

Hairstylists and Barbers

AI reaches salons through booking, marketing and virtual try-on apps; the cut, colour and client relationship remain entirely human.

EXPOSURE	WINDOW	ADOPTION TODAY	READING
17 Low exposure	7–15 yrs until change lands	Low	AI assists; the work stays human-led. Exposure is the share of today's work AI can plausibly take on within the window.

§ 01WHAT IS HAPPENING

What is happening to hairstylists and barbers

Impact

The hands-on work of cutting, colouring and styling has no realistic AI substitute, and observed use of generative tools in the occupation is very low. Where AI appears, it is in the business around the chair: Fresha, Booksy and Vagaro automate bookings, reminders and no-show management; ChatGPT and Canva draft social posts and promotions; and virtual try-on tools from L'Oréal and Perfect Corp let clients preview colours and styles before committing. Colour brands are adding AI-assisted shade matching and formulation suggestions. For most stylists the day is unchanged at the chair, with less time on the phone and more attention to an online presence.

Risk

Minimal transformation; admin and marketing automate while craft, consultation and personal service stay human.

Occupation-level measures place hairdressers in the moderate official exposure tier on task descriptions, but task applicability and observed usage are both low and published adoption is low, so the score is low because measured generative-AI exposure is low. Booking, reminders, retail recommendations, social media content and some colour formulation are the tasks that automate, and they are a small share of the working day. The cut, the colour application, reading the client's hair and face, and the conversation that keeps them coming back are not automatable with anything on the horizon. Over a 7-15 year window the trade changes mainly through how clients find and book stylists, and through more visual tools in consultation, not through any substitution of the stylist.

Sector readiness

Software Adoption Ahead of AI Use

Published adoption ratings for the occupation are low. Most salons use booking and payment software with some automated features, and chains and product brands are piloting AI colour and virtual try-on tools, but AI use by individual stylists is largely limited to drafting social posts. Independent and rental-chair stylists adopt whatever their booking app offers and little beyond it.

§ 02 POSITION

Where you stand

- i Position yourself as a stylist whose online presence, booking experience and consultation are as polished as the cut.
- ii Specialise in advanced colour, texture or barbering techniques where skill and reputation command premium pricing.
- iii Build towards salon ownership or education, where running the business well with modern tools is the advantage.

§ 03 ACTIONS

6 POINTS

What this means for you

Concrete changes to how the work gets done, in the order you are likely to meet them.

- 01 **Automate the diary.** Fresha, Booksy or Vagaro handle bookings, reminders, deposits and waitlists; set them up properly and stop losing time to the phone.
- 02 **Let AI draft, you decide.** ChatGPT and Canva can write captions and design promotions in minutes; keep your own voice and photographs.
- 03 **Use try-on tools in consultation.** Virtual colour and style previews help nervous clients commit and reduce disappointment at the basin.
- 04 **Watch the colour tech.** AI-assisted shade matching and formulation from the big brands is arriving; learn it so you can judge when it is wrong.
- 05 **Invest in the chair, not the screen.** Advanced cutting, colour correction and barbering skills are what clients pay more for and what no app offers.
- 06 **Build the client relationship deliberately.** Notes, follow-ups and remembering details, aided by your booking app's client records, are what keep a column full.

§ 04 CAUSES

6 DRIVERS

What is pushing this change

- 01 **Salon booking and management software.** Fresha, Booksy, Vagaro and similar platforms automate scheduling, reminders, payments and marketing with growing AI features.
- 02 **Generative AI for marketing.** ChatGPT, Canva and Instagram tools draft posts and promotions, lowering the effort of maintaining an online presence.
- 03 **Virtual try-on and consultation apps.** L'Oréal, Perfect Corp and brand apps let clients preview colours and styles, changing how consultations run.
- 04 **AI-assisted colour formulation.** Brand tools suggest formulas and match shades from photographs, supporting rather than replacing the colourist's judgement.
- 05 **Online discovery and reviews.** Clients find stylists through platforms and social media, so digital visibility affects earnings more than ever.
- 06 **Retail and product recommendations.** AI-driven recommendations in salon apps and e-commerce shift some retail selling away from the chair.

