

# COMPANY PROSPECTUS

## STARFISH SEARCH



# CONSCIOUSLY DIFFERENT DISTINCTLY BETTER

Founded in 2019, Starfish was born of a desire to raise the standards of recruitment and value for money offered by search firms to clients across the public, government and not for profit sectors. Drawn from senior levels of well-established executive search companies operating in those sectors, we are united in our commitment to delivering demonstrably better recruitment outcomes.

Our hugely experienced team works across all sectors, specialising in complex, exposed or high stakes recruitment, where reputation and influence really matter. We are insight-led in all we do. Yet it is not just our professional motivations that make us atypical of the executive search industry as a whole.

Each senior member of the team enjoyed a successful career outside of the industry before joining it. That experiential base underpins our judgement and lends substantial depth, substance and balance to the advice we give. As search consultants we have rapidly established a strong collective reputation as trusted advisors with the credibility and judgement to challenge traditional recruitment thinking. For our team, service is a state of mind: our committed approach to our clients is reflected in our responsiveness, tenacity and integrity.

Our aim is simple: to engage, develop and secure the high-quality modern leaders that our public institutions require to thrive in increasingly complex and challenging times. While our clients may share certain characteristics, their very different pressures and opportunities mean that every search must be finely calibrated and carefully curated, ever conscious of the nuances and complexities involved.





We designed Starfish to deliver excellence through a compact business model that places our most experienced consultants in direct contact with the market. Unlike many larger search firms, our approach is always bespoke rather than formulaic; for example, we vary the many different search tools available to us to identify our target individuals, rather than adhering to a blunt and simplistic LinkedIn led approach.

Further, we never use young, inexperienced, researchers to approach senior candidates, a practice that those candidates themselves tell us is now all too commonplace. Combining a boutique customer experience with the search reach of a big firm, our senior colleagues continue to work hands on in compact and focused teams, shaping and developing every search list from scratch, to focus on the right shortlist of talent.

Our deep and contemporary market knowledge has evolved over many combined years of delivering results in different – often changing or reforming – markets. However, our interest in the major socio-economic issues of our time means we are also able to bring to the discussion our own experiences and perspectives to further inform our work.

With an established presence across both statutory and voluntary regulators, government bodies, consumer organisations, regulated industry, retail, public policy and civil society, we are trusted to work closely with both market and buyer, brokering appointments that truly shape the future for us all, for the better.

# FACTS AND FIGURES

FOUNDED IN  
2019

98.8%

PLACEMENT RATE

586

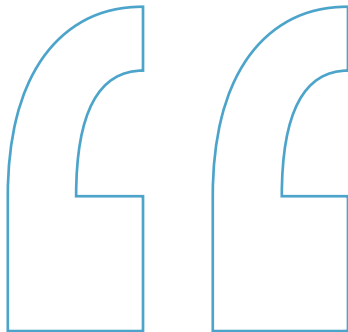
APPOINTMENTS MADE

26%

OF APPOINTMENTS OFFERED  
TO PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE  
BACKGROUNDS



# OUR FOUR PILLARS OF DIFFERENCE



The recruitment process is essentially a homogenous one and the recruitment industry is often perceived by consumers of its services to be relatively amorphous. In practice, however, there are very significant differences in terms of the skill, care and wit with which recruitment exercises are executed. Cerebral, focused and thorough, our goal is to make a tangible difference to the organisations we serve. Never complacent, we strive to build successful, long term, partnerships for mutual benefit. Highly protective of our reputation for excellence, we always prioritise the strength of our relationships and the quality of our work over the maximisation of assignments and fees.

## TRUE CONSULTANCY

We pride ourselves on being genuine consultants acknowledged as adding real value to the organisations we work with, much more than merely deliverers of a recruitment process. We give strategic, honest advice and roll up our sleeves as an extension of your team.

It can often be the case that the type of individual a client thinks they want at the outset of a process is not the same as the one they decide the organisation needs by the end of it. We are not passive receivers of a brief for a role. We use our objectivity, strong analytical capabilities and deep experience to progress our clients thinking while offering constructive challenge where we have complementary insight to bring.

That capacity to rigorously sense-check a brief allows us to produce the right candidate materials, design and execute the right search strategy at the first time of asking, and to deliver as rich a pool of eminently qualified candidates as possible for a client's consideration. That we constructively challenge in the manner we do is at the heart of our burgeoning reputation: the feedback we receive from our clients underscores the fact that this style of working is what sets us apart in our sectors.

