

Start Strong

Appointment of Director

September 2025

Ref: RBTMB





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Welcome

Dear Candidate,

Thank you for your interest in leading this bold new initiative.

During seven years on the Board of the Department for Education, I was privileged to be given insights into the whole of the UK's early years, education and skills landscape. There are few interventions that can be made by families, communities, industry and the state that provide greater societal benefits than strategic focus and investment in the early years of childhood.

When I first learned about the plans for the United Early Childhood Campaign {Start Strong} it felt like the missing piece in this particular puzzle. Children in their early years do not themselves have a voice. It feels to me as though through this work, successfully executed, we could become their biggest advocate.

Our Founders and Funders are ambitious, but also tenacious. They know that this will be a decade-long journey to bring about attitudinal change across our society. All journeys have to start somewhere, and for us the next phase is key. We need to establish an incontestable evidence base, clearly understand the attitudes that currently prevail and build a broad coalition to support the necessary change. With all that done, we can then mobilise powerful communications at scale and make it real.

We need a great leader to make it happen. Read on, and see if you think it could be you. If it could, I look forward to meeting you.

Best wishes,

Richard Pennycook CBE

Former Chair of Skills England and Lead Non-Executive Director at the Department for Education;
Former Chief Executive Officer of the Co-operative Group



About Start Strong

We are a new collective of philanthropic foundations working to transform communications, advocacy, and action on early childhood. We are five trusts and foundations: Collective Futures, Impact on Urban Health, Ethos Foundation, Nesta and Tessa Jowell Foundation – committed to long-term action to change the national narrative on the importance of early childhood, with additional partners joining soon.

Through an evidence-based approach to advocacy and communications, we will unite the early childhood community into a powerful coalition that cuts through, shifts public attitudes, and secures early childhood at the heart of our society and economy.

The UK has some of the highest rates of childhood inequality in Europe, with negative impact on children's development, life chances, and wider society. We believe that to drive real change, we need a well evidenced story about the wide-ranging value and practical possibility of investment into early childhood, shared by a broad coalition, to mobilise a transformational shift.

Our aim is to create a new and transformational story about the pivotal importance of early childhood. This story will drive multiple policy, industry and civil societal goals and be underpinned by shared societal values.

Right now, advocates working on early childhood development – from grassroots campaigners to charities to foundations – are fighting an uphill battle in everything we do. For all our well evidenced research and carefully written advocacy strategies, most of those we seek to influence just do not see the importance of the early years. If they do, it's not clear what is practically within their power to support early childhood; it feels like an impossibly long-term investment in a context of urgent requirements. This operating environment makes genuine progress hard to win, and harder to maintain.

As a result, we are failing to break the cycle of childhood inequality – with millions of babies, young children and their families facing multiple hurdles that prevent them from accessing essential things they need to thrive. This is particularly evident for children from marginalised backgrounds. A fragmented advocacy landscape is at best, failing to cut through with a compelling call to action and at worst, reinforcing misunderstanding.

We need to come together and create a burning platform on this issue that will ignite the public, the government, the media and business to act with ambition, urgency and demonstrate a long-term commitment to transform and then embed our societal prioritisation of Early Childhood.

For every child to Start Strong, we need to create:

- 1.** A shared understanding of the importance of early years on a child's holistic development and on wider societal prosperity
- 2.** A narrative that supports those across sectors to show what collective responsibility for better children's outcomes looks like.
- 3.** A narrative that looks beyond the current economic and societal concerns to prioritise long term change
- 4.** A narrative that acknowledges that children's outcomes are shaped by their primary caregivers and their home environment, and that these are in turn heavily influenced by several systemic factors

Creating this new narrative and mobilising collectively behind it requires time, convening ability and risk-taking capital, which we are uniquely placed to provide.

We...

...are a coalition of philanthropic foundations working in early childhood.

... want a society that prioritises and invests in the early years of a child's life, because of a shared understanding that this is essential to our nation's health and wealth.

... are building a long-term strategic communications and coalition-building vehicle that unites everyone working in early childhood.



Our journey so far...

At the beginning of this year, we did an extensive piece of work, exploring what a collective advocacy effort, specifically focused on tackling systemic drivers of early childhood inequality, might entail.

We consulted with over 50 stakeholders. We carried out comprehensive research on the current landscape of early childhood advocacy in the UK, we looked beyond the UK to learn from global campaigns that have changed societal narratives around complex issues. And we started to put in place the Governance and Operations for the collective.

We also drafted a ten-year goal:

- Transform UK understanding and prioritisation of early childhood with the public, government, media and business as an investment that benefits us all, and that all individuals and institutions have a role in enabling.
- Transform understanding and action (public and institutional) that recognises that primary caregivers and the home environment are the critical contexts that determine early childhood development and outcomes, and that the home environment does not exist in a bubble, but within the systems and structures that influence it.

The scoping stage has made clear that we should begin this long-term change work with a 12–18-month foundational phase that sets the stage for future impact.

In the Foundational Phase we aim to:

1

Begin with an outstanding Chair and Steering Board and recruit a full-time Director who will convene the coalition, drive strategy and decision making.

2

Build a foundational 'coalition of coalitions' providing small pots of funding to a diverse group of mission-aligned existing coalitions, who see value in and want to participate in the long-term collaborative agenda of shifting societal action on early childhood.

