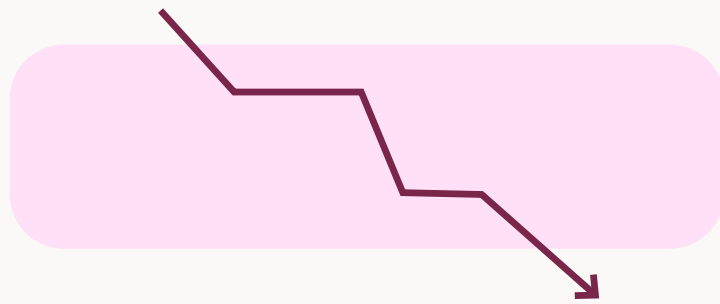


Is beauty on the brink?



The quiet crisis facing
Britain's self-care industry

NOVEMBER 2025



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INTRODUCTION

An industry at risk

At first glance, the UK hair and beauty industry looks unshakable. It contributes more than [£30 billion annually to GDP](#), employs close to half a million people, and has continued to generate growth even in difficult economic times.

+£30B

Beauty industry contribution to annual UK GDP

~500k

People employed in the beauty industry

Consumer demand is resilient, with [spending on personal care rising by 8% in 2024](#) despite ongoing recessionary fears. Yet beneath the headline figures, thousands of microbusinesses and solo practitioners are running on margins so thin that a single cancelled appointment, a sudden rent increase, or a hike in utility costs threatens to topple them.

↑8%

Rise in personal care spending

For too long, **policymakers have viewed beauty as ‘a nice to have’**; an optional indulgence rather than a skilled trade that sustains livelihoods and communities. This perception gap has left the industry under-supported, under-valued, and at real risk.

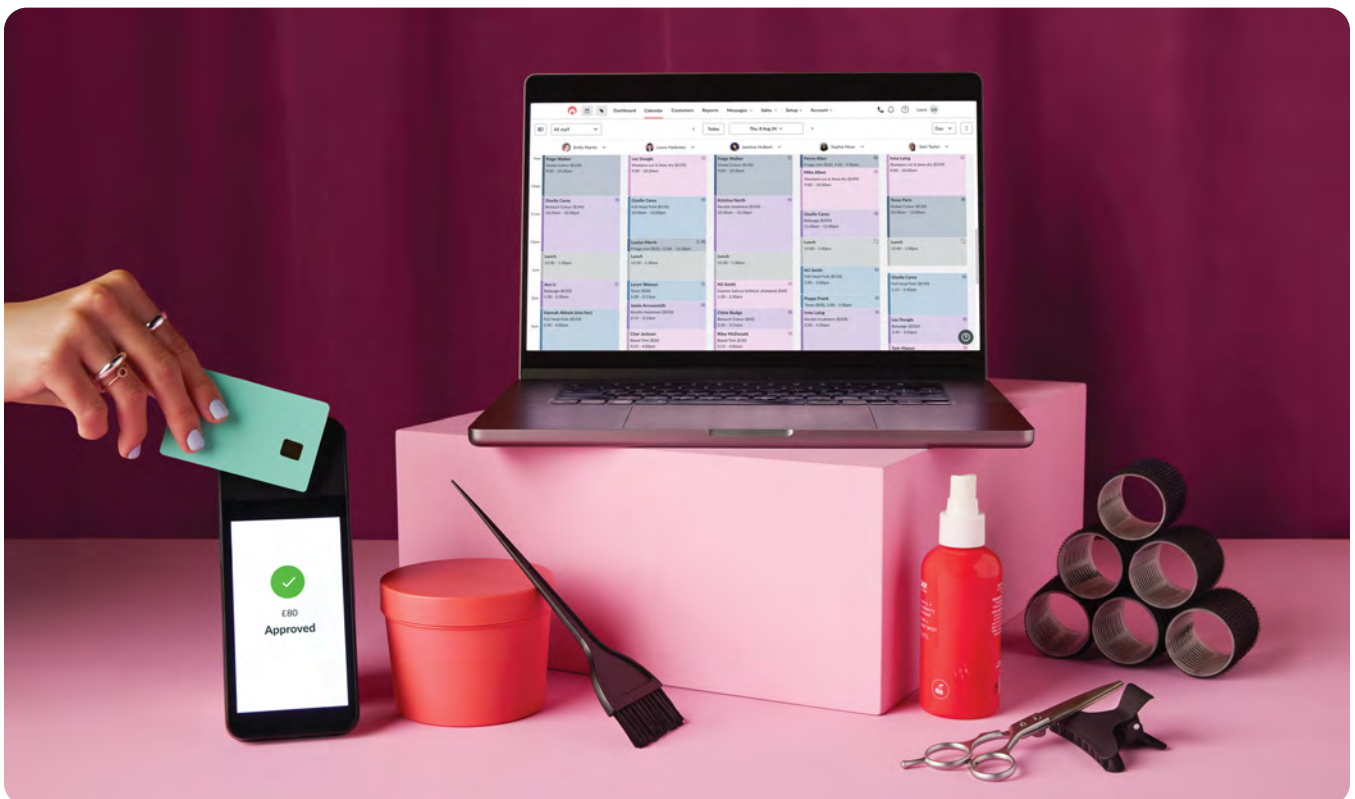
INTRODUCTION

An industry at risk

This report looks to reveal the truth beneath the glossy exterior of the UK's hair and beauty sector; **its undeniable strengths, its systemic weaknesses, and the urgent actions required to safeguard its future.**

