention risk.

As a result, national salary comparisons can become misleading if remote roles are not separated from metro benchmarks. A project engineer in Perth operating on a standard roster is not directly comparable to a project engineer working a two weeks on, one week off roster in a remote location. Understanding this distinction is critical for both employers setting offers and engineers assessing whether higher pay reflects long-term sustainability or short-term compensation for lifestyle trade-offs.



2.5 Consulting Versus Project Delivery Divergence

One of the clearest national trends entering 2026 is the widening gap between consulting and project delivery remuneration. This divergence is not new, but it is accelerating. Project delivery roles increasingly price in commercial exposure, program risk, extended hours, and interface management.

Consulting roles, while still demanding, typically offer more stable hours, clearer progression frameworks, and stronger mentoring environments. As delivery-side salaries rise faster, consulting firms face retention challenges, particularly at the intermediate to senior levels. This has led to internal wage pressure, selective counteroffers, and in some cases, accelerated promotion to stem attrition. The result is a feedback loop where delivery salaries pull consulting wages upward, even when productivity does not increase at the same rate.

2.6 What This Means for the Years Ahead

The national outlook entering 2026 points to a market that will remain tight for the foreseeable future. Salary pressure is unlikely to ease materially, but the way it manifests will continue to evolve. Organisations that respond reactively by inflating titles or matching counteroffers will experience rising costs without improved outcomes. Those that invest in early-career pipelines, structured progression, and retention mechanisms will be better positioned to manage prolonged scarcity.

For engineers, the environment offers opportunity, but also risk. Understanding where demand is genuine, where pay reflects real responsibility, and where inflation masks capability gaps will be essential to making sound career decisions.

3.0 CONSULTING VERSUS PROJECT DELIVERY ROLES

Why Site-Based Engineers Are Paid Differently

3.1 Two Markets That Share Titles but Not Realities

Civil and structural engineers often move between consulting and project delivery roles over the course of their careers. While job titles may appear similar, the nature of the work, the risks carried, and the pressures faced are fundamentally different.





Consulting roles focus on design, technical assurance, coordination, and advisory services. Project delivery roles focus on execution, construction sequencing, subcontractor management, safety, program control, and commercial outcomes. These differences are central to understanding why remuneration diverges so clearly between the two markets.

Treating consulting and delivery roles as interchangeable when benchmarking salary leads to inaccurate expectations on both sides. This guide separates them deliberately to reflect how the market functions.

3.2 Consulting Roles: Technical Depth and Structured Progression

Consulting engineers operate in environments that prioritise technical accuracy, regulatory compliance, and long-term asset performance. Responsibilities typically include design development, technical review, multidisciplinary coordination, and engagement with approval authorities.

Career progression in consulting is generally structured and linked to demonstrated technical competence, peer review capability, mentoring contribution, and increasingly, client-facing skills. While workloads can be demanding, hours are typically more predictable than in site-based roles.

Remuneration in consulting reflects these characteristics. Salary growth tends to be steady rather than abrupt. While absolute pay may sit below delivery roles at equivalent experience levels, consulting provides stronger foundations for long-term technical leadership and professional accreditation.

3.3 Project Delivery Roles: Risk, Accountability, and Commercial Exposure

Project delivery engineers operate much closer to risk. They are responsible for translating designs into reality, often under tight time constraints, budget pressure, and live safety environments. Decisions made on site can have immediate financial and safety consequences.

Delivery roles typically involve extended hours, irregular schedules, and high availability. Engineers are expected to manage subcontractors, resolve issues in real time, and interface with clients, regulators, and suppliers simultaneously.

The market compensates for this exposure through higher base salaries and additional allowances. This premium reflects accountability, fatigue, and the commercial consequences of errors, not just workload.



3.4 Why Delivery Roles Attract Higher Pay

The salary premium for project delivery roles exists for several reasons.

First, delivery engineers carry direct commercial risk. Errors can result in claims, rework, or delays with measurable financial impact.

Second, delivery roles often demand greater time commitment and reduced flexibility. Extended hours, weekend work, and site presence affect lifestyle balance.

Third, delivery environments experience higher turnover. Employers use higher pay to attract and retain talent in roles that are harder to sustain long term.

This premium does not imply that delivery roles are more valuable than consulting roles. It reflects a different risk and lifestyle profile.

3.5 The Hidden Cost of Delivery-Side Salary Inflation

While delivery roles often pay more, unchecked inflation carries consequences. As salaries rise, expectations around capability increase. When engineers are promoted or paid beyond their readiness, project risk increases rather than decreases.

This is particularly evident where consulting firms lose intermediate engineers to delivery roles. Consulting wages rise in response, often without corresponding increases in productivity or charge-out rates. Over time, this compresses margins and reduces investment in mentoring and training.

Understanding this dynamic is critical for employers seeking to balance competitiveness with long-term sustainability.

3.6 Choosing Between Consulting and Delivery

For engineers, choosing between consulting and delivery should not be reduced to salary alone.

Consulting roles offer long-term technical development, stability, and pathways to specialist or advisory leadership. Delivery roles offer faster pay progression, broader commercial exposure, and accelerated responsibility, often at the cost of lifestyle predictability.

Many successful engineers move between both environments during their careers. The most sustainable trajectories involve deliberate timing rather than reactive moves driven solely by short-term pay differences.



4.0 QUEENSLAND (QLD)

Market Conditions, Salary Benchmarks, and Workforce Dynamics

Queensland is entering 2026 as the fastest tightening engineering labour market, driven by population growth, transport expansion, land development, water/flood resilience, and Brisbane 2032 enabling works. Movement between consulting and delivery roles is aggressive, which is lifting salaries across the board.

4.1 Consulting Salaries – QLD (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$75k–\$85k
Junior (1–2 yrs)	\$90k–\$100k
Intermediate (3–5 yrs)	\$105k–\$125k
Senior (5–10 yrs)	\$135k–\$160k
Principal (10+ yrs)	\$165k–\$205k

4.2 Project Delivery Salaries – QLD (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$85k–\$105k
Site Engineer (2–4 yrs)	\$105k–\$135k
Project Engineer	\$125k–\$165k
Senior Project Engineer	\$150k–\$200k
Project Manager	\$180k–\$235k

Workforce note: retention pressure is sharpest in the 4–8 year cohort; non-cash benefits and selective counteroffers are common.



5.0 NEW SOUTH WALES (NSW)

Market Conditions, Salary Benchmarks, and Workforce Dynamics

NSW remains the most competitive and mature market. Hiring is more selective and expectations are higher due to complex delivery environments and reputational risk.

