

Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

Page 2: About you

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

an individual

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".)

Academic with expertise in a relevant subject

Please select the category which best describes your organisation

No Response

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 If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

Natalie Moffat

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?

The fact that sanitary products are not freely accessible when items like condoms are reflects and reinforces entrenched sexism in our society. Menstruation is a process surrounded with silence and shame that women, from an early age, learn to secretly manage and not draw anyone's attention to. This, I feel, has contributed to the fact that - until very recently - no one really problematised why it is that sanitary products are taxed and why it is that they are not freely accessible in public toilets when we take the free provision of toilet paper as a given. Secretly managing menstruation entails a lot of hard work and problems can arise in terms of access to sanitary products in public spaces and access to sanitary products full stop for those living in poverty which can make menstrual management incredibly difficult. As a result of this, girls can be forced to hide their menstruation by skipping school and stuffing toilet roll in their underwear; homeless women may be forced to resort to using dirty rags to absorb blood. This is unacceptable. Menstruation needs to be accepted and normalised. Everyone who menstruates deserves free access to sanitary products as they are essential for facilitating one's full inclusion in public life. Having sanitary products freely available is also an important step towards destigmatising menstruation and realising ideological and material gender equality in our society.

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 think this is a good way to implement free provision of sanitary products as it can make them accessible to anyone who needs. But I also think that additional measures should be taken, such as having free sanitary products in school and university toilets.

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

The card should be available to anyone; card-holders should have unlimited access to free sanitary products

Please explain the reasons for your response.

I think it should be the right of anyone who menstruates to have access to free sanitary products. I also think that some difficulties may arise in terms of monitoring who meets eligibility criteria (how poor must you be?) and the amount of sanitary products given (people's flows can greatly differ and one person's flow may not be the same every month). I think having this as an option for everyone is the fairest and easiest way to implement this. Many will not choose to use it (as is the case with accessing free condoms) if they prefer to purchase the brands they like and can afford to do so but everyone deserves the choice. I think it's an important ideological step against sexism to say that no one should have to pay for having a period.

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 think GP surgeries, pharmacies, community centres and health clinics are all suitable locations for dispensing sanitary products and they should be made available in more than one location (perhaps all of these is possible) so that they are as accessible as possible for everyone.

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

Accessing sanitary products in public spaces is very difficult and can leave people stuck if they are unprepared. There are enormous oversights in terms of catering for women's needs in public spaces which symbolically and materially excludes them. Having sanitary products freely available in the toilets in educational institutional not only makes life easier for women and girls but is an important step towards normalising mensuration and accepting female bodies in these institutions which have historically excluded them.

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)

Yes, occasionally

Please explain or give an example of your experience if you feel able to do so.

Fortunately, I have always been able to buy sanitary products but I have experienced problems in terms of accessing sanitary products in public spaces, having to ask other women for a tampon.

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 think that everyone who menstruates should be entitled to claim free sanitary products as they are absolutely essential. Although I have always been able to buy sanitary products, I'm not well off (having been a full-time student for four years and coming from a low income family) and knowing that sanitary products are freely available will be a big help. However, I may still buy them sometimes if I am able to, would like to, and if doing so is more convenient for me at any time. I understand that I am in a more privileged position than many to still have this option.

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		x				

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

public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS)						
(b) Colleges and universities		X				
(c) Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products)			X			
(d) Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products)					X	

Please explain the reasons for your response

For public sector agencies (such as NHS services) and colleges and universities who will now be obligated to provide free sanitary products, this will cost them a bit; however, I doubt it would be a significant amount they would be unable to afford. Suppliers of sanitary products may experience a drop in sales meaning that they need to reduce the price in their products slightly to keep on top of competition; however, I highly doubt they will be affected much as I'm sure people will continue to buy from them and they have a lot of money and great influence not just in Scotland but worldwide. Sanitary products are only one item retailers sell so I don't think they will be affected. Individuals who use sanitary products will greatly benefit from having them freely available. Something so essential should not be so expensive and the fact that some women living in poverty have to choose between sanitary towels and food is completely unacceptable. This initiative has the power to really help people in this situation.

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

I don't feel like I have enough knowledge about economics to comment on this I'm afraid. However, perhaps to start, the money people have had to spend due to the VAT on sanitary products could be used to obtain sanitary products to be freely provided?

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?

Positive

Please explain the reasons for your response

This Bill has the potential to make a very positive impact in terms of gender equality as it will serve to normalise a central aspect of female embodiment which has been surrounded with silence and shame and help to facilitate women's full inclusion in public life on a symbolic and material level. Although menstruation is strongly associated with women, it is not just women who menstruate. Sanitary products must also be made freely available to female bodied individuals who identify somewhere under the transgender umbrella who menstruate, including in male and gender neutral toilets. This would be an important step towards gender equality for those who do not identify within the binary and raise awareness of the fact that it is just 'women' who menstruate. In terms of the other protected characteristics, absolutely anyone who menstruates should have free and easy access to sanitary products. Having that as an option for them can be nothing, I see, but a

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great benefit.

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

Any negative impact could be avoided by giving anyone who menstruates equal access to sanitary products.

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

Please explain the reasons for your response:

I don't think this will cost so much as to have a great economic impact, I think - if done with consideration - this Bill can have nothing but positive social impacts, and the implementation of this Bill will not lead to significantly more people using sanitary products (the majority of people would have been using purchased sanitary products) so I don't think there will be a significant increase in the environmental damage caused by sanitary products. Recyclable sanitary products also exist and are being developed which could be an option.

Page 19: General

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

No, I think the previous questions have allowed me to express my opinions and I'm very excited about this Bill.