THICK AGAIN ABOUT HAIRDRESSING

HAIRDRESSING HAS CHANGED a lot in the past 10 years. Gone are the days when you spent all day in the salon cutting hair. In 2024 it's a hugely exciting and rewarding career, where you can own your own business, go independent as a freelancer, work in fashion as a session stylist, specialise in colour or education or work alongside other creatives in TV, film, music and theatre. Or all of the above! With over 48,000 salons* on high streets up and down the country, no wonder hairdressing is the biggest, most powerful sector in the £24.5bn-a-year personal care industry, with a workforce of more than 209,000**.

People wrongly assume that hairdressing is a low-pay career. That, too, has changed. The UK's high street salons raked in a staggering £4.6bn in 2020/21*; meanwhile, a swing towards self-employment has meant many stylists are now building their own brands, juggling clients with creative projects and landing lucrative roles as brand ambassadors in their own right — a six-figure salary by the age of 30 is not uncommon.

HAIRDRESSING GREW BY 5% IN 2021/22* **£4.6BN**SPENT IN UK
SALONS AND
BARBER SHOPS
IN 2020/21*

HAIR SALONS HAVE BETTER 5-YEAR SURVIVAL RATES THAN MOST OTHER HIGH STREET BUSINESSES*** SIX-FIGURE SALARIES ARE NOT UNCOMMON

*National Hair & Beauty Federation ** British Beauty Council (2023) Value of Beauty ***Office for National Statistics



AS A HAIRDRESSER

1.TAKE AN APPRENTICESHIP

Available to students of all ages, Trailblazer apprenticeships have transformed how the industry trains and tests its new recruits, combining the latest technologies and industry advancements with an independent end-point assessment to ensure the highest standards of training have been met.

Hairdressing apprenticeships are in the Top 10 apprenticeships in the UK and most likely to result in employment. A salon owner will invest two to three years of time and money, moulding you into the sort of stylist they will want to add to their team, so it's highly likely you'll be offered a job when you complete your qualification.

The Hair Professional Standard (Level 2) has been designed to ensure you gain the level of knowledge, skills and behaviours you need to work well in a hair salon or barbershop. You can then go on to study the new Advanced and Creative Hair Professional (Level 3), equivalent to A-Levels at grades A to E, designed to raise your skills to the highest level.

In England, Trailblazer apprenticeships have already replaced the old frameworks, but reforms are also underway in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – check for updates at Skills Development Scotland, Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

2. STUDY AT COLLEGE

If you feel comfortable in a classroom-style setup and thrive off the energy of peers, studying hairdressing at college could be a good option for you.

A full-time college programme will likely consist of three days attendance each week and part of this time will be spent studying Maths and English. You may gain some element of work experience during your course, however a lot of time will be spent watching demonstrations and practising on head blocks before moving on to live models.

Study hairdressing at college and you'll find a greater variety of qualifications to choose from. You can work towards a vocationally related qualification (VRQ), a national vocational qualification (NVQ, or SVQ in Scotland) or a Technical qualification.

Offering an alternative to college, private academies can train you to become a hairdresser with the advantage of much smaller class sizes and more one-to-one tuition, ensuring you'll qualify in a shorter amount of time. Some courses are Government-funded, so long as you meet eligibility requirements, but for others you will have to pay – at Toni&Guy, for example, the City & Guilds Hair Professionals Level 3 Beginner's Course, designed to get you salon-ready, costs £13,000 plus VAT for a 30-week full-time programme.



STEP INTO HAIRDRESSING

People to meet, things to do, lots to think about!

HOW TO CUT IT

Discover different ways to train as a hairdresser



BE INSPIRED



NOT 'JUST' A HAIRDRESSER

This striking campaign showcases the plethora of career opportunities in hair. Download the videos, Reels and other social assets below.





Independent colourist and educator

A talented colourist with a flair for education, Harriet already runs three of her own businesses, travels the world as a global artist for L'Oréal Professionnel Paris and has just bought her own home in London two years after going self-employed.

Why hairdressing?

I grew up in a family of hairdressers, but it wasn't until I started training at age 14 that I fell in love with hairdressing. I loved what you can do with hair and how you can make people feel.

How did you do your training?