5.1 Consulting Salaries – NSW (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$78k–\$88k
Junior	\$95k–\$105k
Intermediate	\$115k–\$135k
Senior	\$145k–\$175k
Principal	\$175k–\$225k

5.2 Project Delivery Salaries – NSW (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$90k–\$115k
Site Engineer	\$115k–\$145k
Project Engineer	\$135k–\$175k
Senior Project Engineer	\$165k–\$215k
Project Manager	\$195k–\$255k

Workforce note: salary compression is common (intermediate paid closer to senior), but many employers resist premature promotion due to delivery risk.

6.0 VICTORIA (VIC)

Market Conditions, Salary Benchmarks, and Workforce Dynamics



Victoria's market reflects long-duration delivery pressure and high governance requirements. Salary growth is increasingly tied to proven capability in regulated environments.

6.1 Consulting Salaries – VIC (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$75k–\$85k
Junior	\$90k–\$100k
Intermediate	\$110k–\$130k
Senior	\$140k–\$170k
Principal	\$165k–\$215k

6.2 Project Delivery Salaries – VIC (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$85k–\$110k
Site Engineer	\$105k–\$140k
Project Engineer	\$125k–\$170k
Senior Project Engineer	\$155k–\$205k
Project Manager	\$185k–\$245k

Workforce note: moves are often driven by role quality/sustainability more than salary-only jumps.

7.0 WESTERN AUSTRALIA (WA)

Market Conditions, Salary Benchmarks, and Remote Delivery Dynamics

WA pay is heavily shaped by geography and mobility. Remote/FIFO/DIDO premiums often reflect roster strain and retention risk as much as technical complexity.



7.1 Consulting Salaries – WA (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$80k–\$95k
Junior	\$100k–\$120k
Intermediate	\$120k–\$145k
Senior	\$150k–\$185k
Principal	\$180k–\$230k

7.2 Project Delivery Salaries – WA (Total Remuneration) (incl. FIFO/Regional)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$95k–\$125k
Site Engineer	\$120k–\$160k
Project Engineer	\$140k–\$185k
Senior Project Engineer	\$170k–\$230k
Project Manager	\$205k–\$280k

Workforce note: the best retention outcomes come from roster sustainability + pathways, not salary alone.

8.0 SOUTH AUSTRALIA (SA)

Market Conditions, Salary Benchmarks, and Sector Influences

SA is smaller but can tighten quickly due to project-specific ramps (defence, renewables, transport). Interstate pull is a consistent wage driver.



8.1 Consulting Salaries – SA (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$70k–\$80k
Junior	\$85k–\$95k
Intermediate	\$100k–\$120k
Senior	\$120k–\$145k
Principal	\$145k–\$190k

8.2 Project Delivery Salaries – SA (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$85k–\$105k
Site Engineer	\$100k–\$130k
Project Engineer	\$120k–\$160k
Senior Project Engineer	\$150k–\$195k
Project Manager	\$180k–\$230k

9.0 AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACT)

Government-Driven Demand, Consulting Dominance, and Clearance-Led Premiums

The ACT market is smaller and more stable, with pay influenced by government frameworks and clearance eligibility/portability.

9.1 Consulting Salaries – ACT (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$70k–\$85k
Junior	\$85k–\$100k



Intermediate	\$100k–\$130k
Senior	\$120k–\$165k
Principal	\$145k–\$215k

9.2 Project Delivery Salaries –ACT (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$85k–\$110k
Site Engineer	\$100k–\$135k
Project Engineer	\$120k–\$165k
Senior Project Engineer	\$150k–\$195k
Project Manager	\$180k–\$230k

10.0 TASMANIA AND REGIONAL MARKETS

Scarcity-Driven Salaries, Lifestyle Trade-Offs, and Regional Opportunity

Regional markets are driven by scarcity: one large project can materially tighten supply. Packages often include relocation, travel, accommodation support, and vehicles.

10.1 Consulting Salaries – TAS / Regional (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate	\$70k–\$85k
Junior	\$85k–\$100k
Intermediate	\$100k–\$130k
Senior	\$120k–\$165k
Principal	\$145k–\$215k



Project Delivery Salaries – TAS / Regional (Total Remuneration)

Level	Salary Range
Graduate / Site Engineer	\$85k–\$110k
Site Engineer	\$100k–\$135k
Project Engineer	\$120k–\$165k
Senior Project Engineer	\$150k–\$195k
Project Manager	\$180k–\$230k

11.0 PREMATURE PROMOTION AND WAGE INFLATION RISK

When Retention Decisions Increase Cost Without Increasing Capability

11.1 How Premature Promotion Has Become a Market-Wide Issue

Across Australia, a recurring pattern has emerged in both consulting and project delivery environments. Engineers reach a point where their salary progression slows as they approach the next genuine capability threshold. At the same time, market pressure increases as competing employers offer higher pay for similar titles.

Faced with the risk of losing staff, many organisations respond by promoting engineers into more senior roles before they are fully ready. This often occurs in delivery environments where immediate resourcing pressure outweighs long-term capability planning. The result is title inflation that is not matched by experience, judgement, or technical depth.

While this approach may solve a short-term retention problem, it introduces longer-term risks that compound over time. Organisations begin paying senior-level salaries for engineers who still require senior-level supervision.

11.2 The Common Scenario: Site Engineer to Project Engineer

One of the most common examples occurs in project delivery teams. A capable Site Engineer reaches a point where their salary plateaus, but they are not yet ready to operate independently as



a Project Engineer. Rather than risk losing them to a competitor offering more money, the employer promotes the individual into the Project Engineer role.

In practice, the engineer may continue performing much of the same work, with limited exposure to planning ownership, cost control, subcontractor negotiation, or claims management. However, their salary now reflects a higher title rather than a higher capability.

This creates a misalignment between cost and output. The engineer earns more, but the organisation carries increased risk, as decisions are being made by someone still developing the required judgement.

11.3 Why This Drives Wage Inflation Across the Market

Once premature promotions become common, they distort salary benchmarks across the industry. Competing employers are forced to match inflated expectations, even when capability does not justify the increase. Over time, this leads to salary compression, where junior and intermediate engineers earn closer to senior-level pay. This reduces differentiation between levels, undermines structured progression, and increases total labour cost without improving delivery performance.

