

**PROPOSED SANITARY PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) (SCOTLAND)
BILL – MONICA LENNON MSP**

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

This document summarises and analyses the responses to a consultation exercise carried out on the above proposal.

The background to the proposal is set out in section 1, while section 2 gives an overview of the results. A detailed analysis of the responses to the consultation questions is given in section 3. These three sections have been prepared by the Scottish Parliament’s Non-Government Bills Unit (NGBU). Section 4 has been prepared by Monica Lennon MSP and includes her commentary on the results of the consultation.

Where respondents have requested that certain information be treated as confidential, or that the response remain anonymous, these requests have been respected in this summary.

In some places, the summary includes quantitative data about responses, including numbers and proportions of respondents who have indicated support for, or opposition to, the proposal (or particular aspects of it). In interpreting this data, it should be borne in mind that respondents are self-selecting and it should not be assumed that their individual or collective views are representative of wider stakeholder or public opinion. The principal aim of the document is to identify the main points made by respondents, giving weight in particular to those supported by arguments and evidence and those from respondents with relevant experience and expertise. A consultation is not an opinion poll, and the best arguments may not be those that obtain majority support.

Copies of the individual responses are available on the following website www.periodpoverty.scot

Because of the volume of responses received, an index of all individual respondents has not been prepared – where these are referred to in the summary, the identity number generated by “Smart Survey” has been included and the respondent’s name, or “anonymous”, indicated. A list of organisations who responded is set out in the Annexe to the summary.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Monica Lennon MSP's draft proposal, lodged on 11 August 2017, is for a Bill to ensure free access to sanitary products, including in schools, colleges and universities.

The proposal was accompanied by a consultation document, prepared with the assistance of NGBU. This document was published on the Parliament's website, from where it remains accessible:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/12419.aspx>

The consultation document sets out that the proposed Bill will introduce—

- A duty on Scottish Ministers to introduce a universal system of free provision of sanitary products;
- A duty on all schools to provide free sanitary products in school toilets;
- A duty on all colleges and universities to provide free sanitary products in campus toilets;
- Measures to allow Scottish Ministers to extend these duties to other bodies in future, following a period of review, if deemed appropriate or necessary.

With regard to the introduction of a universal system of free provision, the consultation document suggests that a card system could be used, modelled on the 'C-card' scheme which is currently in place in some health board areas in Scotland. That scheme allows for individuals to apply for a C-card by providing minimal personal details. The card can then be produced at designated distribution points, allowing the card holder to obtain free condoms. Respondents to the consultation were asked specifically about whether a similar scheme would be suitable for sanitary products.

The consultation period ran from 12 August 2017 to 8 December 2017.

The following organisations and individuals were sent copies of the consultation document or links to it:

- Schools (secondary, primary and ASN)
- University & College Student Associations
- Local Authority Council Leaders and Chief Executives
- Citizens Advice Bureaus
- Trade Unions
- Foodbanks
- Homeless charities (including Simon Community Scotland and Shelter Scotland)
- Pharmacies
- Equality Organisations (including Engender)
- Youth Organisations (including the Scottish Youth Parliament and Girlguiding Scotland)

On the date of the consultation launch, a roundtable meeting and press conference was held at the Scottish Parliament, including speakers from the EIS, South Lanarkshire College, the Scottish Youth Parliament and Glasgow University Red Alert Society alongside several other attendees with an expressed interest in the campaign.

Monica Lennon MSP was invited to speak about the proposal at several public meetings and events during the course of the consultation period, including at the Women of World Festival in Perth and the STUC Women's Conference in October 2017.

The consultation exercise was run by Monica Lennon's parliamentary office.

The consultation process is part of the procedure that MSPs must follow in order to obtain the right to introduce a Member's Bill. Further information about the procedure can be found in the Parliament's standing orders (see Rule 9.14) and in the *Guidance on Public Bills*, both of which are available on the Parliament's website:

- Standing orders (Chapter 9):
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/26514.aspx>
- Guidance (Part 3):
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/25690.aspx>

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES

In total, 1,753 responses were received. The majority of responses were submitted directly via Smart Survey (an online survey which allows responses to be completed and submitted online).

Responses from organisations

One hundred and nine responses (6% of the total number of responses) were from organisations, which identified themselves as follows—

- 13 (12%) were from public sector bodies (including local authorities, NHS Health Scotland and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland);
- 30 (27%) were from schools, colleges or universities (including student unions);
- 2 (2%) were from commercial organisations; (Kalitasha, which creates menstrual hygiene products for girls who are just starting to menstruate, and Buchanhaven Pharmacy);
- 16 (16%) were from representative organisations (including trade unions, student unions and educational representative bodies such as Colleges Scotland);
- 42 (38%) were from third sector bodies (including the Trussell Trust and individual foodbanks, homelessness charities, period poverty campaign groups, equality organisations and groups working with young women including Girlguiding Scotland); and
- 6 (5%) were from other organisations (including local groups, community councils and political groups).

The vast majority of organisations, 107 (98%) were supportive of the proposal, with 85 (78%) fully supportive and 22 (20%) partially supportive.

Two organisations (2% of those who responded) were opposed (one fully opposed and one partially opposed).

Seventy-six organisations (70%) were content for their response to be attributed to them. Twenty-nine (27%) requested anonymity and four (3%) asked for their response to be confidential.

Responses from individuals

One thousand six hundred and forty-four responses (94% of the total number of responses) came from individuals, of which—

- 57 (3%) were from individual politicians (including MSPs, MPs, Councillors and Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament)
- 192 (12%) were from professionals with experience in a relevant subject;
- 32 (2%) were from academics with expertise in a relevant subject;
- 329 (20%) were from students; and

- 1,034 (63%) were from members of the public.

Of the individual responses, 679 (41%) were content for their response to be attributed to them, 834 (51%) requested anonymity and 131 (8%) asked for their response to be confidential.

“Postcard” responses

The member’s office also ran a postcard campaign in which 31 respondents expressed their support by returning a to the member’s office postcard which stated—

“Everyone who menstruates should have the right to access sanitary products as and when they are required. I fully support the aims of the proposed member’s bill to introduce a free, universally accessible system for the provision of free sanitary products, as well as provision of free sanitary products in all schools, colleges and universities.”

This summary only provides analysis of the responses made to the consultation document questions, whether via Smart Survey or by email or hard copy. People who indicated support but did not actually respond to the consultation directly are not counted amongst the data in this summary.

Gaelic response

One response was made in Gaelic. The response has been published on the Member’s website along with an English translation which has been added by Monica Lennon's office for the benefit of non-Gaelic speakers.

Late response

There was one late response from Renfrewshire Council. The response has not been included in the analysis below, but is available on the member’s website.

Summary of responses

An overwhelming majority of responses (96%) were supportive of the proposal as a whole. A number of common themes emerged in the responses to the consultation. These are listed briefly below—

- ‘Period poverty’ is a serious problem which must be tackled. Providing free sanitary products will ease the financial burden on those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits.
- Menstruation is a natural bodily function which is outwith the control of women and girls, who should therefore not be penalised by having to purchase sanitary products.
- Providing sanitary products free of charge in schools, colleges and universities will reduce instances of girls and women having to miss out on their education due to not being able to afford, or not having access to, appropriate sanitary products.

- There can be a perception of stigma associated with menstruation and the use of sanitary products, with many individuals feeling embarrassed to discuss these issues. Further stigmatisation could occur should the provision of free products be associated with the recipient being 'poor'.
- Any scheme which provides sanitary products free of charge (either via a card-system or in educational establishments) should be structured in such a way that minimises opportunity for abuse (by, for example, stockpiling products in order to sell on) or wastage (by, for example, destroying products or damaging dispensers)

Terminology

It is recognised that it is not just women who menstruate, with, for example, some transgender and non-binary individuals also having periods and therefore requiring to use sanitary products. While this summary routinely refers to 'women' and 'girls' it is at all times intended to include anyone who menstruates.

Disclaimer

Note that the inclusion of a claim or argument made by a respondent in this summary should not be interpreted as verification of the claim or as endorsement of the argument by the Non-Government Bills Unit.

SECTION 3: RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

This section sets out an overview of responses to each question in the consultation document.

General aim of proposed Bill

Question 1: Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? Please explain the reasons for your response.

All 1,753 respondents answered this question.

Reasons for supporting the proposed Bill

The vast majority of respondents, 1,677 (96%), were supportive of the proposal. One thousand, five hundred and seventy-two (90%) were fully supportive and a further 105 (6%) were partially supportive.

