

Barber Shop

Business Opportunity Profile

BOP189 · May 2025

Introduction

Barber shops are usually set up and run by experienced barbers and provide a range of cutting and grooming services. These include cutting, shaving, trimming, grooming and styling hair, beards and moustaches.

This profile provides information about starting up and running a barber shop. It describes the training available, the current market trends and the key trading and legal issues.

Training and resources

The following courses are suitable for anyone starting up a barber shop:

- The Level 2 Award in Preparing to Run a Hair and Beauty Business, which is accredited by the Vocational Training Charitable Trust. The course covers the benefits and risks involved in running a business, and legislation. Go to www.vtctskills.org.uk/qualification/vtct-skills-level-2-award-in-preparing-to-run-a-hair-and-beauty-business for more information.
- A range of short online courses provided by Health Care Courses, which cover infection control in barber shops, disinfecting barber shop equipment and barber shop safety and cleanliness. Go to <https://level4.healthcarecourses.org.uk/courselist1.aspx?search=barber&sort=> for more information.
- Social Media for Salon Businesses, which is an online course provided by the Guild of Professional Beauty Therapists that costs around £47 and covers algorithms, engagement, influencers and creating content. Go to www.beautyguild.com/Courses/CourseView?CourseID=2152dc9a-8c9f-42ca-9d40-e2a120dbcb83 for more information.
- Free videos and webinars provided by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), covering topics including self-assessment, VAT, self-employment and becoming an employer. Go to www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-webinars-email-alerts-and-videos for more information.

There are various online resources, journals and events to help barbers develop their knowledge and skills, including:

- 'Modern Barber' (<https://modernbarber.co.uk>), which is a quarterly print-based journal and online resource for barbers.

- Barber Connect (<https://modernbarber.co.uk/barber-connect>), which is an annual two-day trade event held each May at the NEC in Birmingham.
- 'Salonfocus' (www.nhbf.co.uk/news-and-blogs/salonfocus), which is a magazine available exclusively to members of the National Hair and Beauty Federation.
- 'Hairdressers Journal International' (<https://hairandbeauty.escosubs.co.uk/hairdressers>), which is a monthly online and print-based journal.

Key market issues and trends

Current market issues affecting both start-up and established barber shops include the following:

- In 2024, barber shops were the fastest-growing retail category on UK high streets, with the number of units increasing by 5,791 since 2019. Independent businesses dominate the sector and represent 99% of the market (<https://modernbarber.co.uk/barbershops-lead-retail-growth-according-to-nhbf-bulletin>).
- In 2025, barbers warned that without government support, they are facing an industry crisis. This could result in the closure of mid-sized barber shops, leading to an increase in self-employment and mobile barbers (<https://modernbarber.co.uk/industry-crisis-an-open-letter-from-luke-dolan>).
- The quarterly 'State of the Industry Survey Summary - September 2024' published in December 2024 by the NHBf revealed that 46% of salon businesses, including barber shops, were making a profit and 14% were making a loss. The survey also found that 50% were increasing their prices, 47% were not hiring new staff and 26% were reducing staff hours (www.nhbf.co.uk/documents/nhbf-state-of-the-industry-summary-sept-2024).
- In 2024, the Health and Safety Executive reported an increase in ringworm infections linked to the barbering industry. The infections are caused by poor hygiene practices within barber shops (<https://modernbarber.co.uk/barbers-report-surge-in-ringworm-cases-among-clients>).

Trading, commercial and legal issues

Start-up and established barbers face the following trading, commercial and legal issues:

Trade bodies

Membership of a trade body can provide a wide range of individual and business benefits. Relevant bodies include:

- The British Barbers' Association (www.britishbarbers.com), which represents the UK's barbering industry. Barber shop membership is free and includes access to an accreditation scheme, training opportunities and branded hair products.
- The Salon Employers Association (www.salonemployersassociation.co.uk), which represents VAT-registered PAYE salon owners, including barbers, across the UK and campaigns on issues which

impact on salon businesses. Membership is free.

- NHBF (www.nhbf.co.uk/home), which is a trade body representing the UK's hairdressing, barbering and beauty sectors. Benefits of salon membership include specialist insurance, business, employment and legal support, and a subscription to 'Salonfocus'. Single salon membership costs around £300 per year (excluding VAT).

Start-up options

Many start ups take over an existing barber shop business, while others convert existing high street premises into a barber shop.

Details of existing barber shop businesses for sale on a leasehold or freehold basis can be found at <https://uk.businessforsale.com/uk/search/hair-and-beauty-salons-for-sale> and www.daltonsbusiness.com/hairdressers-salon-businesses-for-sale.

The cost of starting up and fitting out a barber shop from scratch typically costs between £40,000 and £500,000, depending on the number of workstations, quality of equipment and location.

Some barber shops employ their own barbers, while others allow self-employed barbers to rent a chair within the shop. Go to <https://online.professionalbeautydirect.co.uk/blog/things-to-consider-when-renting-a-chair-at-a-salon> for more information about chair rental.

Local authority licensing

Some local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland require barber shops to have a licence before they start trading. As part of the licensing process, local authorities will inspect the premises to ensure that they meet health and safety standards. Go to www.get-licensed.co.uk/licence/hairdresser-licence for more information.

In Northern Ireland, all barber shops must be registered with the environmental health department of their local district authority. Go to www.fermanaghomagh.com/services/environmental-health-service/health-safety-business/hairdressers for more information.

