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Janet Finch-Saunders AM
Chair
Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

By email to: SeneddPetitions@assembly.wales

11th December 2019

Dear Ms Finch-Saunders,

Thank you for your letter of 18 November about Petition P-05-863 Call on the Welsh Government to provide free sanitary products to all women in low income households.

The information you requested is set out at Annex A of this letter. I hope this provides the Petitions Committee with sufficient clarity of the Scottish Government's delivery of access to free period products in education settings and targeted support for low income households. Should you require further information on these matters, please do not hesitate to either contact me again or make direct contact with policy officials by emailing [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or by telephone on [REDACTED]

AILEEN CAMPBELL



ACCESS TO FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS IN SCOTLAND

Access in education settings

Overview

The Scottish Government has taken world leading action to fund access to free period products for those attending schools, colleges and universities. We have invested £5.2 million in financial year 2018/19, and up to £5.5 million in 2019/20, to provide access to period products for almost 400,000 school pupils and students.

Background

In our Programme for Government 2017/18, the Scottish Government committed to *“introduce a scheme to fund access to free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities and consider action to support those on low incomes, but not in education”*.

We have delegated responsibility to local authorities and educational establishments to shape delivery in line with local need. However, prior to implementation, we agreed a set of Guiding Principles to underpin delivery with our Access to Free Sanitary Products Working Group (attached at Annex B).

Schools

This has led to a variety of models being implemented in schools, both across different local authority areas and, in some cases where local authorities have delegated delivery to individual schools, within the same local authority area. There are a range of models including:

- Boxes and baskets of products available in school toilets
- Bags of products hanging inside toilet cubicles
- Introduction of free dispensers both in communal toilets and in individual toilets
- Free Period boxes in a range of classrooms around the school
- Peer distribution

The most effective and innovative delivery models are those that have been developed in close consultation with pupils and/or are pupil-led. From the outset we have cautioned against requiring pupils to access products from a member of staff as this does not meet our Guiding Principles. While this may be a more appropriate route for delivery in primary schools, we know from anecdotal evidence that secondary pupils are likely to feel embarrassment at having to ask staff for products and this may negatively impact on uptake. As feedback suggests that this is still happening in a small number of places, the Scottish Government will work to spread good practice and increase standards.

Colleges and universities

Within further and higher education institutions, where products are being made available to students on campus, the majority of institutions are providing free period products in student

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toilets accessible from storage containers, lockers or free vending machines. Other delivery routes include:

- Free period products at various pick-up points on campus, including from a 'shop front' collection point, student shop, student association offices, and campus reception desks.
- Ordering systems, e.g. one college was operating an ordering system where each student living on campus was given an order form as part of their welcome pack offering them free period products that would be replenished on a weekly basis when rooms were serviced by housekeeping.
- Free period products being placed in their student crisis food parcels.

A number of colleges and universities have put in place special arrangements to provide access to free period products for part-time students or distance learners. Arrangements for part-time students involved reminding students where they could access free products on campus, the distribution of products to outreach centres, the availability of a grant to distance learners upon application to student services, allowing distance learners to request a bulk supply of products, and preparing packs for collection on campus.

Holiday provision

The policy in education settings also encourages local authorities, colleges and universities to provide access to free products during non-term time. Some local authorities are making products available for pupils in non-school settings during school holidays and weekends such as in libraries, youth centres and community centres. As with delivery models, one local authority has a range of holiday provision in place, and a variety of methods were used to promote wide uptake e.g. assemblies, text messaging, PSE lessons, social media updates, special meetings and posters:

- Some schools buildings are open during school holidays and so they're able to ensure continued availability of products
- Schools made up packs of products for pupils to take away
- Schools promoted the opportunity for pupils to help themselves to stock of products beyond what they needed at a particular time

Among the further and higher education institutions providing access to sanitary products outside of term-time, the majority reported that students could access free sanitary products in campus buildings during the holidays. Other arrangements included preparing packs for students in advance of the holidays, encouraging students to "stock up" to cover requirements during the holidays, and operating systems to allow students to request products in bulk in advance of the holidays or place online orders during the holidays.

Impact

We are currently evaluating this policy after a full year of delivery and will publish a report of our findings in Spring 2020. Young Scot has also conducted a follow-up survey to one it carried out in December 2017/January 2018. The findings of the original survey can be accessed at: <https://tinyurl.com/w5ksd7d>. The publication of the results of the second survey is currently scheduled for late January 2020. However, the emerging findings indicate that the policy is having a positive impact, and this is borne out by the case studies we have captured to date.

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An S6 pupil from Argyll and Bute said *'Having pads and tampons available in the toilets is really positive, I've overheard lots of girls talking about how handy it is. I think it normalises periods, which is really important; people aren't as embarrassed about them and it's taken away the stress and anxiety from not being able to get the products that they need. I know a few people who weren't coming in when they had their period because they didn't have stuff at home and now they can get it here they are coming in more.'*

We are also seeing behaviour and culture change as a result.

'It is important for boys to learn about periods too. It is about respect. There was a girl who had a problem with her period, some of the boys were laughing but another one gave her his hoodie and went with her to guidance to help. Boys understand more since we have had free period products in school, we have had assemblies for boys as well as girls to talk about periods. The more boys understand the more respectful they will be' (Pupil, S2, Dundee)

Targeted support to low income households

Background

Building on a successful pilot in Aberdeen in 2017 which recruited 1,070 people, we expanded access to period products to low income families through third sector partners via the food redistribution charity FareShare, and are providing around £1 million across 2018-20 to FareShare to deliver this.

As part of our wider work to increase access to products, we sought an approach that would reach the greatest numbers of those most in need. From existing work with them to help tackle food insecurity, we were aware that FareShare have a unique network of third sector organisations across Scotland that are trusted within their respective communities, as well as the infrastructure required to transport goods across Scotland, making them the ideal partner for this work.