Reasons for full support

Essential products

Many respondents referred to the fact that menstruation is a natural bodily function which affects almost all women and girls at some point in their lives. It was noted that those who menstruate have little to no control over whether they have their period. It was argued that women and girls should therefore not be financially disadvantaged by having to purchase sanitary products.

Some went as far as to say that free access to sanitary products was a basic human right and that the proposed Bill could address long standing equality issues, with an individual respondent, Vanessa Taaffe stating—

“No woman should be discriminated against because she is on her period. This [proposal] will leave every woman on an equal playing field and mean that having a period will not be a financial burden.” [ID: 62990571]

A significant number of comments made reference to the impact that being unable to afford or access sanitary products could have on the health and hygiene of individuals. For example, choosing to use a product for a long period of time due to not being able to access more could lead to a risk of infection. Some considered that as other health-related items are available for free this should also be the case for sanitary products. Reference was made, for example, to free condom schemes. Susan Burns, stated—

“These items are not a luxury but a necessity. If we can give out free condoms to protect the health of the public we should be able to do the same with sanitary products.” [ID: 69213106]

Period poverty

The issue of ‘period poverty’ was referenced by many, highlighting the financial burden experienced by those on low incomes who may struggle to

afford sanitary products. This can often be exacerbated in families with many females requiring products, or when an individual suffers from a condition such as endometriosis and experiences heavier periods and need a large number of products each month. Some noted that sanitary products could be expensive, particularly if choice is limited by what is available in the local area. Examples were given of individuals suffering financial hardship in circumstances where choices had to be made between purchasing sanitary products or other essentials such as food. Sanitary products are often placed low down the list of priorities, as one respondent, Claire Shepherd, stated—

“When one has the worry of how to pay bills in order to keep the gas and electricity on and to buy food, the last thing that is needed is to have the worry of not being able to buy sanitary products. Simply using toilet roll isn't good enough, especially if one has the misfortune of suffering from heavy periods. I know the embarrassment of bleeding through clothes so to worry about that every day of a period must cause so much extra stress. The provision of free sanitary products would relieve what should be an unnecessary stress.” [ID: 63047075]

The Simon Community's response also referenced the stress and embarrassment that can be associated with being unable to afford sanitary products when required—

“Our experience informs us that the impact of not having the means, knowledge or facilities to manage your periods can be distressing and humiliating. The women we work with experience multiple levels of exclusion and being on the street and having your period is another factor that can rob a woman of dignity. We would welcome sanitary products being free and accessible for women and girls wherever and whenever they need it.” [ID: 65218937]

The difficulties faced by homeless women and girls in obtaining sanitary products were highlighted as being a particularly significant problem. It was noted, for example, that these items are often not readily available at foodbanks. The Scottish Women's Convention referred to the “rise in street based homelessness for women” which meant—

“even less access to products, forcing people to use objects came across such as old newspapers in an effort to provide some relief. Not only is this seriously damaging to health, it reinforces the overwhelmingly negative stigma attached to some of the most vulnerable people.” [ID:69220923]

Inclusion Scotland highlighted the link between disability and period poverty with disabled people being—

“(…) more likely to be living in poverty and therefore subject to period poverty. When entitlement to disability benefits ... are discounted fully 48% of all those living in poverty in the UK are disabled people and their families. Therefore disabled women and children and the children

of disabled parents are more likely to benefit from measures to address period poverty.” [ID: 66648153]

These supportive responses were of the view the proposed Bill as a step towards ending period poverty in Scotland.

Educational impact

Focusing on the proposed free provision of sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities, some respondents argued that the proposed Bill would reduce instances of girls and women having to miss out on their education due to not being able to obtain appropriate sanitary products. A number of responses came from teachers and students who had experienced or witnessed this in action. For example, Emma Welsh stated—

“As a teacher, it is a tragedy when students miss school because of a normal bodily function. They miss out on their education which can have a drastic impact on their future. If they can't afford sanitary products, it suggests they are from a low income family therefore if their education is impacted, the cycle of poverty will continue.” [ID: 66405078]

In addition, Hannah Mackay Tait’s response explained—

“Schoolchildren are less likely to be able to afford their own sanitary products, and if their family already struggles with poverty they may worry about being an extra burden. They should be able to access these things if they need them while at school, without having to go and speak to a teacher or the nurse. Teenagers in particular are often embarrassed by their periods, so discretion is vital to make sure everyone is being reached. Schools are also universal environments - (almost) everyone goes to school, so it reaches as many young people as possible.” [ID: 67744048]

It was argued that by being able to easily and discreetly access products via dispensers in on-site bathrooms, pupils and students would be more likely to attend lessons, safe in the knowledge that sanitary products were readily available should their period begin unexpectedly.

The Educational Institute of Scotland’s response set out some of the potential benefits of the member’s policy, including the positive impact it could have on the attainment levels of pupils and students—

“There are likely to be attendance impacts in terms of school/college if products are easier to access In 2017, a safer schools officer working at a school in the UK discovered that a large number of female pupils were truanting because they were unable to buy products during their menstrual cycle [source: The Independent, Mar 2017¹].” [ID: 69122101]

¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/girls-skipping-school-periods-cant-afford-tampons-sanitary-pads-a7629766.html>

Minimising embarrassment and reducing stigma

The issue of embarrassment and anxiety was also raised in this context: one anonymous respondent explained how periods were often seen as ‘taboo’—

“Throughout school many of my friends missed classes because they did not have sanitary products, and didn't want to rely on pants wrapped in tissue paper to be adequate. This came along with periods being a taboo subject - girls at my school, including myself, did not feel like we could ask other students or teachers if there were any available. More than one of my friends took the week off school "sick" because they were unable to afford sanitary products and were too embarrassed to say.” [ID: 62520393]

The embarrassment felt by girls and young women was reflected in member feedback shared by Girlguiding Scotland who reported that 68% of respondents said they did not feel comfortable talking about periods with staff at school or college compared to just 13% who did and that 52% said they would not feel comfortable telling school staff that they were struggling to afford sanitary products [ID: 69140848]

Making products available for free, either in dispensers in toilets which could be accessed in private, or through a discreet card scheme, might reduce some of the embarrassment felt by individuals. The Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland stated—

“Whilst more work is necessary to challenge the stigma surrounding periods, the reality is that most children and young people report embarrassment about periods and wish to manage them as discreetly as possible. During our work on school toilets, we heard of cases where girls opted to go home, rather than have to approach a member of staff for supplies, particularly since in some cases, they had already had to ask a teacher for permission to leave class and may then have to ask a third member of staff for access to a toilet during class time. Availability of products within toilet facilities will help ensure that children and young people’s right to privacy is better respected.” [ID: 69230785]

Whilst some respondents considered that the proposed methods of access would help reduce embarrassment by allowing individuals to access products without drawing attention to themselves, others considered that one of the main benefits of the proposed Bill would be to reduce the stigma associated with periods by helping to normalise them in making sanitary products widely and freely available to all.

Reasons for partial support

One hundred and five (6%) respondents were partially supportive of the proposal and comments were similar reasons to those who were fully

supportive as detailed above. Reasons cited for not giving *full* support included those set out below.

Limited access only

One of the main reasons respondents gave for expressing partial support was their belief that free products should not be made available to everyone, but only to those on lower incomes or in receipt of benefits. Some respondents stated that they would prefer to pay for products as they can afford to do so with one anonymous respondent stating—

“I do not have a problem paying for sanitary products because I can afford them, and would be willing to do so but would want the money to be spent elsewhere within the NHS.

I'm not fully convinced they should be free for all but do agree they should be free to those on low incomes. I think period poverty is about poverty as a whole and would like to see an initiative which addresses the issue without stigmatising those in need.” [ID: 65520561]

Some considered that the products should be available for free in schools, colleges and universities but not universally (e.g. via a card system). Others were of the view that a card system should operate but that there should not be a duty on schools, colleges and universities to provide products for free.

Funding concerns

Some considered that offering free provision to all would be difficult to fund, particularly as local authority and school budgets are already under pressure. Community Pharmacy Scotland suggested that a trial should be carried out to determine how much a card system would cost. [ID: 69148007]

Other reasons for expressing partial support included—

- The need to promote environmentally-friendly, reusable products rather than disposable pads and tampons;
- The view that a card-based system may add unnecessary complications and barriers. NHS Health Scotland suggested that legislation may not be necessary and that such schemes could be administered via a health policy (ID 69110816);
- The need to back up free provision of products with education about the menstrual cycle, types of sanitary products etc;
- The need to also consider those who may need sanitary products for reasons other than menstruation – such as incontinence or post-partum bleeding;
- A few responses stated that products should not be free but instead VAT should be removed from them.

