



BEAUTY, AESTHETICS & WELLBEING

Call to Action: Securing the beauty and wellbeing industry's recovery from COVID-19

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The beauty and wellbeing sector is crucial to the lifeblood of the UK's economy, contributing up to £30 billion a year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting 50,000 businesses and 560,000 jobs, 85% of which are women, many working flexibly¹.

Yet the pandemic has decimated this multi-billion pound industry. The impact of multiple national lockdowns, extended social distancing and insufficient financial support has threatened the viability of thousands of businesses and the livelihoods of many workers and independent practitioners, even now that restrictions have lifted.

The APPG ran an investigation with the industry to explore these challenges, and recommends the following Government action to ensure the survival and longevity of businesses and jobs:

- 1. The Government must broaden apprenticeship incentives for employers, in particular to make it financially viable for small businesses who have particularly struggled throughout the pandemic, to recruit new apprentices. It must also include further accessible and broader holistic and complementary qualifications in the National Skills Fund, to ensure that the viability of a career in the sector is maintained.**
- 2. The APPG is conducting a campaign to help restore consumer confidence in local beauty and wellbeing businesses, which are the beating heart of our high streets. We urge the Government to back this and publicly call on Members of Parliament, along with the wider public, to visit a salon or mobile practitioner and support the sector.**
- 3. The Department of Health and Social Care must recognise the important public health benefits of holistic and complementary therapies and the crucial role these can play in taking pressure off the NHS and supporting patients affected by long COVID, and ensure these services are adequately funded and available to all NHS patients.**

We urge the Government to adopt the above measures and ensure that the beauty and wellbeing industry, which plays a vital role in supporting the UK's economy and high streets up and down the country, and the health and wellbeing of the nation, is restored to its pre-pandemic status once again.

¹ [The Value of Beauty: An Economic Impact Report](#), The British Beauty Council, 2019.

SKILLS AND TRAINING

The beauty and wellbeing sector is facing a serious skills shortage. This hampers both its recovery from the pandemic and its future as it struggles to maintain and recruit staff.

Driven by 18 months of repeated closure, financial hardship and capacity restrictions, there has been a 55% drop in salon apprentices since COVID began. Existing apprentices remaining ineligible for the Government's £3,000 apprenticeship grant for new starters, and support for older apprentices is completely lacking. Employers simply cannot afford apprentices with the growing deficit between the limited reliefs/grants on offer and fixed outgoings during closure, rising debt and an inability to generate income. While the APPG supports overall pay increases for sector staff, these must be matched with adequate Government support for beauty and wellbeing businesses to ensure that they can stay afloat after 18 months of hardship.

There is also a lack of Government fiscal support for learners to achieve qualifications, with many Level 3 complementary therapy courses having been excluded from the new National Skills Fund. Their inclusion in this fund would provide a significant draw for those considering entering the sector, which plays an important role in supporting our wellbeing and taking pressure off the NHS. There should also be more support for those in the sector looking to upskill through higher level qualifications, including moving Level 2 apprentices into Level 3.

A deficit of workers from abroad post-Brexit has also contributed to low practitioner numbers. Urban, the wellbeing booking app, reported that 30% of practitioners working with them pre-pandemic (start of 2020) have not returned.

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CONSUMER CONFIDENCE

Despite the industry's widespread reopening on 12th April, consumer confidence remains depleted and is far from pre-pandemic levels.

While busy during the initial reopening period in April, the National Hair and Beauty Federation's September State of the Industry Survey showed that demand for services soon petered out². This deficit in consumer confidence has meant that fewer than half of businesses are making any profit, with 66% either partially or fully completely reliant on Government support to function.

Now that restrictions have been lifted, we are seeing a resurgence of larger events, parties and holidays which are crucial to the sector's stability. Nevertheless, continued consumer concerns over larger-scale gatherings and international travel uncertainty are continuing to

² [September State of the Industry Survey](#), National Hair and Beauty Federation, September 2021

dampen demand. In addition, continued homeworking has led to reduced footfall in cities, with inner-city businesses facing a significant reduction in demand. The Government should continue to encourage people to visit cities and return to offices, to ensure that these beauty and wellbeing businesses are not left behind in the UK's COVID-19 recovery.

The APPG is conducting a campaign to help restore consumer confidence in local beauty and wellbeing businesses, which are the beating heart of our high streets. We urge the Government to back this and publicly call on Members of Parliament, along with the wider public, to visit a salon or mobile practitioner and support the sector.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the UK public, with lockdown restrictions, isolation as a result of shielding, cancelled operations, limited access to primary care services, and work/financial uncertainty all either exacerbating or causing a wide range of health issues.

The beauty and wellbeing sector plays a vital role in supporting physical and mental health needs, taking significant pressure of the NHS, and helping to treat symptoms associated with long-COVID. Yet Government recognition and support remains scarce. Compared to May - August 2019, demand on wellbeing booking platform Urban was 20% higher in May - August 2021, however complementary therapist availability is only at 87% and struggling to meet needs.

According to the British Beauty Council, mental health issues cost the UK £5bn and 17.6m days of sick leave every year³. Complementary and holistic therapies can support patients with chronic lifestyle-driven conditions – such as anxiety, depression, low back pain, soft tissue injuries, fatigue and stress-related conditions – that conventional medicine struggles to treat effectively. The Federation of Holistic Therapists' annual survey shows that 76% of clients are seeking treatments for long-term health conditions and 62% are taking a preventative approach to health⁴. Yet the sector is hindered in its ability to be an official allied health provider due to a lack of Government support.

Staff shortages from workers being track and traced and the lack of skills funding, have led to demand for services outstripping supply. While Spabreaks has seen 10,000 people visiting spas weekly, a third of bookings are cancelled within a 48 hour period as there not enough therapists to deliver treatments. An apprenticeship standard for wellbeing and holistic therapists was developed during the pandemic, however it remains hard to recruit students for these courses as the Government has failed to endorse the sector as a long-term career path.

The Department of Health and Social Care must recognise the important public health benefits of holistic and complementary therapies and the crucial role these can play in taking pressure off the NHS and supporting patients affected by long COVID, and ensure these services are adequately funded and available to all NHS patients.

³ [The Effects of Personal Care Services on Mental Health and Wellbeing](#), The British Beauty Council, 2021.

⁴ [FHT Member Survey Results](#), The Federation of Holistic Therapists, 2021.