

PERIOD POVERTY
SURVEY FINDINGS REPORT
DECEMBER 2021



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A pilot scheme to provide free period products to all pupils who need them in Northern Ireland schools was approved by the Northern Ireland Executive and will be in place for September 2021. Many issues relating to 'Period Dignity' have been exacerbated recently by lockdowns, particularly period poverty. Period poverty and other issues around Period Dignity need to be addressed: these include embarrassment, and lack of knowledge about periods. This is needed to ensure pupils at school are getting an optimum experience in their education.

CCEA's Data Science and Statistics and Research Unit sought to gain an insight into the frequency and extent of period poverty and other issues relating to Period Dignity in Northern Ireland. This involved four online questionnaires for four groups: Pupils; Teachers, Further Education Students, and Further Education Staff. These questionnaires were available from 15 June to 2 July 2021. A summary of the responses is listed below.

1.1 Key Findings

Pupil Questionnaire (Responses received: 1,711)

- Over a quarter of pupils (27.5% N=382) who have a period have had difficulty accessing period products.
- 83.2% (N=318) of pupils who have had difficulty accessing period products experienced this because they didn't have what they needed with them in school.
- 6.5% (N=25) had difficulty accessing period products because their parents couldn't afford them, while 11.8% (N=45) said they themselves could not afford them.
- 8.12% (N=113) of pupils with a period have missed school because they didn't have access to sufficient period products.
- 9.7% (N=11) pupils have missed school many times because they did not have sufficient period products.
- Over half of pupils (N=789 56.7%) who menstruate have had to ask a friend or teacher for period products while in school.
- 44.2% (N=756) of pupils' schools provide some period products at present, with 48.9% (N=318) having to use these at some point.
- Over half of pupils (53.0% N=737) were embarrassed when buying period products.
- Two thirds of pupils (66.9% N=1,144) agreed that period products were too expensive.
- Almost a quarter of pupils who responded (N=417 24.4%) agree that eco factors are important when choosing period products.
- Almost all pupils (N=1,681 98.2%) who responded to this questionnaire supported the new government scheme that supplies free period products to schools.

Further Education College Student Questionnaire (Responses received: 79)

- Over half (60.8% N=45) of those who responded to the questionnaire had difficulty accessing period products.
- The most common reason given by respondents (N=38 84.4%) for not being able to access period products was they 'didn't have the products they needed with them at college'.
- 20.7% (N=28) FE college students have missed education because they didn't have sufficient period products.
- Four FE college students (14.3%) have missed college many times because they didn't have sufficient period products.
- 44.4% (N=60) had to use an alternative because they did not have access to period products.
- 8.9% (N=7) of FE college students said their college provided free period products.
- Half of students (50% N=3) whose college provides free period products have used them.
- 54.1% (N=40) of FE college students felt embarrassed buying period products.
- The majority of students (N=74 93.7%) agreed that period products were too expensive.
- 69.9% (N=55) of FE students agree that talking about periods and period poverty can make some individuals embarrassed.
- Almost all respondents (N=78 98.7%) would support a pilot scheme to provide free period products in colleges.

Teacher Questionnaire (Responses received: 770)

- The majority of teachers (N=745 96.8%) have heard of period poverty.
- 70% (N=539) of teachers who responded had noted a pupil asking another pupil or member of staff for period products.
- Over half of teachers' (N=426 55.3%) schools already provide free period products.
- 40.6% (N=313) felt that pupils considered eco factors when buying period products.
- Almost all teachers who responded (N=761 98.8%) agreed with the new government scheme to provide free period products to schools.
- 67.0% (N=516) of teachers agreed they would find training on menstrual wellbeing and period poverty useful.

Further Education Centre Staff Questionnaire (Responses received: 21)

- All (N=21 100%) of the FE Centre Staff have heard of period poverty.
- Nine respondents (42.8%) have witnessed a student asking another student or staff member for period products.
- 33.3% (N=7) of FE Staff who responded said that their college already provides free period products.
- Almost two thirds of respondents (N=13 61.9%) agreed that students are conscious of eco factors when buying period products.
- The majority of respondents (N=19 90.5%) agreed that they would support a pilot scheme which would provide free period products to colleges.
- Thirteen (61.9%) respondents agreed that they would find training on period poverty useful.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Research from Plan International UK reveals that, in the UK, three in ten girls aged 14–21 have struggled to afford or access period products during lockdown. According to the charity's CEO: 'Lockdown has exacerbated the already prevalent problem of period poverty in the UK' (3 in 10 Girls Struggle to Afford or Access Sanitary Wear During Lockdown).

