

Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

Page 2: About you

Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

on behalf of an organisation

Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose "Member of the public".)

No Response

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

Representative organisation (trade union, professional association)

Please choose one of the following; if you choose the first option, please provide your name or the name of your organisation as you wish it to be published.

I am content for this response to be attributed to me or my organisation

Please insert your name or the name of your organisation. If you choose the first option above, this should be the name as you wish it to be published. If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

Robert Gordon University Students' Union

Please provide details of a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number. We will not publish these details.

Page 7: Your views on the proposal

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Fully Supportive

Please explain the reasons for your response

Q1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill?

Periods are a difficult part of being a female, add to that financial issues and you find a relatively large problem with access. There are many reasons why this issue has not been openly discussed previously, with stigma probably being number one. In considering our gender balance at the top of government and other decision-making bodies, it's not surprising periods have been a taboo subject. Similarly, there's a lot of work to be done to get women talking about periods - what's normal, how your cycle can change, how your flow/symptoms can change over time. I do think that this would go a long way to opening up these conversations as it sends out a strong "it's okay" message. I can fully understand the longer-term impact of not being able to access sanitary products. The most important from our perspective is the health and wellbeing of our students. Without healthy students, their education is adversely affected. There are well publicised consequences of not taking care of yourself during menstruation and I believe not being able to access sanitary products is only the tip of that iceberg. In considering the average woman will experience 68 menstruating days per year, that's a lot of education potentially missed by students. Now, consider externally accredited courses where students have a minimum attendance. If that student was struggling to purchase sanitary products they may have no choice but to miss classes. This could result in them eventually failing their course. Similarly, if a student decides to purchase products over food or heat for one week, the impact on their concentration will be huge. I absolutely cannot understate the importance of being able to access the most basic of women's needs. I realise the majority of people won't even consider the wider-reaching consequences of being unable to access sanitary products, but as a students' union in a HEI, we see all of this. As a Student Union, we understand the need for equality and diversity in our student population. In recent years, both ourselves and the institution have placed higher importance on transsexual and LGBT+ students than we have in the past. It's incredibly important that these people are considered in this Bill and by government. They are human, they are invariably going through a very difficult time emotionally and physically without the added worry of periods, they are still commonly shamed by society. I recently saw an article regarding trans women who experience menstrual symptoms without any bleeding. Speaking as an individual, I cannot imagine the torture of having to use the female bathroom in order to access the sanitary bins when I identify as a male. Although this is a slightly separate issue, I feel these conversations will be opened up by offering free sanitary products. In sum, menstruation is a fact of life. It happens and is incredibly uncomfortable for the majority of women. Why are we making this more difficult?

Page 8: Universal provision of sanitary products

Q2. Do you think a universal, card-based system (modelled on the c-card system for free condoms) would be an effective means of providing sanitary products for free to those who need them?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response

I believe this system would be effective, however in my understanding the c-card is only for 13-24 year olds, whereas for sanitary products it would have to be unrestricted. A choice of products is essential, under no circumstances should anyone be dictating what type of product someone wishes to use. It would be brilliant to see more use of reusable products, however I'm not sure whether this system would be best for that. While they work out cheaper over their lifetime, they are an expensive outlay and are likely to be unsustainable for free. The basic need here is for one-use products. I also believe we have a very long way to go in creating more awareness of reusable products before people will be comfortable and confident in using them.

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a card-based system?

The card should be available to anyone; its use should be restricted (e.g. by limiting the number of products that may be claimed each month)

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Uses should be restricted to minimise the risk of individuals taking a large number of products and selling them on: at the Union, we have free condoms of varying sizes and we have witnessed them being sold on in

Q3. Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a card-based system?

nightclub toilets, by the individual who came in to collect them. We now issue a small bag of condoms only. this does not have a direct impact on us because we get free condoms from NHS Grampian, but believe it's wrong to be making money from an NHS product. In considering sanitary products will not be free for the company/charity with the dispenser, this could be a huge issue. We also don't believe it should be limited to those on low incomes or benefits because we have a number of students accessing our discretionary fund or emergency loan at the university. This is from the institution's money and therefore students wouldn't be eligible for the scheme. Similarly, the majority of students are on a low income - working part-time (around 16 hours) usually for minimum wage. This would put them all in the bracket, but there may also be full-time workers studying for a postgraduate course part-time who are struggling to make ends meet. Overall, we believe that restrictions placed on who can access products would be discriminatory and factors may not be wholly representative of a persons financial position.

