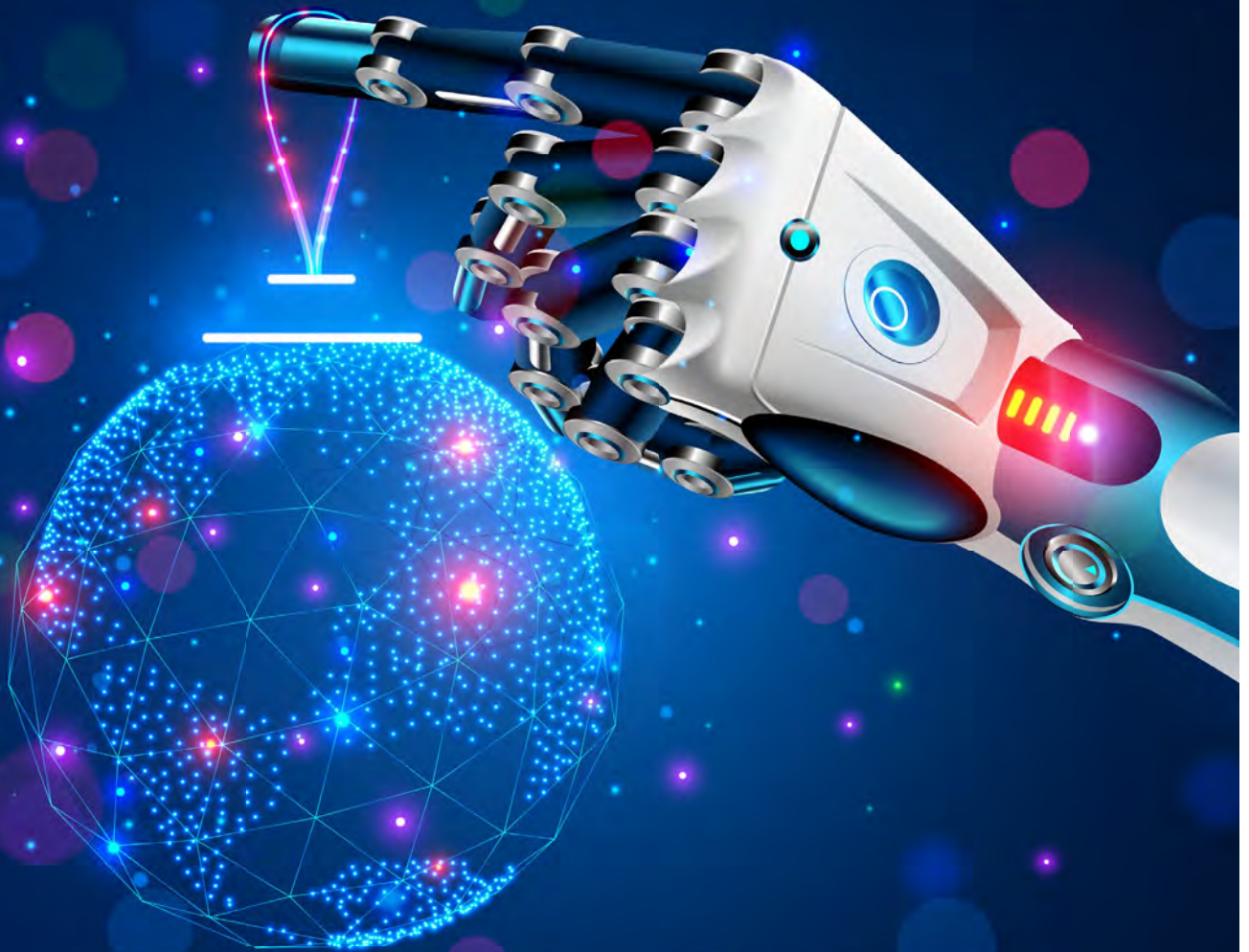


DECEMBER 2024  
VOLUME 14, ISSUE 12



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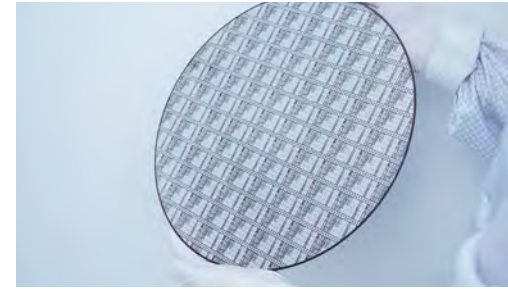
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In this article Fiona Challinor, Production Supervisor at Solsta, shares her inspiring journey as she reflects on her career in electronics manufacturing. From her beginnings as a production operator to her current role, Challinor has embraced challenges, pursued continuous learning, and championed the importance of quality and communication in the workplace.

By Fiona Challinor, Production Supervisor at Solsta

# FIONA CHALLINOR

## FROM PRODUCTION OPERATOR TO INSPIRING ELECTRONICS LEADER

In this article Fiona Challinor, Production Supervisor at Solsta, shares her inspiring journey as she reflects on her career in electronics manufacturing. From her beginnings as a production operator to her current role, Challinor has embraced challenges, pursued continuous learning, and championed the importance of quality and communication in the workplace.

