

# **How to Become a Hairdresser**

- Introduction**
- Training and Development**
- Apprenticeship Programs**
- Essential Skills**
- Job Opportunities**
- Entering the Business**
- Hours and Income**
- Working Life**
- FAQs**
- Essential Links**

Hairdressing is a rewarding career path. Creative jobs that offer an income are hard to come by, and as the fashion industry adapts and evolves more and more people are beginning to realise that hairdressing can be a very satisfying artistic outlet.

Job satisfaction is a crucial element of having a long and fruitful career and according to City and Guilds hairdressers are among the happiest workers in the UK. One of the primary reasons for this is that hairdressers get to meet people from all walks of life on a daily basis, ensuring the job constantly remains engaging, challenging and rewarding.

With so many options available entering the business can seem daunting. In short, there are two routes into the industry; private courses and apprenticeships. Each have their pros and cons and what might work for one may not work for another. This article will help you decide which route to take and whether or not you feel suited to the job.

## **Training and Development**

While an eye for detail, good people skills and a knack for style is a necessity, academic qualifications are crucial. In the UK certain standards must be met before you are deemed fit for service and capable to work professionally.

### **Qualifications**

There are several industry recognised qualifications in hairdressing that can be taken full-time, part-time or in a “learn on the job” capacity. Accreditations include certificates, diplomas and even degrees.

### **National Vocational Qualifications**

A National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) is the standard accreditation in the UK and must be gained at level 2 or 3 in order to be recognised as a competent hairdresser. NVQ tests are both theoretical – in a coursework or exam setting – and practical, which means you must be able to demonstrate

hands-on skills in a controlled setting. Level 4 NVQ qualifications cover specific hairdressing skills in a more concise manner, such as styling, colouring and perming.

### **BTEC Diplomas**

Edexcel are one of the most highly respected examination awarding bodies in the UK and offer a wide array of BTEC Diplomas in hairdressing, barbering and related fields; like NVQs, each qualification has various levels. BTEC diplomas are generally more theory based and require coursework and written examinations. In addition they are recognised by the UCAS tariff and, therefore, can be used as an alternative to A-levels to gain entry into universities.



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### **Degree Programs**

While foundation degree and degree courses are generally not essential, they can be highly beneficial if you plan on running your own salon. Undergraduate programs in hairdressing and salon management can be undertaken at university level and often cover specific sub-topics in greater detail. For example, your place of study may run modules in hairdressing for film and television. Other related topics, such as business and entrepreneurship, can also be highly beneficial; however, practical skills must be gained on the side in order to partake in hairdressing.

### **Combined Courses**

Qualifications can often be split into more than one category to give you a broader understanding of hairdressing. For example, educational establishments may provide hairdressing courses that cover other parts of the beauty industry such as make-up and nails. This can lead to even more employment opportunities after completion.

### **Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeship programs allow you to work and gain formal level 2 and 3 qualifications at the same time. In order to partake in an apprenticeship you must find out what schemes are available in your local area by checking the [Apprenticeships](#) page of GOV.UK.

Fundamentally the best route for you depends on your own circumstances and preferred method of learning. What's available in your area and your personal finances must also be taken into account.

## Apprenticeship Programs

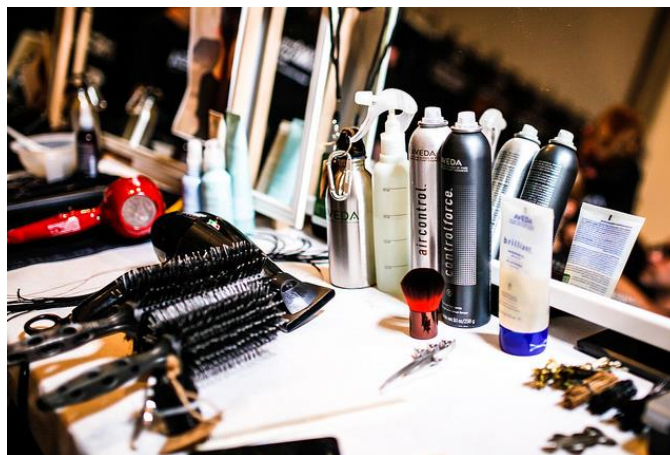
Apprenticeship programs can be highly beneficial as they'll provide a more hands-on approach to learning. An apprenticeship differs from regular full-time schooling or college as the majority of your skills will be developed in the workplace, rather than in the classroom.

### **Learning Approach**

Many apprenticeships will see you working with a split timetable. For example, you may spend four days a week in the salon and one day a week at college. This can be an effective way of learning and will ensure that you constantly develop practical skills and gain a better understanding of the industry.