In consulting environments, this often results in margin pressure, as charge-out rates cannot rise as quickly as salaries. In delivery environments, it increases project risk, rework, and supervision burden.

11.4 The Hidden Cost to Engineers

While premature promotion may appear beneficial in the short term, it can be damaging to an engineer's long-term career. Engineers promoted too early often find themselves underprepared, overexposed, and lacking the support needed to succeed.

This can lead to confidence erosion, performance issues, and stalled progression. In some cases, engineers become locked into inflated titles that make lateral moves difficult, as other employers expect a level of capability that has not yet been fully developed. Sustainable career progression requires alignment between responsibility, support, and experience, not just salary.

11.5 Why This Matters More in 2026 and Beyond

As labour shortages persist, the temptation to use title inflation as a retention tool will increase. However, the long-term cost of this approach grows with project complexity and risk exposure.



Organisations that continue to promote without readiness will face:

- Increased supervision burden on senior staff
- Higher error rates and rework
- Reduced team confidence and cohesion
- Escalating salary costs with diminishing returns

Those that resist this trend and maintain disciplined progression frameworks will be better positioned to deliver projects successfully and retain staff sustainably.

11.6 A More Sustainable Alternative

The most effective organisations separate salary progression from title progression. Engineers are rewarded financially for performance and retention, while promotion is reserved for demonstrated capability.

This approach requires honest conversations, structured development plans, and clear expectations. While more difficult in the short term, it produces stronger teams, lower risk, and better long-term outcomes for both engineers and employers.

12.0 UNDERGRADUATE AND INTERN MARKET DYNAMICS

Why Early-Career Talent Has Become a Competitive Advantage

12.1 The Engineering Talent Pipeline Is Being Pulled Forward

One of the most significant shifts in the Australian engineering market entering 2026 is how early talent is being identified, engaged, and secured. Where companies once focused primarily on graduate recruitment, that window has moved steadily earlier.

Initially, firms began targeting final-year students. As competition increased, attention shifted to third-year students. Today, many high-performing organisations are engaging second-year undergraduates, recognising that by the time students reach later years, the strongest candidates have already committed elsewhere.

This shift is not driven by preference. It is driven by necessity. The prolonged skills shortage means that organisations can no longer rely on graduates alone to meet future workforce needs.



12.2 Why Companies Can No Longer Afford Unpaid Internships

Unpaid or minimally paid internships are becoming increasingly unviable in the current market. High-performing students now have multiple options, and they are far less willing to commit time and effort to roles that do not offer fair compensation.

From the student perspective, paid internships signal seriousness, respect, and long-term opportunity. From the employer perspective, they are now a necessary investment rather than an optional cost.

Organisations that continue to rely on unpaid internships are finding that they attract fewer candidates and lower-quality applicants. The strongest students are selecting employers who demonstrate commitment through paid placements, mentoring, and structured learning.

12.3 Interns as Capability Builders, Not Cheap Labour

The role of interns has evolved. Interns are no longer viewed simply as short-term assistance. They are increasingly recognised as future engineers who can be shaped to meet organisational needs. Companies that treat internships as capability-building programs see far better outcomes. These organisations provide real project exposure, structured support, and clear pathways into graduate roles. Over time, interns who progress through these programs require less onboarding, perform more effectively, and integrate more smoothly into delivery teams. In contrast, organisations that treat interns as disposable or peripheral often lose them to competitors who offer clearer development and progression.

12.4 The Cost of Delaying Intern Engagement

Delaying intern recruitment has real consequences. By the time many companies begin searching for interns, the strongest candidates have already accepted offers elsewhere.

This results in:

- Reduced choice in candidate quality
- Increased reliance on external graduate recruitment
- Higher onboarding and training costs
- Greater long-term retention risk





In a tight labour market, early engagement is one of the few levers organisations can pull to reduce future hiring pressure.

12.5 Why This Matters More in 2026

As experienced engineers become increasingly scarce, the importance of building internal capability grows. Interns and undergraduates represent the most reliable long-term solution to workforce shortages, but only if they are engaged early and treated seriously.

Companies that fail to invest in interns today will face even greater hiring challenges in two to three years' time. Those that build structured, paid internship pipelines will have a significant competitive advantage.

12.6 Supporting the Intern Pipeline Through Structured Programs

As competition for undergraduate talent intensifies, many organisations are recognising the value of partnering with specialist programs that reduce hiring risk while improving candidate quality.

The Lionheart [ALPHA](#) Intern Program has been developed specifically to support Australian engineering employers in building reliable, high-quality intern and early-career pipelines. The program focuses on identifying, assessing, and preparing undergraduate engineers who demonstrate both technical aptitude and professional maturity.

Rather than acting as a transactional recruitment channel, the Lionheart [ALPHA](#) Intern Program is designed to align intern placements with long-term workforce planning. Candidates are assessed not only on academic performance, but also on communication, attitude, and readiness to operate in professional engineering environments.

For employers, this approach reduces time spent screening unsuitable candidates and improves conversion from intern to graduate roles. For students, it provides exposure to meaningful work, fair remuneration, and clearer career pathways within the Australian engineering market.

As the competition for early-career talent continues to accelerate, structured programs such as [ALPHA](#) are becoming an increasingly effective way for organisations to secure future capability without relying solely on last-minute graduate hiring.

13.0 MIGRANT ENGINEERS AND THE AUSTRALIAN MARKET

Barriers, Realities, and Untapped Capability



13.1 The Role Migrant Engineers Play in Australia's Infrastructure Future

Migrant engineers are essential to Australia's ability to deliver its long-term infrastructure pipeline. Civil and structural engineers trained overseas bring valuable technical skills, global project exposure, and diverse problem-solving approaches. In a market experiencing prolonged labour shortages, this cohort represents a significant but underutilised source of capability.

Despite this, migrant engineers continue to face structural barriers when attempting to enter or progress within the Australian engineering workforce. These barriers are not typically related to competence, but rather to risk perception, compliance uncertainty, and experience recognition.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for employers seeking sustainable workforce solutions and for policymakers aiming to support national infrastructure delivery.

13.2 Working Rights as a Primary Barrier

One of the most immediate challenges migrant engineers face is working rights. Many employers are reluctant to progress candidates who do not hold full, unrestricted working entitlements, particularly for permanent roles.

Concerns typically include:

- Uncertainty around visa duration
- Perceived administrative complexity
- Risk of role disruption if visa conditions change

As a result, capable engineers are often excluded early in the recruitment process, even when they possess relevant experience and qualifications.