Impact by sector

The headline figure is an average. Where you work changes the picture.

Independent and rental-chair stylists	Rely on booking apps and social media; AI use is limited to what those tools offer, and the work is otherwise unchanged.
Salon chains and franchises	More likely to deploy AI consultation tools, centralised marketing and automated client management across sites.
Barbershops	Booking automation and online presence are the main changes; the service itself is almost entirely manual.
Education and product brands	Where AI colour matching and virtual try-on tools are developed and taught, offering roles for stylists interested in technology.

Skills to build

The skills that keep the human part of this work valuable as the routine part is automated.

- 01 Advanced technical skill.** Colour correction, precision cutting, texture work and barbering techniques are the core of earning power; keep training.
- 02 Consultation and client reading.** Understanding what a client wants, including with visual tools, is where trust is built and no software substitutes.
- 03 Booking platform proficiency.** Getting the most from Fresha, Booksy or Vagaro, including automated reminders and client records, protects income.
- 04 Social media and content.** Photographing work well and posting consistently, with AI help for captions, is how new clients find you.
- 05 Retail and product knowledge.** Recommending products credibly remains a human strength and a meaningful part of earnings.
- 06 Business basics.** Pricing, bookkeeping and marketing, with AI assistants to help, prepare you for self-employment or ownership.

Tools in use

KINDS OF TOOL WORTH KNOWING

- 01**Virtual hair try-on apps.** L'Oréal Professionnel's Style My Hair and Perfect Corp's YouCam let clients preview colours and styles in consultation.

NAMED TOOLS ALREADY IN USE

Fresha Salon booking and payments platform with automated reminders, marketing and client records.	VISIT
Booksy Appointment booking app widely used by barbers and stylists for scheduling and client discovery.	VISIT
Vagaro Salon management software covering bookings, point of sale, marketing and online booking.	VISIT
Canva Design tool with AI features used by stylists to create social posts and promotions.	VISIT
ChatGPT Drafts captions, promotions and client messages for stylists running their own marketing.	VISIT

In practice

Ways people in this role are already using AI, and what they get from it.

Automated booking and reminders EXAMPLE 1	HOW	A stylist's booking app sends confirmations, reminders and deposit requests automatically and fills cancellations from a waitlist.
	GAIN	Fewer no-shows and almost no time spent on the phone.
Virtual colour preview EXAMPLE 2	HOW	During consultation the stylist uses a try-on app to show a client how a copper or balayage would look on their own photo before mixing.
	GAIN	More confident decisions and fewer unhappy results.
AI-drafted social content EXAMPLE 3	HOW	The stylist photographs a finished cut, asks ChatGPT for three caption options and schedules the post through Canva.
	GAIN	A consistent online presence without an hour of writing each week.

How this role compares

Three neighbouring roles chosen to show the direction of travel.

Receptionists MORE EXPOSED	AI IMPACT AI booking, chat and phone assistants are absorbing routine front-desk tasks. WORK MOVES TO Residual work centres on complex requests and in-person service.
Social Media Managers DIFFERENT SKILLS, GROWING	AI IMPACT Generative AI drafts content and analyses performance, raising output expectations. WORK MOVES TO Strategy, brand voice and community management in a fast-moving field.
Fitness Trainers and Instructors COMPLEMENTARY, LESS EXPOSED	AI IMPACT AI apps generate workout plans and track progress while coaching and motivation remain human. WORK MOVES TO Personal, in-person service built on relationships and expertise.

Closing judgement

If you cut or colour hair, AI is not a threat to your trade and the evidence does not suggest it becomes one. The practical changes are in how clients find you, book you and see what you can do before they sit down, and in how little time you should now be spending on admin. Use the booking automation and let an assistant draft your posts, then put the time into consultation skills, advanced technique and the relationships that fill your column. The stylists who are busiest in ten years will be the ones clients trust, and that is not a software problem.

Evidence and revisions

What the exposure figure rests on, what changed when it was last revised, and the published work cited for this role.

SCORE

17

WINDOW

7-15 years (unchanged)

The 5 October 2026 review held the score.