I did an apprenticeship at my local salon. That initially involved going to college twice a month, but I ended up training exclusively in the salon. This was the best option for me as I learn a lot from watching and being in real-life situations.

Describe those early years...

The first five years are when you learn all the foundations that will set you up for success in the future. Try not to rush this part; master as much as you can and never stop learning.

I spent a lot of my free time assisting and learning from other hairdressers, doing photoshoots and entering competitions. That's all paying off now, in spades.

How did you get to where you are now?

After moving to London I worked for a brand called Not Another Salon, who specialise in colour and before I knew it I was teaching my own classes. Over the last 13 years I've built up my experience, knowledge and contacts and in 2020 I went self-employed. I started teaching around the UK before being made a global educator for L'Oréal Professionnel Paris, which is so exciting.

Bust a hairdressing myth

That hairdressers aren't paid very well. If you do good hair, you can earn good money, wherever you go.







One of the first salon-based hairdressers also to double as a session stylist working in fashion, Luke's pioneering vision has helped develop his family's Hershesons hair business into an exciting global salon and product brand.

Which three subjects interested you most at school?

Art, Business and History.

Who or what got you into hairdressing in the first place?

My dad. I grew up in a salon, always loved the energy, loved the pop culture. I have never imagined doing anything else.

Tell us about your training

I learned from my dad, but I also did a threemonth course at Vidal Sassoon and assisted everyone from Sam McKnight to Guido and Malcolm Edwards. Learning in a salon by watching is the best way of learning.

And how do you find hairdressing now? I'm a hybrid of CEO creative director

I'm a hybrid of CEO, creative director, entrepreneur and session stylist, so the hairdressing part is like meditation for me. When I'm not running between meetings, emails and launches I find the actual practise of cutting and dressing hair very calming.

Describe a typical day...

Monday is finance day, meeting with my Financial Director and team to discuss financial strategy.

Tuesday is my one day in the salon – I will see about ten clients.

Wednesday is my operations day, so I will connect with different people from my team and check in with my HR manager.

Thursday is product day – I film content for social, meet with our factories, check in with my supply chain manager and my digital team and plan new product launches. Friday I might be shooting with a celebrity or for a fashion brand.

Favourite work moment?

My first big career break, working in Sardinia with the supermodel Gisele Bundchen for the Missoni campaign. I was 21.

Bust a hairdressing myth

We're all school drop-outs with no earning potential.







Barber and business owner

When injury ended her career as a professional footballer, Dublin-born Hayden found barbering gave her the same adrenaline rush. Now one of the UK's most high-profile female barbers, Hayden's travelling the world as an educator and has opened her own studio space in London.

Why barbering?

I was 21 when I returned from playing football in America and met someone who had just started barbering. I would drive friends to his house for haircuts and eventually he convinced me to try out a skin fade. It was meant to be a laugh, but on the way home I bought myself some clippers.

Tell us about your first job

I started barbering in my mum's kitchen cutting family and friends and watching online tutorials. Eventually I plucked up the courage to walk into a barbershop and convinced the owner to give me a trial. I started as a junior barber and within a couple of months was charging full price and building a busy schedule.

And how did you get to where you are today? I moved to a barbershop in Berlin, started doing education work and got spotted at an event in LA by the education manager of a

big barber brand who invited me to join their team. Suddenly I was teaching all across the globe! I started to educate for myself too, building up my network and community, which led to me opening my own barbershop and education brand under my surname, Hayden.

What do you love most about what you do, and what are the downsides?

I love that every day is different and that I'm my own boss but most of all I love the freedom to create, The only downside is the time spent away from family and friends.

Bust a hairdressing myth
That you're stuck in a
salon every day. I've
worked all over Europe,
Asia, America and Canada
– and I'm only just getting
started!









Colourist and salon owner

Colour specialist Christel has worked as a Creative Colour Director for top London salons, as well as a global brand ambassador and educator for TIGI and Wella Professionals. In 2016 she launched her own salon, STIL, in London's Notting Hill, adding a second branch in 2022 in upmarket Fulham.

Where did you train and how long did it take?