13.3 Employer Hesitation Around Sponsorship

Visa sponsorship presents another significant hurdle. While sponsorship pathways exist, many organisations remain hesitant to engage with them due to perceived cost, time commitment, and retention risk.

In practice, sponsorship concerns often stem from limited internal understanding rather than insurmountable barriers. However, in a tight labour market, employers often default to candidates who present the lowest perceived risk, even when this narrows the available talent pool. This



conservative approach limits access to skilled engineers at a time when demand consistently exceeds supply.

13.4 The Australian Experience Dilemma

A common requirement in engineering recruitment is “local experience.” While understandable in principle, this expectation often becomes a catch-22 for migrant engineers. Without Australian experience, candidates struggle to secure roles. Without roles, they cannot gain Australian experience.

In many cases, overseas project experience is directly transferable, particularly where standards, codes, and delivery environments are comparable. However, this equivalence is not always recognised consistently across the market.

This creates inefficiency. Capable engineers remain underemployed, while employers continue to face shortages.

13.5 Opportunities for Industry and Government

There is growing opportunity for both industry and government to address these challenges more proactively. Clearer sponsorship pathways, better recognition of international experience, and targeted onboarding support could significantly increase workforce participation.

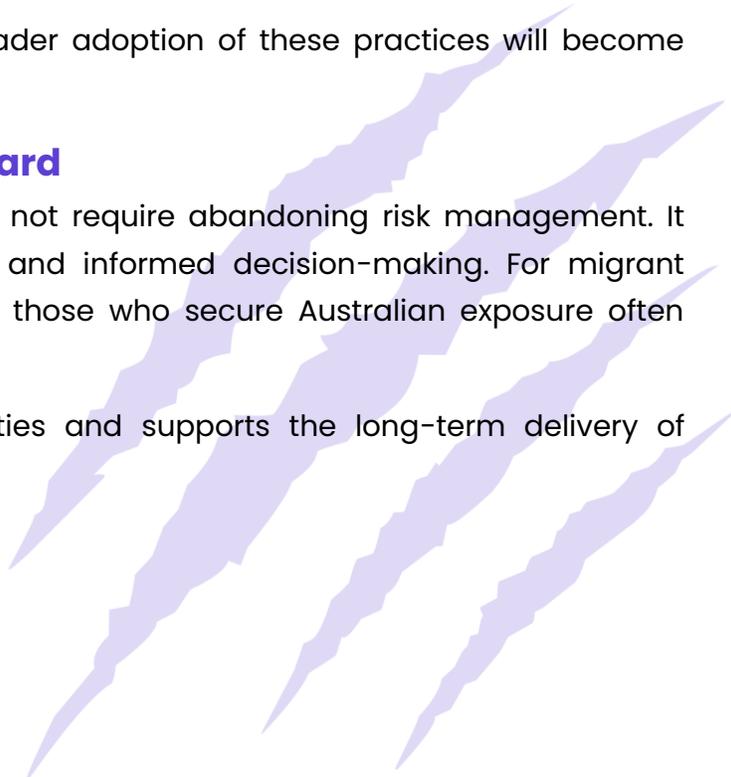
Some employers are already taking this approach by partnering with advisors who understand both engineering capability and visa frameworks. These organisations report stronger retention, reduced hiring pressure, and improved diversity outcomes.

As infrastructure demand continues to grow, broader adoption of these practices will become increasingly important.

13.6 A Balanced Approach Moving Forward

For employers, engaging migrant engineers does not require abandoning risk management. It requires better frameworks, clearer assessment, and informed decision-making. For migrant engineers, the pathway remains challenging, but those who secure Australian exposure often progress rapidly once barriers are removed.

A more integrated approach benefits both parties and supports the long-term delivery of Australia’s infrastructure commitments.





14.0 FIFO AND DIDO ROLES IN AUSTRALIAN ENGINEERING

How Remote Work Models Reshape Salaries, Expectations, and Retention

14.1 Why FIFO and DIDO Roles Sit Outside Standard Salary Logic

Fly-in fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in drive-out (DIDO) engineering roles operate under a fundamentally different employment model to metropolitan consulting or site-based city work. These roles are shaped less by job title and more by roster structure, remoteness, fatigue management, and retention risk.

As a result, FIFO and DIDO salaries often appear inflated when compared directly to city-based benchmarks. This inflation does not necessarily reflect higher technical complexity. In many cases, it reflects compensation for lifestyle disruption, time away from family, and the physical and mental toll of rostered work.

Because of this, FIFO and DIDO salaries should always be assessed separately from standard metropolitan roles when benchmarking or planning workforce strategy.

14.2 Common FIFO and DIDO Roster Structures

Roster structures vary by sector and project, but common arrangements include:

- Two weeks on, one week off
- Eight days on, six days off
- Nine days on, five days off
- Even-time rosters in more remote locations

Longer rosters typically attract higher pay due to fatigue accumulation and retention difficulty. Shorter or more balanced rosters often reduce salary pressure but increase demand for workforce availability.

For engineers, roster choice has a significant impact on sustainability. Higher salaries often come at the cost of reduced personal time and increased burnout risk if not managed carefully.

14.3 Salary Premiums and Allowances in FIFO and DIDO Roles

FIFO and DIDO remuneration is rarely limited to base salary alone. Packages commonly include a combination of:



- Site uplifts or location allowances
- Travel costs and paid travel time
- Accommodation and meals
- Vehicle access or allowances
- Completion or retention bonuses

When these components are included, total remuneration can exceed metropolitan equivalents by a significant margin, particularly for Project Engineers and Senior Project Engineers.

However, it is important to note that these premiums are often tied to continued site presence. Once an engineer transitions back to a metropolitan role, total earnings typically reset closer to standard market benchmarks.

14.4 How FIFO and DIDO Distort National Salary Averages

One of the unintended consequences of FIFO and DIDO pay structures is distortion of national salary data. When remote roles are aggregated with city-based roles under the same title, averages increase in a way that does not reflect the reality of most positions. This distortion can lead to unrealistic expectations for metropolitan roles and pressure on employers to match salaries that are tied to fundamentally different working conditions.

For this reason, responsible salary benchmarking requires clear separation between remote and non-remote roles, as well as transparency around what components make up total remuneration.

14.5 Retention Challenges in FIFO and DIDO Environments

Retention in FIFO and DIDO roles is driven less by salary escalation and more by roster sustainability. Engineers are often willing to accept slightly lower pay in exchange for improved roster balance or location flexibility.

