

Written evidence submitted by the Hairdressing Council (HBT0003)

The science and regulation of hair and beauty products and treatments

The Hairdressing Council is the statutory authority for hairdressing in the United Kingdom and was created through the Registration Act (Hairdressing) 1964.

Executive summary

1. Hairdressing & Barbering Background

- a) As of 2024, there were 232,700 people employed in hairdressing and beauty salons in the UK. This was comprised of 145,200 self-employed workers, or 63% of the sector, and 86,800 (37%) who were employees. This is a much greater proportion of self-employment than the UK average, which stands at 13%. However, with no central register of those trading, these figures carry a high degree of uncertainty and are likely to be below the true figure.ⁱ
- b) In the year to March 2025, consumers spent £6bn on Hairdressing and Beauty servicesⁱⁱ
- c) 44% of adults visit a salon annuallyⁱⁱⁱ
- d) Hairdressers act as Professional Intermediaries in the application of a range of chemical services.

2. Factors contributing to injury caused by cosmetics

- a) Reliable data does not exist, but it is contended a majority of lye and no lye treatments are conducted through a professional intermediary of kind, most probably a hairdresser.
- b) Hairdressers and barbers in the UK operate under a voluntary register (Hairdressers Registration Act 1964)
- c) There is no legal requirement for qualifications or licensing to trade. Anyone can trade without training or registration.
- d) Hairdressing products can be purchased from any market and source.
- e) Trading Standards are responsible for enforcement of salon practices.
- f) These factors create significant consumer safety risks.

3. Evidence of Risk

- a) Historical: In 2011, in-salon products were found to contain Formaldehyde in chemical straighteners and incorrectly labelled, an ingredient prohibited for use in cosmetic products.^{iv}
- b) Hygiene Issues: Lack of sterilisation training increases infection risks.
- c) Chemical Hazards: Untrained use of dyes and relaxers causes burns, allergic reactions and scalp damage
- d) Failures of standards: Inconsistent professional practices lead to the potential for adverse events to products used in salon. Severe allergic reactions to hair colour.
- e) Accountability: No central oversight or complaint mechanism for harmed consumers.
- f) Insurance: Uninsured operators leave consumers without recourse to issues.

- g) Products: The majority of chemical straightening services are conducted in a hairdressing setting.

4. **Proposed Solution**

- a) Mandatory National Register with licensing for all suitably trained hair professionals.
- b) Insurance requirements, validated credentials and a public-facing searchable register.
- c) Mandatory CPD.

5. **Benefits**

- a) Improved public safety and hygiene standards
- b) Greater consumer confidence and transparency
- c) Uniform professional standards and fair competition
- d) Economic savings from fewer injuries and malpractice cases
- e) Clear accountability and complaint mechanisms
- f) Zero cost to HM Government

6. **Government Ask**

- a) **Legislative action** to make registration mandatory. Amend the 1964 Act to mandate registration and licensing.
- b) The Hairdressing Council holds a voluntary register of those trained to NVQ Level 2 and is the sole statutory body in Great Britain specifically for hair and barber professionals. The Hairdressing Council represents and advocates for the industry's needs and works with other trade organisations to raise standards, secure statutory regulation and achieve public and political recognition for the profession.^v
- c) Furthermore, the Hairdressing Council seeks, through the mandating of the register of hairdressing professionals to improve consumer safety and reduce the potential for consumer harm. By verifying qualifications (minimum NVQ Level 2) and maintaining a searchable public register, the Council offers consumers a reliable source to find trained and qualified professionals.
- d) While hairdressers remain subject to general consumer rights under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and Trading Standards, the Council provides sector-specific oversight, professional standards and accountability and offers guidance and referral pathways where consumers believe they have experienced substandard service from a registered professional.

7. **Committee questions:**

- a) What changes (regulatory, legal or otherwise) could ensure that consumers are better protected from and aware of the risks of potentially harmful hair and beauty products and treatments?
- b) Would a register of businesses, with baseline technical know-how and training requirement protect consumers against problem products?
- c) Is there an issue with Black Market and Grey Market products being used in UK hairdressing and beauty businesses that do not comply with UK Cosmetic Regulation?