### **Entry Requirements**

Entry requirements for hairdressing apprenticeships can vary; however, you are usually required to have a minimum of 3 GCSE's at grade D (including maths and English) or above, and be employed in a salon for a minimum of 30 hours per week. Salons often see the benefit of employing an apprentice because it gives their permanent full-time staff more leeway with regards to their workload and schedule; therefore, finding work shouldn't be too difficult.



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### **Timescale**

An apprenticeship will follow a curriculum that runs over a set period. As a new hairdresser you will most likely attend an intermediate apprenticeship, which should take approximately a year to complete. Once you have completed your apprenticeship you will receive an NVQ. Depending on your course provider you may also acquire Functional Skills qualifications in topics such as communication and basic accounting.

### **Payment**

As an apprentice you can expect to earn a minimum wage of £3.30 per hour (£3.40 per hour from Oct 2016), which equates to approximately £124 per week although some employers pay more than the minimum apprenticeship wage. However some employers may pay more, especially when you begin undertaking more revenue generating activities. In addition, they will often provide you with

all of the necessary clothing and equipment for your job. Apprentices are also entitled to up to 20 days of paid holiday per year, plus bank holidays. For more information on the current apprentice pay rates visit the [Pay and Conditions](#) page of GOV.UK.

Apprenticeships are perfect if you prefer learning in a practical working environment. As a hairdresser you will not only benefit by developing basic hairdressing skills, but will also make useful contacts and potentially set yourself up for a job when your apprenticeship is complete.

### **Essential Skills**

At the core you may cut, shape and colour hair, but creativity and a flair for style isn't the only requirement. There are also many social and physical demands that are just as important.

#### **Manual Dexterity**

The ability to use your hands and fingers well is paramount. All it takes is one minor slip to completely ruin a client's haircut. At the same time you'll be working against the clock. Performing well under such intense conditions is a skill that can be learned and improved upon; however, that doesn't make it any less stressful to begin with.

#### **Trustworthiness**

The importance of trustworthiness in a social sense is far more apparent than you may expect. People often trust their hairdressers as much as their closest friends and confide in them when they want to discuss intimate details of their life. While it's certainly not your job to take clients under your wing and offer them psychiatric advice, remember that many will use your chair as a medium to vent. Being a good listener is crucial.

#### **Service/Social Skills**

Hairdressing requires excellent customer service – perhaps on an even deeper level than most other service oriented jobs. This is because friendships with clients will inevitably develop over time. If you're someone who actively invites people into your life and enjoys the company of others, hairdressing could certainly be a hugely satisfying profession.



*Image Credit (Creative Commons): [U.S Navy](#)*

## **Independence**

Even when you're working in a salon you will be left to your own devices. Depending on the business model you pursue this will have a direct impact on your earnings. For example, you will probably be expected to book follow-up appointments and organise your own schedule.

## **Willingness to Learn**

Just like any other sector within fashion the hairdressing industry is constantly adapting. Keeping up-to-date with the latest trends is one thing, but practical application is something else altogether. You'll never stop learning, even after you gain the required formal qualifications.

## **Objectiveness**

Like an actor envisions the thoughts and opinions of the characters they're portraying, at times you must be able to put yourself in your clients' shoes and not allow your own opinions to get in the way of their personal preference. While it's okay to advise a customer and point them in a certain direction with regards to their haircut, you must always remain impartial, even if you don't like what they choose.

With a little perseverance and open mindedness these essential skills can be learned over time. While most will be covered during training, it's up to you to assess your strengths and weaknesses and determine where you can make improvements.

## **Job Opportunities**

As a hairdresser your skills will always be in demand. This security can be highly beneficial during recessions and times of economic turmoil. In addition, with the rising popularity of full-service salons and spas employment opportunities for hairdressers is set to increase by roughly 20% within just a few short years, meaning entry-level jobs will be in abundance.

## **Salons and Barbershops**

Work in salons and barbershops is almost always available. While competition in upmarket establishments can be fierce, if you have the skills and qualifications you'll never find yourself short of interviews.



*Image Credit (Creative Commons): [Brian Miller](#)*

## **Travel and Leisure**

The travel and leisure industry has the widest selection of available jobs. Hotels, spas, resorts and cruises often contain in-house salons and struggle to acquire full-time staff. Working in this sector can be highly satisfying as you'll meet people from all sorts of diverse backgrounds and ways of life. You might even get the opportunity to travel yourself at no personal expense.

## **Film and Television**

The UK is one of the world's most popular filming destinations, especially in and around London. Getting work cutting and styling hair on film and television sets isn't as competitive as you might think, especially on Hollywood productions that require large amounts of extras. If you have training in theatrical makeup or another related field your chances of securing work will increase tenfold. While films don't offer steady employment, – stints usually last for around three months – once you're in it's fairly easy to start networking and lining up your next job.