Employers that rely solely on increasing pay to retain staff often experience high turnover once competing projects offer better rosters. Those that focus on fatigue management, role clarity, and predictable scheduling tend to achieve more stable teams. Long-term retention in remote environments requires recognising that salary alone does not offset lifestyle impact indefinitely.

14.6 What FIFO and DIDO Roles Mean for Career Planning

For engineers, FIFO and DIDO roles can be highly rewarding financially and professionally, particularly early or mid-career. They offer accelerated exposure to large projects, decision-making



responsibility, and commercial environments. However, they are best approached as part of a broader career strategy rather than a permanent

default. Engineers who transition intentionally between remote and metropolitan roles tend to achieve better long-term sustainability and capability development.

15.0 TOTAL REMUNERATION PACKAGES AND NON-SALARY BENEFITS

Why Base Salary Alone No Longer Tells the Full Story

15.1 The Focus On Total Package Thinking

As competition for engineering talent has intensified, employers have increasingly moved beyond base salary as the sole lever for attraction and retention. Entering 2026, total remuneration packages are becoming more nuanced, combining financial and non-financial benefits to address lifestyle, flexibility, and long-term engagement.

This shift reflects a recognition that continual salary escalation is neither sustainable nor always effective. Engineers are increasingly evaluating offers based on overall quality of life, long-term opportunity, and stability, not just headline figures. For this reason, understanding total package value is essential when comparing roles or structuring competitive offers.

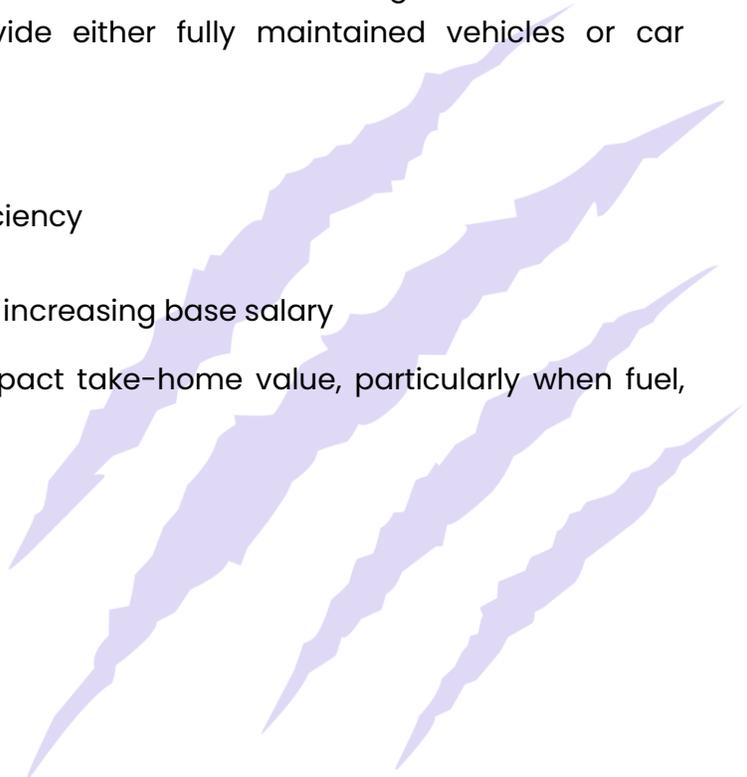
15.2 Vehicles and Car Allowances

In project delivery and site-based roles, vehicles and car allowances are among the most common non-salary benefits. Contractors frequently provide either fully maintained vehicles or car allowances as part of the overall package.

These benefits serve multiple purposes:

- Supporting site mobility and operational efficiency
- Reducing personal expense for employees
- Increasing perceived package value without increasing base salary

For engineers, vehicle inclusion can materially impact take-home value, particularly when fuel, insurance, and maintenance costs are covered.





15.3 Relocation Assistance and Sign-On Incentives

Relocation bonuses have become increasingly common, particularly in regional markets, Western Australia, and defence-adjacent projects. These incentives are used to offset the cost and disruption of moving, and to encourage commitment to longer project durations.

Relocation packages may include:

- Lump-sum relocation payments
- Temporary accommodation support
- Travel allowances for initial relocation
- Return travel commitments after project completion

Sign-on incentives are also being used selectively, particularly for hard-to-fill senior roles. While effective in the short term, these incentives are most successful when paired with clear retention strategies.

15.4 Flexible Work and Hybrid Arrangements

Flexibility has become one of the most valued components of total remuneration, particularly in consulting and advisory roles. Hybrid work arrangements, flexible start and finish times, and compressed work weeks are increasingly influencing candidate decisions.

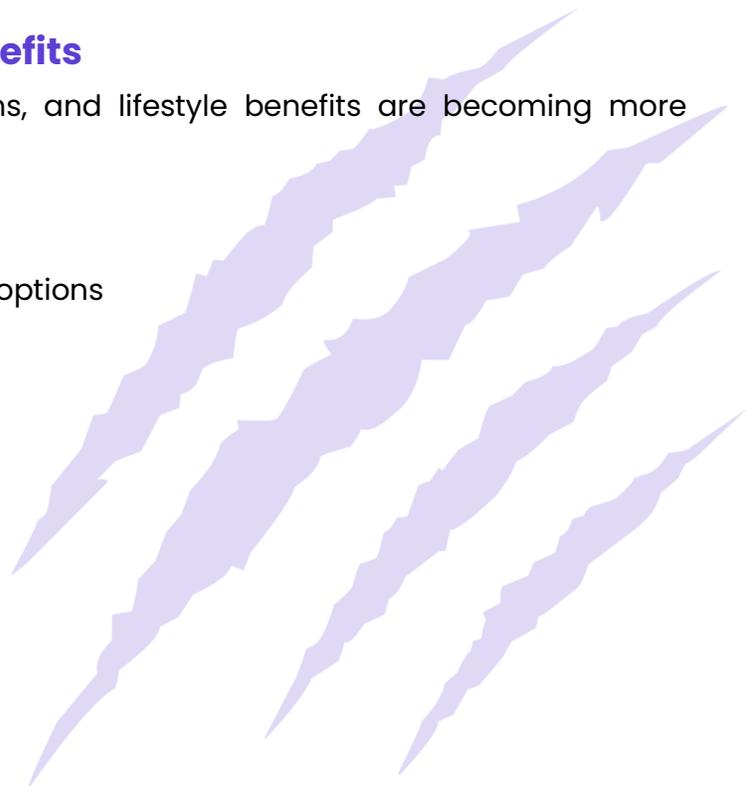
For employers, flexibility can be a cost-effective retention tool. For engineers, it can significantly improve sustainability and work-life balance, particularly in long-term roles. In many cases, flexibility is now weighted as heavily as salary when candidates assess competing offers.

