



Engineering a Diverse Future: Insights from Dr Nike Folayan at the EPC Congress 2024

Report by Alice Johnson, Aston University (Hammermen Finalist)

Who was your role model growing up?

The majority of us from a white ethnic background can probably think of someone who looks similar to us. However, for Dr Nike Folayan, who spoke on diversity and the future of engineering at the EPC Congress 2024, and for many of those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, there was no such figure. Recognising the lack of representation, she decided to gather diversity data after entering the engineering field. Her research uncovered that whilst Black people make up over 30% of engineering students from primary to higher education, only approximately 2% of board members come from BME backgrounds. This raised the question: where do BME engineers go after university?

Dr Folayan, co-founder of the Association for BME Engineers (AFBE), explained that many people from ethnic minorities often return to university for further education. She revealed another staggering statistic that helps to elucidate why BME engineers feel the need to continue expanding their knowledge: whilst over 70% of White males are likely to be employed within the first 12 months of job hunting, only 48% of Black males manage to achieve the same. Now, you can imagine the challenges that women from ethnic minorities are likely to face.

To illustrate these employment challenges, Dr Folayan shared Noah's story through a YouTube video. Using humour and humility, Noah recounted his journey to employment, never once mentioning his race but instead appreciatively recounting the support he received from AFBE initiatives. His story emphasised the importance of putting oneself out there to increase opportunities, a daunting task for those who are introverted or neurodivergent, a topic also addressed at the conference.

Dr Folayan also discussed The Royal Academy of Engineering's new Engineers 2030 Catalyst for Change project, describing the importance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Inner Development Goals (IDGs). However, she argued that the focus should not only be on skills but also values and behaviours, creating a holistic and systematic approach to drive change. Encouraging us to leverage our own spheres of influence, she highlighted how engineers can create a ripple effect on society. Increasing diversity, Dr Folayan believes, will enhance our opportunities for transformation towards a more sustainable and ethical future.



The attendees also had the opportunity to learn more about the AFBE, which has already made significant contributions to the future of engineering through its efforts to improve diversity and inclusion. Through outreach programmes, scholarships, mentoring and support networks, AFBE inspires individuals from BME backgrounds to pursue engineering, thereby expanding the talent pool. The organisation provides career development resources, promotes engineering in schools and advises organisations on diversity, ensuring that BME engineers can thrive and lead. Their efforts enhance innovation by leveraging diverse perspectives and address industry skills shortages by tapping into underrepresented talent pools. The AFBE ensures the engineering sector remains innovative, inclusive and resilient, ready to tackle modern challenges.

In summary, Dr Nike Folayan's talk at the EPC Congress 2024 emphasised the need for greater diversity and inclusion in engineering. Her insights and the stories shared exemplified the challenges and triumphs of BME individuals in the field. By stressing the importance of values and behaviours alongside skills and encouraging us to leverage our spheres of influence, she proposed a way for engineers to bring about societal change. The initiatives of AFBE are important in reshaping the industry, ensuring that future engineers are not only proficient but also represent diverse perspectives, fostering innovation and progress for the betterment of society as a whole. Ultimately, Dr. Folayan's talk taught me that we are stronger together.

Author bio



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Short version:

Alice Johnson is a PhD scientist specialising in cultivated meat bioprocessing, alt protein research writer, amateur mycologist and the co-founder of Rooted Research Collective and Vegan Sisters.

Long version:

Alice Johnson is a PhD scientist specialising in cultivated meat bioprocessing, alt protein research writer, amateur mycologist and the co-founder of Vegan Sisters. With a robust blend of research, industry, and hands-on experience, Alice has channelled her career into advocating for ethical and sustainable food systems.



Her work has garnered international recognition, including appearances on BBC News and publications in a variety of outlets, including The National Geographic and The Biochemist. When she's not in the lab or typing away at her keyboard, Alice can be found exploring woodland realms in search of fungi or discovering the best vegan cuisine across the world, which she eagerly shares on her website.