I did three years of hairdressing college in Sweden then moved to London because British hairdressing is the best in the world. I had to do another year of training before I could go on the floor and work. In my opinion, the UK has the best career path for hairdressing apprentices as you go to college one day a week and work the rest of the time in the salon – and that's what sets you up to learn all aspects of being a hairdresser.

Were your parents supportive of your decision to become a hairdresser?

They were super-supportive (though not particularly thrilled when I cut all my sister's hair off when I was six...).

Describe your career path

I have always loved education and after teaching students in big salon groups I started working for big brands, training hairdressers in colour techniques and products. As Global Creative Technical Director for TIGI I travelled the world as an educator, took part in shows, did hair backstage at Fashion Week and worked in the labs developing new hair colour products. Eventually, I decided to open my own salon and in March 2016 my husband and I launched STIL.

How would you describe your hairdressing role now?

My time is split between working in STIL, doing creative projects, mentoring staff, training assistants and driving and building our business. I love what I do as I have to wear a few different hats and I'm constantly challenged in a positive way every day, which helps me grow and learn. My all-time favourite is colouring hair and being with my amazing clients. I could do this 24/7!

What do you love most about your job?

I love working with my team and watching them grow. I love seeing clients, working on creative projects, educating and driving our business and brand forward as we have so much to create and achieve.







Exaucé Imbo, also known as Ex the Barber, first picked up his clippers at age 14 and never looked back. After practising on his two brothers for six years, he's now one of Glasgow's top barbers with his own barber shop (which he opened during the pandemic), a list of celebrity clients and huge ambitions...

Favourite lessons at school?

Art, because it lets you express your creative side and appreciate the deeper meaning of creativity. PE, because I enjoyed fitness and playing different sports made school a little more exciting for me. Business, because I always liked the idea of owning something developing it from a small local business to a global company.

Tell us how you got started in hair
My dad used to have a guy come to the
house and cut his hair. I was always
intrigued by the way he was cutting so after
watching some YouTube videos I started
cutting hair on my brothers. I wasn't the best
at first, but I felt so comfortable and eager to
learn with the clippers in my hands. I knew
then that this was for me.

Lessons learned back then?

When I turned 16 I got a full-time job as an apprentice in a barber shop, which helped me a lot with certain techniques, especially scissor cuts on Caucasian hair. YouTube is good to get a rough idea of how to start and develop your own unique touch, but it's important to get yourself in the barber shop environment so you have a better

understanding of the craft and how to deal with clients.

How did you achieve your success?

By being available for my clients and being consistently good with my services. This built up my reputation and eventually landed me some high-profile clients (Ex looks after Rangers footballer Jermain Defoe and Celtic rival Odsonne Édouard, as well as Wes Nelson and Chris Biggs). Through this I get lot of free promotion for the business via press and social media content.

What do you love about barbering?

I love meeting new people, putting a smile on their face and adding a little joy to their lives with a fresh haircut. Even though this is a competitive industry, the support barbers and hairdressers have for each other is amazing – there is always respect and recognition for other people's work and successes.

Any downsides?

The amount you have to work to keep up with your client base. I start cutting hair at 10am and I don't finish until gone 7pm – and no lunch break! it can get very tiring.







Session stylist

Jody works in fashion as a men's hair specialist, leading hair teams at Fashion Weeks in London, Paris and Milan, and creating editorials for magazines like 7th Man, Boys by Girls and The Independent...

What subjects did you enjoy in school? PE, because I loved sports and being out of the classroom for an hour was great. History, because understanding what happened in the past for us to be where we are today is so interesting. And Maths – I enjoyed problem solving.

Why hairdressing?

I've always had an obsession with fashion and hair but never really realised it at the time. One day I went to Selfridges to get my hair cut. It cost £20 and I was used to paying £3, but something clicked that day – all the barbers seemed to be enjoying their work. I was curious, I wanted to see what it was like.

You trained at Toni&Guy. What was that like?

I did an apprenticeship and it took me three years to qualify. Don't get me wrong, it was tough. There was no Minimum Wage back then, I earned £60 a week, I cleaned the toilets, swept the floor, shampooed all day and made coffees and teas non-stop. But I tried my best to be the best assistant I could be, regardless of the task I was doing. I just wanted to learn as much as I could.