15.5 Leave, Wellbeing, and Lifestyle Benefits

Additional leave entitlements, wellbeing programs, and lifestyle benefits are becoming more prominent in professional engineering roles.

These may include:

- Additional annual leave or purchased leave options
- Paid parental leave enhancements
- Health and wellbeing allowances
- Mental health support services





While these benefits may not increase immediate take-home pay, they contribute meaningfully to long-term engagement and employee satisfaction.

15.6 Understanding Package Trade-Offs

Not all packages are created equal. Higher base salaries may come with reduced flexibility or increased workload, while lower base salaries may be offset by lifestyle benefits and stability.

For engineers, understanding the full composition of an offer is critical to making informed decisions. For employers, transparency around total package value builds trust and improves acceptance rates.

16.0 EMPLOYEE RETENTION THROUGH EQUITY AND SHARE BUY-IN OPPORTUNITIES

Why Ownership Is Becoming a Strategic Retention Tool

16.1 Why Salary Alone Is No Longer Enough

As engineering salaries rise across Australia, employers are discovering that pay increases alone do not guarantee long-term retention. In many cases, higher salaries simply raise expectations and make future retention even more expensive.

Equity participation and share buy-in opportunities offer a different solution. Rather than competing endlessly on pay, ownership aligns employee success with business success. Engineers who have a stake in the organisation are more likely to think long-term, contribute beyond their immediate role, and remain engaged through market cycles.

This approach is increasingly being adopted by consulting firms, contractors, and specialist engineering businesses seeking stability in an uncertain labour market.

16.2 How Share Buy-In Models Work in Practice

Share buy-in models vary, but the underlying principle is consistent. High-performing engineers are offered the opportunity to acquire equity in the business, either through staged buy-ins, performance-based vesting, or profit participation mechanisms.

Common structures include:



- Deferred equity that vests over time
- Direct share purchase at a predetermined valuation
- Profit share arrangements tied to equity milestones
- Hybrid models combining bonus and equity components

These arrangements encourage retention by rewarding contribution, loyalty, and leadership development rather than short-term output alone.

16.3 Who Benefits Most From Equity Pathways

Equity opportunities are most effective for engineers who play a critical role in delivery continuity, client relationships, or internal capability development. This typically includes senior engineers, principals, project leaders, and high-potential mid-level staff identified for leadership pathways.

Offering equity too early or too broadly can dilute impact. The most successful programs are selective, transparent, and tied to clear expectations around performance and responsibility.

For engineers, equity represents more than financial upside. It signals trust, recognition, and long-term opportunity within the organisation.

16.4 Benefits for Employers

From an employer perspective, equity participation delivers several advantages:

- Increased loyalty and reduced turnover
- Stronger alignment between business goals and individual behaviour
- Greater accountability and ownership mentality
- Improved succession planning and leadership continuity

Importantly, equity allows organisations to reward high performers without continuously inflating salaries. This helps manage labour costs while still offering compelling long-term value.

16.5 Benefits for Engineers

For engineers, ownership pathways offer stability and professional growth beyond traditional career ladders. Equity participation provides exposure to business strategy, financial decision-making, and leadership responsibilities that are rarely accessible through salaried roles alone.



Engineers who participate in equity programs often develop broader commercial understanding, which enhances their long-term career prospects both inside and outside the organisation.

16.6 Equity as a Signal of Organisational Maturity

Offering equity pathways signals that an organisation is thinking beyond immediate delivery needs. It demonstrates confidence in the future of the business and a willingness to invest in people as long-term partners rather than interchangeable resources.

As competition for experienced engineers intensifies, equity and share buy-in opportunities are likely to become a defining differentiator between employers that retain talent and those that continually replace it.

17.0 RETENTION STRATEGIES THAT ACTUALLY WORK IN A TIGHT LABOUR MARKET

How Organisations Keep Engineers Without Losing Control of Costs

17.1 Why Most Retention Efforts Fail

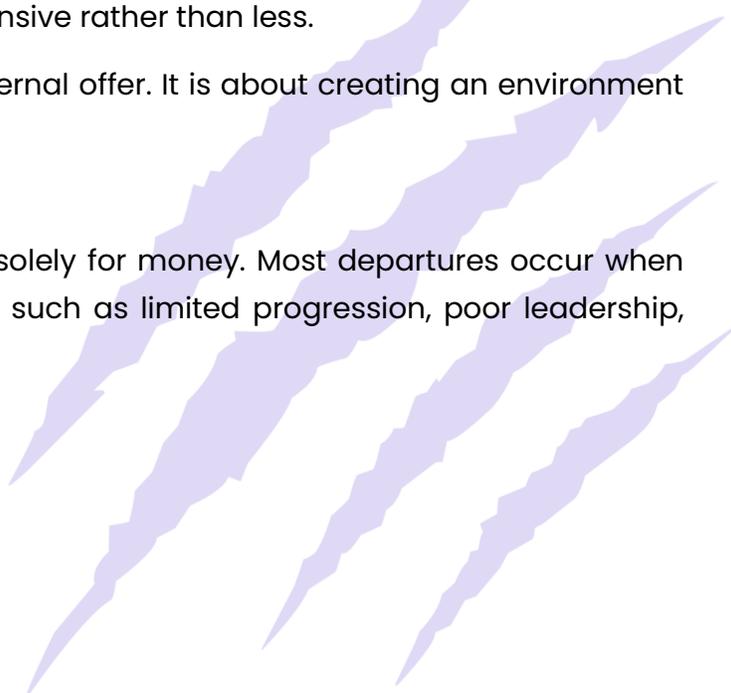
Many retention strategies fail because they are reactive rather than structural. Employers often respond to resignation risk with last-minute counteroffers, rushed promotions, or salary increases that are disconnected from capability or long-term planning.

While these approaches may retain an individual in the short term, they frequently create secondary problems. Wage expectations rise across the team, progression frameworks become distorted, and future retention becomes more expensive rather than less.

Effective retention is not about matching every external offer. It is about creating an environment where engineers see long-term value in staying.

17.2 What Engineers Actually Stay For

Contrary to popular belief, engineers rarely leave solely for money. Most departures occur when salary dissatisfaction combines with other factors such as limited progression, poor leadership, unsustainable workload, or lack of recognition.