Reasons for opposing the proposed Bill

A minority of respondents, 47 (3%), were opposed to the proposal (29 (2%) were fully opposed, and 18 (1%) were partially opposed).

Reasons for full opposition

Waste of funds

Some respondents considered that implementing the proposal would be a waste of money and that funds would be put to better use elsewhere. There were strong views that the taxpayer should not have to pay for free sanitary products for others and were opposed to people being giving 'freebies' and 'handouts', stating that it was the responsibility of the individual to manage their own budgets. As one anonymous respondent stated—

“The more you hand out for free the more people become dependent on these handouts instead of accepting responsibility for themselves and this dependence on the state very often carries on down through generations of families. Everything for nothing only creates a dependant society. At the end of the day someone has to pay for these handouts. I think the money would be better spent on the essential services like police, fire, healthcare and education which are on their knees at present.” [ID: 64830513]

Other reasons for fully opposing the proposal included—

- It is unnecessary and will have little impact;
- Sanitary products were available cheaply in supermarkets with doubts expressed about the existence of period poverty;
- The system could be abused with individuals taking products they don't need simply because they are free.

Reasons for partial opposition

The main reasons for partial opposition echoed what has already been covered above, including the view that products should only be made available to those who cannot afford them and concerns as to how such a scheme will be funded, given multiple pressures on the economy, and there being other priorities for Government spending.

Concern was also expressed that the system would be subject to abuse and create wastage, and that environmentally-friendly products should be used where possible.

Neutral/Unsure responses

Eleven respondents (<1%) were neutral on the proposal (neither supporting nor opposing it) with 18 (1%) choosing 'unsure.' A variety of reasons were given, including a lack of sufficient knowledge to come to a conclusion, a view that products should be available for free in some circumstances but not necessarily as outlined in the consultation document and a belief that the provision of environmentally-friendly products should be prioritised. Despite stating that they were neutral/unsure a couple of responses appeared to indicate either support or opposition to the proposal.

Question 2: 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?

One thousand seven hundred and forty-six respondents (just under 100% of the total) answered this question.

Some respondents appeared to have misunderstood the question and answered specifically about condoms rather than sanitary products.

Yes, 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

One thousand and two respondents (57% of those who answered the question) answered in this way.

Easy to use and discreet

Many responses praised the proposed card system, stating that it would be easy to use and allow individuals to discreetly and anonymously access products, therefore making it a simple way of retrieving them whilst minimising any embarrassment. Farahnaz Robinson set out her support as follows—

“I think it is a very dignified way of doing it since it provides anonymity. Furthermore, it is good that the c-card system can be used at multiple locations - therefore, if someone feels embarrassed about utilising local services (for fear that they may be recognised), they can go to another location. Furthermore, it means that women would be able to access sanitary products regardless of how much they travel.” [ID: 62484687]

However, whilst supportive of the card system, Dundee Youth Council suggested an alternative method of delivery—

“It may be more advantageous for it to be put on Young Scot Cards for young girls as it will remove the stigma which may be felt by many young girls who have already been means tested for something such as free school meals.” [ID: 69219858]

Some viewed the C-card as a successful, tried and tested scheme which was therefore suitable to be replicated for sanitary products: Andrew Wilson, for example, stated that—

“It is clear that the 'c-card system' is productive and works effectively and therefore implementing a scheme similar will allow the previous scheme to act as a 'model' and therefore allow the system to be set up a lot quicker if basing off a model already established as working effectively.” [ID: 66771944]

Referring to the C-card example, others considered that if condoms were being made available for free, sanitary products should also be.

Reducing wastage and abuse

There was a view that a card system would reduce wastage and abuse as it would introduce some level of control as to how many products were accessed. It was argued that those who could afford to buy products would continue to do so meaning that the system would be sustainable and benefit those most in need.

In addition to expressing their support, a number of respondents suggested that certain measures should be put in place in order to ensure the scheme was successful, cost-effective and sustainable. These included—

- The need for the products to be accessible with multiple, easy to access, pick up points and a straightforward registration process;
- The need to ensure that no questions were asked of those applying for a card. For example, a transgender man should be able to use the card with no difficulties. There were some concerns that having to speak to a person in order to access the products might discourage some;
- The need to publicise the scheme to ensure that people were aware of its existence in order to allow it to be of use;
- The need to use the most cost-effective products and/or to use reusable, environmentally-friendly products;
- The need for a choice of products to be made available and to provide accompanying information about the different types.

Unsure whether 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.

Six hundred and twenty-four (36%) respondents to the question answered in this way.

The majority who answered 'unsure' stated that they did not consider themselves to have sufficient knowledge of the C-card, and how the proposed system would work, in order to make an informed decision. Some, including the Trussell Trust, suggested a trial should be carried out in the first instance in order to determine the likely success of a card system. [ID: 69239403]

Card as potential barrier

Others expressed uncertainty on grounds such as that having to register for a card and then produce it in order to receive products could be embarrassing for girls and women and might potentially act as a barrier preventing those who need products from accessing them. Shelter Scotland set out some of the concerns expressed by their staff in response to the idea of a card system—

“Many were favourable of the universal, card-based system, supporting it because they believed those who in need would be able to access products in a dignified and discreet manner, without judgment.

Others were concerned that a card system would be embarrassing for

women, and presented an unnecessary barrier for people who might be in need of help. One adviser described carrying a card as "a deterrent ... a symbol of shame, singling those out who can't afford sanitary products". [ID: 69127395]

In addition, it was noted that, if the scheme required the user to provide a postcode this could be a barrier to some potential users, for example, those who are homeless. NUS Scotland made reference to this in their response to this question—

“While we support aspects of this model, we have concerns about access for some groups and ultimately believe that a variety of approaches may be needed. Requiring a postcode to register for the card-based system will exclude some of the people with the greatest need for support, such as those who are homeless or in temporary and inconsistent accommodation.

Furthermore, requiring a card-holder to collect products in person will disadvantage people with limited mobility, caring responsibilities and student parents. We would encourage other models, such as one similar to the free postal method offered on NHS prescriptions. We would, again, not want this method to be reliant on providing a postcode and would encourage other proofs of eligibility to be found. In the case of tertiary education institutions, this could be through using the institution's postcode.

We also believe that it is essential that access to free sanitary products should not require proof of immigration status” [ID: 69224265]

No, a universal, card-based system (modelled on the c-card system for free condoms) would not be an effective means of providing sanitary products for free to those who need them

One hundred and twenty (7%) of respondents to this question answered in this way.

Some responded by reiterating their opposition to the proposal as a whole. Other respondents gave similar reasons to those covered under 'unsure' above, including—

- A card scheme could create additional stigma as its use would be associated with the card holder being of low income;
- It would be subject to abuse, with some suggesting that products would be obtained by individuals who intended to sell them on for a profit;
- It is not necessary and instead products should simply be available for free in public places. Some considered that a card system would create unnecessary bureaucracy and be a drain on resources.

Question 3: Which of the following best expresses your view in relation to a card-based system?

One thousand seven hundred and thirty-seven respondents (99% of the total) answered this question. As both Question 2 and Question 3 deal with the proposed card system, many of the answers to these questions are similar. Further to this, there was a great deal of overlap in the responses to the various options under Question 3.

Of all the options given, Option 1 (the card should be available to anyone; card-holders should have unlimited access to free sanitary products) was the most popular choice. A breakdown for each option is set out below.

Option 1 – The card should be available to anyone; card-holders should have unlimited access to free sanitary products

Seven hundred and twenty-two respondents (42% of those who answered the question) chose this option.

Minimising stigma and embarrassment

As with other questions, the issue of stigma associated with the subject matter was highlighted. Arguments included that unlimited access for all and making the card available to everyone would reduce stigma. The Simon Community stated—

“Our feedback suggests that women who can afford to purchase products will continue to do so. By making it universally available there is a reduction in the potential stigma the 'poverty card' might create [ID: 65218937]

Inappropriate to limit number of products

Some were against the concept of limiting the number of products available on the grounds that each individual may experience different durations or heaviness of menstruation, making it difficult to determine a 'standard' number of products that should be made available. Some were of the view that placing a limit on the number of products available could lead to further embarrassment and stigmatisation. This is set out further by Kalitasha in its response—

“Many studies show that experience of menstruation can contra[s]t vastly from person to person. By limiting, this immediately puts pressure on those who are at one end of a spectrum to not necessarily be fully honest about their experience of their cycle. It can contribute to stigma by giving the impression to that user that they are not 'normal' if they have a heavy flow for example.” [ID: 62468373]

All who need access will have it

A system open to all would help ensure no one 'slips through the net' and cannot obtain the products they require. Concern was expressed that the

'hoop-jumping' associated with means-testing application forms would prevent people who are in need of products from obtaining them.

