



Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill

[About the STUC](#)

The STUC is Scotland's trade union centre. Its purpose is to co-ordinate, develop and articulate the views and policies of the trade union movement in Scotland; reflecting the aspirations of trade unionists as workers and citizens.

The STUC represents over 560,000 working people and their families throughout Scotland. It speaks for trade union members in and out of work, in the community and in the workplace. Our affiliated organisations have interests in all sectors of the economy and our representative structures are constructed to take account of the specific views of women members, young members, Black members, LGBT+ members, and members with a disability, as well as retired and unemployed workers

Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill STUC Consultation Response

Question 1: What are our views of the proposed Bill?

The STUC is concerned about increasing reports that women and girls affected by low incomes, benefit sanctions and other austerity measures are unable to afford period products and are experiencing detriment to their health, dignity and wellbeing as a result. The Trussell Trust has reported that thousands of food bank users received feminine hygiene products through its services in the past year and that some women have resorted to using toilet roll, socks or newspaper because they are unable to afford period products. The STUC notes that access to period products in educational establishments is variable across Scotland, with some schools having a policy of supplying these through the main office, which might put girls off asking for supplies; and some colleges having only one vending machine in a ten-storey building. The STUC believes that not having enough, or suitable, products to manage menstrual bleeding effectively is associated with health risks including toxic shock syndrome, and also with shame, embarrassment and distress. The STUC also notes that publicity around the Bill discourages stigma around menstruation and encourages people to talk about issues which were historically hidden as "women's issues." The STUC believes that this is healthy in a broader sense of tackling misogyny and sexism.

Q2. Do you think a universal, card-based system (modelled on the c-card system for free condoms) would be an effective means of providing sanitary products for free to those who need them? Yes or No.

Yes

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

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

Q4. Do you have a view on which locations would be most suitable for dispensing free sanitary products (e.g. GP surgeries, pharmacies, community centres, health clinics)?

The STUC believes that the potential of free sanitary products being provided in any and all public buildings should be explored.

Q5. Do you agree that there should be specific obligations on schools, colleges and universities to make sanitary products available for free (via dispensers in toilets)? Yes or No.

Yes

Q6. Have you personally ever struggled to access or afford sanitary products during menstruation? (e.g. financial barriers, unexpected circumstances, health issues)?

Not applicable: Although we have gathered evidence via the STUC women's committee that finances, domestic abuse, embarrassment and shame are all potential barriers to accessing sanitary products.

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

N/A but we do not believe that access should be restricted to a certain number of claims or type of product.

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

	Significant increase in cost	Some increase in cost	Broadly cost-neutral	Some reduction in cost	Significant reduction in cost	Unsure
(a) Government and the public sector (e.g. local authorities, the NHS)		X				
(b) Colleges and universities		X				
(c) Businesses (including suppliers/retailers of sanitary products)			X			
(d) Individuals (including consumers of sanitary products)				X		

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

In terms of sustainability of products, other sanitary products which are not tampons or sanitary towels e.g. menstrual cups, could also be provided for free.

Q10. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation?

The Bill is likely to have a positive impact on the normalisation of menstruation, stopping it being a "hidden women's issue". In turn, this can have an effect on challenging sexism and misogyny. A broad range of sanitary products should be available for free, including maternity pads.

Q11. Do you consider that the proposed Bill can be delivered sustainably i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?

Yes. Although other products e.g. menstrual cups should also be provided for free in order to alleviate current and future environmental impacts.