

Seeing Beyond the Salon

Overview

This initiative was designed to help hairdressing students engage with business and entrepreneurial thinking in a way that felt practical, relevant and directly connected to their chosen profession. Rather than introducing entrepreneurship through abstract business theory, the approach used familiar industry brands, practitioner insight and real career opportunities to make entrepreneurial concepts more accessible and meaningful.

Challenge

Many hairdressing students aspire to freelance work, salon ownership or specialist careers but do not necessarily identify with the language of entrepreneurship. Traditional business concepts such as business models, cash flow and customer segmentation often feel disconnected from their day-to-day training.

There is a need to:

- Make business thinking tangible and relevant.
- Build confidence around self-employment and business ownership.
- Highlight a wider range of career opportunities within the sector.
- Demonstrate how entrepreneurial thinking connects to professional practice.

Approach

Business Models Through Familiar Brands

Students explored the Business Model Canvas (BMC) using recognised hair and beauty brands including L'Oréal, Schwarzkopf and Wella.

Instead of treating these as abstract case studies, students actively deconstructed:

- Who their customers are
- How these brands generate income
- What products and services they offer at different price points
- How branding, positioning, and education (training stylists, salons, academies) drive growth

Students then mirrored this thinking to design their own “future salon business models,” making the leap from consumer to creator.

Real-World Industry Insight

A key part of the programme was bringing in industry professional Pam Doherty, a practicing hairdresser with real-world experience of building and navigating a career in the sector, working with international brands and on creative shoots.

Pam shared practical, grounded insights such as:

- The importance of securing a good accountant early
- How accountants support with tax, business structure, and even long-term financial stability (including mortgage readiness)
- The value of specialising rather than staying general
- How niche expertise can lead to higher earnings and international opportunities

This shifted the conversation from “one day I might own a salon” to “here are the practical steps I can start now.”

Reframing Career Pathways in Hairdressing

Students were introduced to the idea that hairdressing is not a single career path, but an ecosystem of opportunities:

- Salon ownership
- Freelance/mobile stylist work
- Editorial and fashion styling
- Specialist services (colour, bridal, textured hair, etc.)
- International travel opportunities through niche expertise

The message was clear: specialising is not limiting — it is a gateway to mobility, higher income, and global opportunity.

Immediate Impact

This approach resulted in a noticeable shift in how students engaged with entrepreneurship content:

- Increased engagement with business concepts through relatable examples
- Greater confidence in discussing pricing, customers, and business ideas
- Stronger interest in freelancing and self-employment pathways
- Improved understanding of the practical steps needed to start a business
- Students began to see themselves as “future business owners in training,” not just learners of a trade

From Classroom Learning to Industry Opportunity

Following the entrepreneurship and employability sessions with hairdressing students, an industry visit was facilitated with Pam Docherty.

The visit was shared publicly through Instagram content, capturing students engaging directly in a professional salon and creative industry environment. This created a visible bridge between education and industry practice, allowing students to see how their skills translate into real commercial work.

What made this intervention significant was not just the visit itself, but what happened afterwards. Following the engagement, Pam Docherty recruited two of the students who demonstrated proactive engagement during the session to support her on professional shoots with international brands.

This included:

- Assistant support on live commercial and editorial shoots
- Exposure to professional set environments and industry workflows
- Early entry into portfolio-building experiences with global-facing work

This outcome demonstrated a direct pipeline from education → engagement → employment opportunity.

Key Learning

This case study reinforced a number of themes that emerged throughout the programme.

Entrepreneurial learning became significantly more effective when it was anchored in familiar industries, delivered alongside real practitioner experience and connected directly to learners' own aspirations and career pathways. Rather than presenting entrepreneurship as a separate subject, the activity embedded entrepreneurial thinking within a vocational context that students already understood and valued.

For vocational learners, business and entrepreneurial education works best when it feels like an extension of their craft rather than an additional topic to be learned. By combining structured tools such as the BMC with industry brands, lived experience and career-focused discussion, students were able to connect entrepreneurial concepts to their own future ambitions.

The case also demonstrated the value of practitioner-led exposure. When students were given opportunities to engage directly with industry professionals and real working environments, opportunities became tangible rather than theoretical. Instead of viewing employability as a future goal, students were able to demonstrate initiative, professionalism and capability in authentic industry settings.

The recruitment of two students onto professional commercial and editorial shoots highlighted the power of relationship-based opportunity creation. The most significant outcome was not the result of a formal recruitment process, but of learners being visible, engaged and able to demonstrate their potential in a real-world environment.

Ultimately, the case demonstrates how linking curriculum activity, industry engagement and practitioner relationships can help learners move from understanding entrepreneurial concepts to recognising and pursuing real career opportunities.