

HAIRDRESSERS AS 'EVERYDAY INFLUENCERS' ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY



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KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Hairdressers are a prime example of ‘everyday influencers’ on climate change, but their potential has not been fully realised.



Our research highlights the **potential for hair salons and hairdresser-client relationships to be used for public engagement with climate change** and sustainability. It is important for hairdressers to be **vocal and visible** about climate change and sustainability.



Hairdressers have unique skills for reading and engaging with diverse clients, and developing trusting, safe spaces for holding climate conversations. This includes understanding when clients may prefer not to discuss these topics.



It was not known if or how salon actions translate to client conversations and actions. We found that **climate change and sustainability conversations are already happening** in the hair salons we engaged with, and these conversations are also **somewhat influencing the mindset and behaviour of clients**.



Although many hairdressers have considerable knowledge and experience engaging with clients, there is **potential for training and development** around climate change and sustainability.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

How do sustainable hair salons in the UK engage with clients about climate change and sustainability?

Major changes are needed across society to tackle climate change. **Having conversations about climate change is key** to achieving such changes – it helps to raise awareness of issues and solutions, normalise climate action and enable people to have their say. Climate conversations happen in many circumstances but for this project, we focus on the unique setting of the hair salon.

Hair salons are widespread, have a strong connection to their local area, and are important economically and socially. At their core is the relationship they have with clients. **Yet almost no research exists which explores the relationship between hairdressers and clients through a climate or sustainability lens.**

We interviewed 30 owners and directors of sustainable salons between June and July 2024.



We identified salons that were already taking climate and/or sustainability action (mostly through membership of the [Green Salon Collective](#)). We aimed to capture a broad range of salons across the UK, including a mix of sizes and business structures.

In the interviews, owners and directors provided information about their **salon's sustainability and climate actions**.

They then discussed their **engagement with clients** on these topics, including the **content of the conversations, influence and trust**, and **wider influence**.



There were **four key findings** from the interviews which relate to clients.

1) SALONS AS SOCIAL SPACES

This finding relates to **trust, client relationships** and how **salons are a social space**. Most owners and directors spoke about characteristics which make salons unusual or influential. Appointments can be **long** and client relationships are **maintained for years**, with one stating that for long-term clients, “you know their life”.

“WE HAVE SITUATIONS [...] WHERE WE HAVE AT LEAST THREE GENERATIONS OF FAMILY, IF NOT FOUR. SO OUR LEVEL OF INFLUENCE GENERATIONALLY, AS WELL AS DEMOGRAPHICALLY, IS HUGE.”

“AN ACTUAL HOUR SAT WITH ONE PERSON HAVING A CONVERSATION – THERE’S NOT MANY OTHER INDUSTRIES THAT DO THAT.”

More than half of the owners and directors explained how **clients trust them because of their relationship** or because it’s simply **part of their role**. Salons were seen as **relaxing and intimate spaces (both physically and emotionally)**, with hairdressers viewed as a “confidante” or “counsellor”.

“CLIENTS TRUST THEIR HAIRDRESSERS, OTHERWISE THEY WOULDN’T KEEP COMING BACK TO US. IT’S AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THEM TO AIR THEIR FEELINGS AND THEIR OPINIONS IN A SAFE SPACE.”



The trusted relationship between hairdressers and clients extended to climate change and sustainability conversations. Almost all owners and directors thought **clients trusted them to talk about these topics**.

“WHEN YOU HAVE A HAIRDRESSER, YOU HAVE TO TRUST THEM ANYWAY. NO MATTER IF IT’S ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY OR ANYTHING.”

They explained that client trust on sustainability is also built by salons taking **visible action, communicating their efforts**, and **personal commitment from hairdressers**.

2) CLIENT CONVERSATIONS & 'READING CLIENTS'

Most owners and directors spoke about their ability to **'read' clients and tailor how they engage** with people accordingly, developed through years of experience. This includes quickly understanding clients' attitudes and interests.



"IT'S OUR JOB TO READ THE CLIENTS. [...] YOU CAN USUALLY TELL [BY] HOW THEY DRESS, WHAT THEY'RE WEARING. THAT SOUNDS ODD, BUT EVERYONE HAS GOT A WAY ABOUT THEM, REALLY."

"WHEN A NEW CLIENT COMES THROUGH THE DOOR, YOU'LL FISH. YOU'LL DROP LITTLE THINGS IN TO SEE WHAT PICKS UP."

The climate and sustainability topics discussed with clients **tended to relate to environmental actions the salon is taking**. Conversations are initiated by both the clients and hairdressers.

A large majority of hairdressers also have climate conversations that are not related to sustainability in hairdressing. This includes transport, shopping, food and drink, climate change as a generational issue, plants, and politics. Extreme weather and recent news also prompted conversations. Most said that **clients respond positively**, but several mentioned a lack of engagement from some clients.

Many interviewees experienced **differences in clients' engagement**. **Age was commonly mentioned**, but opinions differed on which generations were more engaged. Many said it was **down to individuals** or certain interests.

"KIDS ARE EASY. MUMS ARE EASY. TEENAGERS, IF YOU CAN GET THEM CHATTING ARE EASY. RETIRED, AS I SAID, THEY HAVE TO SEE IT ON THE ONE SHOW."