In Northern Ireland, some people have to make a difficult choice between food, warmth, and period products. Many pupils can't afford period products and if their parents are struggling financially, are unwilling to ask for help to buy them ([BBC News – Period taboo: Why can't we talk about menstruation?](#)).

Period Dignity refers to the accessibility and availability of essential period care needed to support a period, in conjunction with the removal/breaking of stigma and taboo around periods. Education is a key factor in breaking the stigma surrounding periods and promoting respect, understanding and open discussions about what people may experience when menstruating.

Plan International describes what it calls a 'toxic trio' of:

- the cost of sanitary products;
- a lack of education about periods; and
- shame, stigma and taboo.

A pilot scheme to provide free period products to all pupils who need them in Northern Ireland schools has been approved by the Northern Ireland Executive and will be in place for September 2021.

The Period Dignity Project aims to promote Period Dignity and tackle period poverty in schools, helping girls and young women to reach their potential. As part of the Period Dignity Project, CCEA sought to gain an insight into the frequency and extent of period poverty in Northern Ireland by developing online questionnaires for four groups: Pupils; Teachers; Further Education Students; and Further Education Staff. These questionnaires were available from 15 June to 2 July 2021.

2.2 Role of the Data Science, Statistics and Research Unit

CCEA's Data Science, Statistics and Research Unit is an independent department within CCEA and has a proven record of providing high calibre research and evaluations to support and inform the development of products, markets, and services. The unit designs and provides customised research and evaluations to facilitate managing delivery, accountability, and quality research.

The Data Science, Statistics and Research Unit was commissioned to develop the four Period Dignity questionnaires for Pupils, Teachers, Further Education Students and Further Education Staff. Results from these questionnaires were then analysed.

2.3 Report Structure and Interpretation of Tables

This report details the key findings obtained from the online questionnaire.

The structure of the remainder of this report is as follows:

- Section 3: Methodology
- Section 4: Results
- Section 5: Conclusion

3.0 METHODOLOGY

As stated, the methodology involved an online questionnaire, available from 15 June to 2 July 2021, allowing the four groups of respondents (pupils, teachers, FE students and FE Staff) to provide their opinions on issues relating to period poverty.

The responses received for each of the questionnaires are as follows:

- Pupils – N=1,711
- Further Education Centre Students – N=79
- Teachers – N=770
- Further Education Centre Staff – N= 21

Quantitative responses were analysed using SPSS, while qualitative responses were analysed using thematic coding.

Please note, the value 'N' in the report is the number of actual responses to the items presented, described, or illustrated. In some instances, where respondents are asked to give multiple responses to an item, 'N' may be greater than the total respondent figure.

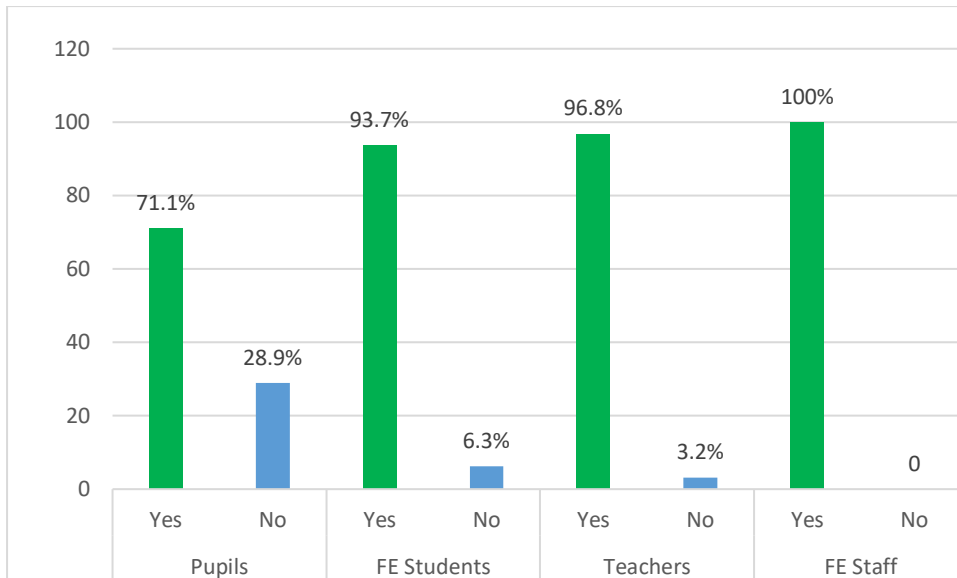
4.0 RESULTS

This section details the feedback from the four online questionnaires from each of the following groups: Pupils, Teachers, Further Education Staff, and Further Education Students.

4.1 Combined Results

This section compares the results from the four questionnaires.

