

## **Report of the Independent Assessor for AGM 2026**

### **Context**

This is my first report to the membership, and I am indebted to my predecessor, Maureen Edmondson, for the high standard of probity, experience and expertise she brought to the role.

IFST was established in 1968 and is, at the time of writing, governed by a Memorandum and Articles of Association operating through a not-for-profit, limited liability company which was granted charitable status in November 2007. The company's directors are members of the IFST Board of Trustees ('the Board'), elected by our membership. The Charitable Object ('Object') for which the institute was established is the general advancement and application of food science and technology, for the benefit, safety and health of the public. Internal IFST Regulations, which are subordinate to the Memorandum and Articles of Association, augment their application. IFST is an association of members and collectively the Trustees and Officers must serve the members whose competence and adherence to our code of professional conduct uphold the Object.

It is the responsibility of the Board 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 year 2025/26 in review**

During 2025/26 global challenges continued to impinge on our members including geopolitical and trading turbulence, erratic climate events, but also opportunities driven by innovation and growth.

IFST continues to grow stronger, more ready and determined to serve members in delivering the Object and alive to the difficulties members face. There are, however, continued challenges. Recognising these in May 2025, the Board refocused our strategic priorities for the next three years. These are:

1. The provision of trusted, evidence-based knowledge materials
2. The development of capable and competent people.

The strategic priorities are delivered through 6 workstreams, detailed in the Annual Report of the Trustees. The key measures of success will be member numbers and diversity, and financial sustainability.

Increasing progress was made in the output of soundly researched and well delivered technical material in a variety of formats. In-person events, including by Branch committees, continued to attract a pleasing level of interest. We successfully made the "International Journal of Food Science & Technology" fully open access and launched a new open-access journal "Translational Food Sciences". Our open access membership magazine, Food Science and Technology continues to be

attractive in content and an excellent information source. It is particularly encouraging to see focused work taking root on our equity, diversity & inclusion practices. Relations with Government departments and other stakeholders have strengthened. Our membership numbers grew, resolution of technical issues with the Customer Relationship Management system paid dividends and the commencement of online 'New Member Welcome' sessions was warmly welcomed by participants.

The 'Report of the Trustees' fleshes out and adds to these achievements. Perhaps the most far-reaching achievement of the past year was that, after four years of hard work IFST was granted a Royal Charter to become the Chartered Institute of Food Science and Technology (CIFST).

Over the next year, we must transition to Chartered status. This will include:

- Updating our constitution and governance documents
- Refreshing our branding and communications
- Engaging members in celebrating this achievement
- Providing guidance on professional designations and usage of the Chartered title

Members and stakeholders will continue to be kept informed throughout this process.

## **Discussion**

The Board brings together a group of talented, experienced and enthusiastic Trustees. It is effectively chaired and with relevant agendas is functioning well. There is a disciplined focus on the matters in hand. The Executive are providing increasingly well-presented data including on membership numbers, publications accepted and budget variance. With the move to three-year planning and the need to monitor progress carefully, financial reporting and management accounts have improved with the quality and timeliness of information flow required to take decisions in a timely manner.

The Board is grateful, enabling it to focus on the challenges that still face IFST. The division of responsibilities between the Board and committees is appropriate. The Board asks searching questions and has deliberated carefully with appropriate speed but without undue haste, has received external expert advice and taken courageous decisions.

Key committees that the Board relies on are also well chaired and populated by experienced, dedicated and responsible individuals. The membership of committees is increasingly diverse.

It remains to be certain that the future financial sustainability of CIFST is possible but correct and courageous steps have been taken. Membership growth, prudent expenditure and publications, which play a pivotal role in enabling the Institute to achieve its Object, are essential to our financial viability.

The transition to open access publication promotes unrestricted online access to free, permanent, scholarly research and is a new financial model for IFST not without potential difficulties. The quality of papers accepted, and integrity of peer review process has remained high but at the time of writing the volume of publications is not growing as needed. Reflecting the recent changes and common problems encountered by scientific journals we are alive to the problems and acting in concert with our new publisher and with the benefit of imaginative ideas and focused attention it is reasonable to infer a likely suitable growth, but a careful eye needs to be kept on this.

## **Conclusion**

In the face of the challenges and opportunities facing it the Board, which benefits from a range of very significant skills, experience and effort, has worked effectively with fully recognised collective responsibility.

The '5 S's' of good governance are a reasonable yardstick.

1. **Setting strategy:** the Board has revisited the strategic objectives to simplify and focus them against our medium and longer term needs.
2. **Scrutinising performance:** The Board is effectively scrutinising performance, and difficulties are being dealt with effectively. The Board schedule and agenda setting has been usefully revised to ensure adequate oversight of the full portfolio.
3. **Stewardship of resources:** Sound financial management, courageous planning and close monitoring has resulted in suitable opportunities for future growth. The Board has demonstrated the ability and willingness to take decisions that will move us to the much needed financial sustainability.
4. **Stretching the Executive team:** Stretch with consideration has been demonstrated with good dialogue between Board and Executive.
5. **Supporting the team:** The President, Board and Chief Executive are working well together with the right focus on the problems facing us and the right information to deal with them.

## **Foreseeable challenges and risks**

A risk register is regularly reviewed by the Executive and Board and is not repeated here. The following high level Board challenges are entirely my own view and appear to me to be relevant. They are accompanied by my own view of the associated unmitigated risks. Note, unless otherwise stated I am content that the Board is currently working to mitigate or eliminate the risks.

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Potential risk before mitigation</b>
1	Financial sustainability, i.e. income matches expenditure without drawdown from reserves within three years and preferable thereafter exceeds expenditure, by the following means.	Depletion of reserves and ultimate collapse of the Institute.
1.a.	Maintenance of a steady growth in membership with retention, professional development of members and a good balance between students, academia, industry, policy makers and food service.	Membership growth and progression falters and/or does not reach the levels necessary for member development and income to reach target.
1.b	Peer reviewed publication volume in our journals regains growth.	Publication income falls short of the target level needed.
1.c	Control of current expenditure to facilitate financial sustainability	Failure risks too heavy a burden placed on 1.a and 1.b.
2	Transition to the appropriate governance reflecting chartered status absorbs unrealistic cost and administration time and/or falters.	Reputational damage and disruption to planned progress to financial sustainability
3	Capitalise reputationally and financially on chartered status to drive membership growth and influence. CIFST transcends IFST in terms of salience with stakeholders and acknowledged leadership on vexed questions, for example, a shared understanding of what 'safe and healthy food for all' means.	Failure risks poor to no reputational and/or financial return on the investment committed to gaining and maintaining chartered status.
4	Succession planning at the most senior levels in the organisation.	The competence and leadership required to drive financial sustainability is lost.

Appointed as Independent Assessor from March 2025 I have attended all but two Board meetings and Standing Committees at least once. I am not a voting member of any group. Chairs of Committees and the IFST team have graciously welcomed me to observe, listen and learn. This is my first report to you and I thank the IFST family for the privilege and for your co-operation with my role.

In my second year I aim to attend, if possible, all Board meetings, continue attendance of at least two meetings of each of the standing committees and broaden

my knowledge and experience of the activities of Branch Committees and of Special Interest Groups, SIGs.

### **Conclusions**

Despite the above challenges and potential risks, I am of the view that IFST, and CIFST are on the right track to a promising future. It remains a privilege to observe and be a small part of a vibrant and highly competent governance team that is working hard to realise the full potential of this outstanding institute with much to give to our profession and society as a whole.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'MJ Walker', written in a cursive style.

Michael J. Walker Hon FIFST

Independent Assessor

4<sup>th</sup> March 2026