How did you get to become a session stylist? After 15 years working at Toni&Guy as an educator, I went freelance so I could work as a hairdresser in the fashion world. I worked on loads of magazine editorials for free to build up my portfolio and then used this to advertise myself to brands for work. It was a long process to establish myself, but now the hard work is starting to pay off.

Tell us about your role now

I work as a freelance hairstylist and my job is very varied. I work mainly on photo-shoots for fashion brands and magazines. I head teams at Fashion Week in London and Paris and Milan. I work with actors on press junkets and premieres. Every week is different, every day is different. The pressure to deliver high quality work is immense but the buzz of the job is unreal.

Did you realise hairdressing was going to give you this life?

People presume that if you're a hairdresser, you didn't do well at school. They think it's a dead-end job. But hairdressing is a career

that's so rewarding as you constantly see the results of your work. You have the gift to make people feel incredible about themselves. You can never stop learning in this craft. You don't need to conform to rules. You can be yourself and be proud of who you are.







Entrepreneur

An award-winning hairdresser, innovator and educator, Lee Stafford is one of the UK's top ambassadors for the British hairdressing industry. From humble beginnings to his own global product line and a nationwide education brand, the success of Lee's career has been built on determination and passion...

Who or what got you into hairdressing in the first place?

My mum had hair like a welcome mat, the kind you have outside the front of your house. It was really thick, coarse and dry and she used to go to the salon all the time. One day she asked me what I was going to do with my life. She said, "You love fashion, you love girls, you hate getting your hands dirty and you hate the cold weather. What about hair?"

How did your training go?

I trained in a West End salon for a short time but I left at 16 and set up a salon in my mum's dining room for the next six years. It was a slow and painful experience learning from all my mistakes; however, I ended up buying the family house off mum when I was 17, all my mates moved in (one lived under the stairs) and it was a lot of fun, to say the least. What I would tell someone now that I'm uglier and wiser, is to seek out the best stylists and salons and then stick to them like glue.

Tell us about your hairdressing role now It's changed massively over 40 years, from being in salons, on TV and onstage and generally surrounded by loads of people all day, every day to now running my product and academy businesses mostly from my home in England, or wherever I fancy... New

York or Ibiza. As job titles go, I'm now the founder of Lee Stafford Haircare and the Lee Stafford Education foundation. I passionately, wholeheartedly gave blood, sweat and tears to learn the craft of hair, management and business for decades. I set goals, took risks and eventually found the best to learn from and when opportunity came knocking, I was pumped and prepared to take the bull by the horns.

What has surprised you most about working in hair?

Firstly, how difficult the craft is to master and secondly, the impact you can have on someone's life when you create an incredible haircut. Also, the travel, the money and the excitement you can experience within the hairdressing industry – it's unique!

'Sell' hairdressing to a 16-year-old...

Do you want a career that embraces your quirks and differences, where you can be as creative as your imagination will allow you? Where you can travel the world, make people feel amazing and make a lot of money doing it? Do you want to work in an industry that has been found (independently) to be the happiest profession of them all? If any of this is floating your boat, then a job in hair is for you – just make sure you work hard for it.







Junior stylist

Holly's career kickstarted big time when she became an assistant at ARKIVE by Adam Reed, a salon that's beloved by beauty editors and actresses alike. Now qualified, she's a junior stylist at Cobella and grabbing new opportunities with open arms!

How did you get into hairdressing?

I started as a Saturday girl after I left school at age 16, then trained at college for two years before working there full time in my local salon. But when I moved to ARKIVE by Adam Reed, the training was on another level. I would definitely recommend exploring salons in your local area to find the one that suits you best. It took me a while to find somewhere that really felt like home.

How was training?

An apprenticeship is tough but very much worth it! Some days it can be hard to see a light at the end of the tunnel, but in hairdressing practice really does make perfect. And I'm honestly doing things now that I could never have dreamed of doing a few years ago. I'm so glad I stuck it out because everything has paid off and I couldn't be more grateful.

What do you love most about your job – and what are the not-so-good bits?
I love doing different things every day and meeting new people. The downside is the

long days – they can be really tiring!

Bust a myth about hairdressing
People assume you don't need to be
intelligent to be a hairdresser – that's not
true at all. I didn't go into hairdressing
because I've got no qualifications – I've
got 7 GCSE's at A-B. But also It takes years
of training to succeed in this career. It's
harder than it looks.

