

Empowering women in STEM: Unlocking the potential of a diverse future

As we move forward in the 21st century, the world is embracing technological advancements at an unprecedented pace. At the heart of this revolution lies the domain of STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (...Maths here in the UK!), driving innovation and progress across various sectors, including in Chemicals. However, a significant challenge remains: the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields.

Hearing on the radio recently a well-known presenter and their team questioning what STEM stands for, it begs the question how we can expect everyone to educate their children about the benefits of a STEM career, if many are not aware of the issue or even know what the 'buzz' acronym means.

Reading the article by Universum Global titled "Global Women in STEM" it highlights the persistent global gender gap and the importance of empowering women to bridge this divide. Let's hope that one day this subject becomes 'a non-issue', but for today, we have to accept that it's an ever-present issue we must continue to tackle.

The article by Universum Global reflects how different countries are at different stages of their progress, as are different companies in the UK and across Europe too, something we see in our work.

We thought it was helpful to summarise some of the main points the report identified to help companies attract more females into their businesses.

- You must be seen to care about diversity and show how you are working towards diversity across your own company.
- By recruiting more females, more females will want to join your company.
- Be empathetic to what will attract and motivate a female to join and stay with your business.
- Organizations and institutions must take a proactive approach to create an enabling environment that nurtures female talent.

Perhaps there is also a bigger piece of work for us to consider though, and that is how we build a bigger and stronger pool of women who have STEM skills.

There has been significant progress in gender equality over the last few years, but despite this the representation of women in STEM roles remains alarmingly low. Through RMG's own search work recruiting for professional level roles in the wide Chemicals and Process Manufacturing sector, and in Healthcare and Life Sciences, we still see that women constitute a minority in certain technical professions or in some short-lists, especially in such as Engineering and Operations Management. The article quotes in the UK that 13% of Scientific and Technical management roles are held by females, with only a fraction reaching leadership positions within STEM organizations.

A critical aspect of empowering women into STEM is continuing to break stereotypes that perpetuate the idea that certain fields are better suited for men, or reiterating intuitive counter-productive beliefs that it's female workers who will need or be more attracted by flexible working conditions, which is quite thought-provoking, having experienced always working with a family. It's becoming increasingly known that stereotypes start from an early age, influencing career choices and educational pursuits. To challenge this narrative, we must keep encouraging young females to explore their curiosity in STEM subjects and keep providing them with positive STEM role models to aspire to.

One thing is for certain, successful and ambitious professional working women or young female students in the UK, do not want 'favours' or to be patronised. Women want to be recruited or to succeed on merit, due to their own potential, skills, or achievements, not just to fit into a certain government or company quota.

It has been reassuring to see the awakened confidence and self-belief of young women in the sector in very recent years, ready to equally compete in their chosen (STEM) career-paths, and rightly so.

There is work still to be done. But as a final takeaway from the article, it stresses the need for continued tailored support and mentorship for women pursuing STEM careers. Providing access to networking opportunities, skill development programs, and leadership training which can significantly improve career progression for women in these fields. Which is good to acknowledge that this is happening in our local Chemicals hub and UK sector network.

Diverse perspectives foster creativity, leading to more well-rounded solutions to complex problems. By encouraging and empowering more women to participate in STEM careers, I believe we can harness the power of diversity and create a more inclusive and equitable world.

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