

Report of the Independent Assessor for AGM 2025

IFST was established in 1968 and is governed according to a Memorandum and Articles of Association. The Charitable Object is the general advancement and application of food science and technology, for the benefit, safety and health of the public. IFST is an association of Members and all that we do must serve the Members since their roles, executed in a professional fashion, serve the Object.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees - elected by Members - to ensure that the Object is served. It is the responsibility of an Independent Assessor (IA) to assess the effectiveness of the Board in this role and report accordingly to the Members at the Annual Meeting.

The Board of IFST reiterated six strategic priorities designed to serve the membership of IFST and deliver against the charitable object. The Annual Report provides the Board and Executives understanding of the progress made in these six areas. I will not repeat that. My purpose is to give my assessment of the Board as it continues to develop IFST. The Board in partnership with the Acting CEO has revisited the strategic objectives and amended them to reflect the current and future needs of the sector, our members and the resources available to IFST.

The year to Sept 2024 was a particularly challenging one for IFST. Changes in leadership bring to light strengths and weaknesses of any organisation. IFST is no exception. Residual challenges of changed post covid working practices resulted in significant staff turnover with the added costs of recruitment, induction and reduced effectiveness. This was exacerbated by the new CRM system bringing complications that chewed up human and financial resource. IFST service to members was compromised. Independent of these issues, IFST budgeting had been over ambitious and the expected revenue was not raised.

I am pleased to say that despite these multiple challenges, and due to the diligence and hard work of Trustees and core staff, IFST has managed to retain it's core business and achieve substantially even if not optimally against the six priority areas established by the Board.

*Priority 1 - Providing and sharing evidence-based FS&T knowledge and
Priority 2. Influencing and supporting key Stakeholders.*

At core, IFST is a science and technology institute. IFST has continued to provide independent scientific information in information statements, fact sheets, technical briefs, tool-kits, knowledge hubs, webinars, conferences or access to trusted resources etc. Publications play a pivotal role in enabling the Institute to achieve its charitable objective. The publications tender process and the

transition from Wiley to OUP for the international Journal has been well managed and the flip to Open Access and a second Journal is underway. Importantly the quality of papers accepted and integrity of peer review process has remained high. The Magazine continues to thrive.

The Scientific Committee and External Affairs Committee are well led and managed and sufficiently resourced and refreshed by volunteers and IFST colleagues. There is a thorough, systematic approach to issues that need to be addressed, and processes to ensure independence of scientific output. The IFST resources are used by an increasing number of stakeholders ranging from students to policy makers.

The aspiration that IFST becomes the first stop shop for scientific and technical information on food science and technology in UK and beyond is still elusive. This is a combination of awareness by potential users as well as the limitations of the search capabilities of the IFST digital systems. The increasingly agile use of social media is helpful in this regard and the IFST communications strategy expands the reach of the science. Online access to events is improving. The aspiration to be a dissemination partner for good food science and technology research should be encouraged by the Board as resources allow.

Priority 3 Promoting Professional Standards and Development.

Priority 5 - Encouraging and supporting future talent.

It is imperative that there is a pipeline of early education through apprenticeships, tertiary education and continuing professional development for Members if IFST is to retain its vitality and integrity. And more importantly that the Members deliver the charitable object.

There is continuing pressure on the sector – increasing costs of energy, materials and employment. Recruitment of skilled staff is very difficult. Standards get stressed and increase the risk to public health, consumer safety and confidence. The need for IFST to promote professional standards and encourage entry to the profession is more pressing than ever.

Severe technical difficulties with the Member data base as well as excessive churn in staff limited development of these objectives in the first part of the year. While those issues have been identified and are being addressed, some catch up is still needed. But very significant progress has been made in the second half of the year and the Board is now much more aware of what has to be done, what can be done and what has been achieved to date. This should be an important area of focus for the Board in the next year. A welcome initiative is the examination of why many students do not progress through to associate and full

membership. A look at why many Members do not progress to Fellows might also be useful if the IFST really does want to support and enable FS&T professionals from “cradle to grave”.

Priority 4. Utilising and growing the strength of membership

Membership numbers are always a challenge for professional bodies. IFST has not achieved its ambitions in this regard although some small growth has been reported. This growth has been achieved through both group and individual membership status. The above-mentioned reviews re transition and advancement through the membership levels will be useful and the outcomes should be carefully addressed by the Board.