8. Further information

- a) Hairdressers and barbers operate under a voluntary register established by the Hairdressers Registration Act 1964, with no statutory requirement for qualifications or licensing^{vi}
- b) Voluntary System Limitations: The current voluntary registers attract does not catch all of those trading and has no meaningful ability to enforce standards on those that are not registered. This has led to a situation where anyone can setup as a hairdresser or barber, purchase chemicals and other products and with no training or qualifications trade, putting the consumer at considerable risk of harm.

9. Public Safety Risks

- a) Hygiene and Infection Control: Unregulated practitioners often lack training in sterilisation and hygiene, raising risks of cross-contamination, skin infections, and other communicable diseases^{vii}.
- b) Chemicals: Hair professionals routinely handle potentially hazardous chemicals (e.g. dyes, relaxers). Use without proper training can result in chemical burns, allergic reactions and lasting scalp damage with issues for both the consumer and worker.
- c) Allergies: There is a lack of rigor and consistency in colour testing with misinformation prevalent amongst workers and a lack of understanding from consumers. This puts consumers at risk of adverse reactions, especially but not solely in relation to PPD (PPD allergy is the most common and serious hair dye reaction in the UK, causing contact dermatitis, swelling, and rarely systemic reactions).
- d) Lack of Accountability: Without licensing or mandatory registers, there is no centralised oversight or complaint mechanism, leaving consumers with few redress pathways after harm.

10. International Precedents & Regulatory Models

- a) United States Model: Almost all U.S. states require licensing via cosmetology boards, involving mandatory training hours, examinations, inspections, and continuing education
- b) German Model: Mandatory apprenticeship: Hairdressers must complete a 3–3½ year dual vocational training (theory + practical) and pass a state exam to receive a journeyman certificate. Self-employment requirements: To open a salon, professionals must register with the Register of Crafts and Trades (*Handwerksrolle*), typically requiring master certification.

11. Proposal: Mandatory National Register

- a) Key Components:
 - i. Compulsory Registration and Licensing of all practicing hair professionals
 - ii. Insurance must be suitable and in place
 - iii. Validated Professional Credentials confirmed by accredited training providers
 - iv. A centralised public-facing register, searchable and transparent
 - v. Mandated Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to keep skills and safety awareness current
 - vi. Robust Oversight and Enforcement, including audits, inspections, and sanctions for non-compliance

12. Public Interest & Benefits

- a) Enhanced Safety: Ensures all professionals meet minimum hygiene and chemical safety standards, significantly reducing risks
- b) Consumer Confidence: A mandatory, vetted register enhances trust and transparency, giving consumers confidence in professional competence and recourse
- c) Consistent Professional Standards: Levels the playing field with uniform requirements, discouraging unqualified competition and raising overall industry standards
- d) Economic Efficiency: Fewer preventable treatments-related injuries, fewer malpractice issues and fair competition across the sector.
- e) Clear Accountability Framework: Licensing enables defined channels for investigation, appeals and disciplinary proceedings—a major upgrade over voluntary registers.

13. Implementation Strategy

- a) Legislative Action to amend the 1964 Act, mandating registration and licensing
- b) Transitional provisions granting current professionals time-limited registration and verification pathways
- c) Public Engagement Campaign to build awareness and inform behaviour change
- d) Pilot Phase in targeted regions, enabling adjustments before national rollout

14. Cost & Economic Assessment

- a) Regulatory Oversight: Estimated via administrative fees and enforcement activities funded by registrants. Current registration (2026) is £75 per year
- b) Public Health Savings: Savings generated by reduced treatment of preventable injuries and diminished infection outbreaks

15. Recommendations for Government Action

- 1. Amend the Hairdressers Registration Act 1964 to convert voluntary into mandatory registration.

8 January 2026

References:

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/activitysizeandlocation/adhocs/3091hairdressingandbeautysalons2025>

iii <https://hji.co.uk/clients-trust-independent-salons-most>

iv [Hair Salons: Facts about Formaldehyde in Hair Products - Overview | Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

v <https://haircouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/CBIE-Report-for-the-BHC.pdf>

vi <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8592/CBP-8592.pdf>

vii <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy8npdinxq31o>