"Having been involved in senior appointments for 25 years, Starfish are better than anyone else at getting to the heart of an organisation's needs at the particular point in its strategic cycle and organisational development. Their playback of our needs and subsequent production of a brief are second to none. On every assignment they have demonstrated an intuitive understanding of the drivers and values that influence the diverse candidate communities they are searching in and are well able to persuade candidates outside of mainstream talent pools to apply. Their advice is clear and grounded in practical experience. Their compact business model and advisory approach means they have a grip on progress and are personally available as the search progresses."

**DAME JULIE MELLOR DBE, CHAIR OF DEMOS, FORMER CHAIR OF THE YOUNG FOUNDATION, CHAIR OF THE FEDERATION OF INDUSTRY SECTOR SKILLS AND STANDARDS, TRUSTEE OF INVOLVE (EXPERTS IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION), AND FORMER TRUSTEE OF NESTA AND CLORE SOCIAL LEADERSHIP.**





## INTELLECTUAL WEIGHT AND RIGOUR

Our intellectual acuity and heft, together with the level of curiosity we bring distinguishes us from the mainstream executive search industry. In illustration of this, and as our client roster shows, we are increasingly the partner of choice for many of the UK's leading Think Tanks and Foundations – organisations comprised of some of the sharpest minds in their areas of expertise. That they choose to place their trust in our consultants is an acknowledgement of the advanced quality of insight and judgement we bring.

It takes, however, time and effort to acquire insight. We invest in serious research projects that allow us to place the insight we gain, enhanced by our wisdom and experience, at the full disposal of our clients. For example, our 2022 report, **"The Post Pandemic Board"** was a well-received collaborative project borne out of our determination to ensure that our engagement with boards was fully cognisant of the issues in front of them.

## AGENTS OF CHANGE

In these fast-changing times, no organisation is in steady state. Our relationships endure and are reflected in increasingly long-range programmes of work, especially in board building and refresh. Our style of service is underpinned by insight into the change journey for every client organisation we work with. Each stage of the recruitment process is influenced by that organisation's specific strategic cycle and an ever-changing external context. Everything we do, from the narrative we produce and our blended style of interviews, to the advice we give, is tailored to suit prevailing conditions.

## ACTIVE SENIOR INVOLVEMENT IN EVERY PROJECT

Once secured, we never pass our commissions to junior colleagues. Our senior team is not employed as a sales force, rather as a professional, pioneering and expert resource given to our clients on every recruitment. More than being transactional or "one size fits all" we are constantly evolving our professional practice to respond to the changing legislative and policy landscape, as well as shifting candidate markets.



# DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE BOARDS

By combining a specialist Board Practice with an authentic social focus and investment in developing diverse candidates, we have already made a demonstrable contribution to organisations we have worked with and built confidence in the candidate pool. We consciously offer both of the fundamental components of creating diverse boards. These are i) supply of and access to diverse talent and ii) market knowledge and sheer experience of non-executive recruitment, including acting as broker between client and candidate. Many firms have evolved to focus reactively on one or the other.

All search firms offer comparatively advanced approaches to diversity in 2023; we all present a fierce narrative on the subject. Yet improving board diversity requires a shift in candidate mindset, and occasionally a shift in client mindset too. Diversifying boards, and especially improving the diversity of the cadre of Chair appointments, requires time and investment by skilled and experienced headhunters who understand trends in talent pools, candidates and their behaviours. It also requires a high level of credibility, skill and judgement to gently challenge very senior and time-poor panels to evolve their own thinking, assumptions and preferences in pursuit of the outcome they want.

We are influencing thinking about board diversity to move it on from the focus on protected characteristics in favour of the notion that without diversity a board is simply incomplete. We aim to build, support and develop genuinely flexible boards that are a rich resource for their organisations, with a rich density of lived experiences, neurodiversity and occupational personality types. We are more directly challenging thinking about the value of educational achievement, professional accomplishment and seniority in board work, to open non-executive fields up to people who have exceptional skills in communication, influencing, building co-operation, independent judgement and strategic reach.



# CASE STUDIES

In 2021, GambleAware launched a new Strategy to support planned increases in both funding and impact. Starfish Search was initially contracted to complete a Board Evaluation Review to take stock of existing Board capability, and to make observations and recommendations relating to the Board's development in line with new strategic priorities.

