

CASE STUDY: Nayera Aslam, Aviation Engineering Manager, Associate Director, AECOM



I work with a range of technical experts in AECOM and partner consulting firms or contractors to bring together a team who can successfully design, build and manage aviation projects across EMIA. During my 10 year career, I have worked on projects such as the London 2012 Olympic Games and Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games as a traffic engineer.

1. What first attracted you to working in the construction industry? How did you find out about civil engineering and what qualifications did you require?

At the age of 16, I selected maths and science subjects for higher education as I enjoyed those subjects and had a natural aptitude for them. My interest in engineering was first sparked by the engineering feat of the Channel Tunnel. The idea of travelling by train through a tunnel under water as far as France seemed incredible to my young mind. I wanted to find out how this technical feat was possible and whether I could do something similar. As I delved further into the world of engineering, I became inspired by designing iconic structures such as the Hoover Dam which make a positive difference to the lives of individuals and connect and shape cities and countries.

Upon further research into engineering as a possible career I found inspiring engineering figures who all seemed to fit the same mould and, fundamentally, did not represent girls like me. This acted as a catalyst for me; if I wanted to see a change, then I would have to become that change.

2. Tell us about your current role(s). What does a typical day look like? What do you like and dislike about the role?

My work day differs daily – I could be flying to Amsterdam to have meetings with current or prospective clients or discussing new opportunities in India or interviewing new potential additions to our aviation team. I work with an inspiring set of professionals from architects to financial planners and I always need to have my finger on the pulse. The variety of my job keeps me on my toes but means I have to be flexible in my working patterns and retain a lot of information. I have a great opportunity to work with people from a range of cultures and countries, but keeping an eye on the time differences can be difficult.

3. What qualities are required to do your role?

As well as a sound basis of civil engineering and technical skills, I need to be organised and able to communicate with a range of people. Being able to make quick judgements and

think on my feet is very important. There is an interesting challenge in being able to lead whilst taking directions from others.

4. What are your future career aspirations?

I want to be influential in my industry and a leader of an organisation. I want to become a role model for others to help set the foundation for female engineers to break the glass ceiling.

5. Have you encountered any obstacles in your career because of your gender?

Being a female engineer means I sometimes get overlooked. Conversely, I sometimes have unwanted attention and an almost greater need to prove my worthiness. There have been many occasions where being female and of an ethnic minority means people immediately assume I am junior or lacking in knowledge. It is very nice to challenge these stereotypes. Overall, I do not think my gender has made a marked difference on my career progression.

6. In the time you have worked in construction, do you think the industry has improved its attitude towards women?

Absolutely – rather than trying to force a handful of women to the forefront, women are now a more accepted part of the industry.

7. Why do you think women remain underrepresented in the industry?

Unfortunately, I think this is based on a lack of knowledge of the engineering profession in general. The unfortunate assumption is that engineers dig up the ground and only get their hands dirty. The vast range of professions in our industry is not shared. I think from a very early age, our education system lets us down and does not fully understand or explain our industry. Having this lack of information from a very young age will certainly impact on girls seeing engineering as a viable profession.

8. Would you recommend that young women seek out careers in construction? What advice would you give them?

Yes – our industry is what you make of it. The opportunities are endless and are only curtailed by your own ambition.

9. How does a diverse workforce benefit the industry as a whole?

At a time where the world is facing global problems such as climate change and unprecedented population growth, greater diversity is critical in designing innovative solutions. Creativity, ingenuity and lateral thinking are essential skills for engineers. The greater the diversity - whether in terms of gender, race or background - the better the

outcome. I want engineering to be seen as a desirable profession which appeals to a wider audience and attracts talent from all walks of life.

10. What should the industry and wider society be doing to encourage more women to work in construction?

I believe more women can be encouraged into engineering by showcasing some of the incredible female engineers we already have. We need to smash the perceptions of our industry and truly show the broad range of projects and job roles we work in.

11. Do you think the industry can get to a point where there are as many women as there are men?

Yes, with the right education and support of the government and industry.