

## Report of the Independent Assessor for AGM 2021

IFST was established in 1964 and is governed according to a Memorandum and Articles of Association and its Regulations. It is a charity whose 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 whose roles, executed in a professional fashion, deliver the public benefit Object.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors - 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.

Appointed as IA from Sept 2020 I have attended Board meetings and some Standing Committees. I am not a voting member of any group. I am grateful to my predecessor Alex Kent for the insights he shared with me prior to standing down in June.

The Board of IFST established 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 those. My purpose is to give my assessment of the Board as it continues to develop IFST.

### **Priority 1 - Providing and sharing Food Science & Technology Knowledge.**

One of the major successes of 2020 is the Covid-19 resource hub. From a standing start, an energetic disparate group of volunteer experts provided information and advice for Members and others. The IFST investment in scientific team capacity, IT enablement and communications combined to make this a success.

This illustrates that IFST can deliver, at pace and with quality, necessary knowledge on key issues that Members and the public need. The Horizon Scanning workshop (Jan 2021) identified other areas where IFST should be proactive. The Board would do well to ensure these get the necessary focused attention. Any such resource should be easily accessible to all Members and non Members who need it. The aspiration should be that IFST is the first stop shop for scientific and technical information on food and food production across the whole of the UK and beyond.

### **Priority 2 - Influencing and supporting key stakeholders.**

IFST has made progress in reaching out to, communicating with and influencing key stakeholders. While hard to measure, the rapid and independent scientific response to Covid 19 enhanced IFST profile and engagement with government and food safety leaders.

The scientific capacity in the team alongside an active Scientific Committee and External Affairs Committee have resulted in IFST responding more effectively to key consultations and, as a result, contributing more effectively to development of policy. This is entirely appropriate for a professional body such as IFST.

Food science and technology practitioners do not '*operate in an island. We are part of so much more*' (apologies to HSBC). In establishing the strategic direction of IFST the Board should consider how best to ensure dialogue, engagement, and open access to global scientific knowledge. Withdrawal from IUFoST requires a fresh and creative approach to international partnerships.

Brexit and Covid-19 have brought enhanced awareness of devolution. The IFST Board will need to provide strategic response to policy and practice divergence. Virtual working enhances the potential of SIGs and Branches to serve key stakeholders and members more effectively regardless of geography.

### **Priority 3 - Promoting Professional Standards and Development.**

IFST is a professional body for food scientists and technologists. There are however many in the sector who are as yet unaware of the benefits of membership and/or professional registration in an ever changing commercial and professional environment.

While some events were postponed due to the Covid -19 pandemic, the Professional Development team are actively reviewing the Competence Criteria for the Registers and for Accreditation of relevant courses. The accreditation of short courses and an increased emphasis on Apprenticeships is to be welcomed. The Board could usefully maintain scrutiny and stretch to make this programme more relevant for future as well as current professionals and at pace.

### **Priority 4 - Utilising the strength of membership.**

IFST has 2800 members with aspirations to reach 4000. The Board has approved a plan and budget to work towards this goal. The enhanced digital offerings and more disciplined approach to proactive provision of Information Statements, Fact Sheets, our Love Food Love Science website and access to webinars should help achieve this goal. Group schemes will be part of this programme of recruitment. Membership retention and student to associate transition are a challenge.

IFST relies on volunteer efforts to populate its governance structures, expert working groups, Branches and SIGs. Those who give most gain most. But volunteer time is a very precious resource and Members must benefit professionally from their involvement and service.

IFST is especially aware of the needs of sole practitioners working in SME's. The Forum facility on the website has sadly been out of action for some months and urgent action is being taken to reinstate this valuable system. More might then be done to facilitate sole practitioners support through a network of like-minded professionals.

Members are individuals and will be looking to IFST for personalised responses to specific professional needs. Additionally, communities of support (regardless of geography) will be important in an increasingly digital world of work. Members will welcome deliverable outcomes as a result of belonging to IFST. The Board will need to develop a strategic response to supporting individuality alongside mutuality. Membership should not be an objective in itself. Membership value is the key to attracting and maintaining Members.

### **Priority 5 - Encouraging and supporting future talent.**

The disruption in education at all levels in 2020/21 has made this rather challenging. However young people are already well adapted to online work and the launch pads, Ecotrophelia and other student offerings have been largely maintained. The Student Committee is active under energetic leadership.

IFST web resources have been used more in the last year and as education went online, the visits to Love Food Love Science resources rocketed. Improved search capacity will only enable this to increase.

The Education and PD team have work underway to understand more about the career paths in the sector, the gaps in education, the competencies required and the training resources offered by employers.

The Education Forum/team are seeking strategic direction from the Board and given the plethora of potential activity in this area provision of this direction along with appropriate resource should be a priority for the Board.

### **Priority 6 - Financial Stability, effective governance and sustainability.**

The Board has been a good steward of IFST resources. The Finances of the Institute are in good order with a budget adequate to support the strategic objectives agreed by the Board. Under the leadership of the Hon Treasurer the Finance Committee have managed the investment of IFST

reserves and ensured they are adequate for the risks currently in play. IFST reserves are invested in a portfolio that has active benefit as opposed to merely doing no harm. The Hon Treasurer has reported to the Board in an open and transparent manner. The Executive team manages the resources in an effective and efficient manner in line with authorised expenditure delegation and provide full and timely reports.

Nominations Committee have been consulted on all governance positions in the past year with nominations and elections conducted consistent with the Constitution and Memorandum & Articles of Association. Board induction and training, a skills audit (last done in 2017) and in due course a survey of attitudes and behaviours (not done in 2020) will be needed to further enable continued good governance.

## **Conclusion**

Good Boards are responsible for setting the strategy for their organisations, scrutinising performance, ensuring good stewardship of the resources, stretching the Executive team to deliver to their full potential and supporting them in doing so.

The IFST Board has established the Strategic Priorities listed above. However the world has changed in the last year and as the profession emerges from Covid 19 and the ramifications of Brexit are realised, the Board may need to be more vigorous and courageous in strategy or in programmes to deliver the strategy. Tweaking may not be enough going forward and the Board should be constantly aware of this.

All aspects of work patterns have been stirred up in 2020-21 and so also has IFST's way of working. Project Diamond is re-examining the governance processes and also how IFST is networked through Branches and SIGs. IFST cannot stand still on this and we look forward to the outcome of this project. Equality Diversity and Inclusion remain on the Board agenda and as always EDI is a friend of excellence and never an enemy.

While there is a temptation to relax as we emerge out of the pandemic and the challenges Brexit has brought to the profession, that would be unwise. The Board will need to be ever more purposeful in strategy and more challenging in the objectives set to deliver it while prioritising use of the resources they steward. Each Member represents and reports on one of the interlinked Strategic Priorities but there is a collective Board responsibility and accountability for all of them. Adequate scrutiny and pace of delivery can be a dilemma for Boards that meet quarterly. Could/should the Board be more nimble with shorter, more frequent virtual meetings?

The Executive team have responded well to some seismic changes in ways of working, delivery of outputs and working from home. The outcomes for IFST have been mostly positive and much has been learnt that informs the future. We are indebted to the team for their hard work and determined attempts to maintain and enhance our profession. The Board now needs to support the team while at the same time stretching them to deliver maximum benefits for Members as they in turn deliver the Object of IFST.

In summary I conclude that the Board has fulfilled its obligations and responsibilities to the Institute. During a year of profound challenge and change the IFST Board and committed staff team have adapted rapidly to deliver above and beyond expectations. The delivery of that change is welcome but illustrates the potential to go further in delivering for Members and the public.

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