## **Fashion**

When it comes to hairdressing the fashion industry is probably the most competitive. As a professional hairdresser you could find yourself preparing preparing models for photo shoots, working with magazines and photographers, styling the rich and famous and potentially working on many different projects around the world.

## **Freelancing**

As a freelance hairdresser, there are four main ways to conduct business, so it's important to consider what would work best for you before you take the plunge. These options are as follows:

- Opening your own salon.
- Renting a chair in an existing salon.
- Running your business from home.
- Travelling to clients' homes (mobile hairdressing).

The latter two options are more appropriate if you want complete flexibility.

## **Working from Home**

Working from home may require substantial overheads. You will need to set up a specific space for hairdressing (which includes suitable décor) and will have to invest in all of the necessary equipment and supplies. In addition you will require public liability insurance to cover your clients if there's an accident. That said, it's definitely the most versatile freelancing option and can lead to a very rewarding way of life.

## **Mobile Hairdressing**

Mobile hairdressing is generally not as expensive as the other options as you won't need to pay rental fees or mortgage payments. However, you may need to pay for permits, licenses and insurance. When working in other people's homes, you should also be aware that the space will be

very different – kids running around, little space, etc. Focusing on specific niches could be more beneficial if you don't feel comfortable in certain situations, so before you start it's good to think about what kind environment you want to work in, – nursing homes, family homes, and corporate offices, etc. – your options are numerous and sometimes going niche can actually help you acquire more business.



*Image Credit (Creative Commons): [Anthony Kelly](#)*

### **Renting a Chair**

Working as a hairdresser is not always glamorous. Days can be long and tiring, especially if you're moving around hauling equipment from house to house. If you rather stand on a less risky ground, renting a chair in a salon is almost always a good option. By working this way you would be responsible for your own organisation, accounting and promotion.

### **Opening a Salon**

Opening up your own salon is without a doubt the costliest option. As a self-employed hairdresser you will be responsible for hiring staff, making appointments, and ensuring all the legal regulations are being followed. Opening a salon comes with great responsibility and is only recommended for experienced professionals. If this is your goal consider taking a more conventional approach to begin with.

There are an abundance of job opportunities for hairdressers and the industry is only getting bigger and better. With so many options in different sub-sectors, securing work isn't an issue, the real problem is what to choose!

### **Entering the Business**

Writing a CV for a hairdressing position is similar to writing one for any other service job; the main difference is simply how you sell yourself to a potential employer. A CV is often the first thing a recruiter will read, so it is vitally important that you highlight and promote your skills and experiences. A really good resume can, therefore, take you further in the application process and be the key to your dream job.

A CV should include the following information:

- Contact details
- Personal statement
- Education and qualifications
- Related experience
- Work history
- References

Tailor your CV to clearly display the qualities and essential skills that a hairdresser should have, and then use your personal statement to give your potential employer an idea of the kind of person you are. Your goal is to convince them that you can perform professionally and will be a joy to work with for long periods of time.

Educational qualifications and extracurricular activities – regardless of the topic – display a willingness to learn and develop. If you have participated in any shows or events, gather your work in a binder or create a blog where you can showcase pictures that’ll show off your skill set. This will give the interviewer the opportunity to see your work and allows you to firmly support the statements on your CV.



*Image Credit (Creative Commons): [Mainstream](#)*

Always include full details of your work history; limit it to three if you’ve had multiple jobs. Include previous employer contact details and a brief description of your role. Any previous employment – even if it’s unrelated – will help you to highlight your positive work ethic and demonstrate that you are a motivated individual.

You should include the contact details of your referees; people who can support your CV and tell the interviewer what you are like as an employee. Try to use referees who have either employed you in the past or who currently work in an authoritative role, such as managers, teachers and policemen.

Your cover letter is an accompanying letter that is posted with your CV. It should introduce you as a person and outline why you wish to work within your chosen profession and, most importantly, with that specific company. Keep it short, concise and no more than half a page in length. Should your potential employer wish to know more, they will give you an interview.

The following websites offer a variety of templates for both CVs and cover letters:



- [Totaljobs.com](http://Totaljobs.com)
- [Prospects.ac.uk](http://Prospects.ac.uk)

If you manage to secure an interview you're already on the right track. Practice your interview technique with friends and family and prepare answers to common questions in advance. This will help boost your confidence. Remember that the interview is your chance to engage with potential employers on a human level, so don't be afraid to showcase your unique personality and individual quirks.

### **Hours and Income**

The [National Careers Service](http://National Careers Service) states that the average starting salary for a hairdresser in the UK is approximately £14,000 per year. Fully-trained hairdressers can, however, make up to £20,000 or more per year. Top-level professionals in the film, television or fashion industry often make upwards of £30,000 per year or more.

*NOTE: These figures are only intended as a guideline*

#### **Full-time Hours**

You can expect to work up to 40 hours per week from 9am until 6pm. This often includes Saturdays. Hours may have some flexibility, but this depends on the salon and upcoming schedule. Some salons may also stay open late on one or two evenings during the week.