It is encouraging that the Board and senior team have established a working group to address membership numbers, transitions between professional levels, retention of international students and overseas members, EDI, service levels for members etc. and tasked them to recommend actions that will enhance the IFST offering within the charitable objective. The ready availability of so much of the IFST scientific knowledge and information may be a perverse deterrent to people joining and this will also be addressed. The Board should ensure prompt study and action of any report.

Priority 6. Financial Stability: effective governance and sustainability.

2023-24 has been an especially challenging year for the IFST. Issues of staff turnover, system complexities, failure to achieve the revenue for an ambitious budget and a change in senior leadership have all been addressed.

The Board is indebted to Chris Gilbert-Wood who stood down as Board Member and Chair of the External Affairs Committee to take up the Acting CEO role mid IFST business year. Under his leadership these significant and strategic, resource and system issues were identified, analysed, reported and are being addressed.

The Board is a careful steward of the IFST resources. It is clear from the Audit report that despite all the difficulties there is no evidence of any impropriety and that the IFST is a going concern with a budget and resources adequate for current purposes and plans. However, there is a need for more income if the aspirations of IFST are to be met. A working group has been established to advise IFST of income generation options that are within our charitable criteria.

Under the leadership of the Hon Treasurer the Finance Committee have managed the investment of reserves through some choppy economic waters and advised the Board on fees, financial challenges, draw downs, strategic decisions re the

publishing contracts, pensions liabilities, proposed staff restructure and updated financial policies.

Governance requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association have been largely adhered to and the whole Board is now better acquainted with their provisions and made aware of changes and updates to relevant legislation and codes of practice.

Conclusion:

There is a silver lining to every cloud, and the challenges faced have resulted in a stronger Board working together with fully recognised collective responsibility. Together Trustees bring a range of very significant skills, experience and effort to the table to ensure a stronger IFST. IFST has, as a result a very bright future.

The Board is responsible for the 5 S's of good governance.

- Setting strategy: the Board has revisited and revised the strategic objectives.
- Scrutinising performance: The Board did not effectively scrutinise performance and as a result the difficulties outlined above emerged. But these have been identified, analysed and are being dealt with effectively. The Board schedule and agenda setting has been usefully revised to ensure adequate oversight of the full portfolio.
- Stewardship of resources: the churn of staff, system difficulties and reduced income necessitated a re-organisation. Accompanied by sound financial management this has resulted in greater stability and opportunities for future growth.
- Stretching the Executive team: A board of expert enthusiastic FS&T professionals has a tendency to keep piling on new ideas without adequate consideration of the limited resource to deliver them. The turnover of senior staff has been a salutary lesson. Stretch with consideration will still be needed.
- Supporting the team: The acting CEO who is now President Elect is well aware of this challenge for the new CEO and team. The whole Board is now cognisant of the need to support the CEO in dealing with system issues, modernisation of the processes, improvement in service to members and the delivery of quality events in a timely way.

The personnel changes of the last year have been unsettling and difficult for all involved. They do also provide opportunity for constructive change. The Board

needs to continue to scrutinise appropriately while supporting the leadership and team.

Foreseeable challenges and risks will be

- Transition to open access for the International Journal and the launch of a new Journal.
- The predominance of remote working: the challenge to ensure that “working from home’ is “working for Members”.
- The development, retention and professional development of inclusive Membership between students, academia, industry, policy makers and food service
- Leadership of the FS&T profession in a culture where science is undervalued.
- Increasing income.
- Modernising and consolidating quality systems and processes of IFST in order to enhance service to members.

Members can be assured that the IFST has come through a second difficult year stronger, more ready and determined to serve Members in delivering the Charitable Object of the general advancement and application of food science and technology, for the benefit, safety and health of the public.

Appointed as IA from Sept 2020 I have attended Board meetings, some Standing Committees and working groups. I am not a voting member of any group. Chairs of Committees and IFST team have graciously welcomed me to observe, listen and learn. This is my last report to you and I thank the IFST family for the privilege of being your IA and for your co-operation with my role.



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Independent Assessor
15th February, 2025