Delivery

FareShare has distributed a range of free period products to those on low incomes through its network of community organisations. FareShare has partnered with Boots and the Scottish companies Hey Girls and Unicorn Cups to increase the variety and range of products provided as well as make a range of reusable environmentally friendly products available. Products are available in a variety of settings people on low incomes are comfortable accessing, including community cafes, community centres, food banks, refuges, and youth centres.

A community development worker in each of its four redistribution centres coordinate the service and provide education and training to community groups. The community development workers have worked in partnership with Hey Girls to learn together and plan their approach to training for community organisations. Organisations that receive products have been encouraged to run period workshops for their service users to open up conversations about menstruation, breaking down some of the stigma around periods. The workshops also make reusable period products available to participants.

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Impact

FareShare reported in April 2019 that it had reached approximately 600 charities and over 35,000 people – almost double their initial target. By comparing the post codes of the organisations it is supplying products to through standard measures of deprivation, FareShare reports that 36% of these organisations are within the top 20% of deprived areas.

The community development workers describe significant positive outcomes as a result of this initiative. Free period products have helped reduce household costs, allowing low income families to put money towards other essential items such as food, clothing and toiletries. Free products have also helped tackle social isolation among some service users, giving them confidence to go about their lives as normal while on their periods, and anxiety and stress associated with not being able to access adequate period protection has been reduced, improving the wellbeing of beneficiaries. There are also environmental benefits from people opting to switch to using reusable products.

People benefitting from the initiative have said:

“I have a heavy period and go through a lot of sanitary pads. This costs quite a bit of money and reduces what I can spend on food that week for me and my kids. Getting free products has been a godsend and a weight off financially when we are already struggling on benefits.”

“It’s been great to get this stuff for free, I have a teenage daughter also to buy for and we don’t have a lot of income, especially with our money being cut, its helped take a bit of financial stress of our monthly shopping bill not having to buy sanitary products for two.”

“I wasn’t leaving the house on the week I had my heavy period because I couldn’t afford the amount of sanitary products I required so had to stay in. This is a lifesaver for me getting out.”

General support for low income families

In January 2019, we announced funding of a further £4 million for local authorities to significantly increase the number and range of places where free period products are available for those who need them. Similar to the initiative in schools, it is for individual local authorities to decide what works best in their area, delivering to respond to local need and circumstances. The main intent of this commitment is tackling poverty. However local authorities have been asked to consider wider need, to address the overarching gender equality and dignity issues that affect all of those who menstruate, regardless of income.

Working with their Community Planning Partners, local authorities across Scotland are making free products generally available in locations such as council buildings, museums and libraries, sports and leisure centres, places of worship, community centres, town halls, and GP practices and health centres.

For those for whom affordability of period products is an issue, some local authorities are undertaking targeted distribution through organisations that work closely with those in particular need and who are less likely to be able to access universal provisions, including those engaging with the criminal justice system, care experienced young people, victims of gender violence, young mums, and vulnerable families.

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ACCESS TO FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS IN SCOTLAND

ORIGINAL GUIDING PRINCIPLES¹ AND Q&A

Statement of Purpose

The Scottish Government has committed to providing access to free sanitary products to students in schools, colleges and universities to support equality, dignity and rights for those who menstruate and to ensure that lack of access to products does not impact on an individual's ability to fully participate in education at all levels.

Guiding Principles

The delivery model should be based on:

- **Protecting students' dignity**, avoiding anxiety, embarrassment and stigma
- Making a range of products and different qualities available, giving students **choice** about the products they want to use;
- A response that is **reflective of students' views and experiences**;
- An efficient and dignified approach which demonstrates **value for money**;
- An **offer** for all eligible students throughout the year regardless of whether it is term time or holidays
- Ensuring sanitary products are easily accessible to **meet individual needs**;
- Individuals being able to get sufficient products to **meet their needs**;
- **Gender equality**, ensuring anyone who menstruates can access products, including transgender men/non-binary individuals, and that language is gender neutral. The roll out of gender neutral toilets should also be taken account of.
- **Awareness raising and education** to both promote the 'offer' and change cultural norms

Eligibility

Students in publicly-funded secondary schools², colleges and universities³ and in secondary years in independent schools

Q and A

1. Should provision be made for non-domiciled students if they return to their home country during the holidays?

Yes, however the response for such students should be proportionate and deliver value for money. For example, mailing products monthly outwith the UK would not be value for

¹ Note these have been adapted for non-education settings

² For the purpose of calculating budgets a pro-rata allowance for girls in primary schools will be included and the expectation is that proportionate local solutions should be found for delivery in primary schools

³ Individuals (including non-domiciled students) considered by a publicly funded college or university to be a registered student (full or part-time) and primarily based in Scotland for their programme of study - *including* those based in Scotland on distance learning programmes but *excluding* those where the programme of study is primarily or wholly outside of Scotland

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money, however putting in place provision for 'holiday packs' for students to take away with them would be a potential solution.

2. Are home schooled students eligible?

The commitment in Programme for Government extends to students in schools, however we expect Local Authorities to take account of their home schooled population in considering delivery models. For example they should ensure that the provision which is put in place for access at weekends and during the holidays is also accessible to home schooled children.

3. Are reusable products included in the definition of 'free sanitary products'?

Scottish Government support the principle of reusable sanitary products on both value for money and environmental grounds. We expect that as partners are developing local delivery plans that they consider how they intend to make reusable products available for those who wish to use them. This should be considered as part of wider delivery and may vary from sector to sector.

4. Are apprentices within the eligible population?

The PfG commitment is for students at schools, colleges and universities therefore apprentices registered as students at publicly funded colleges are within the eligible population.

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