Exposure Index v2. Inputs: task applicability 14/100 (Microsoft AI applicability score 0.07 for Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists); observed usage 4/100 (Anthropic observed exposure 0.03); official exposure tier 40/100 (BLS: moderate); labour-market trajectory not yet mapped for this occupation, so its weight was spread across the other inputs; published adoption rating 10/100 (low adoption). Weighted base 16.8. Final score 17. New report: the window of 7-15 years is set from the score band.

HOW THE FIGURE IS BUILT (EXPOSURE INDEX V2)

Task applicability — Microsoft Research, AI applicability score	14 × 39%	5.3
Observed usage — Anthropic Economic Index, observed exposure	4 × 22%	0.9
Official exposure tier — US BLS AI-exposure category	40 × 22%	8.9
Labour-market trajectory — US BLS projected employment change 2025–35	not measured	–
Published adoption rating — This report’s adoption level	10 × 17%	1.7
Weighted base		16.8
Exposure score		17

MEASURES BEHIND THE SCORE

US Bureau of Labor Statistics · *Employment Projections 2025–35 and AI Exposure Categories* (27 August 2026)
AI-exposure tier: Moderate. Projected employment change not yet mapped for this occupation. Matched to Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists.

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Microsoft Research · *Working with AI: Measuring the Applicability of Generative AI to Occupations* (10 July 2025)
AI applicability score 0.07 for SOC 39-5012; scaled to 14/100 as the task-applicability input.

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Anthropic · *Anthropic Economic Index report: Cadences* (26 June 2026)
Observed exposure 0.03 for SOC 39-5012; scaled to 4/100 as the observed-usage input.

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UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology · *Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market* (28 January 2026)

UK context: around 70% of UK workers are in occupations with tasks AI could perform or enhance, above the US average; a one-standard-deviation rise in exposure was associated with a 3.9% fall in UK job postings.

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<https://www.careerguard.ai/sources>

§ 12 APPENDIX

Method and sources

Each report was written from a large body of published research. The exposure score itself is computed, not written: it is the CareerGuard Exposure Index, a weighted average of occupation-level measures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (AI-exposure classification and 2025–35 projections), Microsoft Research (AI applicability scores) and Anthropic (observed exposure), together with the adoption rating published on the report. The organisations and publications below are the standing literature behind the narrative sections. Every source, with dates, licences and archived copies where we are permitted to hold them, is catalogued in the research library.

Exposure Index v2 (October 2026). Each input is scaled to 0–100 and weighted: task applicability 35% (Microsoft AI applicability score ÷ 0.5), observed usage 20% (Anthropic observed exposure ÷ 0.75), official exposure tier 20% (BLS very high = 100, high = 70, moderate = 40, low = 10), labour-market trajectory 10% ($50 - 2.5 \times \text{projected \% employment change}$), published adoption rating 15% (very high = 85, high = 70, medium-high = 55, medium = 40, low-medium = 25, low = 10). Inputs not measured for an occupation are dropped and the remaining weights renormalised. An editorial adjustment of at most ± 12 points is allowed only for automation channels the measures cannot see (robotics, self-service, machine vision, medical imaging, RPA/OCR, generative video) and is always logged with its reason. Scores are whole numbers, not rounded to five. The change window shifts one notch (a year at each end) per ten points of movement.

I GLOBAL AND MACROECONOMIC IMPACT OF AI ON WORK**World Economic Forum**

The Future of Jobs Report series — Employer survey of expected job growth and decline, skill shifts and technology adoption (2020, 2023 and 2025 editions); *Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Entry-Level Work* (2026).

AI governance and transformation reports — Frameworks on ethical AI, talent strategy and industry transformation.

McKinsey Global Institute

AI, Automation and the Future of Work series — Research quantifying automation potential by task, sector and demographic, from "Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained" to "Agents, robots, and us" (2025).

Industry-specific reports — Financial services, healthcare, manufacturing and others.

PwC

Global AI Jobs Barometer — Annual analysis of job postings and productivity by AI exposure (2024–2026 editions).

Upskilling Hopes and Fears survey — Employee perceptions and readiness.

