

Alison Geddis brings to the table more than 30 years' experience as a practising biomedical scientist, and more than two decades of commitment to the IBMS, serving as Chair of the Northern Ireland branch, as a member of the Institute's Council and a member of its Education and Professional Standards Committee, which she chaired for a number of years.

But more than this, she brings passion and pride in the profession, along with a long-held faith in the IBMS as a force to effect change.

"I have always believed in and promoted the IBMS," she says. "I want to make sure that what we do is proactive and energetic, and always looking to make things better. That's what drives me – I don't want to stand still – I want to look for new and better ways of doing things."

"I know from being on the Council that we can make a difference, and I am a people person – that also motivates me to make sure things happen."

In taking up the role of IBMS President, Alison also hopes to encourage younger generations, especially young women, to enter STEM fields.

"I would also like to be a role model to young scientists and young people entering the profession – especially women – to show them what's possible," she says.

"When I started out in haematology, women were seen as second class citizens in labs – there were literally things that the men didn't allow us to do. But that has all changed dramatically – women make up more than 50% of laboratory biomedical scientists now. But there is still a barrier. I would like to see more women taking on management and senior roles."

Public profile

Over her two-year term, Alison will be working closely with the IBMS Council

MEET THE PRESIDENT

New IBMS President **Alison Geddis** discusses pride in her profession, belief in the work of the IBMS and desire to see biomedical scientists recognised for the vital role they play.

I would also like to be a role model to young people entering the profession – especially women

and members to push through the plans set out in the Institute's 2018 to 2020 strategy – including the ambition to raise the profile of biomedical science.

"We make an enormous contribution to patient care, but have a very low public profile," she adds. "People simply don't understand what we do; the care that's taken, the training, the expertise, all that's involved to become a registered biomedical scientist, and the huge contribution of our support staff."

"In my own work in blood transfusion, when people give blood they don't know about all the testing that goes on to ensure the quality every time – I think they would be astounded."

While images of queuing ambulances or trolleys lining hospital corridors paint a compelling picture of the pressures facing other parts of the health service, "there's no visual for a backlog in a lab," says Alison. "We need to raise our profile, show colleagues, patients and the public that, without our work, the health service

just couldn't deliver for patients. The only time we tend to feature in the press, unfortunately, is when there are mistakes."

"I'm very proud of my profession, and I'm very proud of all the work that biomedical scientists do. There are a lot of unsung heroes in our world. Those people who stay behind when there is a problem to make sure the results get out because it will impact on people's care at the other end."

Essential contribution

While the threat of being under-appreciated as an "under-the-radar service" remains, Alison says she has seen biomedical science move to the very heart of healthcare over the course of her career, with the advent of better technology, and more extensive and reliable tests.

"It's changed the face of the clinical arena," adds Alison. "Biomedical scientists and their teams analyse over 150 million samples and the results are used to make



ALL ABOUT ALISON

Alison, from Kircubbin, County Down, is married with two daughters.

She started her career in cytology at Belfast City Hospital, before moving into haematology and blood transfusion.

Alison joined the IBMS in 1982, before becoming a Fellow and achieving Chartered Scientist status.

She was Northern Ireland branch Secretary and Chair, before being elected as a National Council member.

Alison was a key player in Queen's University's decision to seek IBMS accreditation for their biomedical science degree programme.

Alison's tenure as President began on 1 January, when she took over from Ian Sturdegess.

Her inauguration ceremony took place on 1 February at the IBMS offices in London and she will remain in post until 31 December 2019.

decisions on diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. Our contribution to the patient pathway is essential.

"Looking to the future, the biomedical scientist is ideally placed as a key player in the genomics revolution."

"Having good quality results in a much more timely way means a routinely better service for patients."

Yet, all too often, the work of laboratories isn't taken into consideration when it comes to the planning of healthcare services, she adds.

"When a new service is being set up, commissioners think about the nurses, the doctors, the porters, where it's going to be – but they don't think about how the samples are going to get to the lab, the impact on the workload, when they need results, who is going to interpret them."

"We need to raise the profile across the whole of healthcare. Quite often we're brought in at the end when all the decisions have been made – we need to be involved in the decision-making from the start."

Supporting members

Biomedical scientists will also need a steady hand at the tiller, as unprecedented financial pressures push change through the NHS, not least the consolidation of laboratory services across the UK.

Alison adds: "I think that is a big issue for many members who have concerns about retraining or moving, and the potential for job losses and loss of expertise."

"We need to support our members by giving them the tools to see how their skills are still needed in this new world,

to equip them to be able to be involved in the planning to make sure the right biomedical scientists are in the right places delivering high-quality, safe services to patients. In short – to make sure it works." 