"THE OLDER CLIENTELE ARE A BIT MORE DIFFICULT. THEY'RE KIND OF SET IN THEIR WAYS. AND THE YOUNGER CLIENTELE, THEY'RE NOT READY FOR THAT. SO YOU'RE SORT OF LOOKING, THE KIND OF 25 TO 45 MARK."



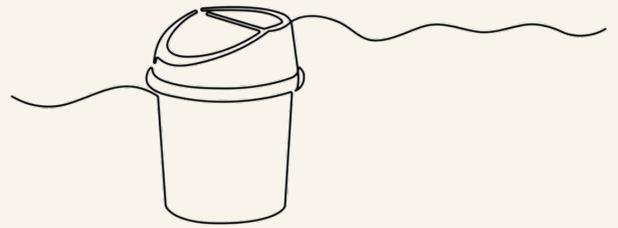
Some owners and directors were more comfortable than others in discussing climate change and sustainability or being forthright about their opinions. Some felt they should have conversations "from a no judgement point of view" whereas others felt that "sometimes you have to be honest and frank".

3) PHYSICAL ITEMS PROMPT CONVERSATIONS

Most owners and directors said that **physical salon items prompt engagement with climate change or sustainability**.

For example, **stickers** (e.g. on mirrors or doors) which were seen as conversation starters - “[they] get people chatting”. Other items that were mentioned include:

- **Posters** and **brand-provided materials**
- Unconventional **towels/gowns**
- **Eco heads** on showers
- **Recycling bins** and **refill stations**
- **Sustainability awards** won by the salon
- **Non-hair items** e.g. sustainable toilet roll, salon lighting, plants



“YOU WILL HAVE PEOPLE THAT HAVE SEEN WHAT’S ON THE BACK OF THE TOILET DOOR [POSTER] AND THEN SAY, ‘I DIDN’T REALISE HOW MUCH YOU DID’ AND TALK ABOUT IT.”

It was felt that **props helped with climate and sustainability conversations** because these topics are:

“...NOT ALWAYS SOMETHING THAT THEY [CLIENTS] WOULD NATURALLY BRING UP IF THE PROMPTS WEREN’T THERE.”

“IT’S RELEVANT BECAUSE IT’S PART OF THE SALON.”



4) INFLUENCING CLIENT BEHAVIOUR & MINDSET

Most salon owners and directors said they were **already using, or could use, their influence** with clients for climate and sustainability engagement. **But many said this influence is not being used to its full potential.**

“HAIRDRESSERS ARE MASSIVELY UNDERREPRESENTED FROM AN INFLUENCE PERSPECTIVE.”

“WE CAN INFLUENCE PEOPLE QUITE EASILY IN CONVERSATIONS AND WE CAN LEAD CONVERSATIONS A CERTAIN WAY. [...] AS AN INDUSTRY WE COULD BE A LOT BETTER AT THAT.”

Some even felt that hairdressers have a *responsibility* to use their influence for good:

“YOU SHOULD USE THAT PLATFORM FOR A BETTER CAUSE AND NOT JUST TALK ABOUT CRAP.”

Salon conversations, practices and purchases can create change, leading to clients taking up sustainable practices at home or in their own businesses. The most direct form this takes relates to hair and haircare products, but wider salon practices such as using bamboo toilet roll and having milk delivered in glass bottles were also influential.

Instances where hair salons have been able to **influence clients on climate change or sustainability topics that are not related to hair or the salon were rarer**. However, one mentioned influencing clients' banking choices, and two mentioned food.

“A COUPLE OF MY CLIENTS HAVE TAKEN RECIPES OFF ME. THAT WOULD PROBABLY BE MY MAIN THING WITH THIS MEAT FREE [INFLUENCE].”

Almost all owners and directors spoke about education and knowledge.

This is partly related to hairdressers' wider influence towards other businesses, the hairdressing industry and brands. However, interviewees also noted that climate and sustainability actions in salons tend to be led by a knowledgeable owner who then influences their hairdressers and clients.



FIND OUT MORE

This research has been published as an article in a peer-reviewed academic journal ('Humanities and Social Sciences Communications'):

[Public engagement and climate change: exploring the role of hairdressers as everyday influencers](#)

Hairdressers as everyday influencers is part of a wider project called GoZero, which investigated governance arrangements for Small- and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) decarbonisation in five sectors around the UK, including hairdressing. Hairdressing was selected due to its scale, energy intensity, and unique influence potential.

GoZero was enabled by funding from the UK Energy Research Centre Phase 4 Programme. Both researchers were affiliates of the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) when the research was conducted.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS



Dr Briony Latter is a climate change researcher in the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) at Cardiff University. Her research focuses on public engagement, the arts & culture and sport sectors, and social transformations across different sectors and scales.



Dr Sam Hampton is a researcher at the University of Bath and the Environmental Change Institute at the University of Oxford. He conducts research on engaging businesses and communities for climate action. Sam is one of the founding members of the Zero Emissions Enterprise Network (zeenetwork.co.uk).

Find out more about the researchers at: www.cast.ac.uk