*Image Credit (Creative Commons): [Brian Miller](#)*

#### **Part-time Hours**

Part-time work is readily available in salons. Freelancers often work part-time in order to have more control over their schedule and finances. This could be beneficial if you have other commitments and would like to make a little money on the side.

#### **Temporary Work Placements**

Temporary work placements are commonly available in the film and television, travel and leisure, and fashion industries. This could be a suitable option for you if you'd like steady full-time employment, but for only a short duration of time.

## Freelance Hours

While freelancing gives you complete freedom with regards to hours and income, if you choose to rent a space in a salon you will still be confined to certain hours and probably won't be allowed to charge more than their standard rate. This doesn't apply if you work from home or commute to clients' houses.

## Trainee Income

Trainee hairdressers usually get paid the National Minimum Wage for an apprentice. This can vary depending on your age. For more information visit the [Minimum Wage Rates](#) page at GOV.UK.

Unlike most other careers hairdressing offers plenty of flexibility; from standard shifts to one-off appointments, you'll be in control. While competition can be highly competitive when working in high-end establishments or fashion, there are certainly plenty of opportunities to earn a comfortable living, even if you're between jobs.

## Working Life

The responsibilities of a hairdresser extend far beyond the cutting of hair. As a service profession it is important that you enjoy working with a close-knit team and engaging with customers. This is a crucial aspect of providing a tailored service. Clients will often view their trip to the salon as an opportunity to develop self-confidence and engage in conversation about life, so understanding their therapeutic needs is paramount. Many will also see you as a "style consultant", so the ability to assess your clients' personality, style and face, and then offer practical recommendations is highly important.

Just like the fashion industry the hair industry is influenced by different styles and changes rapidly; therefore, it's important that you keep up-to-date with all the latest fashion trends. Attending frequent workshops, seminars, and participating in competitions will make it easier to develop skills and follow what's going on in the industry.



*Image Credit (Creative Commons): [Kevin Jaako](#)*

As a hairdresser it's important to have or develop the following qualities:

- Creativity: An interest in the creation and appreciation of form and style.

- Social skills: Ability to interact with people and provide excellent customer service.
- Salesmanship: Ability to sell the salon and its services as a product.
- Strong physique: Hairdressers spend most of the day standing and walking, so it's important to have good shoes and retain the correct posture.

On a day-to-day basis you will be expected to perform a variety of tasks, including:

- Opening and closing the salon and checking the facilities.
- Working with clients to cut and style hair.
- Maintaining a high level of cleanliness throughout the day.
- Checking stock levels and ordering the required products.
- Operating the till and answering any incoming phone calls.
- Booking appointments and organising your future schedule.

While hairdressing can seem like an excellent creative and social outlet, it's also highly important to remember that it's a business. You'll need to sell yourself, the salon and the products in order to reap the financial benefits the profession has to offer.

### FAQs

**Q:** Do I really need training and qualifications?

**A:** Yes. Training is essential in order to prove that you're capable of undertaking the job. Working in certain sectors, such as film and television, may not require specialist qualifications (although they can help); however, you will be expected to have basic formal hairdressing qualifications such as a certificate, NVQ or diploma.

**Q:** What are the entry requirements for most educational institutions?

**A:** Most programs prefer applicants to have a GCSE grade D or above in maths, English and art (or a related subject). Previous experience working part-time in a salon can also be beneficial. That said, it really depends on the interview.

**Q:** Will I be left with student debts?

**A:** This depends on what route you take. If you don't have the funds you may be entitled to a student loan if you learn through a college or university. Apprenticeship programs pay you a salary. This allows you to throw yourself right in the deep end and come out without any long-term debts.

**Q:** How long do apprenticeship programs take?

**A:** It depends. Most apprenticeships take around 18 months to complete; however, if you have previous experience, such as an NVQ level 1, they could be shorter.

**Q:** How much can I realistically expect to earn?

**A:** It's really up to you and how hard you work. Hairdressers who open their own salons can eventually earn upwards of £100,000 per year. If you have a desire and passion there's no reason why you can't achieve the same results.

## **Essential Links**

[Hair and Beauty Industry Authority \(HBIA\)](#): The official council for the hair and beauty industry.

[Hair Council](#): Organisation dedicated to raising standards across the hairdressing industry.

[Association of Hairdressers and Therapists \(AHT\)](#): National network of like-minded specialists working in the hair and therapy industry.

[National Hairdressers' Federation \(NHF\)](#): The largest trade association for hairdressers, barbers and beauty salon owners.

[National Careers Service](#): Government run organisation that provides free practical advice on CV writing and interview techniques.

[GOV.UK](#): Information about UK government services, rules and regulations.