

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 If you choose the second or third option, a name is still required, but it will not be published.

Dr Camilla Mørk Røstvik, University of St Andrews

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?

Partially supportive

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

Please explain the reasons for your response

The bill correctly surveys the current taboo and complicated status of menstruation in Scotland (and most of the Western world) today. It proposes an excellent idea which would improve the lives of menstruators financially and practically, as well as, potentially culturally. However, the bill does not cover how it would work with commercial partners, who these partners would be, and the potential pitfalls of this system. The bill compares its central idea with that of the C-card/condom project, but this is not an entirely fair comparison. Whereas condoms have one purpose (preventing pregnancy), menstrual products are more complicated and varied. For example, menstrual non-reusable products (tampons and pads) have been given out in Schools in England as part of sex education for a while, which campaigners like Chella Quint have pointed to as very problematic due to the 'product placement' undercurrent of such collaborations. To start school children off with non-reusable products creates a life-long customer for the menstrual product brand, and has been proven to put off older menstruators from trying reusable options. This is not to say that reusable options are the end-goal, but they must not be undermined by the non-reusable market which has radically different intentions with its customer group than those creating products (like reusable pads and cups) that may last for over 10 years. The bill should make a stronger point about providing information about all the menstrual product options at an early stage, ideally alongside some history of menstruation. If not, the end goal (ending period shame as well as poverty) will not shift. Menstrual product companies and advertisers have a long history of engaging cleverly with governments, education and menstruators, from co-opting feminist messages to working in collaboration with NGOs. This can be seen as a good thing, but it is also a part of a financial strategy for the brands. The bill could be improved by suggesting which companies will be working with the Scottish government, and ensuring that the big brands (ex Bodyform) do not over-run the smaller, more eco-friendly alternatives (ex Mooncup) who have far less marketing power and influence. Furthermore, neutral packaging should be considered for products aimed towards younger users, to avoid product placement in the lives of young people. Inviting and paying menstrual companies to effectively advertise in schools must be considered as part of a negative spin-off effect of this Bill. In summary, the bill is excellent and important, but it needs to critically consider the commercial interests involved. The Bill correctly acknowledges the taboos of menstruation, but it also needs to consider that it is the history of products, advertising and companies that is in part to blame (there is an extensive and growing literature showing this, as well as anecdotal evidence). The bill has a strong message of equality and progression at its heart, but it must consider how menstrual product companies might make strange bed fellows for this aim. If the aim is to end period poverty ONLY, this Bill is already perfect. If the aim is to end period shame, pain and stigma ALSO, it must have a more critical relationship to the commercial ramifications. I would suggest that the Bill is timely and important, and must not be slowed down. I would also suggest that the Bill is backed up by further government policies about menstruation that deal with the wider cultural and societal issues connected to this evermonth taboo, for example including the history of menstruation in sex ed or history at school level, ensuring that reusable products are a realistic alternative, and providing clear information and guidance about menstruation for all.

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

Yes, but this must be accompanied by a choice of products and information about how to use them. The bill did not explain how the choice of manufacturers was made regarding condoms, but this needs to be made very clear in the case of menstruation because the products vary a great deal more than condoms.

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

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

Please explain the reasons for your response.

I believe that the card should be available to anyone, with unlimited access. However, I wonder how the product companies would respond to this and what they would want in return. Giving up a solid market like menstruators would come with strings (no pun intended) attached. This option could effectively end the hold products and advertising has on menstruators, but what would be the incentive for brands to create more and (much needed) better products? A decision like this needs to be carefully thought through in terms of the relationship with business, but if the suggestion is to nationalize these products it would be a radical and important step on the way to freeing menstruators from the commercial grip of big pharma and business.

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)?

Menstruators bleed everywhere; so everywhere! Why should this be medicalized via GPS and pharmacies? This needs to be in place where the products are, and at any time. Schools, work HR offices, health clinics, sports centres, community centres, post office (for small villages), town halls, food banks, universities and colleges, and via online orders.

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

Yes, as long as this involves a range of good products and not just the typical old-fashioned non-reusable pads in one size or a 10-year old tampon.

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

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

I would expect to claim free products occasionally

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)?

A focus on reusable options would mean that menstruators would need less products.

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

Anything we can do to combat period poverty and stigma is positive. Research has shown this consistently for over a century. This issue affects women most, and it must therefore be considered under the Equality Act.

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

A frank and open discussion with sanitary product providers about what their stake is in all of this. And a clear goal from the government about what they want with this intervention long-term: to end period poverty only or/and to end period shame.

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?

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Yes

Please explain the reasons for your response:

Yes, if there is a focus on re-usable products.

Page 19: General

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

No Response