April 2026 Employment Changes Effecting Salon

For brands selling direct into the professional hair industry

A commercial view of how rising employment costs will impact salon behaviour and how brands can respond to protect revenue, strengthen relationships and stay relevant.

From 1 April 2026, salons across the UK are facing another rise in employment costs, with further pressure added from the Statutory Sick Pay changes taking effect from 6th April 2026. For salon owners, this is not just a payroll issue. It affects pricing, rotas, recruitment, retention and day-to-day commercial decision-making. For brands selling into salons, it is a reminder that the more sales and education teams understand what their customers are navigating, the better they can support them.

This is not legal advice. It is a commercial market view on what is changing, what it may mean in practice, and how salons and brands can respond positively.

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The key changes from April 2026

Area	Current	New from April 2026	Difference	Practical effect on salons
National Living Wage (21+)	£11.44 per hour	£12.71 per hour	+£1.27 per hour	A full-time team member working 40 hours now costs around **£50.80 more per week** before on-costs
18-20 rate	£8.60 per hour	£10.85 per hour	+£2.25 per hour	A full-time younger team member working 40 hours now costs around **£90.00 more per week** before on-costs
16-17 rate	£6.40 per hour	£8.00 per hour	+£1.60 per hour	A junior team member working 40 hours now costs around **£64.00 more per week** before on-costs
Apprentice rate	£6.40 per hour	£8.00 per hour	+£1.60 per hour	An apprentice working 40 hours now costs around **£64.00 more per week** before on-costs
Statutory Sick Pay	Payable from day 4 for eligible employees	Payable from day 1 for eligible employees from 6 April 2026	Waiting days removed	Short-term absence may create earlier direct cost and more immediate rota pressure
Statutory Sick Pay weekly rate	£116.75 per week	£123.25 per week, or 80% of average weekly earnings if lower	+£6.50 per week at full SSP rate	Slightly higher direct sickness cost, particularly where absence levels are already difficult to manage

Why this matters for brands selling into salons

Brands do not need to become legal advisers. But they do need to understand the commercial reality their salon customers are facing.

When salons are under pressure, buying behaviour often changes. Owners may become more selective, more cautious and more focused on anything that clearly supports revenue, retention and productivity. This is where strong sales and education teams can make a real difference.

The brands that stand out will be the ones whose teams understand what salons are navigating and can respond with empathy, relevance and practical support.

A practical how-to for sales and education teams

1. Understand the pressure points

   Make sure teams know the headline changes, but also what they mean in weekly cost terms for salons employing apprentices, junior staff and larger employed teams.

2. Ask better commercial questions

   Not every salon is affected in the same way. Teams should ask thoughtful questions about staffing, footfall, pricing confidence and current priorities rather than making assumptions.

3. Adjust the conversation

   This may not be the moment for a hard push on promotions or non-essential activity. It is the moment for commercially aware conversations around revenue, retention, productivity and client loyalty.

4. Position education around outcomes

   Education teams should link training to measurable business value, such as improving consultation, boosting retail, increasing retention or helping teams work more efficiently.

5. Help salons prioritise

Support salons in focusing on what will make the biggest difference commercially. Simplicity and relevance matter more than volume.

6. Equip field teams with context

Sales and education teams should be briefed so they can speak confidently, empathetically and credibly about the pressures salons may be feeling from April onward.

What Smart Brands Will Do Next

1. Invest in Online Apprentice Training
Short, accessible learning covering:

- Consultation skills
- Retail confidence
- Product knowledge in real scenarios

Not just *how to use products* but how to **sell them**.

2. Create Structured Education Pathways

- Entry-level certification programmes
- “First-year stylist” journeys
- Clear development frameworks

Early-stage education builds long-term loyalty.

3. Focus on Retail Conversion Training
Teach teams:

- How to recommend naturally
- How to link service to product
- How to increase average spend

This delivers immediate commercial value to salons.

4. Deliver Commercial Education

Support salons with:

- Understanding KPIs
- Pricing confidence
- Client retention strategies
- Business performance metrics

Brands that teach business not just hair become true partners.

5. Provide Practical Tools

Make implementation easy:

- Retail scripts
- Consultation frameworks
- Apprentice service menus
- Pricing guidance

Simplicity drives adoption.

What brands should brief their sales and education teams on

- Salons are likely to be facing increased weekly wage costs from April
- Apprentice and junior wage changes may hit some salons particularly hard
- SSP changes from 6 April 2026 may add further short-term cost and rota pressure
- Salon owners may be more cautious on spend, stock and training commitments
- Teams should ask better commercial questions rather than make assumptions
- Conversations should focus on support, relevance and practical value
- Education should be positioned around revenue, retention and performance outcomes
- Strong partnership language matters more than a pure sales message

What this means for salons

For many salons, the issue is not simply that wages are going up. It is that several cost pressures are landing at the same time. Teams still need to be retained, service standards need protecting, and owners are already balancing margin pressure, recruitment challenges and cautious consumer spending.

The weekly increase matters because it turns a headline wage rise into a practical business number. A salon with multiple employed stylists, assistants or apprentices could see payroll costs move quickly, especially once National Insurance, pension contributions and other on-costs are factored in.

This is why salons need to treat these changes as a planning issue rather than a last-minute compliance exercise.

A practical how-to for salons

1. Review the real weekly cost increase

    Map the wage changes across every employed team member. Do not just look at hourly rates in isolation. Calculate the weekly increase by role so you can see where the biggest pressure points sit.

2. Reforecast payroll and margin

    Update weekly and monthly forecasts now. Look at what these changes mean for break-even, service profitability and cash flow over the next quarter.

3. Assess pricing and productivity

    If costs are rising, salons may need to review pricing, appointment structure, utilisation and retail performance. The goal is not to react emotionally, but to protect margin in a measured way.

4. Check apprentice planning carefully

    The apprentice increase is significant. Salons should make sure apprentice pay is compliant, training is structured and the commercial contribution of junior team members is being developed properly.

5. Prepare for day-one SSP

    From 6 April 2026, sickness absence may affect payroll from day one rather than day four. Review absence policies, manager guidance and rota contingency plans now.

6. Brief managers early

    Salon managers need to understand both the legal change and the commercial impact. They are often the people handling rota changes, team concerns and day-to-day morale.

7. Use the moment to support retention

    Handled well, this can also be a positive message to teams. Planning ahead shows professionalism, care and stability.

What salons can do now

- Review payroll costs immediately, including wage and apprentice increases
- Reforecast weekly and monthly staffing costs
- Check whether pricing, service times or rotas need adjusting
- Make sure apprentice pay and training plans are compliant and commercially structured
- Prepare for the SSP changes taking effect from 6 April 2026
- Review absence policies and manager guidance
- Brief salon managers on likely team questions and concerns
- Use forward planning as part of your retention message to staff

My thought's

This is one of those moments where market awareness matters. Salons need to plan early and commercially. Brands need teams that understand the pressure their customers are under. The more informed those conversations are, the stronger the relationships will be.

The market is shifting, and with it, the expectations salons have of the brands they work with.

This is not just about navigating cost increases. It is about how brands position themselves, how their teams engage and how effectively they support salons commercially.

The businesses that get this right will strengthen relationships, increase loyalty and drive growth even in a more challenging environment.

And in my experience, that starts with having the right people, in the right roles, delivering the right conversations.

If you are currently reviewing your team, structure or approach to the market, I am always open to a conversation to share what I am seeing across the industry.

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