For Challinor, no two days are quite the same. Her commitment to excellence and passion for electronics manufacturing has driven her journey from production operator to supervisor over the past six years, exemplifying how the electronics industry is evolving to embrace diverse talent and leadership.

**Bridging communication and quality control**

"Communication is at the heart of everything we do," Challinor explains, describing her typical day. It begins with staff meetings where she plays a crucial role in ensuring information flows smoothly between management and the production team. She emphasises the importance of removing communication blockages, as they can lead to misunderstandings, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities. "I don't like communication blockages. If people need to know something, they should know it." By ensuring open channels, Challinor helps maintain clarity, alignment, and productivity, which are essential for the team to achieve their goals effectively.

As a production supervisor, Challinor also oversees quality control, team management, and maintaining rigorous industry standards including ISO 13485. Rather

than simply adhering to what this medical standard requires, her focus is on why meeting these quality levels is crucial for the business.

She manages essential processes like ESD checks and temperature and humidity monitoring, ensuring that every step meets or exceeds expectations. "Upholding these quality levels isn't just about compliance with ISO 13485; it's about delivering reliability and trust to our customers, minimising risk, and enhancing our reputation for excellence," she notes. By doing so, Challinor helps to ensure the company maintains a competitive edge and sustains customer satisfaction.

Challinor's impact extends beyond her supervisory role. As the group IPC (Institute of Printed Circuits) trainer, she shares her expertise across sister companies, including conducting training sessions at their Redditch facility. "I love doing it," she enthuses. "Not only are they learning from me, but I'm learning from them too. They do different types of work, and I find all aspects of the electronics industry fascinating."

Challinor uses the knowledge she gains from these experiences to refine her training approach, improve processes, and bring fresh insights back to her own team, ensuring continuous growth and development for everyone involved.

## From Navy beginnings to electronics manufacturing leadership

This passion for continuous learning has been a defining characteristic of Challinor's career. Having served in the Navy earlier in life, where her interest in electronics first flourished, she emphasises the importance of seizing opportunities. "If I could tell my younger self anything, it would be don't waste time – just go for it."

The electronics manufacturing landscape has transformed significantly during



Challinor's career. "When I started in electronics, there was only one female in the company. Now, thanks to STEM initiatives and changing perspectives, it's becoming more diverse."

She's passionate about dispelling outdated perceptions of manufacturing as dirty work, highlighting instead the clean, regulated environment and vast array of opportunities available – from electrical design to PCB engineering.

At Solsta, Challinor has found an environment that nurtures growth and values diverse perspectives.

"It's the best place I've ever worked at," she reflects. "In previous roles, I was just a number – the quiet girl in the corner with nowhere to go. Here, I'm trusted with responsibility and encouraged to use my voice."

The transition from production operator to supervisor presented its own challenges. Learning to balance hands-on production work with supervisory duties took time, particularly during the implementation of new computer systems.

"My instinct was to dive into every task myself, but I realised that my role now was



to empower others to handle the details, while I focused on the bigger picture,” Challinor recalls. But her dedication and willingness to learn helped her navigate these changes successfully.

## Empowering the next generation

Today, Challinor is an integral part of maintaining Solsta’s high standards and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Her role involves ensuring all staff uphold the company’s commitment to quality, particularly in medical device manufacturing. She takes pride in helping her team understand and maintain these

exacting standards while promoting a positive, collaborative work environment.

“I would like to become more involved with ‘behind the scenes’ working with the process engineers, which includes prototype work and getting the processes right the first time, using my IPC knowledge to help create a good quality, reliable product.”

When she’s not supervising production or conducting training sessions, Challinor unwinds by taking long walks in the countryside with Banksy, her beloved American Bulldog Staffy cross. These moments of relaxation help balance the demands of her dynamic role in an industry she’s grown to love.

Looking ahead, Challinor remains excited about the future of electronics manufacturing and the opportunities it presents for the next generation. Her advice to aspiring females, particularly young women? “Anyone can be whatever they want to be. Don’t let anything hold you back – the industry is full of opportunities if you’re willing to pursue them.”

Electronic Specifier is committed to supporting Women in Tech, and in 2025 we will highlight women working in embedded systems within the Automotive Industry. Our aim is gain deeper insights into their journeys by building a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they’ve faced and the strategies that drive success, helping to identify what enables progression and what can be shared across the wider industry.

The editorial themes for the year include career progression, work-life balance, skills development, and the importance of professional networks and communities. Each topic will explore practical experiences and insights to encourage growth and development.

If you or someone you know would like to be involved, then please reach out to our Associate Editor, Sheryl Miles. Whether for the website or magazine, we welcome contributions from women in the industry. If you would like an interview, a written Q&A, or an article sharing your perspective, your input is encouraged and valued. By showcasing diverse experiences, we aim to provide a platform for open dialogue and shared learning.

If you’re interested in contributing or finding out more, please reach out to Sheryl Miles, at [sheryl.miles@electronicspecifier.com](mailto:sheryl.miles@electronicspecifier.com). Together, we hope to shine a light on the realities of working in tech and inspire others along the way.