



Report of the Independent Assessor for AGM 2024

IFST was established in 1964 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 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, 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. I am a Fellow of the IFST and as such attend some regular events and benefit from the Journal and Magazine.

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 year to Sept 2023 has been a particularly challenging one for IFST. The challenges of new ways of working emerging post Covid, new leadership with a new CEO and President, very significant and strategic team vacancies as well as technical difficulties in transfer to the new membership data base.

I am pleased to say that despite these multiple challenges, and due to the diligence and hard work of some core staff, IFST has managed to retain it's core business and achieve substantially 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. The International Journal and the Magazine provide stimulating scientific knowledge and information to a high standard. The Board in exercising its

responsibilities reviewed the publishing contract in light of the need and intent to move to open access publication.

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.

As a professional body, IFST wisely engages with relevant policy issues whether by responding to consultations in a timely and appropriate way or by monitoring and liaising with policy makers to ensure they are supported with relevant scientific and technical data. IFST as guardian of the independence of thought and quality of output can be a trusted partner in the necessary dialogue, engagement and communication of global food science and technology knowledge. The External Affairs committee works to engage with key policy aspects – proactive and reactive - of the profession and is increasingly effective in doing so. The governance guide for directors and food safety managers should be required reading for all leaders in the sector.

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.

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 ever present.

Severe technical difficulties with the Member data base as well as excessive churn in staff limited development of these objectives in the past year. While professional registration and maintenance of code of professional standards has been steady, the education brief did not progress adequately. The Board has now affirmed the new leadership and restructure of the standing forums along with a plan to deal with the deficit. Among others things, this will include promotion of alternative routes into the profession. The Board would do well to ensure this work is resourced, reviewed and delivered. Without it, the ambition that regulators, retailers and the general public can be confident that technical personnel at all levels within the food sector are

recognised as being professionally competent and striving to remain current in their knowledge and skills through effective CPD will not be achieved.

Priority 4. Utilising and growing the strength of membership

IFST has not yet achieved the target of 4000 Members although numbers have increased slightly. Group schemes and individual membership renewals have been impeded by the technical difficulties around the Membership data base. As in other professions, student to associate transition still remains a challenge. IFST attracts a large number of international students and work under strategic priorities 1&2, 3&5 should, alongside the enhanced online presence assist with their retention. The new plans for encouraging new entrants to the profession and assisting their career progression should address this issue which again needs Board attention.

The pandemic forced IFST to enhance its on-line offerings and this has extended the reach. As IFST moves to reinstate in-person events it must not allow its reach to be diminished. There is a need for events to be hybrid to allow for reduced travel and time commitment by Members while still enabling essential networking and professional development.

The concept of IFST Communities has not yet achieved its goal of enhancing engagement and support or creating a safe space for the many practitioners - industry, food service, government and academic - who need access to science, advice and support. The intergenerational nature of our Members along with the transitions of offering from pre-covid 'in person only' to 'online only' during covid and progression to 'hybrid gatherings' post-covid makes finding a solution rather more complex but still necessary.

Priority 6. Financial Stability: effective governance and sustainability.

The Board is a careful steward of the IFST resources. The risk register is owned, scrutinised and amended by the Board. The finances of the Institute are in good order with a budget adequate to support the core strategic objectives agreed by the Board. While the 60th anniversary provides options for celebration, the resources are not concomitant with some aspirations! 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 and updated financial policies.

Governance requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association have been largely adhered to as are requirements of Company Law and Charitable Law. The Board is apprised of changes and updates to relevant legislation and codes of practice.

Conclusion

The Board is responsible for setting strategy for the organisation, scrutinising performance, ensuring good stewardship of resources, stretching the Executive team to deliver to their full potential and supporting them in doing so.

The IFST Board is populated by talented and competent committed Directors. The Board has set 6 strategic objectives but does not use its Board time to scrutinize them in a proportionate way that is mutually supportive of all the portfolios. Agenda and time management as well as periodicity of meetings and work flow could be usefully addressed.

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 scrutinize appropriately while supporting the leadership and team.

Foreseeable challenges and risks will be

- transition to open access for the Journal,
- the predominance of remote working: the challenge to ensure that “working from home” is “working for Members”.
- The balance of Membership between academia, industry, policy makers and food service
- Leadership of the FS&T profession in a culture where science is undervalued.
- Dealing with devolution in a post Brexit world.
- Further enabling entry into and progression through the profession.

Members can be assured that the IFST has come through a difficult year ready and determined to serve its 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.



E Maureen S Edmondson
Independent Assessor
30th January 2024.