One anonymous respondent referred to the fact that people may struggle to afford products at different times for different reasons—

“I would be worried that a system for people on low benefits would exclude women with no recourse to public funds. There are also families who may not be entitled to benefits but who are struggling with debts and not have enough available. Women who may be subject to domestic abuse but unable to provide proof of benefits may also be disadvantaged.” [ID: 69232805]

Other reasons given included—

- Condoms and medical prescriptions are both available for free to anyone in Scotland, and the same should therefore apply to sanitary products. Some noted the limited uptake of condoms via C-card and suggested that this should allay concerns that people would abuse a system with sanitary products;
- Means-testing based could be costly and difficult to administer and that universal access would therefore be a preferable option;
- By making the card system open to all and unlimited would mean that someone would be able to pick up products on behalf of a person who was unable to collect them in person.

Option 2 – 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)

Three hundred and thirty-two respondents (19% of those who answered the question) chose this option.

As with Option 1 (unlimited access to all), many who chose Option 2 focused on their belief that products should be available to everyone – stating that women should not be penalised for having their period, and the view that limiting availability to those of lower incomes could restrict those in need from gaining access.

Providing a more cost-effective system

There was a view that providing an unlimited number of products to all would be costly. In order to reduce costs, the preference of those respondents would be to limit the number of products available rather than limit access to some people but not others. It was considered that limiting the number of products available would make the scheme cost-effective and sustainable. This view was shared by Inclusion Scotland who stated that—

“We firmly believe in universal access as a means of reducing the stigma associated with means testing but support some limits on usage to make the scheme sustainable and affordable.” [ID: 66648153]

Reducing environmental impact

There was a view that there might be a negative impact on the environment by providing unlimited numbers of products. Those respondents suggested that instead, reusable or biodegradable products should be provided. An individual respondent, Livia Smith stated—

“Unlimited access to the products may cause excessive environmental damage. Alternatively, the promotion of environmentally friendly options, like moon cups, could be given. Equally, the government could work with manufacturers to create products with more degradable materials ...” [ID: 62955131]

In addition to the above points, some respondents suggested that, while the numbers should be limited, the limit should be generous and therefore allow for different women’s needs. A few respondents suggested that there should be a means of obtaining more products if necessary.

Reducing abuse/wastage

As with responses to some of the other questions, particularly those who answered ‘yes’ to question 2, some respondents expressed concern that the system would be open to abuse. By limiting the number of products available each month, abuse and wastage would be less likely. Robert Gordon Students Union is of this view, providing an example of its own experience of providing free condoms to students—

“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 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.” [ID: 67551261]

Option 3 – The card should be available only to those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits; card-holders should have unlimited access to free sanitary products.

Two hundred and fifty-nine respondents (15% of those who answered the question) chose this option.

Many of those who responded in this way gave similar reasons to those who chose Option 1 (unlimited access to all) in that they considered the number of products made available should not be limited as different individuals have different needs at different times, making it inappropriate to try and quantify the number of products which would be required each month.

Furthermore, the reasons given for restricting access to those on low income were similar to some of the responses given by those who chose Option 2 (limited number of products available to all). For example, many who chose Option 3 expressed concern that a system which was open to all would be subject to abuse with people taking a large number of products that they did not require. In addition, it was suggested that the use of reusable or biodegradable products should be considered in order to limit the potential negative effects on the environment.

Appropriate use of funds

A number of respondents were of the view that a card scheme should be for those on lower incomes as they considered that this would be the best use of funds and ensure that those who most needed help would receive it. Many considered that a card scheme would not be financially viable should it make free sanitary products available to all and that limiting its reach would ensure its sustainability.

A few respondents suggested that the card scheme should be targeted towards those on low incomes or in receipt of benefit in the first instance, before being rolled out to all.

Option 4 – The card should be available only to those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits; its use should be restricted (e.g. by limiting the number of products that may be claimed each month)

One hundred and forty-six respondents (8% of those who answered the question) favoured this option.

The majority of these respondents gave similar answers to those already covered above under options 1-3 including—

- The view that, given the limited funding resources available, the card scheme should only target those most in need and that public funds could be better utilised in ways other than providing free products to those who do not require them;
- The view that limiting availability and targeting those most in need would stop abuse of the system occurring;
- The view that by limiting availability, wastage of unused products would be reduced.

Option 5 – There is no need for a card scheme

One hundred and ninety-seven respondents (11% of those who answered the question) chose this option.

A minority of respondents stated that there was no need for a card scheme as they did not agree with the proposal and therefore did not think sanitary products should be provided for free to anyone.

Some of the respondents made certain assumptions about a card scheme system stating that the scheme would be limited to certain people or be

difficult to access and considered this to be unfair. Some answered on the assumption that a card system would be in place in schools, colleges and universities (rather than for free in dispensers as the other part of the proposal suggests) and highlighted some of the problems this may cause.

Other reasons given repeated points already covered at various points throughout this summary including the view that sanitary products should be freely available without a card whilst others considered that a card scheme would create barrier to accessing sanitary products.

Option 6 – other

Eighty-one respondents (5% of those who answered the question) chose this option.

Some responded that they had chosen this option as they were simply unsure as to whether the system would work. Many were unfamiliar with the C-card system and therefore felt unable to determine their view on a proposed similar system for sanitary products.

Other responses included a variety of comments, including suggestions as to how a card system would work most effectively, and a number of respondents stated that sanitary products should be made available universally or expressing concern that a card system could create stigma.

Question 4: 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)?

One thousand five hundred and twenty-eight respondents (87%) answered this question.

Most respondents simply listed locations they considered suitable rather than providing any detailed explanation. Some stated that they did not consider that such products should be available free of charge anywhere.

Some respondents did not specify individual types of premises but instead explained that certain conditions should be in place in order to ensure the scheme was successful. Many of these reasons were similar to points made in response to Question 3. These included—

- Making products available in as many locations as possible to ensure accessibility and prevent individuals having to travel to obtain them;
- Making products accessible at all times and from locations that are open 24 hours a day or via a vending machine;
- Making products available at the places women and girls felt comfortable visiting and were likely to visit as part of their everyday lives;

- The process of collection to be discreet and confidential, for example, products should be sent out by mail via a registration system;
- Education and advice should be made available to recipients of the products, with one suggesting a family planning clinic as a suitable venue for such assistance.

The most commonly listed individual locations are set out below—

Health-related locations

- Pharmacies were by far the most common response given to this question. These were located in most towns or villages and were open at weekends making them accessible for the majority of people. Whilst supportive of such an initiative, Community Pharmacy Scotland explained that certain factors would have to be considered in order to ensure its success—

“... this would incur an immediate and significant cost in terms of training, stockholding, infrastructure (IT, storage facilities) and staff time spent administering the service. We are wholeheartedly in support of the proposals, but must highlight that whichever operational model is chosen, community pharmacy businesses would have to be reimbursed and remunerated fairly in order to break even.” [ID: 69148007]

Other health-related locations included—

- GP surgeries and health clinics, including sexual health clinics; but there was some difference of opinion as to whether products would be issued by a doctor, nurse or at a central point. A number of respondents also expressed concern about any additional resources this would require, given the pressures already on the NHS;
- Hospitals;
- A few respondents suggested that making products available only at health-related locations would ‘medicalise’ periods which could be off-putting for some people.

Educational institutes

- Schools, colleges and universities were listed by a high number of respondents.

Community/council buildings

- Community centres;
- Public toilets;
- Council premises including libraries and leisure centres.

Retail premises

- Shops including supermarkets

Other venues mentioned with less frequency included:

- Workplaces;
- Commercial venues including cinemas, pubs and restaurants;
- Job centres;
- Food banks;
- Homeless shelters;
- Refuges;
- Train stations;
- Youth clubs, youth groups.

Question 5: 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)?

One thousand seven hundred and forty-one respondents (99% of the total) answered this question.