Any advice for someone thinking about hairdressing as a career?

Your first day going to work and speaking to strangers, washing their hair for the first time – it's scary. But being out of my comfort zone and trying new things has helped me mature and grow in confidence. Having someone sit in front of you and show you a picture on Instagram of someone's hair that they love, and then three hours later they leave with that same hair... it's such an amazing skill to have.

Your favourite career moment to date? My first-ever Fashion Week. I'm still not over it!







Salon owner

Jack is the owner of Baxter South in Glasgow, a salon where the entire team is self-employed, juggling clients with creative projects. He's also in big demand as a colourist, so he splits his time between home and London, showcasing his work on photographic sets and on the catwalk.

How did you get started in hair?

My mum was a hairdresser but it really wasn't something I'd considered until I was desperate for a job! I did an apprenticeship and qualified a few days after my 18th birthday. It was probably the first time in life I'd succeed in something I actually cared about.

Is hairdressing difficult to master?

At the beginning it was definitely tough, a lot of long hours and realising hair wasn't easy to get right. But as time progressed and my skills with hair and people improved, I really fell in love. I've always been self-motivated so when the going got tough I kept my head down and just kept at it and it's most definitely worked out!

Describe your role now

It has evolved a lot. I'm mostly colourfocused working in different locations across the UK. I've been lucky enough to try most avenues of hair and even when it's been a challenge I have taken something from it, eventually leading me to where I am now. In short, I am a salon owner and colourist catering to clients who know what they want, and it's a challenge I love.

What has surprised you about working in hair?

The people. The human interaction and the relationships I've made along the way drive and motivate me always to get better. When I was at school I was always clock watching, time used to pass so slowly. Now I would pay big money to have more time in my day, ha!

Any advice for someone considering hairdressing?

Do it, you will not regret it – I know I haven't!
It wasn't until I was a few years in that I
realised how many paths you can go down
in the hair industry. It's literally a career with
endless opportunities and THE BEST people!













Session stylist and activist

Lisa started her career as a 13-year-old in her local salon. Now she's working on music videos for Ed Sheeran, Kendrick Lamar and Harry Styles, campaigning for hair equality in salons up and down the UK and became a TV star as a judge on E4's The Big Blow-Out.

Let's start with your favourite subjects at school

I loved Art, as it gave me a creative outlet to escape and paint, but I loved English too and you'll often still find me with a book.

So how – and why – did you choose hairdressing?

At age 13, I would knock on the door of my local hairdressing salon every Friday after school and ask for a job. At my 20th attempt, they gave in. Keep knocking on doors and don't take no for an answer. What started off as a way of earning pocket money for the park on a Friday night turned into me being good at something and the sparks started to fly.

And the training?

Rather than do an apprenticeship, I attended college but also worked three days a week in the salon because the hours allowed me to do this.

Describe those early years learning your craft

Every path you take leads you onto something bigger and better. When my salon was being refurbished I went and worked in a barber shop and this taught me how to work with short hair. When a client with textured hair got turned away from my salon, this inspired me to learn about Afro and textured hair. I learned

early on that education is power and once you know the correct way, then you can make your own way.

And where has all that taken you?

I work as a session hairdresser with some of the biggest names in music! I've been on set with A-List celebrities! I have been onstage educating to thousands and I've been on TV as a judge in [the E4 show] The Big Blow Out. I've got my own business, WIG London, teaching hairdressers how to work with textured hair as I believe every client should be able to go into any salon in the UK and get their hair done, regardless of their hair type.

What do you love most about hairdressing, and what are the downsides?

I love the weird requests, the not knowing, the rushing and the stillness... I love how varied my role is and how it takes me all over the world and allows me to meet new people and see new ways of life. The downside? You give up a lot: missed weddings, birthdays... you name it. But it's worth it, for that independence, that buzz. And it's hard to give up.

Any advice for someone thinking about becoming a hairdresser?

Be your own boss, be in control, be creative and write your own rules. There's only one you, and that's your brand. Own it.