This report is written for those who have the power to drive change: UK hair and beauty professionals, who need to know they are seen and heard; training bodies and support services for the industry, who can transform how new practitioners are prepared for work; and policymakers and advocates, who must stop treating these professions as secondary and instead recognise its role as a cornerstone of the UK economy

Powered by Timely - the booking and payments system that aims to make running a hair or beauty business easier.



SECTION 1

The fragility of scale

THE PROBLEM

The UK beauty industry is a powerhouse that contributes [more to GDP than sports and amusement](#), yet its structural fragility leaves thousands of individual businesses vulnerable to collapse. Scale does not equal stability. **The £30 billion contribution** disguises the daily reality for thousands of practitioners, who are constantly juggling to stay afloat.

GDP
contribution

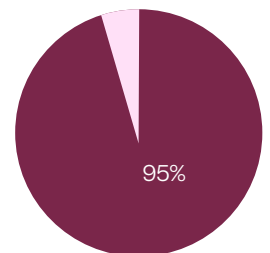
SPORTS AND
AMUSEMENT

BEAUTY
INDUSTRY

THE CONTEXT

The industry employs as many people as the hospitality industry and contributed more than the live music sector to GDP in 2023-2024, [which contributed an impressive 6.7 billion](#). However, the structure of the industry makes it inherently vulnerable: **a high proportion – as many as 95% – of businesses are classed as microbusinesses, and many of those are operated by solo practitioners as of 2024**. For some, turnover is so low that they remain beneath the VAT threshold, meaning that a modest increase in costs can erase profit entirely.

95% of businesses
are microbusinesses



SECTION 1

The fragility of scale

THE SOLUTION

Digital tools and financial literacy: If beauty professionals are expected to stop relying on trial and error, they need trusted, accessible alternatives. Even through short financial literacy courses, professionals can quickly gain the tools to price their services sustainably, manage their P&L, and protect profitability. Industry partners, training providers, and professional associations must actively signpost and encourage the uptake of these resources, ensuring that even solo practitioners are equipped to run their businesses as confidently as they deliver their treatments.



SECTION 2

The under-pricing crisis

THE PROBLEM

Hair and beauty professionals are systemically under-pricing their services, often undervaluing their time to be 'affordable' rather than sustainable. This issue is compounded by a cultural double standard that treats skilled hair and beauty work as 'luxury' rather than 'essential', locking the sector into a cycle of unsustainable margins.

21% of salons
run at a loss



SECTION 2

The under-pricing crisis

THE CONTEXT

While the Office for National Statistics reports an average net return of [15.1% across UK private service industries](#), beauty margins often fall far below this benchmark with hairdressing particularly only having a [profit margin of 8-10%](#). Without precise data on average profitability for salons and solo practitioners, the gap remains under-acknowledged in policymaking, yet it is evident to those working day-to-day in the trade.

Behind every economic statistic is a human story:



Timely data shows that on average, nail technicians booking back-to-back **gel manicures appear to be earning around £70 per treatment**, each lasting just over an hour. In reality, they're covering costs for polishes, acetone, files, chair or salon rent, electricity for lamps, and insurance. They also spend unpaid hours cleaning tools, marketing their services online, and chasing late payments or no-shows. What looks like £70 per hour has actually fallen closer to minimum wage.



Massage therapists face similar pressures. Data from Timely's customers shows a **60-minute massage averages £111.05 for solo practitioners**; however, once oils, laundry, travel time, parking, and treatment room hire are considered, the margin shrinks sharply.

Where treatments are delivered as part of a team, the same service averages £135.47, with shared overheads providing a small cushion.



However, even hairdressing, often thought of as one of the steadier parts of the industry, is precarious. **A wash, cut, and blow-dry averages £64.32 for 73 minutes of work**. Beauty professionals invest in training and equipment, operate under health and safety regulations, and deliver skilled services, yet their prices are constantly undermined. The effect is a sector locked into under-pricing, unable to reflect the true value of its labour.