Engineers are more likely to stay when they have:

- Clear expectations around progression and capability development
- Confidence in leadership and decision-making
- Sustainable workload and predictable demands
- Exposure to meaningful projects
- A sense of being invested in rather than replaced

When these conditions are present, salary becomes one component of a broader value proposition rather than the defining factor.

17.3 Separating Pay Progression From Title Progression

One of the most effective retention strategies is separating remuneration growth from title advancement. Engineers can be rewarded financially for performance, loyalty, and contribution without being promoted into roles they are not yet ready to perform.

This approach allows organisations to:

- Retain strong performers
- Maintain capability standards
- Reduce project risk
- Avoid long-term wage distortion

Engineers benefit from this clarity as well. They understand what is required for promotion and can focus on development rather than chasing titles for financial reasons.

17.4 Investing in Leadership and Mentoring

Strong leadership is consistently one of the most powerful retention factors. Engineers are more likely to stay in demanding roles when they trust their leaders, feel supported, and have access to guidance when challenges arise.

Mentoring programs, regular feedback, and visible leadership presence contribute significantly to retention, particularly at the intermediate level where attrition risk is highest. Organisations that neglect leadership development often experience higher turnover regardless of salary competitiveness.



17.5 Early-Career Pipelines as a Retention Strategy

Retention does not start at the senior level. Organisations that invest in interns, graduates, and early-career engineers create internal pipelines that reduce reliance on external hiring.

Engineers who grow within an organisation are more likely to stay, perform effectively, and progress sustainably. This reduces wage pressure and builds institutional knowledge that cannot be replicated through lateral hiring alone.

17.6 Retention Through Trust and Transparency

Transparent communication plays a critical role in retention. Engineers are more likely to remain with an organisation when they understand business constraints, project realities, and how decisions are made.

Honest conversations about workload, progression timelines, and future opportunities build trust and reduce the likelihood of surprise resignations.

17.7 What This Means for Employers in 2026

Retention in 2026 will be defined less by who pays the most and more by who builds the most sustainable environments. Organisations that rely solely on salary escalation will struggle to stabilise teams. Those that invest in people, structure progression deliberately, and align incentives thoughtfully will retain talent more effectively and deliver better long-term outcomes.

18.0 WHERE THE MOST ENGINEERING SHORTAGES EXIST ENTERING 2026

While the Australian engineering market is broadly constrained, the most severe shortages are concentrated in specific roles, sectors, and experience bands. Understanding where these gaps exist is critical for both engineers planning their careers and organisations planning their workforce.

18.1 Queensland: Urban Development and Subdivisions

Queensland is currently experiencing one of the most pronounced shortages of capable Site Engineers and Project Engineers within urban development and subdivision delivery. Population



growth, residential expansion, and enabling infrastructure have accelerated faster than the availability of engineers with practical subdivision experience.

Many projects require engineers who understand:

- Live services coordination
- Staging and sequencing of subdivision works
- Council approval processes
- Interface between developers, contractors, and consultants

The challenge is not a lack of engineers overall, but a lack of engineers with the right delivery judgement at the Site Engineer and Project Engineer level. This has driven intense competition, salary escalation, and a growing trend of premature promotion, increasing project risk across the sector.

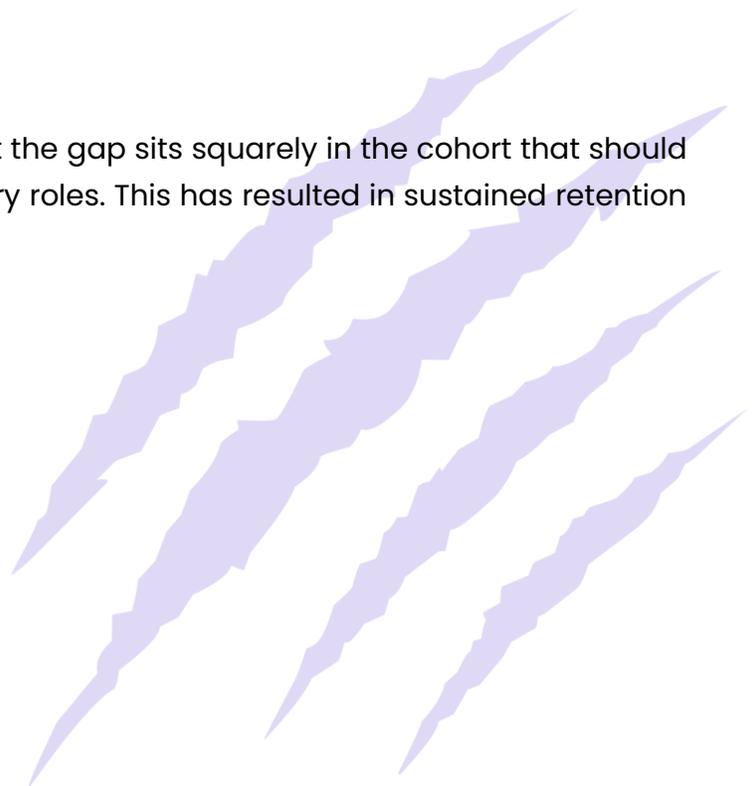
18.2 New South Wales and Victoria: Mid to Senior Delivery Capability

In NSW and Victoria, shortages are most acute at the intermediate to senior Project Engineer and Senior Engineer level, particularly on transport, urban renewal, and interface-heavy infrastructure projects. These markets are constrained by a lack of engineers who can operate independently in complex

environments involving:

- Multiple stakeholders
- Claims exposure
- Tight governance frameworks
- High public and political scrutiny

Graduates and juniors are entering the market, but the gap sits squarely in the cohort that should be transitioning into confident, autonomous delivery roles. This has resulted in sustained retention pressure and wage compression at these levels.





18.3 Western Australia and Regional Markets: Sustainable Delivery Engineers

In Western Australia and regional markets nationally, the most significant shortages relate to delivery-focused engineers willing to operate sustainably in FIFO, DIDO, or regional environments. While salaries are high, the real constraint is not attraction but retention.

Engineers with both technical capability and the resilience to manage rostered work over the long term remain in short supply. Employers who fail to address roster sustainability and career planning face constant turnover, regardless of pay.

18.4 A National namesake: Engineers Who Bridge Design and Delivery

Across all states, one of the most valuable and scarce profiles is the engineer who understands both consulting and construction realities. Engineers who can translate design intent into buildable outcomes, manage constructability risk, and communicate effectively across disciplines are increasingly difficult to find.