3

Create a strategic communications roadmap, informed by research and testing with our foundational coalition. This will identify the priority audiences, messaging principles, channels and voices that have the most potential to shift societal narratives, understanding and action on early childhood. The roadmap would include a goal for the next Government Spending Review as an interim milestone.

4

Create a long-term shared measurement approach, which benchmarks and tracks changes in societal narratives, mindsets and action over time. This needs to have practical value for the long-term coalition in understanding the impact of its activity and refining and adapting over time.

5

Design a long-term sustainable model for this vehicle. During Foundation phase, Ethos Foundation will act as fiscal host. By end of Foundation phase, we need a plan for its long-term operational and governance structure and secured funding for this to be launched.

Our Principles

Work of this kind has been undertaken through strategic philanthropy efforts in both the US and Australia, but it is newer in the UK. If successful, the impact would be systemic – positively changing the conditions for all actions on early childhood, for the long-term.

We understand that we need to commit to this over several years, which means we will need to be agile and deliver quick wins, whilst staying focused on the long-term collective impact we want to achieve. All the while adding value to a sector that is well established and doing great work. In what we do, we will be guided by our principles, keeping a laser-sharp focus on:

- strategic communications that work and engage influential voices.
- a relational approach – drawing in both existing and new players adding value whilst building a coherent shared story across and beyond the early years sector.
- an equitable approach to early childhood, ensuring our communications and possible policy solutions, are designed equitably so all children are given the environment and support to thrive.
- a consistent long-term view, with an agile approach around how to get there.

We will approach our work with a test and learn mindset building collective intelligence and a strong foundation for future success.





Why do this?

This is a vital opportunity to create the vehicle to transform national prioritisation and investment in early childhood. You will work with us to build something new and to unite a sector and society, so every child has a strong start to life benefiting us all.

As Director, you will play a pivotal role in building and driving the Campaign: setting and delivering strategy, establishing effective operations, and ensuring measurable impact. You will work closely with the Chair, Board, and coalition partners to deliver on ambitious goals at both local and national levels.

You will bring a proven record of leading strategic communications and advocacy campaigns with social purpose, coupled with exceptional relationship-building and influencing skills. You will be energised by collaboration and by working across a broad coalition of partners and funders.

With a strong commitment to early childhood development, you will inspire others, secure resources, and ensure that Start Strong achieves sustainable, equitable, and lasting change.

Our Founding Director...

... will be a leader with the energy, ambition, drive and entrepreneurial spirit that is needed to start up this coalition and lead it to impact.

Supported by a committed Steering Group and a passionate and capable Chair, we are looking for a multifaceted leader and activator.

You will be a doer, naturally collaborative, relationship-focused and determined to drive change.

ESSENTIAL



Entrepreneurial Mindset

A 'can-do' entrepreneurial mindset, with demonstrable experience of 'starting up' organisations that have gone on to succeed.



Outcome Driven

Able to drive outcomes and impact with clarity whilst harnessing equitable input of coalition.



Strategic Communications Experience

Proven track record of success in driving and delivering agenda-shaping strategic communications and advocacy initiatives.



Diplomacy & Networks

Demonstrate tact and diplomacy, with the ability to be agnostic to solutions, to listen, engage and deliver on strategic goals.



Relationship Building

Strong network that can be utilised for the benefit of the coalition e.g. Government and Political, Media and Philanthropic.
Demonstrated experience of building relationships across sectors.

DESIRABLE



Early Years Experience

Demonstrable experience or understanding of early years, either in professional or personal capacity is not essential but desirable.



Public Representation

Experience of leading communications including media, delivering presentations and ability to speak to and connect with diverse stakeholders.

Your key responsibilities

As a start-up we will need a leader who is willing to roll their sleeves up and get things going. You will be as comfortable with the strategic as you will in the day to day doing, with laser-sharp focus on future success.

1. Drive and deliver the coalition by providing strategic, operational, and communications leadership.

2. Lead on narrative change and advocacy: developing and championing the coalition's agenda with policymakers, funders, the media, and the wider public.

3. Establish and manage effective operations, governance, and financial systems to ensure accountability, transparency, and organisational resilience.

4. Build and maintain strong relationships with funders, coalition members, and external stakeholders, securing large-scale, multi-year financial support.

5. Commission and oversee key research, projects, and partnerships, ensuring they add maximum value and impact.

6. Act as a visible and credible ambassador for the coalition, promoting its goals with policymakers, influencers, funders, and the media.

7. When we are ready, recruit, a high-performing core team, fostering a collaborative and inclusive culture.

8. Identify and pursue opportunities to broaden the coalition's reach, impact, and partnerships across diverse sectors.

Terms of Appointment

This role reports to: The Chair

Location: You will be able to work from home and will also have access to desk space with one of our partners: Nesta, Impact on Urban Health or desk space at Ethos Foundation. A degree of time spent in person, including in London, will be essential to this role.

Time commitment: Full time with flexibility to work outside of working hours.

Salary: £90k-£100k dependent on experience.

Benefits:

5% employer pension contribution

30 days' annual leave

Flexible working

Process

- Applications close: noon Wednesday 1 October
- Saxton Bampfylde Interviews: w/c 13 October
- Start Strong interviews in early November with a view to appointing by mid-November

Due diligence

Due diligence will be carried out as part of the application process, which may include searches carried out via internet search engines and any public social media accounts.



How to Apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is partnering with Start Strong on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code **RB TMB**

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

The closing date for applications is noon on **Wednesday 1 October 2025**

☐ * The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.