Yes – there should be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free (via dispensers in toilets)

One thousand four hundred and eighty-six (85% of those who answered the question) responded positively to this option, although some caveated their support by saying that steps must be taken to ensure proper funding was put in place, or expressing concern that school budgets in particular would be adversely affected by the introduction of such obligations.

Easy access for pupils and students

Pupils spend a large part of their day in the school premises and therefore could not easily leave in order to obtain sanitary products should they require them. While college and university students would be more likely to be able to leave their campus, this ability may be limited depending on their schedules and circumstances.

Pupils and students were likely to be on little to no income and therefore less able to afford sanitary products and might feel reluctant to ask family members for products - so would benefit greatly from having access to free sanitary products.

As with responses to previous questions, some considered that providing products for free and making them available to everyone in these locations would help to normalise the subject of periods and reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation.

Many responses covered issues which are discussed in further detail under Question 1, including—

- Reduce instances of non-attendance – reference was made to instances of pupils and students not attending classes due to being on their period and being unable to access or afford sanitary products;

- Improving health and wellbeing – in addition to making girls and women more likely to attend their classes during their period, it was considered by many that having free access to products could also improve their health and wellbeing.

No – there should not be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free (via dispensers in toilets)

93 respondents (5% of those who answered the question) responded in this way.

The reasons given are again similar to those covered elsewhere in the summary including concern about—

- the cost of creating obligations on schools, colleges and universities, and that it would place unjustifiable financial pressure on local authorities and on educational institutions;
- a high amount of wastage with individuals taking products that they do not require or the system being abused with individuals taking an excessive number of products in order to sell them on.

Unsure

One hundred and sixty-two (9% of those who answered the question) were unsure.

The majority of respondents who were unsure gave similar reasons to those who answered ‘no’, including expressing concerns as to how such a system would be funded, considering school budgets in particular to already be stretched. Others were concerned that such a system would be subject to abuse with pupils either vandalising dispensers or taking more products than they needed. Some therefore suggested that they should only be provided via a school nurse, teacher or other central point rather than from dispensers.

Further points made included—

- If a card system is put in place allowing individuals to obtain products for free at various locations then separate provision for free access in schools, colleges and universities would not be necessary;
- Steps should be taken to ensure transgender and non-binary individuals who require sanitary products can easily and discreetly access them;
- There should not be a requirement on these institutions; they should instead be *encouraged* to provide products for free;

Question 6: Have you ever struggled to access or afford sanitary products during menstruation? (e.g. financial barriers, unexpected circumstances, health issues)

One thousand seven hundred and twenty-one respondents (98% of the total) answered this question.

Those who answered yes

Of those who answered the question, 76 (4%) had frequently struggled to afford products, whilst 501 (29%) had struggled occasionally.

Lower income/financial hardship

This was viewed as a particular problem for women who had to provide products for not only themselves but other family members as an individual respondent, Margaret Allan, explained—

“Being a mother of four children dependent on one salary, sanitary products are not cheap and therefore providing sanitary protection for myself and two young daughters could be very difficult on a monthly basis.” [ID: 65437166]

Many of those who had occasionally been unable to afford or access products cited past instances of financial hardship as the reason. One anonymous respondent told of her experience as a young girl without access to products, and the effect that this had on her—

“When I was young and menstruating, I struggled to afford sanitary products. ... The worst experience was if I started menstruating at school, had no products, and not enough money to purchase from the vending machine. Can you imagine how it felt to have an improvised pad out of toilet paper? The worry that it might leak? The discomfort? And then the stress of getting the money to buy products – when you are only 12 and already horrified by the whole damn thing? ... It should not happen anymore. There is no excuse.” [ID: 68913044]

Some students made reference to the particular financial struggles that they often face and how this can make afford products difficult.

Some respondents explained that as their periods could be very heavy, they would need a large amount of products each month and sometimes struggle to afford them as one anonymous respondent explained—

“I have endometriosis, which can cause me to have long-lasting and heavy periods. When I was in my early twenties and earning a very low wage, I sometimes could not afford the amount of sanitary products I required, and would have to borrow money from friends or family to purchase them.” [ID: 68524847]

Period starting unexpectedly

Many respondents mentioned instances in which their period started unexpectedly when they did not have products with them and were unable easily to access them. This was particularly the case for individuals who had

irregular periods (including those with conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome) which were by their nature unpredictable.

Those who answered no

Of those who answered the question, 659 (38%) responded 'no', they had not struggled to afford or access products.

The majority of respondents (84%) did not offer any further comment. The comments that were made are summarised below—

Financial stability and easy availability

The majority of respondents who said they had not struggled to access or afford sanitary products said that this was due to their personal circumstances meaning that they had always been able to afford such products, had been provided with them by caregivers or that such products were readily available at their place of education or work.

Some, however, noted that sanitary products could often be very expensive and that they knew people who had struggled to afford them in the past or continued to do so. An individual respondent, Pauline Rourke, explained—

“I have always been fortunate, having been in employment since leaving school. My mum also worked but this does not detract from the fact, other school colleagues were not so fortunate and I witnessed friends & family members who were on low incomes.” [ID: 65301534]

However, some respondents took the contrary view that sanitary products were inexpensive and therefore affordable for most as an anonymous respondent stated—

“Even when I have been on a low income (c.9-10k), I could still afford sanitary products, which cost me about £2 per month.” [ID: 65203154]

Another anonymous respondent was of the view that—

“(…) they cost pennies. How can anyone struggle to afford them?” [ID: 68843126]

Reusable products

A number of respondents explained that they used reusable sanitary products rather than disposable ones. These products could be bought for a one-off payment and then potentially last for several years making them more cost effective and easier to afford than disposable products which need to be purchased regularly. As one respondent, Pamela Fergusson, explained—

“I use a mooncup which is an expensive one-off purchase (about £20) every few years – so it more than pays for itself if it replaces disposables. It would be really good if these were more accessible – either free or at a reduced price. However I realise that there is

probably a need for greater awareness about them before this could be workable.” [ID: 63198202]

Other responses

Of those who answered the question, 437 (26%) responded ‘not applicable: I do not need or use sanitary products’ and 48 (3%) preferred not to say.

Question 7: If sanitary products were available for free, which of the following would apply to you?

One thousand seven hundred and twenty-two respondents (98% of the total) answered this question.

I would expect to claim free products regularly

Of those who answered the question 169 (10%) said that they would expect to claim free products regularly. A few respondents answering this way reiterated their opposition to the proposed Bill as a whole.

Products should be free for all

Many respondents answering in this way were of the view that all women should be able to access these products for free each month as women should not be financially penalised for menstruating and that free sanitary products should be available to all who require them, regardless of their income level. One anonymous responder explained—

“I don’t wish to be financially penalised for my biology and think this should be shouldered by our society as a whole. If we only think certain sectors of society should receive it, it implies we still feel that our biology should have financial ramifications in some cases rather than being society’s responsibility as a whole.” [ID: 62961940]

Some respondents simply stated that, as their period occurred once a month, they would expect to claim free products each month.

Low income/financial hardship

Some respondents said they would take products on a regular basis due to being under, or expecting to be under, financial strain with soon-to-be student Eva Sigurdardottir explaining—

“(S)oon I’ll be at university and I will have to get these myself – whereas my parents buy these for me at the moment. From talking to older friends, I know that this is something that is difficult to afford when having to pay for food etc. with little wage. Therefore, I can imagine I will be applying for free sanitary products regularly.” [ID: 68607937]

I would expect to claim free products occasionally

Of those who answered the question, 346 (20%) said that they would expect to claim free products occasionally—

- Many respondents explained that they would still expect to regularly buy products but may occasionally claim them for free should their period start unexpectedly in circumstances when they are unable to access products by other means;
- Some respondents stated that, whilst they were currently able to afford products and therefore would not claim them for free, they would consider doing so should their financial circumstances change;
- A few who responded this way said they would not expect to claim free sanitary products as they favoured the use of certain brands or preferred to use reusable products. However, they considered that there might be occasions on which they decided to obtain free products.

Those who would not expect to claim

476 (28%) who answered this question said they would not expect to claim free products, providing similar reasons to those who, under Question 6, had responded that they had not struggled to access or afford sanitary products.

