Entrepreneurs secure NPIF II backing for new venture to reshape hospitality recruitment

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The entrepreneurs behind two of the UK's most successful hospitality tech businesses have joined forces to launch a new venture that aims to reshape hospitality recruitment.

Sam Brown and Nick Holroyd-Doveton have raised £800,000 to further develop their matchmaking platform, Candid Hospitality. The funding came from NPIF II – Mercia Equity Finance, which is managed by Mercia Ventures and part of the Northern Powerhouse Fund II (NPIF II), Haatch and an angel investor, and marks the first NPIF II equity investment in Hull.

Sam Brown was previously a director of Airship Services, which was also backed by Mercia and the first NPIF and was sold to Zonal in 2022, while Nick Holroyd-Doveton co-founded Omnifi, which was sold to Access Group in 2021.

Hull-based Candid was developed with input from leading hospitality operators and suppliers. It enables candidates to build an anonymous profile and view opportunities, and employers to find the right people without sifting through multiple CVs. In place of CVs, candidates are matched on skills and values to ensure they not only meet job requirements but also fit into the company's culture. Hospitality operators and suppliers pay a flat monthly fee to recruit candidates at all levels, from front of house to boardroom.

Launched in February this year, the platform has already attracted over 3,000 candidates and 100 brands including Big Table Group, Loungers, Honest Burgers, Turtle Bay, Punch Pubs, Flight Club and The Alchemist, and resulted in over 700 matches. The company plans to double the size of its team from seven to 14 in the next two years.

Nick Holroyd-Doveton, Candid co-founder, said: "*Having spent years in hospitality, both Sam and I know the challenges of recruitment. Candidates are often afraid to look for a better job in case their current boss finds out, while employers spend huge sums on new hires only to find they are the wrong fit. We felt the process must be ripe for change.*

"Using our industry contacts, we spoke to 60 operators and over 100 candidates and developed Candid based on their feedback. It uses the 3Cs - culture, competencies and compensation – which are key to successful hires. The anonymity protects candidates and removes subconscious bias, and enables employers to access 'passive hires' who may not be active job seekers but may be interested if the right role came along."

The hospitality sector is the UK's third largest employer, accounting for around 3.5 jobs directly and with a further 3 million in the supply chain, according to a report by the trade body UK Hospitality.

Will Schaffer, Investment Director with Mercia Ventures, added: "*Having worked with Sam previously during his time at Airship, we are pleased to back him and Nick in their latest venture. Candid offers an innovative solution to the challenges of hospitality recruitment and has gained rapid traction. The funding will enable the team to build on its initial success and to drive further growth."*

Lizzy Upton, senior investment manager at the British Business Bank, said: *"The hospitality sector plays a vital role in the UK economy and is an industry built on people. Candid Hospitality is showing how innovative businesses in Yorkshire are using technology to tackle longstanding challenges and unlock new opportunities for growth. Through NPIF II, we're proud to support these businesses and ambitious founders like Sam and Nick as they innovate and help strengthen one of the UK's most important sectors."*

Jonathan Keeling, Partner at Haatch, said: *"We've backed over 150 startups at Haatch, and it's rare to see this level of product–market fit so early on. Sam and Nick are proven founders with deep hospitality experience, and Candid is already delivering results for some of the UK's most respected operators. We believe this business can redefine how hospitality recruitment is done, putting culture and competence at the heart of hiring."*

The £660m Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II (NPIFII) covers the entire North of England and

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provides loans from £25k to £2m and equity investment up to £5m to help a range of small and medium sized businesses to start up, scale up or stay ahead.

The purpose of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II is to drive sustainable economic growth by supporting innovation and creating local opportunity for new and growing businesses across the North of England. The Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II will increase the supply and diversity of early-stage finance for the North's smaller businesses, providing funds to firms that might otherwise not receive investment and help to break down barriers in access to finance.

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About Candid Hospitality
Candid Hospitality is a UK-based hiring platform purpose-built for the hospitality industry. At its core, Candid is rethinking recruitment for a sector driven by personality, pace, and people. The platform helps ambitious operators attract, engage, and retain the right talent - more quickly and more meaningfully. From its Culture Snapshot tool, which quantifies team dynamics, to Miso, an AI-powered assistant that nudges, screens, and helps manage candidate flows, Candid offers hospitality-specific automation and insights that drive better hiring outcomes. Trusted by forward-thinking hospitality brands across the UK, Candid, headquartered in Hull is scaling rapidly across sectors and regions. The company was founded by a team with deep experience in hospitality and tech, and is backed by leading investors who share its vision for a more human approach to hiring.

About Mercia Ventures

Mercia Ventures is a proactive venture capital investor focused on being the first-choice partner for growth. Mercia Ventures makes equity investments of up to £10million across all sectors, with specialisms in Software, Consumer, Healthcare and Deep Tech.

Mercia Ventures is part of Mercia Asset Management PLC and sits alongside its wider private equity, debt and proprietary balance sheet capital operations. The Group has 11 offices in the UK and Mercia Ventures' national footprint and 48 strong investment team draws on their experiences as founders, PhD scientists, software engineers, corporate financiers and management consultants to help its partner companies successfully achieve their ambitions.

www.mercia.co.uk

About the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund II

- Operated by the British Business Bank, NPIF II provides a mix of debt and equity funding. NPIF II will offer a range of commercial finance options with smaller loans from £25k to £100k, debt finance from £100k to £2m and equity investment up to £5 million. It works alongside the Combined Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), and Growth Hubs, as well as local intermediaries such as accountants, fund managers and banks, to support the North's smaller businesses at all stages of their development.

- The funds in which the NPIF II invests are open to businesses with material operations, or planning to open material operations, in: Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire & Warrington, Cumbria, Liverpool City Region, Leeds City Region, South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority, York & North Yorkshire, Humber and East Yorkshire, Northumberland, County Durham, Tyne & Wear

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About Haatch:

Founded in 2013 by Scott Weavers-Wright OBE and Fred Soneya, Haatch is an award-winning pre-seed and seed-stage fund manager investing in B2B SaaS companies solving critical business challenges. With over 200 investments across 150+ companies and a portfolio value exceeding £1 billion, Haatch combines deep operator experience with a mission to democratise venture capital access. Backed by over 1,500 investors and a £27m partnership with the British Business Bank, Haatch also manages a dedicated £8m co-investment fund for the East Midlands. Learn more at www.haatch.com

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