The aim for GambleAware was to have an independent and impartial perspective on its board's composition, governance arrangements (such as Scheme of Delegation and Committee Structure), culture and atmosphere. This was required in order to make a series of informed decisions about changes that could be made to support the strategy.

The Review included a series of interviews completed by Starfish Search with individual trustees, as well as the Chair and the Chief Executive. The firm also undertook a detailed review of all relevant governance documentation, which was analysed in the context of GambleAware's plans for growth and development.

An insight-led report was produced for the Board, highlighting key themes and making a series of thoughtful and well-evidenced recommendations for the Chair and CEO to consider. Starfish Search attended a Board meeting of GambleAware Trustees to present their observations and respond to questions.

Following successful completion of the Board Evaluation Review, Starfish Search was then contracted to complete a full search. The aim of this exercise was to identify and select at least four candidates who would fill critical skills and knowledge gaps identified in the Review, and whose appointments would also improve diversity and further enhance its agility and resilience.

## GambleAware

### **GAMBLEAWARE'S PRIORITIES DURING THIS EXERCISE WERE TO SECURE AT LEAST FOUR NEW TRUSTEES:**

- deemed to be of high enough calibre or potential order to meet the demands of an expert and high quality existing trustee team
- whose individual skills and experience would address new or priority areas emerging under the Strategy eg measuring impact, policy development and commissioning
- who would be independent and perceived as such (especially by the gambling industry), and otherwise free of bias or conflicts of interest
- who understood the broader regulatory dimension in which GambleAware works
- who together would broaden the mix of backgrounds on the Board through cultural and ethnic diversity, through regional representation, or through 'first time' non-executives keen to develop.

This exercise was successfully completed in November 2021 with the following individuals appointed: Mubin Haq, Baroness Hilary Armstrong, Koravangattu Valsraj and Marina Gibbs.



In November 2020, The Health Foundation contracted with Starfish Search to secure at least two new Governors for its nationally influential Board. At a time of change and development for the Foundation, the aim of the exercise was to identify and select at least two candidates who would fill critical skills and knowledge gaps created by Board departures, and who would also deliver a step change in Board diversity.

### **THE HEALTH FOUNDATION'S PRIORITIES DURING THIS EXERCISE WERE TO SECURE AT LEAST TWO NEW GOVERNORS WHO COULD FULFIL REQUIREMENTS ON A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT AXES:**

- they needed to be of significant calibre, influence and accomplishment to transition effectively on to a formal, established and already expert Governor team led by a former Permanent Secretary
- their individual skills, experiences and personal credibility would help address priority areas for the Foundation, given its reach, reputation and £1bn endowment – these areas were stated as (1) large scale investment management (ideally with experience in more than one sector), and (2) deep experience in Health Inequity
- they needed to be in a position to be independent in their Governor capacity and perceived as such, and otherwise free of bias, optics issues or any conflict of interest
- All candidates needed to be in a position to offer good availability and a personal commitment to a serious non-executive appointment
- they were required to demonstrate appropriate personal style and qualities that met the culture and atmosphere of the Foundation Board, and to have sound judgement in this respect, but nonetheless be able to stimulate fresh thinking and take others with them on the journey
- the appointments were expected to broaden the mix of backgrounds on the Board particularly in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity, broader lived experience, and located outside London and the South East.



The Health Foundation has significant reputation and brand presence and is therefore well known and attractive to those already within its sphere of influence. In this instance, in response to the brief provided, Starfish chose to position the Foundation to achieve reach and connection beyond immediately obvious talent pools. This enabled both them and the Foundation to engage meaningfully with a range of candidates who could bring new and different experiences to the Board. The recruiter's capacity to understand and analyse the situation and suitability of candidates applying for such sophisticated appointments gave confidence to the Panel at shortlist stage.

This exercise successfully completed in March 2021 with the contractual requirements exceeded and the following three new Governors appointed:

- Ravi Gurumurthy, CEO of Nesta
- Katie Blacklock, Independent Non-executive Director of the holding company that oversees the operations of all financial services within the Edmond de Rothschilds Group, and
- Dawn Edge, Professor of Mental Health and Inclusivity at the University of Manchester who is also the University's academic lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with a remit for Race, Religion and Belief.