Microsoft Research and Anthropic

Working with AI (2025); *Anthropic Economic Index* (2025–2026) — Occupation-level usage data from Copilot and Claude conversations, the two observed-usage measures behind the 2026 revision.

Stanford Digital Economy Lab and Stanford HAI

Canaries in the Coal Mine? (2025–2026); AI Index Report (annual) — Payroll evidence on early-career employment in exposed occupations; annual measurement of AI capability, investment and adoption.

Deloitte

Human Capital Trends series — Workforce, talent and HR technology trends.

Tech Trends series — Emerging technologies and their business implications.

Accenture

Technology Vision series — Forward-looking analysis of emerging technology, with emphasis on AI.

Fjord Trends — Design, innovation and human experience in a digital world.

Boston Consulting Group

AI/ML insights and industry solutions — "The AI Revolution in the Workplace" and related research.

EY

AI and workforce reports — Adoption, talent strategy and ethics.

IBM Institute for Business Value

AI and automation studies — Business models, workforce evolution and leadership.

OECD

AI Policy Observatory — International data and policy on AI, labour markets and skills.

Employment Outlook — Labour-market trends including technological impact (2023–2026 editions).

International Labour Organization

Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupational Exposure (2025) — Task-level exposure gradients for every ISCO occupation; successor to the 2023 global index.

International Monetary Fund

Staff Discussion Notes on AI and work (2024, 2026) — Complementarity framing: where AI augments and where it substitutes.

UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Assessment of AI capabilities and the impact on the UK labour market (2026) — UK occupational exposure and job-posting evidence.

Brookings Institution

AI and automation research — Economic and social implications, displacement and skills.

Yale Budget Lab and Goldman Sachs Research

Tracking the Impact of AI on the Labor Market; AI and the US labour market (2026) — Aggregate labour-market monitoring; macro displacement estimates.

Oxford University (Oxford Martin School)

The Future of Employment — Frey & Osborne and subsequent research on susceptibility to automation.

MIT Technology Review

AI & Work — Reporting on AI research and its implications for industries and jobs.

Gartner

Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence — Maturity and adoption of AI technologies.

Future of Work reports — Workplace models and talent strategy.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Employment Projections 2025–35; AI Exposure Categories; Occupational Outlook Handbook — Ten-year employment projections and, from the 2025 cycle, an AI-exposure tier for every detailed occupation.

Indeed Hiring Lab

AI at Work Report (2025) and posting-market updates — Skill-level transformation estimates and job-posting trends by occupation.

II CORE AI AND MACHINE-LEARNING RESEARCH

OpenAI*Research papers, blog and API documentation* — Large language models, generative AI, safety and societal impact.**Google DeepMind***Research papers and blog* — Reinforcement learning, AI for science, AGI and ethics.**Meta AI***Research papers and blog* — Large language models, computer vision, AI for social good.**Hugging Face***Transformers library and model hub* — Open-source state-of-the-art NLP models.**TensorFlow and PyTorch***Documentation and community forums* — Core frameworks illustrating practical capability.**arXiv***cs.AI, cs.LG, cs.CV, cs.CL* — Pre-print research.**NeurIPS and ICML***Conference proceedings* — Top-tier academic research.**ACM and IEEE***Journals and proceedings* — ACM Computing Surveys; IEEE Transactions on AI.**Kaggle***Datasets and competition solutions* — Applied machine learning on real-world problems.**The Alan Turing Institute***Research and reports* — Responsible and applied AI.

III ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE AI DEPLOYMENT**NIST***AI Risk Management Framework* — Voluntary framework for managing AI risk.**European Commission***AI Act* — Risk-tiered legal framework for AI.*Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI* — Principles for responsible development.**Partnership on AI***Research and best practice* — Responsible AI development.**AI Now Institute***Annual reports* — Social implications: power, inequality, rights.**ACM FAccT***Proceedings* — Fairness, accountability and transparency.**Data & Society***Publications* — Social implications of data-centric technology.**WIPO***Conversation on IP and AI* — Intellectual-property implications of AI.**IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of AI/IS***Ethically Aligned Design* — Recommendations for ethical AI design.**Center for AI and Digital Policy***Policy briefs* — Accountable AI policy.

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