

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT - RESULTS

Title of Policy	Access to Free Sanitary Products
Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy	The Scottish Government has committed to providing access to free sanitary products to students in schools, colleges and universities to support equality, dignity and rights for those who menstruate and to ensure that lack of access to products does not impact on an individual's ability to fully participate in education at all levels.
Directorate: Division: team	DHSJ: Social Justice & Regeneration: Social Justice Delivery Unit

Executive summary

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

The policy will contribute to the National Outcomes "We protect, respect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination", "We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally" and "We are well-educated, skilled and able to contribute to society".

Through the EQIA process no negative effects have been identified as a result of implementing this policy.

Background

The issue of "period poverty" has had significant and sustained media coverage both within the UK and internationally in the past 12-18 months. In our Programme for Government, published in September 2017, we committed to introducing a scheme to fund access to free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities. In October 2017,

the First Minister announced that delivery of the commitment would take place from the beginning of the new academic year in August 2018.

In order to help shape the policy and its delivery, the Scottish Government has convened a Working Group with membership comprising key internal policy colleagues and external stakeholders including COSLA, Colleges Scotland, Universities Scotland, and the National Union of Students. Early in the policy cycle, the Working Group developed and agreed the following Guiding Principles:

ACCESS TO SANITARY PRODUCTS - GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Statement of Purpose

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

Guiding Principles

The delivery model should be based on:

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

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- Awareness raising and education to both promote the 'offer' and change cultural norms

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

While overall responsibility for this overarching policy rests with the Scottish Government, implementation will be for the delivery partners (i.e. local authorities, colleges and universities).

The Scope of the EQIA

We consider the impact to be low but the risk to be medium. We have identified some potential impacts on the protected characteristics. No negative impacts have been identified. However, there are evidence gaps meaning the potential impact on certain groups is either unknown or not well understood. Further evidence gathering has taken place - which provides more information on some of the relevant groups - and relevant stakeholders are engaged with policy development. Further work is ongoing to generate relevant evidence and engage with those who will be impacted by the policy.

Key Findings

There is a growing evidence base for the need for and supply of free sanitary products which has built on the previous anecdotal evidence. We worked closely with Young Scot to gather insight on young people's views about accessing sanitary products. An online survey received over 2,000 responses (one of the biggest responses they have ever had), with around 25% of respondents indicating that they had experienced difficulty in accessing sanitary products at some point in the past year.

The Aberdeen pilot recruited over 1,000 women and girls across low income groups, selected schools and a college and university and has been featured positively widely in the media. It has generated evidence on the extent of the issue of lack of access to sanitary products and also potential solutions. It shows that two thirds of the low income women who participated have at some point experienced difficulty accessing sanitary products. This figure was 32% for students and 20% for school pupils, providing tangible evidence that accessing sanitary products can

be an issue for a range of people, but that this disproportionately affects those on low incomes.

In addition to the evidence provided by the Young Scot/SG partnership and the Aberdeen pilot, both Plan International and Women for Independence have also published data on this issue.

This growing body of evidence has identified that between 10-25% of those surveyed have had difficulty accessing sanitary products. However it is not possible to determine the extent of, or reason for, that difficulty, i.e. whether this was an enduring difficulty or a one-off situation. Some of this evidence suggests that some girls may be missing school during their period if they have difficulty accessing products, which could have an impact on educational attainment.

In her public consultation for a Proposed Sanitary Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill, Monica Lennon MSP asked what overall impact the proposed Bill is 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 vast majority (86%) of the 1,741 respondents who answered this question believed the Bill would have an overall positive impact on equalities. A variety of themes were identified, including:

- Access to free sanitary products could contribute to reducing and removing the stigma attached to periods;
- It would increase equality for those who cannot afford sanitary products and would stop those who menstruate having to pay for products they need on a monthly basis;
- Age inequality might be addressed by enabling younger people to access free sanitary products thereby allowing them to continue with their education;
- Disabled people, who might be living on smaller incomes, would benefit;
- Transgender members of society who may also menstruate and therefore require sanitary products would benefit

However, 34 people (around 2%) who answered this question believed the proposal would have an overall negative effect on equalities. The main reason cited was that the proposal could be unfair on the wider community and was sexist. A further 217 (12%) respondents were either unsure or neutral on the proposed Bill.

The EQIA did not identify any potential negative impacts on equality from implementation of this policy. Providing access to free sanitary products is likely to be of significant benefit to all females and transgender men/non-binary people who menstruate and also those on low incomes by addressing inequalities.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The evidence collected over the course of the EQIA satisfied the Scottish Government that there is clear support for providing access to free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities.

We anticipate the policy will have a positive impact on all individuals in school, college and university who menstruate. The evidence suggests that some students are missing education to manage their menstruation, potentially affecting educational attainment. By providing access to free sanitary products within educational institutions, the policy will ensure that all students who need them have access to sanitary products in a dignified manner.