Q4. Do you have a view on which locations would be most suitable for dispensing free sanitary products (e.g. GP surgeries, pharmacies, community centres, health clinics)?

I absolutely believe these are the correct places for them to be. I would also suggest any other space used regularly by the public but is discreet. It's really important that any location is discreet, especially when considering the discussion about stigma.

Page 11: Schools, colleges and universities

Q5. Do you agree that there should be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free (via dispensers in toilets)?

Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response

I would absolutely expect schools to make products available for free. For College and University, I have a slightly less expectation for this but fully support the idea. RGU:Union took part in the pilot by CFINE and we currently have 44 students on the pilot. Three of these students said they had been unable to purchase sanitary products in the past and had used some of the other methods mentioned in the consultation paper such as toilet roll. You could say this is only three of over 40 students - however, should those people have to be in this position as a full-time student? I refer back to my comments about the impact on education. We did however, have a larger proportion of participants experiencing financial difficulty, but have always found money to purchase sanitary products - but at what cost? food? heat? travel to campus? some would be shocked to hear that in the university sector, we do have students who struggle to purchase products because we are often viewed as 'elite' and at least middle-class for attending university in the first place. In a country like Scotland where HE is free, financial position doesn't impact choice highly, thus we have a good number of students in financial problems. I would make note that HE and FE institutions are already struggling with the extra burdens placed on them financially in recent years. If this was to go ahead, I would urge the SFC and therefore the Scottish government to consider the financial implication of this and adjust funding appropriately.

Page 12: Personal experience (questions 6 and 7 are for individual respondents only)

Q6. Have you ever struggled to access or afford sanitary products during menstruation? (e.g. financial barriers, unexpected circumstances, health issues)

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No

Q7. If sanitary products were available for free, which of the following would apply to you?

I would expect to claim free products occasionally

Please explain the reasons for your response

I'm unlikely to claim free sanitary products because I do not feel I am in a financial position to need this and I am not taking part in the pilot myself. Some months are harder than others however, so there may be times where I would use it to give myself a little room in the budget.

Page 14: Financial implications

Q8. Taking account of both costs and potential savings, what financial impact would you expect the proposed Bill to have on:

	Significant increase in cost	Some increase in cost	Broadly cost-neutral	Some reduction in cost	Significant reduction in cost	Unsure
(a) Government and the public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS)	X					
(b) Colleges and universities		X				
(c) Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products)						X
(d) Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products)				X		

Q9. Are there ways in which the Bill could achieve its aim more cost-effectively (e.g. by reducing costs or increasing savings)?

No Response

Page 16: Equalities

Q10. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation?

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Slightly positive

Please explain the reasons for your response

We believe equality would benefit from this Bill, especially gender-reassignment. I would hope that some of the issues outlined in the consolidation paper are addressed using this Bill as a vehicle for a wider change of culture in some religious groups and race.

Q11. In what ways could any negative impact of the proposed Bill on equality be minimised or avoided?

Publicity must be considered carefully. I have seen much backlash through online discussions regarding free sanitary products. Many believe that although it is a necessity for those with female organs, it should not be free. One comment I saw said that razors are a necessity for men to shave their faces so they should also be free, as should toothbrushes etc. I believe this argument is flawed as one of the key drivers of this Bill is around the health and wellbeing of people. It is not appropriate to substitute sanitary products, hygiene is essential here and can cause death at the extreme.

PR around gender-neutral toilets has been very mixed and even linked to certain political ideologies. I reject this because we are all human and should be allowed to be comfortable being who we want to be. There's even lots of good science backing trans people. So, in using this as an example of where publicity has not gone so well, this must be handled properly by everyone involved - not just the Scottish parliament.

As mentioned earlier, if colleges and university have to provide this service, their SFC funding should be reviewed.

Page 18: Sustainability

Q12. Do you consider that the proposed Bill can be delivered sustainably i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?

Yes

Page 19: General

Q13. Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposal?

No Response