



# IBMS IN THE PANDEMIC

At a time when biomedical science has never had a more public profile, the IBMS has been working hard in the media and with government to promote the role of its members. IBMS President Allan Wilson explains the measures the institute has taken.

**T**he last few months has been a very busy time for us, with unprecedented opportunities to highlight IBMS members' crucial work to the wider public. In terms of media exposure, we have been contacted by numerous companies and agencies such as BBC television and radio, Sky News, Channel 4, LBC, many commercial radio stations and a whole range of printed media, including most of the national newspapers.

Wherever possible, we've promoted the contribution of our members who are involved in testing during the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic has given biomedical science a profile that we had previously never been able to obtain – I've never heard the words "testing in the laboratory" so frequently in our country's media! This has been a rare opportunity to highlight the role of biomedical



scientists, not just in pandemic testing but across the whole range of laboratory processes.

### IBMS key messages

The majority of the public probably previously had very little concept about what actually goes on in laboratories, but there's now a growing recognition of what we do. There's also a growing recognition of the issues around the whole specimen pathway – how we receive samples, where samples come from, how we feed the results into IT systems and then how we get people to deal with the results.

And this isn't just relevant to public perception: I think this experience has highlighted that even other health professionals can have a poor knowledge of what we actually do. This has also been an opportunity to demonstrate the complexity of work that we do, and how key we are to the vast majority of clinical diagnoses. If we come

out of this with a deeper and broader understanding of what biomedical science does across the country, then that will be a huge benefit.

### Wider impact

There's also been increased government recognition of our role and the funding needed for our work. Over the years, I think as a nation we have under-resourced laboratory services so that we run at a bare minimum level, but that doesn't produce much resilience or potential to flex or increase capacity when we have issues such as the current pandemic. We're not looking to build capacity needlessly, but I think when you have cut things to the bone, it then proves very difficult to expand capacity when you need it.

One final benefit for us is that we are seeing an increasing interest of young people in science. It will be very interesting to see the application rates for science courses at universities and I think we'll see the uptake of science courses at school grow, too. There is certainly now a growing motivation for children and students to follow science-based courses, and the pandemic has highlighted not just the pivotal nature of what we do, but also how fascinating all this is. It's not

just people sitting in white coats with test tubes – what we do is so challenging on so many fronts that we offer hugely rewarding careers to people who decide to follow a science route. 