# MEET THE TEAM



**Juliet Taylor, Chief Executive and Co-Founder** bring 20 years' experience in senior search and selection. Juliet is also Head of our Board Practice and continues to work hands on with her clients. Over 20 years in board and senior executive search she has demonstrated a deep personal commitment to advancing candidates from underrepresented communities in leadership and built a strong reputation for the quality of her advice and support. The first 10 years of her executive search career were spent supporting the appointment of Chairs, NEDs, Permanent Secretaries, Directors General and Directors for a wide range of government related organisations. More recently, she has retained a broader client portfolio, including membership bodies, think tanks, trusts and foundations.



**Katy Giddens, Director and Co-Founder** has specialised in executive search for over 20 years and has longstanding client relationships with the Chairs and CEOs of some of the largest arts, culture and heriage organisations as well as household brand charities. Katy has personally recruited chairs and Board members for a huge variety of organisations including the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, Mind, NSPCC, RNIB, Nesta, the Access Foundation, Social Finance, the RSA, Historic Royal Palaces, British Science Association, English Heritage, Royal Horticultural Society, Heatherwick Studios and the Church of England. She is a former senior fundraiser for UCL and the British Museum.



**Abbey Watt and Erin Fuller are Assistant Consultants who support the administration of our searches.** Abbey joined Starfish in January 2023. Originally from Aotearoa (New Zealand), she has extensive experience in executive support and internal communications. Working for the New Zealand government before moving to the UK in 2016. Abbey recognises that people and relationships are key and builds strong relationships with clients and candidates alike. Erin is passionate about inspiring others to make a difference by contributing to meaningful impacts within their communities. She has worked with philanthropists from a number of sectors and backgrounds. In January 2021, she completed the Beyond Suffrage trustee training programme for young women of colour and sits on the Board of Yorkshire Building Society's Charitable Foundation.



"I have broad experience working with senior headhunters and felt especially well looked after by you and your team. I was particularly impressed by the way you personally represented St John. You were, clearly, fully on top of the brief, and had also got under the skin of the values and tone of St John as well as the commercial aspects of the role. I think you did a fine job for them and for me."

STUART SHILSON, MCKINSEY & CO



**Rod Lyons, Partner** has previously been Director and Partner at two major national search firms. He brings deep experience of working with a truly diverse range of clients. With the presence to be credible at the most senior levels – from Permanent Secretaries, Presidents and CEOs of multinational companies to international NGOs – his past consultancy roles are many. Amongst others, he has worked with the Royal Society, King Charles' International Business Leaders Forum, VSO, States of Jersey, various UK Government Ministries and on numerous Chair, NED and senior executive roles for public bodies. His consultancy expertise is supported by the experience and insight he has gained in both professional and personal capacities, including as board member and chair of several organisations such as science parks and innovation centres, FE colleges, chambers of commerce and large social enterprises.



**Parna Taylor, Partner** has specialised in strategic counsel and communications across the political and non-profit worlds, working with a wide variety of organisations including international non-profits, government-funded agencies and family foundations. She has completed diagnostics of teams and structures and advised extensively on complex relationships and networks. She previously helped to establish a major global Foundation, spending seven years as its Director of External Affairs. During this time, she established strategic partnerships with the UN Security Council's Counter Terrorism Directorate and US State Department, and worked with the governments of Kosovo, Italy, Indonesia and the Philippines. Parna is a former Special Adviser at Downing Street and Vice President (Public Affairs) at international advisory firm FTI Consulting.



# JUST SOME OF OUR CLIENTS...

British Chamber of Commerce

Salix Finance

Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Church of England

Citizens Advice

Royal Horticultural Society

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Federation of Small Businesses

English Heritage

Girls Day School Trust

Chartered Institute for Securities and  
Investment

St John Ambulance

Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors

British Red Cross

Lending Standards Board

TrustMark

Business Banking Resolution Service

Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman

Shaw Trust

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and  
Accountancy

RSPCA

Historic Royal Palaces

Alzheimers Society

Registry Trust

Lloyds Bank Foundation

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Chartered Management Institute

Nationwide Foundation

Institute of Contemporary Art

Heatherwick Studio

Royal United Services Institute

Imperial College

University of the Arts London

Toynbee Hall

Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion

IMPRESS

Centre for Ageing Better

Kantar Public

Coop Group

ResPublica

Demos

Social Market Foundation

GambleAware

The Health Foundation

Engage Britain

Involve

The Young Foundation

Cancer Research UK

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