Financial stability

A large number of respondents who did not expect to claim explained that this is due to being in a position where they were able to afford such items. However, a number of respondents said they may consider claiming free products should their circumstances change with others stating that, whilst they did not expect to claim products they would like to see them made available for free so that those who required them could claim them. Student Anna MacIver stated—

“As I've always been able to afford to buy my own sanitary products or sometimes my parents would if I'm at home then I don't know if I'd feel comfortable enough to expect to claim free products. However, you never know when circumstances can change so I think it would be good to know it would be possible to get for free if I really needed to.”
[ID: 68266359]

Other reasons given included—

- As with those who expected to only claim products occasionally, some respondents stated their preference for reusable products or certain brands of disposable products;
- Some respondents explained they did not menstruate and therefore did not need the products. Reasons for this included being post-menopausal or the type of contraception used preventing periods.

Other responses

Of those who answered the question, 683 (40%) responded 'not applicable: I do not need or use sanitary products' whilst 48 (3%) preferred not to say whether they would expect to claim free products.

Question 8: Taking account of both costs and potential savings, what financial impact would you expect the proposed Bill to have on:

One thousand seven hundred and twenty-four respondents (98% of the total) answered this question (although not all of those made selections for all of four parts of the question) as follows—

Scottish Government and the public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS)

One thousand seven hundred and eighteen respondents answered question 8(a).

Increased costs

1257 respondents (73%) were of the view that there would be some form of increase in costs for the Government, the public sector, local authorities and the NHS. 235 respondents, (14%) thought there would be a significant increase and 1022 respondents (59%) thought there would be some increase. Some were of the opinion that any increase would be offset by the benefit such a scheme would bring to those who would be able to access free sanitary products. Reasons given included—

- The opportunity to provide health education and health related benefits;
- Removing the tax on sanitary items would help lift a burden currently placed on those in society who require them;
- Women would be less likely to visit their GP with health problems such as infections thus reducing the burden on the NHS;
- Fewer work days and days at school/colleges/universities would be lost by those who cannot afford to access sanitary products;
- The positive difference providing free sanitary products would have on those people who currently cannot afford them.

Some respondents drew an analogy with the Government currently funding the supply of methadone to drug users and providing condoms free of charge under the C-card scheme, and should therefore also provide the necessary funding for the initiatives set out in the proposal. Others felt that it was the duty of the Government to pay for such a scheme as public sector bodies, including colleges and universities, were already constrained by budget cuts.

Cost-neutral

Two hundred and twenty-three respondents (13%) thought that the introduction of the scheme would be broadly cost-neutral. Reasons given included that the cost of sanitary products could be absorbed into all budgets the same way that the cost of toilet paper is, and that the Government already funds free condoms which doesn't seem to have had a significant budgetary impact.

Reduction in cost

Forty-six respondents (3%) thought that there would be a reduction in cost for the Government, public services, local authorities and the NHS. Thirty-one respondents, (2%) thought there would be some reduction and 15 respondents (1%) thought there would be a significant reduction.

Reasons given included that if women had access to free products they might be less likely to visit their GP with health issues relating to their periods. A few respondents noted that that Government and work places would see financial savings due to fewer missed work days and physical and mental health issues related to the lack of access to sanitary products.

Unsure

One hundred and ninety-two respondents (11%) were unsure of the potential financial impact. Some felt unable to answer decisively as they did not know what impact the scheme would have on costs or were not fully aware of the real costs of sanitary products.

Colleges and universities

One thousand six-hundred and ninety-nine respondents answered question 8(b).

Increased costs

1032 of respondents (60%) were of the view that there would be some form of increase in costs for colleges and universities. 107 respondents (6%) thought that there would be a significant increase in cost for colleges and universities whilst 925 respondents, (54%) were of the view that there would be some increase in cost.

Reasons given included that—

- Colleges and universities would have to provide dispensers in toilets or a staff area along with information leaflets;
- Colleges and universities would need to be allocated additional funding to cover the huge costs of providing free sanitary products.

However, as with previous responses, a number of respondents thought that the costs of funding such a scheme would be outweighed by the benefits it would bring to those who currently struggled to afford sanitary products.

Cost-neutral

Three hundred and seventy-three respondents (22%) thought that the impact on this sector would be broadly cost-neutral. Reasons given included the Government and not colleges and universities should fund such a scheme, and some respondents provided anecdotal evidence of pilot schemes launched within universities which had had no real direct financial impact.

Reduction in costs

Forty-two respondents (2%) thought that there would be a reduction in cost for colleges and universities. Twenty-one respondents (1%) were of the view that there would be some reduction in cost whilst 21 respondents (1%) felt that there would be a significant reduction in cost. Similar to reasons given above, some who responded in this way considered that fewer women would be absent from college and university if they were able to access free sanitary products and that the Government should fund such a scheme rather than educational establishments.

Unsure

The remaining 252 respondents (15%) were unsure.

Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products)

One thousand six hundred and ninety-eight respondents answered question 8(c).

Increased costs

Five hundred and seventy-four respondents (34%) were of the view that there would be some form of increase in costs for businesses. Seventy-eight respondents (5%) thought that there would be a significant increase in costs to businesses whilst 496 respondents, (29%) were of the view that there would be some increase in cost. Reasons given included that—

- Those businesses that are currently profiting from the sale of sanitary products have a responsibility to those people who need to access them so the manufacturers and retailers of these products should make a contribution to the scheme;
- For manufacturers and retailers the introduction of the scheme might lead to a reduction in profits if some demand was switched from premium products to basic free products;
- There would be a cost to the supplier if products are to be provided free of charge;
- There could be pressure on manufacturers to produce sanitary products at a lower or more competitive price.

However, some respondents expressed a lack of empathy for those producers of sanitary products who could potentially see a reduction in profit with the introduction of this scheme. In the opinion of a number of respondents such companies had been making a sizeable profit on their products at the expense of women for too long.

Cost-neutral

Five hundred and seventy-three respondents (34%) were of the opinion that the impact on businesses, including suppliers and retailers of sanitary products, would be broadly cost-neutral. Reasons included that the Government should fund such an initiative, and that those people who can afford sanitary products would continue to buy them from chemists or supermarkets much as they do with condoms.

Reduction in cost

One hundred and ninety-one respondents (11%) were of the view that there would be a reduction in cost for businesses. 130 respondents (8%) thought that the scheme would result in some reduction in cost for businesses, whilst 61 respondents (4%) thought there would be a significant reduction in cost. Reasons given included a fear that manufacturers of sanitary products might raise their prices if this scheme is introduced. Some respondents felt that businesses would have a guaranteed purchaser of their products, others thought that manufacturers might benefit as the production of more accessible products could lead to an increase in demand. Similar to previous responses, some considered that businesses would benefit from reduction in absenteeism amongst their staff. Some thought that businesses might benefit by gaining free advertising for their products in schools and other places.

Unsure

The remaining 360 respondents, (21%) answered unsure to this section. A number of those respondents felt unqualified to offer a response.

Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products)

One thousand seven hundred and seven respondents answered question 8(d).

Increased costs

134 respondents (8%) were of the view that there would be some form of increase in costs for individuals. 25 respondents (1%) thought that there would be a significant increase in cost whilst 109 respondents (6%) were of the view that there would be some increase in cost. Reasons given included—

- Concern that the producers of sanitary products will raise their prices for those who will still be purchasing them in order to subsidise the cost of products;
- The cost of premium sanitary products could rise as fewer people may purchase them.

Cost neutral

Two hundred and one respondents (12%) were of the opinion that the impact of the scheme on individuals would be broadly cost neutral. Reasons include that the take up of the scheme might not be very high and therefore would not have a make huge impact on budgets. Again, some expressed the opinion that the cost should fall on the Government and not individuals.

Reduction in cost

One thousand one hundred and eighty-five respondents (69%) considered that there would be a reduction in cost to individuals. 472 respondents (28%) thought that there would be some reduction in cost whilst 712 respondents (42%) thought that there would be a significant reduction in cost. The prevalent reason given was that individuals would no longer have to pay for sanitary products, unless they chose to do so.

Unsure

188 respondents (11%) were unsure of the financial impact the scheme might have on individuals.

Question 9: Are there ways in which the Bill could achieve its aim more cost-effectively (e.g. by reducing costs or increasing savings)?

Eight hundred and thirty-seven respondents (48% of total responses) answered this question.

Getting manufacturers of sanitary products involved in the scheme

A number of respondents suggested that manufacturers should be encouraged to get involved in the scheme and either provide their products at a reduced cost or even donate products free of charge. One respondent, Ailie McWhinnie, made the following suggestion—

“Introduce legislation or a deal with sanitary companies where businesses/organisations etc. can buy products at much lower cost, in bulk, when buying for the purpose of free products. Maybe introduce the maximum profit they can make per item when selling for use as free product.” [ID: 68787642]

Other respondents felt that it would be a good idea to get large companies involved in the scheme by perhaps entering into sponsorship agreements to provide products in schools, colleges and universities. Respondents felt that doing this would offer manufacturers good publicity and also might encourage women to use their brands as a result.

