**NEWS ARTICLE**

AECOM’s rising stars celebrate World Youth Skills Day 2024

**15 July 2024:** Celebrated yearly on 15 July, [World Youth Skills Day](https://unevoc.unesco.org/wysd/) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014 to emphasise the importance of equipping young people with skills for employment, decent work, and entrepreneurship. The 2024 theme, ‘Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Future’, focuses on preparing youth to tackle global challenges like climate change, economic inequality, and social justice. It underscores the significance of sustainable development and the pivotal role of youth in building a more equitable and resilient world.

[AECOM](http://www.aecom.com) Africa is dedicated to developing the skills of its young professionals, including engineers, quantity surveyors, project managers, and architects. Through its comprehensive Candidacy Mentoring Programme, AECOM ensures these professionals are well-equipped for successful and fulfilling careers. The programme pairs candidates with experienced mentors who provide invaluable insights, advice, and encouragement, helping them navigate the complexities of their professional development.

In addition to mentorship, AECOM offers extensive on-the-job training, allowing young professionals to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios and gain hands-on experience crucial for their growth. Continuous learning is supported through external training opportunities and access to the AECOM University training portal, with over 5 000 training modules. This comprehensive approach ensures that AECOM’s young professionals stay updated with the latest tools and techniques in their field.

By combining mentorship, practical training, and global project involvement, AECOM nurtures the next generation of engineering talent, empowering them to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the company and the industry at large. In celebration of World Youth Skills Day, we profile three outstanding young professionals from the AECOM Candidacy Mentoring Programme.

**Kaveel Jugdiswar: Building Infrastructure and Social Impact**

A candidate engineer for the Building Services team under Buildings + Places, Kaveel has been with AECOM since June 2022. Specialising in bulk earthworks design for major infrastructure projects, he is currently focused on data centres, working predominantly on international projects. He also has experience in stormwater, sewer line, and water design.

Kaveel appreciates the mentorship opportunities at AECOM, citing how the program has helped him prioritise his professional registration and manage his responsibilities more effectively. “In terms of engineering’s impact on society, I think the biggest thing for me, and that is also why I gravitated toward construction before entering consulting, is I like to see the difference it makes to work in developing areas and provide solutions to issues for people on a daily basis.

“Apart from the civil engineering aspect, there is a social engineering aspect. It is great to do technical things on paper, but it is completely different to actually go see it on-site, how it is working and how it is improving people’s lives. That really makes a tangible change and is what appealed to me most,” says Kaveel.

Kaveel’s future plans include becoming a mentor to guide and inspire the next generation of engineers, stressing the importance of continuous learning and perseverance in the STEM field. “The learning does not stop once you complete your education. You must always have an open mind. It does get difficult at times, but just concentrate on the end goal. If you encounter problems, remember there are solutions and resources to use to your benefit.”

Kaveel concludes: “The programme has made me what I am today, and I truly appreciate that. If you know how to use the resources that AECOM gives you, along with throwing you in the deep end, you can make a really good opportunity out of it.”

**Hakeem Adams: Modelling the Future of Transport**

A BIM modeller in the Highways and Bridges Department, Hakeem focuses on geometric modelling for various road projects, including non-motorised transport (NMT) infrastructure such as sidewalks and bicycle trails. With a background in traffic engineering, Hakeem transitioned to geometric modelling to leverage his understanding from the traffic side.

“Before I started at AECOM I was involved in the traffic engineering side,” Hakeem explains. “I fell in love with how the geometric aspect is derived from the traffic side. That was the reason I felt I needed to get into modelling because of my understanding derived from the traffic side. That was really what pushed me towards this specialisation.”

At AECOM, Hakeem values access to the latest digital tools and software, enhancing his proficiency and efficiency. He is optimistic about the impact of AI on streamlining engineering processes. “Given how coding has improved over the years, certain tedious tasks now just require a plug-in code and can run in the background while we focus on much more complex information. That is really where AI is heading towards.”

All the projects that Hakeem has worked on so far at AECOM have been international projects. “You learn a lot in regard to the different standards and guidelines used globally. It is different, but the basics stay the same, which is the beauty of engineering. On-site exposure is a challenge, but I enjoy the design aspect.”

Hakeem is focused on achieving his professional registration through the AECOM Candidacy Mentoring Programme by 2026. “The programme engages you to be much more focused on achieving the smart goals that you have set yourself. It is a peer-to-peer, supportive environment. We are working in a group-driven industry. It is not individual based. Your success is never just your success. It is a collaboration that adds up to the final product. It is motivational atmosphere and helps everybody achieve their goals at the end of the day.”

His advice to youngsters contemplating going a STEM career like engineering is to remember that small things add to the bigger picture. “Have patience learning the small things. At the majority of tertiary institutions, once you obtain your degree, you think you are just going to walk in and carry out complex these complex tasks. Instead end up working on much more mundane tasks than you anticipated. What you do not realise is that one day this will have equipped you to take on more complex tasks with much more responsibility,” says Hakeem.

**Sinky Thobejane: Engineering Water Solutions for Communities**

Sinky joined AECOM in July 2022 and works closely with the water team. With a BTech in Civil Engineering Water, she has contributed to significant projects, including upgrading pipelines and working on large-scale international irrigation schemes. Her passion for water engineering was ignited by witnessing the impact of water projects in her rural community.

“I was fascinated at how it worked and wanted to understand more, which sparked my interest in water engineering, especially as it has just a tangible impact on local lives and communities. How to improve these systems and continue to make a local impact?” Sinky adds that this is an important part of AECOM’s Sustainable Legacies commitment that underpins all its projects.

Working at AECOM has been her first experience of being part of a Candidacy Mentoring Programme. Since joining, she registered as a Candidate Technologist in August 2023. “I have learned additional skills like how to structure an engineering report. We have quarterly presentations whereby your progress is assessed. It motivates us to gain more experience, manage our time and it gives us confidence in our own capabilities, which is very important being part of a larger team.”

Sinky adds that the programme has also boosted her confidence in her presentation and communication skills, which is integral as engineers are required to communicate with a range of stakeholders, from contractors to clients.

“If you are entering the engineering field, know that there are a lot of qualified people in this industry with a lot of experience who can mentor you as a junior engineer or a technician. Then doors will open for you, doors that you did not even think you can open with your knowledge. Also, do not be afraid to ask questions or ask for advice. If you are tasked with a project and encounter an engineering problem, just reach out. You will be empowered and continue to learn at the same time,” concludes Sinky.

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**Notes to the editor**

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