Barbering equipment and products

Examples of suppliers specialising in equipment such as barber chairs, wash units, mirrors, razors, clippers and hairdryers include Cool Blades (www.coolblades.co.uk), Salons Direct (www.salonsdirect.com/barbering), Sally Salon Services (www.sallybeauty.co.uk) and Capital Hair & Beauty (www.capitalhairandbeauty.co.uk).

Products, including shampoos, shaving foam, blades, beard oil, cleansers, scrubs, moisturisers and wax, are available from a variety of specialist suppliers, including Barber Blades (<https://barberblades.co.uk>), Aston & Fincher (www.astonandfincher.co.uk) and Capital Hair & Beauty (www.capitalhairandbeauty.co.uk).

Management software

Many barber shops use specialist software to manage client records, treatment preferences and appointments. Examples of specialist software include:

- Slick (www.getslick.com/solution/barbers).
- Square (<https://squareup.com/gb/en/solutions/barbershop>).
- Salon Manager (www.salonmanageronline.co.uk).

Booking platforms

Some barber shops register with hair and beauty platforms, which enable clients to book appointments online. Examples of platforms include:

- Vagaro (www.vagaro.com).
- Treatwell (www.treatwell.co.uk/partners).
- Fresha (www.fresha.com).

The Good Salon Guide

The Good Salon Guide is a scheme that assesses professional standards within the hair and beauty industries. To be included in the guide, barber shops are assessed and rated. If a barber shop meets a set of minimum standards, it is awarded registered status. Go to www.goodsalonguide.com for more information.

Tax and VAT

Barber shops must comply with HMRC tax rules relating to tips. The rules can be complex, and barber shops must ensure that tips are accounted for correctly. For example, tips cannot be used to make up employees' National Minimum Wage. Go to <https://salontippingcompliance.co.uk/for-employers/faqs> for more information about compliance.

All income earned by a barber shop is standard-rated for VAT, including chair rental fees. Barber shops must register for VAT once their taxable turnover reaches the mandatory threshold. Go to www.gov.uk/guidance/rates-of-vat-on-different-goods-and-services for further information about VAT rates.

Workplace health, safety and hygiene

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 place a general duty of care on barber shop owners to protect the health and safety of their employees and anyone else who may be affected by their business activities.

Specific health and safety issues applicable to barber shops include:

- Controlling substances hazardous to health, such as ingredients used in hair and beauty products which can irritate the skin (www.hse.gov.uk/coshh/industry/beauty.htm).
- The transmission of bacteria and contagious conditions such as ringworm, impetigo, scabies and cold sores (www.nhbf.co.uk/news-and-blogs/blog/preventing-cross-contamination-a-spring-cleaning-guide-for).
- The risk of transmission of blood-borne viruses, such as hepatitis (www.hse.gov.uk/biosafety/blood-borne-viruses/index.htm).
- The use of appropriate protective workwear, such as gloves and aprons (www.hse.gov.uk/ppe/index.htm).
- The safe use of electrical equipment (www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/power.htm).
- The safe disposal of clinical waste, such as used razor blades (www.hse.gov.uk/healthservices/needlesticks/actions.htm).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a guide to managing risks at www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm.

Insurance

A barber shop owner requires several types of insurance cover, including:

- Public and product liability insurance, which covers barbers against claims for compensation from anyone injured or adversely affected by their activities.
- Treatment risk liability insurance, which covers a barber shop against claims of negligence, malpractice or accidental injury to a client.
- Employers' liability insurance, which is mandatory as soon as the barber employs anyone.
- Legal expenses insurance, which provides cover for defending disputes with suppliers, clients, HMRC, local authorities or landlords, or to defend employment tribunal cases.
- Premises and contents cover, which will be needed to cover the barber shop, supplies and equipment against accidental loss, damage, fire, flood and theft.
- Business interruption insurance, which provides cover if the barber shop has to close while repairs are carried out following an insured event such as flooding or fire.

Specialist insurance for barber shops is available from insurers and brokers such as Salon Gold (www.salongold.co.uk/salon-insurance/barbers), Salon Saver (www.salonsaver.co.uk/barber-shop-insurance) and Salon Secure (www.salonsecure.co.uk).

Legislation

This section provides an at-a-glance list of the key legislation that barber shops must comply with.

Local authority and licensing regulation

- The Hairdressers Act (Northern Ireland) 1939 requires all barber shops in Northern Ireland to be registered with the environmental health department of their local authority. An equivalent registration requirement for barber shops also applies in some areas of England, Wales and Scotland, depending on local by-laws and procedures in each area.

Workplace health and safety

- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 require employers and the self-employed to reduce the risk posed to clients or employees by identifying potential health risks arising from exposure to potentially harmful substances, such as ingredients used in hair and beauty products that can irritate the skin.
- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 place a general duty of care on barber shop owners to protect the health and safety of their employees and anyone else who may be affected by their business activities.
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers and self-employed people to identify and assess any workplace risks and provide adequate health and safety training for employees. In Northern Ireland, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 apply.
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) and the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (PPE) (as amended in 2022) and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland set out requirements regarding the use and maintenance of work equipment and protective clothing, and the training of employees in their use.

Related factsheets

SEC003 Hair and Beauty - Sector Update

SYN002 Hair and Beauty - Industry Snapshot

BOP032 Hair Salon

BOP303 Freelance Hairdresser

MBP184 Trichologist

MBP335 Wig Fitter

MBP463 African Caribbean Hairdresser

BIF439 Licensing for the Beauty Sector

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