



BUILDING A SKILLED AND ADAPTABLE WORKFORCE

Submission: Retention of Mandatory Hairdressing Qualifications

THE HAIRDRESSING AND BARBER INDUSTRY

The hairdressing and barber industry makes a substantial contribution to the Australian economy, accounting for more than \$3 billion in services annually and over \$350 million in retail sales. Beyond economics, hairdressing is deeply embedded in the social fabric of Australian communities, contributing to self-confidence, wellbeing, and social connection.

The industry is also globally competitive, with Australian hairdressers and barbers recognised internationally as salon owners, stylists, educators, and innovators. Career pathways include salon ownership, editorial and fashion work, education, trichology, and technical consultancy, among many others.

Given the industry's economic, social, and cultural impact, it is critical that its integrity and professionalism remain protected. Mandatory qualifications are central to this. They ensure that hairdressing remains a recognised and respected trade, guaranteeing safety, skill, and confidence for both salon owners, workers and consumers.

THE CASE FOR MANDATORY QUALIFICATIONS

1. **Public Safety and Consumer Protection**

Hairdressers and barbers work daily with chemicals, electrical equipment, and sharp instruments. Mandatory qualifications ensure workers are properly trained in hygiene, chemical handling, and occupational safety practices.

Case study: Chemical burns from untrained services

A NSW based salon reported a client suffering scalp burns after an unqualified worker applied bleach without conducting a skin test. The case resulted in hospitalisation, compensation claims, and reputational damage to the business. Mandatory training in chemical handling and patch testing prevents such harm.

2. **Professional Standards and Wage Integrity**

Qualifications underpin professional recognition, career progression, and fair wages. Without mandated training, wages would be suppressed as unqualified workers flood the market.

Case study: Wage suppression in deregulated markets

In New Zealand, where licensing and qualification requirements were relaxed, entry-level wages dropped significantly due to an oversupply of unqualified workers. Australian salons risk the same outcome, undermining career pathways for apprentices and qualified professionals.

3. **Insurance and WorkCover Risks**

Unqualified practitioners increase the likelihood of workplace incidents and client injuries, leading to higher insurance premiums, disputed claims, and elevated WorkCover risks.

Case study: Insurance claim refusal

An insurer in Victoria declined a claim for injury when it was discovered the staff member responsible did not hold a Certificate III in Hairdressing. This left the salon owner personally liable for medical costs and damages. Mandatory qualifications protect both consumers and business owners.

4. **Training and Apprenticeship Pathways**

Hairdressing is one of Australia's most established trades, with strong pathways through TAFE and private training colleges. Removing mandatory qualifications would dismantle these pathways, discourage new entrants, and exacerbate already low apprenticeship completion rates.

Case study: Apprentice retention

AHC survey data (2024) found that apprentices in salons with structured, qualified training pathways were 30% more likely to complete their Certificate III compared to those in unregulated environments. Without mandatory qualifications, dropout rates will increase further.

Recent data from *Apprenticeship Support Australia* shows a 50% non-completion of apprentices, with 30% leaving the industry due to lack of training pathways.

5. **Migration and Compliance Concerns**

Mandatory qualifications underpin hairdressing's place on the Skills Migration List. Removing them risks undermining the integrity of skilled migration, opening the door once again to unskilled entrants and unscrupulous training providers - problems the sector fought to close more than 20 years ago.

Case study: The 2005-2010 RTO crisis

During this period, over 200 RTOs were deregistered by ASQA for failing to meet standards. Many international students were left without recognised qualifications, while unqualified entrants entered the workforce. This highlighted the dangers of deregulation and the importance of mandatory, nationally recognised training.

6. **Social and Community Value**

Hairdressers and barbers contribute to mental health, self-esteem, and community connection. During COVID-19 lockdowns, the absence of salon visits had a significant impact on Australians' wellbeing. Removing qualifications would diminish recognition of the industry's social contribution and professional

value.

Case study: Mental health support in salons

Research by *Beyond Blue* found that many Australians disclose personal struggles to hairdressers, who often act as informal support figures. Mandatory training ensures professionals have the confidence, boundaries, and professionalism to handle such conversations safely.

IMPACT OF REMOVING MANDATORY QUALIFICATIONS

- **Consumer Harm:** Unsafe services and poor technical standards will increase consumer complaints, injury claims, and reputational damage.
- **Workforce Devaluation:** Wages will decline, career pathways will be weakened, and young people will be discouraged from entering the trade.
- **Business Risk:** Insurance costs, WorkCover claims, and compliance risks will rise, further straining small business operators already under pressure from rising costs.
- **Industry Reputational Damage:** The perception of hairdressing as a professional, skilled trade will be eroded, damaging both domestic and international standing.
- **Repeat of Past Failures:** Deregulation in the 2000s led to widespread misuse of hairdressing as a migration pathway and closure of non-compliant RTOs. Removing qualifications risks repeating these failures.

CONCLUSION

Mandatory qualifications are essential to protect the safety, professionalism, and sustainability of the Australian hairdressing and barber industry.

Removing them would:

- **Endanger** public health and safety.
- **Suppress** wages and devalue the profession.
- **Increase** insurance and WorkCover risks.
- **Weaken** training and apprenticeship pathways.
- **Complicate** migration and compliance frameworks.
- **Undermine** the social and economic contributions of the trade.

The Australian Hairdressing Council urges the Productivity Commission to:

- **Uphold mandatory qualifications** as the foundation of professionalism and consumer safety.
- **Recognise the industry's social and economic value**, both as a skilled trade and as a contributor to community wellbeing.
- **Support small business sustainability** by ensuring training, wages, and service standards remain protected.
- **Protect migration integrity**, ensuring only qualified professionals enter the workforce.

Hairdressing is a proud and professional trade. It supports small business, provides critical skills, and contributes to the wellbeing of millions of Australians. It must not be undermined by deregulation.

SUPPORTING STATEMENTS

Attached is a supporting submission from SAHBA (South Australia Hair & Beauty Association).

Below is a supporting statement from SaCSA (Service & Creative Skills Australia):

Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA), the Jobs and Skills Council representing the Arts, Personal Services, Retail, Tourism and Hospitality industries, supports the recommendation that OERs in NSW and SA are retained, reflecting our role in ensuring that regulation upholds workforce quality, protects consumers, and supports both industry productivity and long-term sustainability.

The Australian Hairdressing Council would be pleased to provide further information, case studies, and industry data to assist the Commission in its deliberations.

Sincerely,



Fiona Beamish

Chief Executive Officer

Australian Hairdressing Council