JORDAN AND BEN

Salon owners

Two best mates with a passion for hair, Jordan Massarella and Ben Jones opened Massarella & Jones in April 2021, describing it as their "personality-filled, quirky little home from home where everybody is welcome." Clients love it so much that they moved to a bigger premises in December 2022.

What were your favourite subjects at school?

Ben: Drama, Art and History. Growing up on a farm I've always used my hands to make things and find creative solutions to fix things up around the yard, so this is why I enjoyed and excelled at Art. Drama has given me the confidence to captivate an audience, whether that's in a theatre, in the salon or in general life.

Where did you train and how long did it take?

Jordan: When my earlier career as a dancer came to an end, I re-trained at [Warwick salon] Nashwhite and being that little bit older meant I really knuckled down so I could be on the salon floor as soon as possible. It's never too late to retrain and learn a new skill, particularly a trade like hairdressing – you've just got be prepared to start from the bottom and work hard.

Describe your career paths from that point:
Jordan: While still an apprentice at Nashwhite I won a national award – The Rising Star – and [fellow Nashwhite stylist] Ben and I collaborated for the first time, entering the L'Oréal Colour trophy together and winning the Afro Look Award. Meanwhile, Ben and I continued to build a joint client base, culminating in us deciding to open our salon and build our own brand.

Ben: One year down the line, we were

already in the process of moving to a bigger location. It's great to be in control of your own destiny and create a brand that reflects you and your future career plans.

Has anything surprised you about working in hairdressing?

Ben: The versatility within the industry and the different careers paths. Hairdressing isn't just what you see when you walk into a salon. A hairdresser is behind nearly everything you look at: beauty, fashion, TV, film, ad campaigns, education, and much more.

What do you love most about what you do? Jordan: I love working with my best friend every day. The relationships we've built with our clients are super-special and I love connecting with people on a level deeper than just their hair.

Any advice for someone considering hairdressing as a career?

Ben: Lots of my friends did Sixth Form, then uni, and then jumped around different industries trying to find a career that worked for them. I have spent the last 11 years in one industry and explored so many options within it. In hairdressing you have the freedom to work independently or with household brands, compete in national awards events, design your own photographic collections and build your own brand. It's an incredible industry – the opportunities are so vast!



TO WATCH JORDAN AND BEN IN ACTION









ROB AND LEE

Salon owners

Back in 2010 Rob White and Lee Nash Jones launched their salon, Nashwhite, with a promise they continue to live by: honesty, kindness, transparency and simplicity. Today, they lead a collective of creative, like-minded people working together to do the very best not just in hair but also for the community around them.

Which subjects did you do well in at school?

Lee: School was a challenging period of my childhood, due to lack of concentration in subjects that I had no interest in. Science Technology was my favourite subject because it allowed me to use my hands in a manual and creative capacity, giving me freedom to do or create what was within my head.

How did you get into hairdressing?

Rob: My dad's friend owned a hair salon and needed help over the summer. From the very first day, I knew this was an environment I wanted to be in. It didn't feel like a traditional workplace, some of the stylists had travelled the world and others were involved with Fashion Week and creative work. Plus, they were earning really good money. So, it was a no-brainer.

Were your parents supportive?

Rob: My mum cried when I told her I was going to be a hairdresser. She is an accountant and expected me to go down the academic route. Fast-forward to today and my mum now works full-time for me as financial director of our business and always tells me how proud she is of me.

Where did you train?

Lee: I did an apprenticeship with Toni&Guy and qualified after 18 months. It not only taught me how to do hair but also how to build confidence with people, develop an identity and find out who I wanted to be. Hairdressing teaches you discipline, good strong morals and the value of people.

Describe your role now:

Lee: Since developing NashWhite, my role is incredibly diverse. One day I will be looking after clients, the next I'll be creating content or mentoring my team. We design our interiors, we create and manage our online platforms and we are always thinking of new ways to grow. Hairdressing has given me a role that keeps me excited each and every day.

'Sell' hairdressing to a 16-year-old considering their options

Rob: If you want to wake up on a Monday morning and dread another week of work ahead, hairdressing is not for you. But if you want to feel like you never work another day again, be surrounded by creatives that support each other, get to travel and be involved with fashion shows and celebrity hair, then maybe it could be THE career for you!