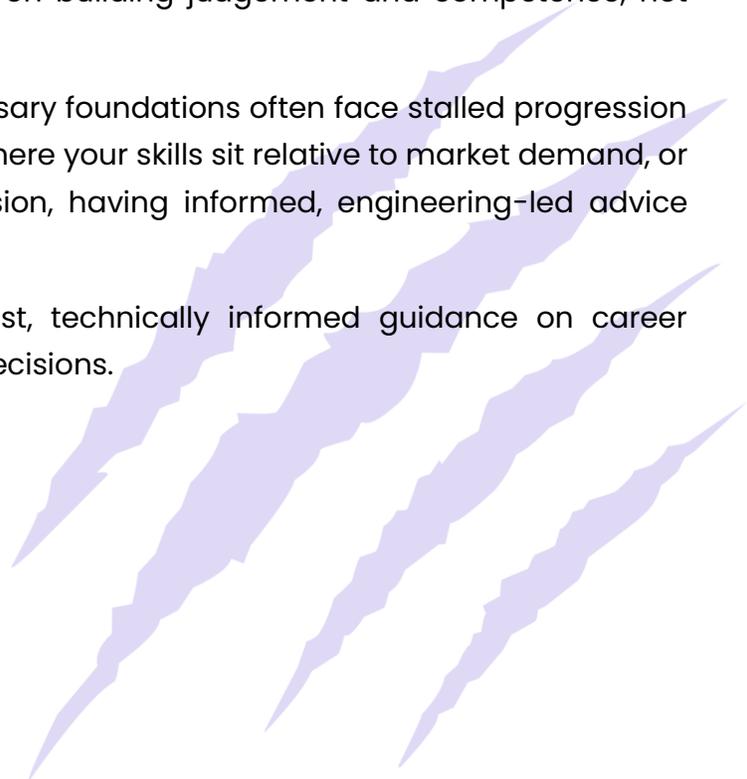
This capability gap is becoming a defining constraint on project performance nationwide.

19.0 WHAT THIS MEANS FOR ENGINEERS

For engineers, the market entering 2026 offers opportunity, but also risk. Engineers who align themselves with high-demand capability areas such as subdivision delivery, complex project environments, and interface-heavy infrastructure will continue to see strong career and salary outcomes. However, long-term success depends on building judgement and competence, not simply accumulating titles.

Engineers who move too quickly without the necessary foundations often face stalled progression later, despite short-term gains. If you are unsure where your skills sit relative to market demand, or how to position yourself for sustainable progression, having informed, engineering-led advice matters.

Lionheart works with engineers to provide honest, technically informed guidance on career positioning, salary benchmarking, and next-step decisions.





20.0 WHAT THIS MEANS FOR EMPLOYERS AND HIRING MANAGERS

For employers, the next phase of the market requires more than competitive salaries. It requires clarity. Organisations that continue to rely on reactive hiring, counteroffers, and inflated titles will experience rising costs, increased risk, and unstable teams. Those that invest in early-career pipelines, structured

progression, and realistic role alignment will outperform their peers over the next three to five years. Hiring managers and directors who understand where shortages are real, where inflation is self-inflicted, and where intervention is most effective will make better decisions under pressure.

Lionheart partners with engineering-led organisations to provide market intelligence, salary benchmarking, and access to technically assessed engineering talent across consulting and project delivery environments.

21.0 FINAL CHECKLIST FOR HIRING MANAGERS AND DIRECTORS

Before entering 2026, leadership teams should be able to confidently answer the following:

Workforce Strategy

- Do we know which roles will be hardest to fill in the next 12 to 36 months?
- Are we building internal capability or relying on lateral hires?
- Do we understand where shortages are genuine versus market-driven inflation?

Salary and Progression

- Are salary increases tied to capability or purely retention pressure?
- Are we promoting engineers based on readiness or fear of losing them?
- Do titles accurately reflect responsibility and authority?

Early-Career Pipeline

- Are our internships paid, structured, and competitive?



- Are we engaging undergraduates early enough?
- Do we have a clear intern-to-graduate pathway?

Retention and Sustainability

- Are rosters, workloads, and expectations sustainable?
- Are leaders equipped to have proactive retention conversations?
- Are we investing in people, or only reacting when resignations occur?

If you answered “no” or “unsure” to more than two of the questions above, the cost of inaction will likely exceed the cost of intervention.

22.0 FINAL THOUGHTS

22.1 FOR ENGINEERS

If you are a civil or structural engineer navigating the market entering 2026, clarity matters more than ever. Salaries are rising, but not evenly. Titles are inflating, but capability still determines long-term success.

Many engineers are making moves that feel beneficial in the short term but create friction later when expectations exceed readiness.

If you are unsure:

- Whether your current salary reflects real market value
- Which sectors or roles are most in demand for your skill set
- How to progress without risking premature promotion
- Where your experience sits relative to consulting versus delivery pathways

Lionheart provides confidential, guidance to help you make informed career decisions. Our approach is practical, technically grounded, and focused on long-term outcomes rather than short-term moves.

If you want an honest, technically grounded view of your market position - without inflated promises or pressure, Lionheart offers confidential guidance to help you make the right next move.



22.2 FOR COMPANIES, HIRING MANAGERS, AND DIRECTORS

The engineering labour market entering 2026 is no longer forgiving of reactive decisions. Rising salaries, constrained talent pools, and increasing delivery risk mean that workforce strategy has become a critical business function, not an operational afterthought.

If you are:

- Struggling to secure or retain Site Engineers, Project Engineers, or Senior Engineers
- Unsure whether your salary benchmarks are competitive or inflated
- Experiencing delivery risk due to capability gaps
- Looking to build sustainable pipelines rather than rely on counteroffers

Lionheart partners with engineering-led organisations to provide clear market intelligence, technically assessed talent, and practical hiring strategy support.

We help organisations understand where the real shortages are, how to structure roles realistically, and how to secure talent without undermining long-term stability.

If your hiring or retention challenges feel increasingly expensive and unpredictable, Lionheart provides engineering recruitment and workforce strategy support designed for prolonged scarcity.

In a market where talent is constrained and mistakes are expensive, clarity is no longer optional. The organisations and engineers who perform best over the next decade will be those who make deliberate, informed decisions rather than reactive ones.

This guide has been designed to support that clarity.

How it is used will determine its value.