It was also suggested that manufacturers should reduce the cost of sanitary products, with one anonymous respondent stating—

“Perhaps approaching sanitary products manufacturers to reduce the sale price and having a basic range which is affordable without all the frills.” [ID: 64691401]

Bulk buying

A number of respondents suggested that bulk buying sanitary products would help to keep the costs of the scheme down with one anonymous respondent stating—

“Presumably, supplies could be bought in bulk at lowest prices. I’m sure that special deals could be done with companies involved in supply”. [ID: 65204507]

A number of different themes emerged, some of which have already been covered in more detail elsewhere in the summary—

- Offering the option of reusable sanitary products such as the ‘Mooncup’ could help to both keep down costs and also help the impact on the environment;
- Costs could be kept down by ensuring that free sanitary products were only supplied to those people who really needed them;
- A limit should be set on how many products could be claimed monthly
- The free prescription scheme should be ended in order to help fund the provision of free sanitary products;
- Remove tax which is charged on sanitary products or use the money raised by that tax to fund the provision of free sanitary products.

Question 10: 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?

One thousand seven hundred and forty-one respondents (99% of total responses) answered this question.

One thousand four hundred and ninety respondents (86%) considered that the Bill would have an overall positive impact on equalities. One thousand three hundred and thirty-six respondents (77%) were of the opinion that the proposed Bill would have a positive impact whilst 154 (9%) felt that the proposed Bill would have a slightly positive impact.

A number of different themes emerged, some of which have already been covered in more detail elsewhere in the summary—

- The proposed Bill could work towards reducing and removing the stigma attached to periods;
- It would ensure gender equality with women no longer having to pay for sanitary products;
- It would increase equality for those who cannot afford sanitary products and would stop women having to pay for products they need on a monthly basis;
- It could help address age inequality by enabling younger girls to access free sanitary products which would allow them to continue with their education;
- The proposed Bill would benefit disabled people who might be living on smaller incomes;
- It would not only benefit women but also transgender members of society who may also menstruate and therefore require sanitary products;
- If condoms could be supplied free of charge then so should sanitary products.

Negative

Ten people (<1%) of the total who answered this question thought that the proposal would have a slightly negative effect on equalities whilst a further 24 (1%) felt that it would have a negative effect. The main reason given was that

the proposed Bill could be unfair on the wider community and was sexist. One anonymous respondent stated—

“It reinforces the stereotype that people in poverty are dirty and unable to look after themselves. It feeds the idea that women cannot take care of themselves. It shows that women will receive support on issues while men’s issues, increased suicide, lack of performance in education, anger management, etc. are overlooked.” [ID: 62963682]

Others felt that the scheme should include the free provision of incontinence aids for both sexes and older and disabled people.

Unsure/Neutral

Seventy-two respondents (4%) were unsure, the main reason for this being a lack of sufficient knowledge, while 145 (8%) were neutral (neither negative nor positive).

Question 11: In what ways could any negative impact of the proposed Bill on equality be minimised or avoided?

Seven hundred and eight-nine respondents (45% of total response) answered this question. Some reiterated their view that a Bill was not required. A number of issues were raised by the respondents covering a range of factors as to how any negative impact on equality could be minimised or avoided, many repeating points which have been covered elsewhere in the summary—

Access for transgender and non-binary people

A number of respondents made the point that free sanitary products should be made available to transgender and non-binary members of the population. One anonymous respondent stated—

“Ensure there is no gender or age restrictions, this means young girls and those who are transitioning from female to male should still have access to sanitary products and are not being excluded and can feel accepted.” [ID: 66900598]

The importance of education

A number of respondents were of the opinion that education had an important role to play in getting people to understand why the Bill is necessary as one anonymous respondent explained—

“Education in schools, colleges, university etc as well as a national campaign to inform people why free sanitary products are needed.” [ID: 62848708]

Other suggestions included—

- Ensuring access to free products for homeless members of society;
- Ensuring that products can be accessed easily and discreetly;
- Ensuring access is available to all and that any scheme for free provision is not means tested;

- Ensuring that the scheme is properly regulated to avoid the system being abused.

Question 12: Do you consider that the proposed Bill can be delivered sustainably i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?

One thousand seven hundred and thirty-two respondents (99% of total respondents) answered this question,

Those who answered yes

One thousand two hundred and twenty respondents (70%) were of the opinion that the Bill could be delivered sustainably.

Social and economic impacts

A number of respondents answered that the Bill would have a positive social impact for women as giving them access to free sanitary products would improve their lives. Others were of the view that any negative economic impact would be outweighed by the positive social impact of the Bill. Francesca Brennan stated—

“Other universally accessible resources have proved sustainable e.g. prescriptions, free school meals. No reason for any sanitary materials to be different. I think it would have very positive social and economic impacts.” [ID: 62495802]

Whilst Neil Bibby MSP was of the view that—

“There will be positive social impact as a result of this Bill. Environmental impact should be neutral. Any economic impact will be offset by the benefits to society and improved well-being amongst women and girls including greater educational engagement”. [ID: 69194114]

Environmental impact – reusable products

Some respondents put forward the idea that the promotion of the use of reusable sanitary products could help to lessen any potential negative impact on the environment. Silvia Barlaan suggested that—

“Instead of tampons, girls who regularly use the supply could be offered menstrual cups and reusable cloth pads to reduce economic and environmental cost.” [ID:62614742]

Those who answered no

Eighty-eight respondents (5%) felt it could not be delivered sustainably

One respondent, Farahnaz Robinson, summed up her view as follows—

“As seen in my previous responses, I think this is unsustainable if delivered as a piece of legislation. It will inevitably become dated, or treated as a tick-box exercise. It will increase individual workload or stress within the public sector, as schools or other institutions will be mandated to organise or manage the distribution of free sanitary goods.” [ID:62484687]

Other reasons given included the potential negative impact of an increase in the production of disposable sanitary products, while Glasgow City Council had concerns about the reliance on vending machines—

“Reliance on vending machines for dispensing would have a disproportionate impact on the environment.” [ID:68712807]

Unsure

Four hundred and twenty-four respondents, 24% of those who answered this question, were unsure whether the Bill could be delivered sustainably, their main reason being a lack of sufficient knowledge.

Question 13: Do you have any other comments or suggestions on the proposal?
--

Six hundred and thirty-six respondents (36% of the total) answered this question.

Many of respondents expressed their support or opposition to the proposal with many reiterating comments made in answer to other questions while others simply commented that they did not have anything to add to their previous answers.

As with many of the other questions, the issues of period poverty, gender equality and the need to minimise stigmatisation featured heavily. Some of the other points which were raised are summarised below—

Environmental considerations

A number of respondents used this question to emphasise their view that the use of environmentally-friendly, reusable products should be considered over disposable products. It was considered that such products would not only be eco-friendly and cost less, they could also be beneficial to the health of individuals, as one anonymous respondent explained—

“I believe the sanitary products provided should be, as far as possible, free from potentially toxic substances such as dioxins, pesticides, bleach and chemical fragrances. This is important to protect women's health as well as to minimise impacts on the environment.” [ID: 69219810]

The wider issue of poverty

Some respondents were of the view that period poverty is part of a wider overall problem facing many people, with Elaine Nisbet, Anti-Poverty and Welfare Advice Manager at West Lothian Council, stating—

“Period poverty is one aspect of an overall poverty agenda. Reducing costs for households is one way in which to mitigate against the effects of poverty. All interventions should be linked in with good quality advice and support to help people consider wider implications, areas of help.”
[ID: 67702999]

The need to be inclusive

Some responses made reference to the fact that the provision of sanitary products should not be restricted to girls and women, as some transgender and non-binary people also experience menstruation. It was therefore suggested that the proposed Bill should be as inclusive as possible. Glasgow University Red Alert Society stated—

“We feel strongly that there should be no discrimination in the provision of these products – specifically the gender of the person should not be assumed as to whether they qualify for these products or not. If the Bill passed into legislation, there would need to be some thought as to how it would be enforced in all areas i.e. what if a school/college/business does not comply.” [ID: 69086034]

Other respondents raised concerns that many schools, colleges and universities do not have gender-neutral toilets, which would prevent some people from accessing free products (for example, if a transgender man required sanitary products).

