

Local Government and Communities Committee

Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

Scottish Youth Parliament Workshop 7th sitting

Members of the Local Government and Communities Committee attended the Scottish Youth Parliament's workshop on period products which was held at Dunfermline High School on Sunday 27 October 2019. The event was well attended and comprised three elements (1) A Flipchart discussion, (2) A Walking debate and (3) An informal round table discussion on a number of questions to inform the Committee's scrutiny of the Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Bill.

Flipchart discussion

Participants took part in a flip chart discussion where they wrote comments and shared views on the following two questions.

Question 1

What is your experience of existing schemes for free period products across schools, colleges and universities and other public bodies? Comments included:

- No sustainable options are available
- Some young people don't know how to access products in schools
- Hey Girls packs are provided by Orkney Council and are welcome. Young people had asked the school to remove the branded packaging and the school refused because of hygiene reasons.
- The quality is not consistent across schools and has not always been good enough
- There was concerns raised that the products were often of poor quality
- Products are now provided in sports centres but are 'shocking'
- Need more variety of products, different sizes for different 'flows'.
- They should be available in all bathrooms not just girls
- Some pupils had to go through their head teacher who provided envelopes with products but they still had to ask for them and this was not ideal
- Some young people in the schools had set up a "period club" and taken leadership and ownership, making up bags full of products, for heavy to medium flows, leaving the bags in toilets and available for people to take home in the holidays.
- Products should be provided during the holiday period as well as school/college terms

Question 2

Have these schemes had any impacts either positive or negative on young people with protected characteristics so disabled LGBT, religious or ethnic minority background young people or young people or women or girls? Comments included:

- Products should be available in male bathrooms
- Is awkward for trans and non binary people to access products

- Packaging on the products should be inclusive as there are lots which only use the Venus symbol, should use inclusive language 'people who menstruate'
- More needs to be done to educate people who don't menstruate
- The availability is a positive thing as students are more confident and have one less thing to worry about
- Some schools have introduced a card system and if they wish to go to the bathroom they just need to show the card and they are allowed to leave class without making further comment.

Walking debate

Participants then took part in a walking debate. Yes and No cards were placed at either end of the room and members decided where on the spectrum to stand depending on their personal views to the following questions.

Question 3

The Bill should allow the Scottish Government to require organisations other than schools and colleges to provide free period products. Do you support this?

There was overwhelming support for this. Graham asked members for their views and these were that products should be available widely to accommodate for periods starting unexpectedly. Many felt that providing period products was simply an extension of a duty of care that schools and colleges already have for their students. A couple of members felt the bill was too vague and should be specific about where products should be made available. One thought the SG should be responsible for the funding of all provision even where provision is made within private organisations.

Question 4

Should there be a legal requirement on organisations to provide free period products?

There was overwhelming support for this. Members felt that SG via councils should fund the provision.

Question 5

Are you in favour of reusable products being made available in addition to or as an alternative to products currently available?

There was overwhelming support for this but reusable products should be available in addition to not as an alternative to the products which are current available.

Examples of reusable products - washable sanitary pads, period pants, menstrual cups and sustainable products such as plastic free disposables were available for the group to look at and discuss and Graham asked (1) if the products were familiar and (2) how easy products were to get hold of

- Most of the group were familiar with some of the reusable products like the menstrual cup. Comments included:

- Menstrual cups are made from silicon and some people are allergic. These are also not suitable for people with endometriosis
- They should be available in addition to not as an alternative
- Some people simply prefer disposable pads or tampons so these should continue to be available
- It is good to encourage people to use sustainable products
- Reusable products may not be suitable for young people as using them for the first time could be quite intimidating
- There are potential hygiene issues around reusable products
- They should be heavily promoted alongside traditional products so more people try the products and protect the environment
- Access is difficult as the reusable products are not widely available and most have to be purchased online. There is some limited availability in chemists/supermarkets but products are also potentially of limited suitability, ie there is not a wide enough range available.
- Products are also expensive and this puts people off trying them as if they are not suitable then they have wasted the money perhaps £20-£30
- It is difficult to find the reusable products that suit and the expense of buying several until you find the right one can put people off trying them at all

Blue sky thinking discussion

The Bill requires the setting up of a scheme to provide products and participants were asked how best they felt the “scheme” should operate and what elements it should include. General comments included:

- That products should be available in schools/colleges, all public buildings and sports clubs
- That a registration scheme would create a barrier which would make it difficult for people to access and many could not see the point of this additional process
- This was related to issues with people registering online for Universal Credit and how it ‘doesn’t work for the people who need it most.’
- If registration was required, this should be online but also on paper as some people don’t have access to the internet.
- The suggestion of the C-Card scheme was not widely supported and would create a barrier
- Pick up points were suggested
- Members felt that a delivery service of some kind should be in place so that disabled people or those who could not afford to travel to access products

Voucher Scheme

- Needs to be unlimited
- Some suggestions to use the young Scot card for young people, but also acknowledging that not all people have a young Scot card, refugees etc.
- Voucher scheme was voted against.
- Opt out for schemes rather than opt in.

The Committee would like to thank the Scottish Youth Parliament and its members for taking part in this interesting and informative workshop which made a useful contribution to our scrutiny of the Bill.

