

A vibrant future

Incoming President **Jessica Smith** discusses her geoscience career and hopes for the Society's future during her Presidency

What first drew you to geoscience?

I marvel at those people who can tell stories about falling in love with geoscience as a child and going on to pursue this passion. If I am honest, I was not particularly aware of the subject until I went to university and only started to appreciate the range of exciting careers that geoscience offers after graduating.

Whilst at school, an archaeological dig took place near where I lived in the area of Banffshire where the Deskford Carnyx—a Celtic boar-headed war trumpet—was found in the 1800s. This captured my attention, so I studied archaeology at the University of Glasgow. Here, I chose Earth science as my second subject, simply because volcanoes and fossils sounded fun, but I ended up switching to study that instead.

Tell us about your career to this point

When I graduated in 2004, I wasn't interested in a career in oil and gas or a more academic career path, which led me to the ground engineering sector. I worked for a few years before completing an MSc in Engineering Geology at Imperial College London in 2009. For this, I was incredibly fortunate to receive funding from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, otherwise I doubt it would have been an option for me. I credit this MSc for giving me exposure to the diverse opportunities that are possible for engineering geologists and for demonstrating the value of the state investing in students.

I then spent a few years at the company TRL where I gained

experience in transport-related research, including the SafeLand project on landslide risk and management in Europe. After that, I joined Golder Associates (now part of WSP), where I spent much of my time working on rockfall protection in Gibraltar.

Looking back, joining Atkins (now AtkinsRéalis) in 2015 was an important step for me professionally, as well as for my involvement with the Society. Atkins supported me when I was successfully elected to Council in 2017 and went on to become Vice President Regional Groups.

I then joined SSE Renewables, where I was seconded to work on the proposed Coire Glas Pumped Hydro Storage project, near Fort William in Scotland. As the Technical Authority for Engineering Geology, I had oversight of the phenomenal ground investigation that was carried out for the scheme. It was a genuine honour to be involved in such a technically and logistically challenging ground investigation, which proved to be a great opportunity to develop early career professionals in rock engineering skills that have sadly dwindled in the UK in recent years. There is a large and growing need for engineering geology skills in the UK,

“I want to bring greater focus on respect, representation and relevance to ensure that the Society is a home for all geoscientists”



yet we aren't seeing enough people come through the pipeline to meet this demand.

More recently, I have joined a different part of SSE as Engineering Manager in Scottish and Southern Electricity Network's Distribution business. This change is offering me many opportunities to learn new skills and get to know a different part of the business away from my technical background.

What skills or experiences do you feel will be useful for your role as President?

One of the key presidential duties is to deftly chair Council meetings that cover many aspects of the Society with considerable thought and discussion. I continue to pay attention to things that facilitate inclusive and meaningful discussion, as well as effective decision making.

What have been some of your highlights working with the Society so far?

As Chair of the Byelaws and Charter



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"It was a genuine honour to be involved" says Jessica of her time as Technical Authority for Engineering Geology on the Coire Glas Pumped Hydro Storage project in the Scottish Highlands
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Review Working Group, I had the privilege of attending a meeting of past Presidents at Burlington House, during which I met Lynne Frostick, who was the Society's second woman President (2008–2010), which I found inspiring. Also, in October 2025, Fellows voted unanimously to approve a revised set of Byelaws and to endorse a revised Royal Charter at a Special General Meeting, which was a great moment to reflect upon the incredible work by all involved.

How has the Society changed during your time as a Fellow?

Upon joining in the early 2000s, I perceived the Society as London-centric, but there are continuing efforts to decentralise and be the organisation that our members elsewhere want and need us to be.

I am also heartened to see ongoing positive change in equality, diversity, inclusion and accessibility (EDIA). This is important if we are to continue being relevant to our members (and prospective members), plus it is simply the right thing to do.

What are the most important challenges the Society currently faces?

The publishing landscape is certainly changing, and this is a challenge that our Publishing House continues to step up to as increasing open access and the ever-growing use of AI require us to change our ways of working. However, we have a strong portfolio, an excellent reputation and a dedicated team, which all helps us here.


Attracting new members is vital for the sustainable growth of the Society as well, so we need to not only listen to our current members, but people who could be members in the future too.

What do you hope to achieve during your Presidency?

I want to bring greater focus on respect, representation and relevance to ensure that the Society is a home for all geoscientists.

Campaigns like 'This is Geoscience' deserve credit for including diversity in

its resources, which will undoubtedly show a great many young people that geoscience is a sector for them. I recognise that I am a bit different from a great many of our past Presidents; indeed, I will be only the fourth woman President, which is staggering when you consider that the Society was founded in 1807! I hope to be a visible demonstration that you don't need to fit a certain mould to take on exciting roles, like being President of the Society.

Without respect and representation, it will be hard for us to be relevant to our existing and prospective members. I want to continue to work with our staff, volunteers and members to discover how we can remain a vibrant organisation that is relevant to all geoscientists. 



Jessica T Smith is Design Engineering Manager at Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, and the incoming President of the Geological Society