Further points made included—

- Further evaluation and consultation is required before the proposal can be taken forward;
- Ways of working in conjunction with sanitary product manufacturers should be explored;
- Some reference was made to existing schemes, such as the Scottish Government’s trial of providing free products in Aberdeen and the provision of free products in all North Ayrshire secondary schools;
- Should sanitary products be made available for free, they should be of high quality with a variety of sizes and types made available;
- The needs of disabled people should be considered, for example in ensuring distribution points are accessible;
- Consideration should be given to also providing incontinence products free of charge.

SECTION 4: MEMBER'S COMMENTARY

Monica Lennon MSP has provided the following commentary on the results of the consultation, as summarised in sections 1-3 above.

I would like to put on record my sincere thanks to everyone who participated in this consultation. I am very grateful to the Non-Governmental Bills Unit for their professionalism and support throughout this process and for being patient with a new MSP in a hurry to make progress on the issues presented by period poverty.

That leads me to thank those who have expressed an interest or shown support for my wider campaign to raise awareness about the need to improve access to sanitary products. There were 1,753 responses in total; 109 from organisations and 1644 from individual members of the public. Many people shared their own lived experiences and this has been invaluable in evidencing the problem. Together, I believe we have established that period poverty is real and that has made it easier to debate and discuss possible solutions. I am eternally grateful to everyone who has made that possible, whether you shared your story in public or in confidence.

The results of this consultation are clear: the vast majority of the public and the organisations who have responded, overwhelmingly support my proposals. Of all the responses received, 96% are supportive of my proposal to make it a legal right to access sanitary products in Scotland. (90% fully, 6% partially)

Most respondents are full supportive of my proposals to introduce legal duties to create a universal system of access to sanitary products and duties on schools, colleges and universities to provide them to students.

The reasons given for supporting the proposals include the acknowledgement of 'period poverty' as a serious problem which must be tackled, and that providing free sanitary products will help ease the financial burden for many women and girls on low incomes. It was also widely accepted by respondents that menstruation is a natural bodily function, and that those who menstruate shouldn't therefore be penalised for this. Despite menstruation being natural, there was a recognition in many comments that there remains a stigma around menstruation. Many respondents were supportive of the idea of universal provision due to a concern that restricting access to low-income women only would lead to further stigmatisation.

Of the 6% who indicated partial support, similar reasons were given to those who were fully supportive. Reasons for partial support included the belief that access should be limited, not universal, and others expressed concerns that provisional to all would be difficult to fund.

I welcome the contributions and debate around these points, but I remain absolutely clear, like the 90% who have expressed full support for the proposals, that universal access is the way forward.

I have been open from the outset that I believe access to sanitary products should be available to everyone who menstruates. There is a clear difference between establishing a system which is open to all, and a system which automatically provides to all with no opt-out (such as free prescriptions).

The system I have proposed, modelled on the system which is available in many health board areas for the distribution of free condoms, would remove any means testing or additional barriers that might prevent those with the greatest need from accessing these essential products. Those who can afford to purchase products would likely already continue to do so – only 10% of respondents said they would expect to claim products regularly, and 20% occasionally.

However, a universal system of access would normalise access to sanitary products and prevent further stigmatisation. We live in a country where items like free condoms are already freely available – and since there is no means test for these items, it seems to me that there is no logical argument to justify means testing the provision of sanitary products.

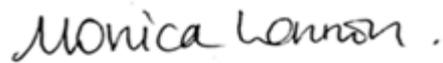
I am grateful for the comments around what some respondents view as potential issues with a 'card-based' system. 57% said they were in favour of the proposed model, while 36% said they were unsure. Those who were unsure still agreed with the principle of universalism, and simply expressed concerns around how a 'card' would work, asking for further reassurances that it would not act as a barrier or that there would be no requirements for registration. I have considered these points carefully and will take them fully on board as I take my proposal forward. My proposal for a universal system is to ensure that products are as accessible as possible for everyone who needs them.

There was also widespread support for specific duties on schools, colleges and universities. I am delighted that the Scottish Government have already agreed with my proposals on this, and announced in their Programme for Government 2018/19 that they would take this forward. 85% agreed that there should be specific duties on these institutions to provide them. I hope the Scottish Government will agree to take these proposals further by agreeing to enshrine them in law in this proposed Bill. Providing these legal protections will ensure that provision is equal across the country, and also that the initiative will be adequately funded.

Another theme which arose in the responses was how the Bill could be more environmentally friendly through the provision of reusable products. I am grateful to those who have raised these issues, and I am determined that the any scheme which is established should have choice and dignity as its centre. Reusable products, like menstrual cups, can cost approximately £20 and if these were available through the universal system I am proposing, benefits to the environment would be realised.

There was also some discussion around the inclusivity of the Bill. I have been clear from the outset that this Bill is about providing sanitary products to every individual who menstruates, including trans individuals and not just women and girls. As I take the Bill forward, it will continue to have inclusivity at its heart.

The consultation has demonstrated there is overwhelming and widespread support for my proposal. It is on this basis that I intend to introduce legislation to Parliament, and seek to build cross-party support for my proposals.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Monica Lennon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Monica Lennon MSP

ANNEXE**Responses from organisations (anonymous /confidential responses not included)**

		Smart Survey ID
1	Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership	69228778
2	Ayrshire College Students Association	69185643
3	Baird Memorial Primary School	66435581
4	Binti International	69008393
5	Buchanhaven Pharmacy	64573920
6	Caledonian Women	64829486
7	Canongate Youth	68395918
8	Children in Scotland	69223661
9	Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland	69230785
10	City Centre Initiative Glasgow	67518490
11	Coastal North Girlguiding	65486945
12	Colleges Scotland	69223505
13	Communication Workers Union (CWU)	68930055
14	Community Pharmacy Scotland	69148007
15	Cyrenians	65783441
16	Duddingston Primary School	66311851
17	Dundee Foodbank –	67241203
18	Dundee Youth Council	69219858
19	Dundee University Students Association	69226039
20	Dunfermline Foodbank	67483626
21	East Ayrshire Council	69218921
22	East Lothian Foodbank	67247236
23	Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)	69122101
24	Edinburgh Montessori Arts School	66326871
25	Edinburgh University Students' Association	69033414
26	Engender	69145659
27	Fire Brigades Union	69021527
28	Forfar Academy	66354632
29	Girlguiding Scotland	69140848
30	Glasgow City Council	68712807
31	Glasgow Labour Group	69197213
32	Glasgow South West Foodbank	67195225
33	Glasgow University Red Alert Society	69086034
34	Glasgow Youth Council	68794541
35	GMB Scotland	69217652
36	Health & Hygiene Project Leith (H&H Card)	69212941
37	Intensive Rescue Foundation International	62928749
38	Hey Girls (Buy One Give One Sanitary Pads)	65795075
39	Inclusion Scotland	66648153
40	Inverclyde Council	68137304

41	Kalitasha	62468373
42	Lanarkshire Carers Centre	69224996
43	Linwood High School	67550543
44	Maxwelltown High School, Dumfries	66505493
45	Midlothian Council	69224021
46	NHS Health Scotland	69110816
47	No More Taboo	69202245
48	North Ayrshire Council	65292161
49	North East Scotland College Students' Association	64661131
50	NUS Scotland	69224265
51	Perth and Kinross Foodbank	67525433
52	Queensferry High School	66348886
53	Robert Gordon University Students' Union	67551261
54	Sandyhills Community Council	69221588
55	Save the Girl Child Movement	69223014
56	Scottish Out of School Care Network	69174574
57	Scotland's Rural College Students' Association	69192140
58	Scottish Trans Alliance/Equality Network	68980302
59	Scottish Trades Union Congress	69217810
60	Scottish Women's Convention	69220923
61	Scottish Youth Parliament	69215789
62	Shelter Scotland	69127395
63	Simon Community Scotland	65218937
64	St Kentigern's Academy	66610196
65	Tarbert Academy Parentcouncil	67564088
66	Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)	69150578
67	The Empower Project	67217312
68	The Trussell Trust	69239403
69	UNISON Scotland	69200785
70	Unite the Union Scotland	69192234
71	Unst Partnership Ltd	65511570
72	Usdaw	69137142
73	Vulva Sapiens	65140912
74	Wellbeing Scotland	69242044
75	West Lothian Council	67702999
76	West Lothian Council and Armadale Management Committee West Lothian –	68174907