

Future Forum 2016/17: A new year – a new Young Ambassador!

CIA Matters met with recent winner of our the 2016/17 Young Ambassador Award, Stefano Ceci of Johnson Matthey, to talk about plans to boost Forum membership and enhance the benefits that members receive... as well as the challenges posed by Brexit.

Q Stefano – congratulations on being crowned Young Ambassador! You were on the finalists' table at the Awards Dinner back in June – how did it feel when your name was announced?

A Thank you! I felt mixed emotions, it was great to win but also felt for the other finalists. In the end I realise that I was representing the others around the table too – in effect it didn't really matter if it was me or someone else that won. The award means something bigger than me; it represents the hard work of many young professionals in industry. I am really happy to win the award and take it forward over the next year!

Q Tell us a bit about you ...

A I've led a fairly standard entry into the world of work for a graduate: I went through A-Levels, achieved the grades needed to complete a chemical engineering degree, achieved my degree and got a job with Johnson Matthey in sunny Teesside! I guess what might make me slightly more distinct is that I like getting involved with 'extra stuff' like STEM activities and my local institution of engineers.

Q You will be leading the Future Forum over the coming months. Most people have heard of the Forum – but what exactly is it?

A The Future Forum is a network of young professionals including people from any background and working in any function in the chemicals industry. As the chair of the Forum I'll be attending CIA Council meetings and providing the young person's view. For the Forum, I'll be working with the CIA to help organise networking events but also by circulating and requesting information to/from young people in the industry.

A big thanks to Lee, the previous ambassador, for his work with the CIA; I'm looking to build on his achievements over the coming year! It sounds like a great initiative on paper, but what are the precise benefits – for



individual members, and for industry as a whole? Building on previous Ambassadors' efforts, the CIA will host networking events in key regions in the UK. As well as this, there is an e-newsletter 'Forum Connect' circulated each month to members who are in the Future Forum. The newsletter is intended as a method of getting information about lobbying to members of the Forum, but also to request information from people as well.

I wanted to build on the commitment the other finalists had at the awards ceremony. They have the chance to participate in the various policy groups operated by the CIA. With our participation at council and policy groups we'll be contributing to decisions that'll impact the future of the industry, and helping to shape what the future might look like.

Q 2016 will mainly be remembered for the Brexit vote. A recent Future Forum survey revealed that the vast majority of respondents were disappointed with the referendum result. What are your thoughts on the issue?

A I'm employed by the chemicals industry and its continuing success means my own future success. The UK chemicals industry relies on exports to the EU and as such any uncertainty associated with sales could affect our industry. However, as I found out at a recent Council meeting there are opportunities that Brexit can bring. Enhanced international competitiveness due to the weaker pound is a good example of a potential short term opportunity. We can make Brexit happen and work for us in the UK. It's up to organisations like the CIA to keep up the pressure to the government and listen to what industry needs.

Q Other than Brexit – what do you see as being the other big issues affecting our industry?

A Something close to my heart, and relevant to my role with the CIA – an issue will be communicating the benefits of the UK chemicals and pharma sector to the general public and helping them understand topics (like the pros and cons of fracking). There needs to be continued communication to the UK public on what the industry is and does. Communication should also attract people to the opportunities in the industry.

Q You mentioned employment. What can employers do to boost the attractiveness of careers in our industry, particularly to school leavers and graduates?

A I'm an end product of the UK's education system and was attracted to industry by the opportunity for advancement and the chance to earn a living wage. I was also attracted by the interesting work I could get involved with once qualified; I could do something I was good at and was interested in as well.

Supporting STEM initiatives is important too, as STEM activities and outreach communicates what the chemicals industry is to the general public. For example, I've spoken to parents at college open evenings explaining what engineering actually is and how the subject's students are studying relate to jobs in the industry.

One thing I think we need to be mindful of is the potential impact of Brexit on the Industry's ability to attract and retain the best talent. I've had personal testimonials given to me about how bright EU students have since decided UK PLC will not be their choice for work and this is a real shame. So there's an opportunity for UK employers to voice support for free movement of people so that we can continue to benefit from the contribution of overseas talent in growing UK businesses.

Q Turning the attention back to your own career (and promising that I won't report back to your boss)... What would you say are the best and worst parts of your job?

A Hmm... My boss might well read this...! The best bit is the opportunity to work with people from different backgrounds and disciplines, and then getting together to build something great. A good example was when I worked at one of Johnson Matthey's

manufacturing facilities to design and change out a piece of sub optimal equipment – a project involving many people where the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

A tough question – and on a serious note I think the worst part is when, as an industry, safety incidents occur and people get hurt and the environment gets damaged. This still happens in the chemicals industry (and other industries), you only need to think back to some all too recent and all too public incidents published in the press. It's up to engineers, technicians and health and safety professionals in the industry to prevent the big incidents – an important but serious task.

Q Now here's a scary question! Looking ahead ten years – where do you see yourself in 2026?

A I have a lot of energy and drive for advancement – my graduate programme has left the door open for careers in technical, people management or commercial leadership. I think the limit will be my own ability to recognise and take the opportunities as they come up; I feel the industry provides opportunities for people who seek them... I've seen people complete apprenticeships, go through degrees and end up managing whole teams of people.

Q Finally, the success of the Future Forum relies on the involvement of employees across CIA's network of member companies. How can, and why should people get involved?

A Members have access to networking opportunities, social media platforms and information via e-newsletters. The main benefit is networking and communication of member's positions on key industry topics.

People should get involved because they can help influence policy positions made by the CIA. A topic that is important to a Future Forum member can be integrated into the lobbying strategy that the CIA uses.

As part of this if you, as a member or partner company, see an opportunity to host an event or could speak and provide content (e.g. guest speakers) please get in touch via CIA's Luke Symns at SymnsL@cia.org.uk.



To join the Future Forum:

Email mailing list: join by sending a blank email with the subject 'join' to FutureForum@cia.org.uk