CASE STUDY

Jade Elizabeth Hair

From undervaluing to understanding worth



When Leicester-based stylist Jade Elizabeth opened her salon eight years ago, she had no idea how much she would have to learn about money, pricing, and profit. *“I didn’t know much about being self-employed or managing money,”* she admits. *“My partner supported me so that I could put everything I earned straight back into the salon.”*

That early reinvestment helped her build the foundations of her business, but like many independent beauty professionals, Jade learned her financial lessons the hard way.

“About four years ago, I realised I’d been massively undercharging. I raised my prices by £10 to £20 per service, and some clients left, but it made space for new ones who truly valued what I do.”

The shift didn’t just bring confidence; it brought clarity. After years of relying on instinct, Jade started using tools and training to make sense of her salon’s numbers. She now uses a system which tracks the amount of colour used per client, helping her price every service accurately. *“That’s been huge for me,”* Jade says. *“I used to just guess, but now I can see the numbers in black and white. It means I’m not just covering costs; I’m actually making a proper profit.”*

“Being able to save, take time off, and still have money coming in is something I could never do before.”

For Jade, the difference between surviving and thriving came down to financial awareness.

Now fully booked almost all year, Jade’s experience shows just how vital financial education is for the future of the beauty industry. *“If I’d known all this at the start, things would have been so different,”* Jade reflects. *“It’s not enough to be good at what you do; you have to understand the business behind it. Once you do, it changes everything.”*

CASE STUDY

Legally Blonded

The power of knowing your worth and your rights



By the time **Leanne, founder of Legally Blonded**, turned 18, she had already opened her first salon. Now 35, she has seen every side of the industry, from creative highs to moments that exposed just how vulnerable small business owners can be.

After personal and legal battles affected both her business and her family, Leanne began teaching herself the law to understand how to protect what she had built.

“I had to learn about data, insurance, and compliance, everything the industry doesn’t teach you,” she says. “And once I started, I couldn’t believe how much we’re missing as professionals.”

Her realisation was simple but devastating. The majority of beauty professionals are unprotected, untrained in compliance, and unaware of what their insurance actually covers. That insight pushed her to rebrand her business as Legally Blonded, a platform that teaches hairdressers about law, policy, and compliance in plain, relatable terms. *“Legal and compliance isn’t a sexy topic,” she laughs. “But it’s the thing that keeps your business alive.”*

“When you’re protected, you can do your job confidently, and that’s what every professional deserves.”

Leanne’s knowledge has become a lifeline for others in the industry. She now works full time for Citizens Advice while continuing to support the industry through Legally Blonded. Her goal is to qualify as a barrister and represent hairdressers and service providers in court. *“I want to make a real change,” she says.*

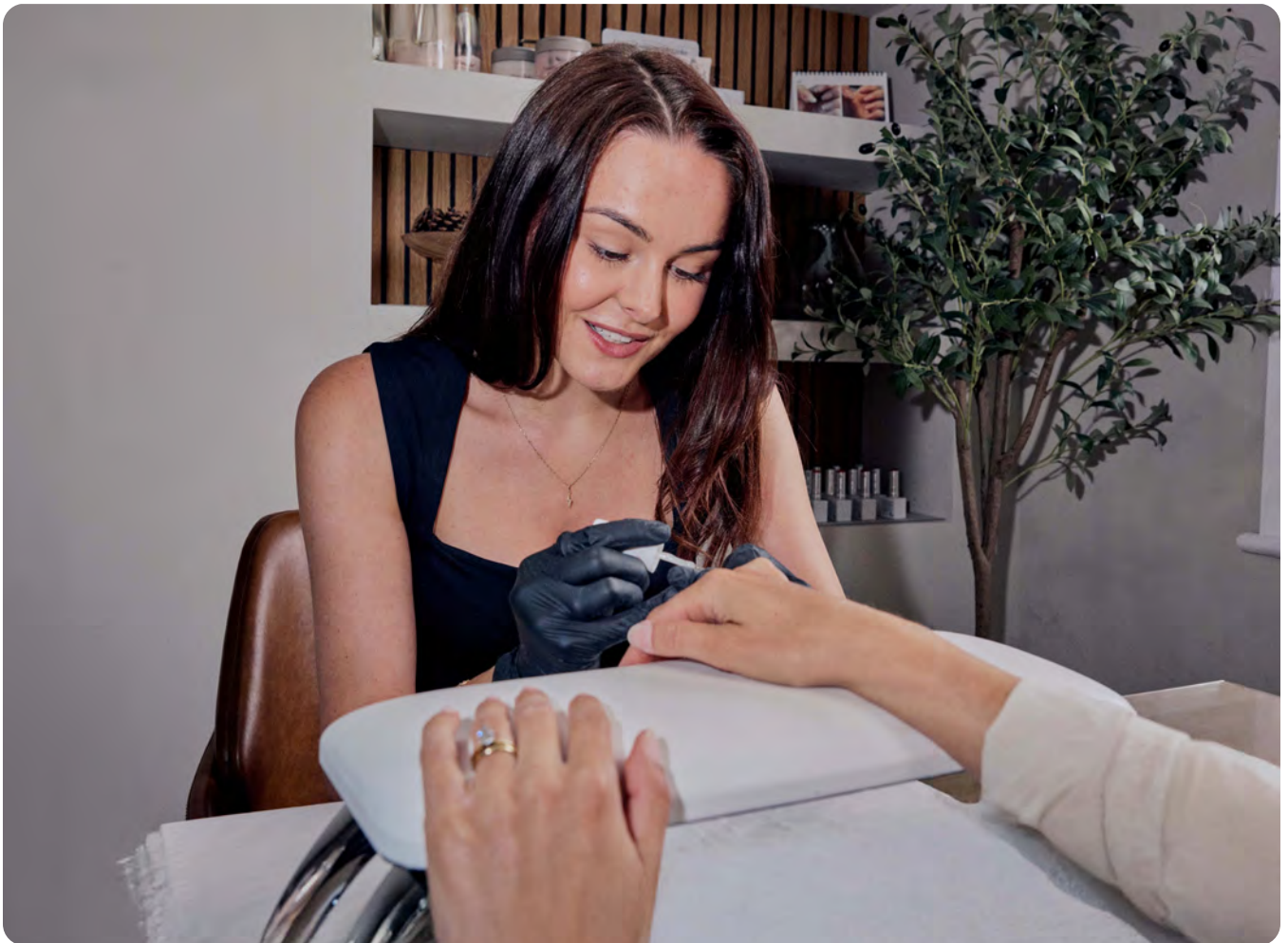
Leanne’s story underlines a message at the heart of the Beauty on the Brink report; financial sustainability is not just about pricing. It is about protection, confidence, and taking the business side of beauty as seriously as the craft itself.

