

CEEMET & ECEG POSITION PAPER ON CAREER GUIDANCE

Brussels, 24 January 2023

Following the 2020 global pandemic, companies of the European chemical and MET sectors are currently facing an ever-growing challenge in recruiting and retaining talent. This is in addition to dealing with trends such as demographic change, ageing population, and transformation at the workplace. The need for competent people is as strong as ever with the shortage of labour being felt across the sectors.

The chemical and MET industries are forerunners in responding to the ambitious objectives of the Green Deal and are at the same time at the forefront of technology. In parallel, more and more young people want to work for highly digitalised and tech companies as well as for a greener industry. Our industries thus enjoy a competitive advantage as youngsters prefer to work in greener and digitalised sectors. However, according to the latest studies conducted by the chemical industry representatives¹, there is a serious lack of interest towards STEM-related studies across the EU 27. This is coupled with insufficient and in many instances inefficient career guidance especially for young people in transition phases (between compulsory education and secondary education, between secondary education and tertiary options).

This creates a significant obstacle for European industry and for our two sectors specifically, as the current green and digital transitions have accelerated the necessity for skills to meet the needs of a greener and more digitalised economy of the future.

To respond to these challenges, the sectors need to engage in activities which address the re-skilling and up-skilling of the workforce and the recruitment of new talents from both vocational education and training (VET) centres and the academic environment.

Moreover, in order to attract and secure future talent in the chemical and MET sectors **ECEG and Ceemet believe that the potential of effective career guidance should be maximized and to this end the MET and chemical industries have come up with concrete proposals on reshaping career guidance into a more explicit and effective mechanism. Indeed, the final goal is to encourage**

¹ KFC-CEPIC Talent Strategy to Support a Thriving Chemical Industry Towards 2050, Strategic Skills Survey of Chemical Industry Federation of Finland -

young people to opt for a STEM-related academic path, vocational education and training, and as a result, to work for these two industrial sectors.

In adopting this position paper, Ceemet & ECEG would especially like to tackle the issue of career guidance targeted towards young people between the age of 14 and 18, always considering that career guidance systems differ significantly among the EU Member States. In some countries (e.g. Finland) career counsellors in compulsory and secondary level education have a university degree in career counselling, while in other Member States career guidance is the teacher's responsibility and there is no requirement to have a specific, related training or degree.

This being said, there is a common challenge in practically all Member States which is the lack of structured co-operation between career guidance and working life. Industry is often a non-familiar environment for young people which makes it difficult to explain the future potential of it in practice. Partially it has to do with the fact that under 18-year-olds rarely have opportunities to visit production sites.

Having the above mentioned in mind, ECEG and Ceemet strongly believe that there is a need for a joint action for career guidance to serve the ever-changing needs of the labour market. Indeed, well-designed, and effective career guidance is the starting point to the skilled workforce needed by our industries as it is an indispensable tool to attract young people and women to STEM-related studies and VET, and to advise them on employment opportunities and skills needs. Ceemet & ECEG would therefore like to propose the following recommendations to be considered by relevant stakeholders and decision-makers as soon as possible:

The Chemical and MET Sectors should:

- reinforce the link between educational institutions, industry, and career guidance professionals. We need to create both opportunities for career advisors to get to know the sectors and a framework to mutually set goals and targets for the recruitment of the future workforce.
- train ambassadors to work with educational institutions. They should promote current and future sustainability developments of the industry, to widen the understanding of the sector specificities both towards career counsellors and teachers. Co-operation among all parties is key.
- organize informative sessions and awareness raising events/campaigns to promote the good working conditions existing in our industries, possibilities for lifelong learning, and opportunities to contribute to the energy transition and sustainability goals.

Public authorities should have the responsibility to:

- assess if career guidance is organized in an efficient manner and set goals accordingly, catering to the needs of the industries.
- invest in awareness raising activities that empower women to access STEM education and career paths, for example using adequate social media targeted to young people.
- invest in effective, practical, and flexible career guidance free from gender stereotypes and the training possibilities of career counselors that can constantly be adapted to the changing needs of the labour market.

- promote a structured exchange of best practices on career guidance – both among counselors and between industry, educational institutions, and people responsible for career counselling.
- put in place communication campaigns to promote vocational education and training as a proper alternative for academic paths in industry.

The educational system should:

- with the support of public authorities, invest in training and lifelong learning possibilities of career advisors and STEM teachers.
- with the support of public authorities, invest in tailor made career advice targeted to youngsters.
- assess together with public authorities, industries, and social partners how to develop career guidance to be more effective, be linked to labour market needs and employment opportunities.
- reinforce the link with the main labour market stakeholders (industry, companies, social partners) so that career guidance is also relevant for future work prospects and tightly linked to employment opportunities. This requires building mutual understanding of industries' skills needs.

Parents should be encouraged to:

- change their mindset towards joining our sectors, vocational education and training and career paths.
- guide their children towards STEM studies.
- communicate that alternative career pathways and lifelong learning opportunities are feasible options later in working life.

In order to increase the sectors' attractiveness, industry should encourage its young workers, STEM students and other similar target groups to act as ambassadors both on social media and within educational institutions.

Both sectors have a significant impact on people's understanding of sustainability issues, competition factors and future skills needs, and the need to take an active role as partners in this discussion.