SECTION 2

The under-pricing crisis

THE SOLUTION

Education reform and policy recognition: Business and financial skills must be embedded into hair and beauty qualifications. Just as apprenticeships in plumbing include costing and profit management, NVQs and VTCT pathways in beauty should integrate these essentials from the outset. Policymakers should also treat beauty as an essential trade, granting access to targeted grants and tax reliefs, similar to those that construction and hospitality already benefit from.



SECTION 3

The economic risk of inaction

THE PROBLEM

If the fragility of hair and beauty microbusinesses is not addressed, the economic risks will ripple throughout local communities, affecting high streets, unemployment figures, and the wider UK beauty economy. Inaction accelerates decline.

THE CONTEXT

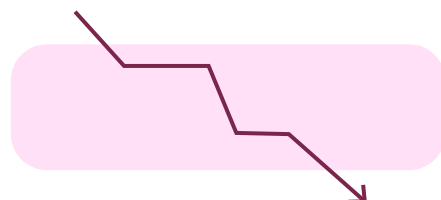
The industry employs almost [half a million people](#), with **90% of these positions held by women**, so closures would directly drive up unemployment – and even worse, to a marginalised group. Furthermore, salons are anchor tenants on high streets, yet the national high street vacancy rate in the UK stands at [13%](#) UK wide as of early 2025. The disappearance of salons accelerates this decline.

90% of beauty industry employees are women



Exports of UK beauty products have [already fallen almost 5.9% annually since 2020](#). If service businesses collapse at scale, this trend will continue, weakening the pipeline of consumer demand and product innovation.

£4.3B export loss



SECTION 3

The economic risk of inaction

THE SOLUTION

The immediate partnership action: Timely is not standing on the sidelines; we are taking action now. We have partnered with **The Curve**, a leading financial education platform, to deliver a short, accessible financial literacy course designed specifically for hair and beauty professionals. By embedding this training directly alongside our booking and payments system, we are creating a simple, accessible foundation for long-term business sustainability, turning ‘survival mode’ into a pathway for growth. This is only the start of our commitment to advocacy and change.

Timely will continue to work with partners, industry bodies, and policymakers to ensure that beauty professionals have access to the resources, training, and advocacy they need. But The Curve partnership demonstrates what’s possible when tailored support meets the realities of day-to-day salon life; simple, accessible steps that empower professionals to thrive.

[Start the course](#)



CONCLUSION

Recognising hair and beauty as a trade

The UK hair and beauty industry is too important to leave to chance. It contributes billions to the economy, employs hundreds of thousands, and sustains the fabric of communities up and down the country. This is not a question of effort or skill; beauty professionals are highly trained, creative, and resilient. What they lack is a system designed to support them.

The choice now sits with those in positions of influence. To continue to treat beauty as a 'nice to have' is to allow a multi-billion-pound cornerstone of the UK economy to remain fragile. To act – to embed support, recognition, and infrastructure – is to give beauty professionals the future they deserve, and to strengthen the communities, high streets, and economy that depend on them.



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