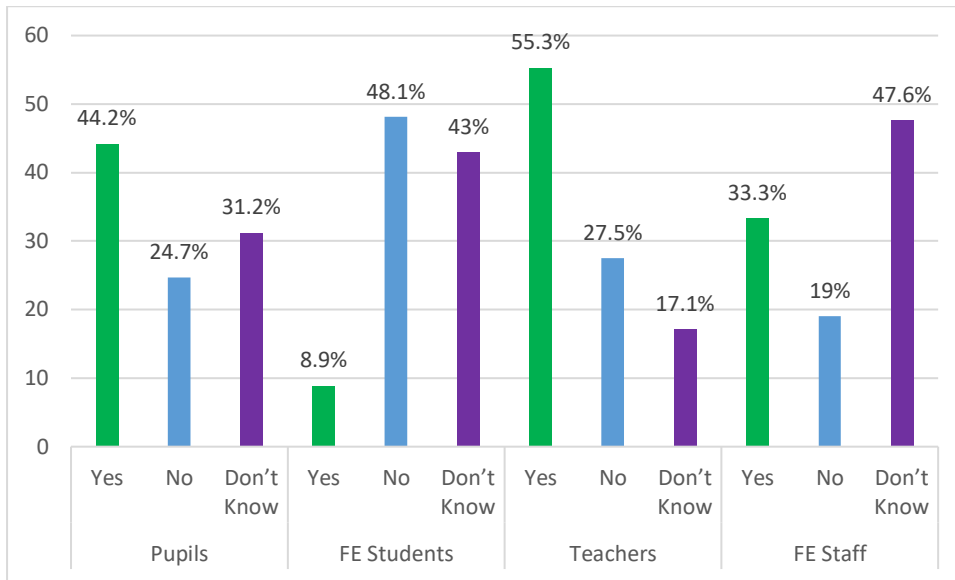
Figure 1: Proportion of respondents who are aware of Period Poverty



Responses from all four questionnaires indicate that the majority are aware of period poverty and its meaning. All of the FE Staff (100% N=21) are aware of period poverty, while 96.8% (N=745) of teachers are aware. Less awareness is evident among pupils (71.1% N=1216), but still: the majority have an awareness.

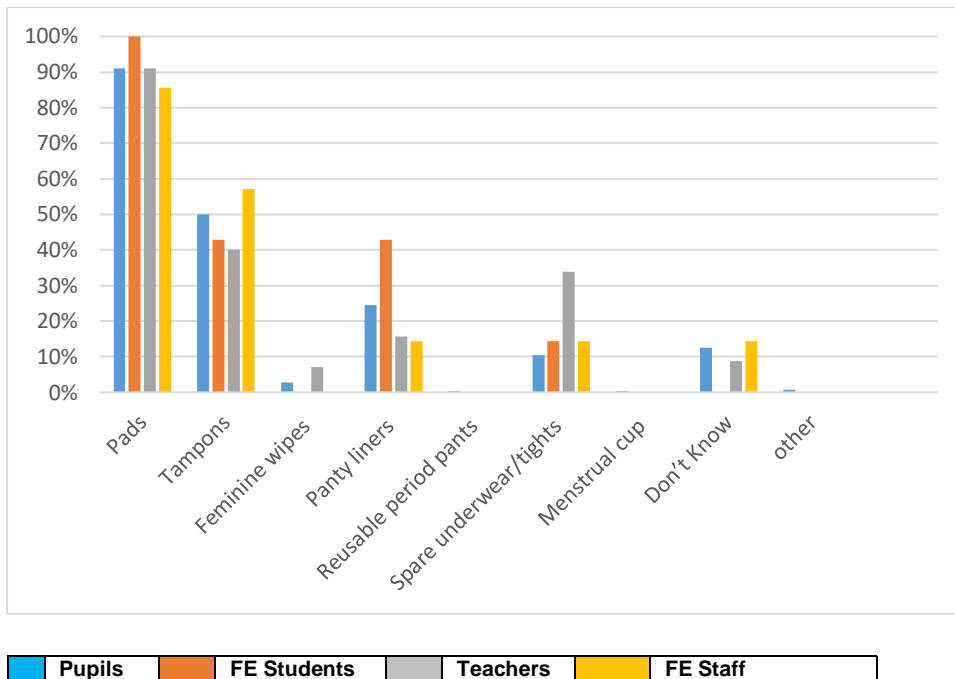
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Figure 2: Proportion of respondents whose school/college currently offer free period products



Responses from teachers (55.3% N=426) reveal that their schools provide free period products. However, only 8.9% (N=7) responses from FE students indicate that their college provides free period products.

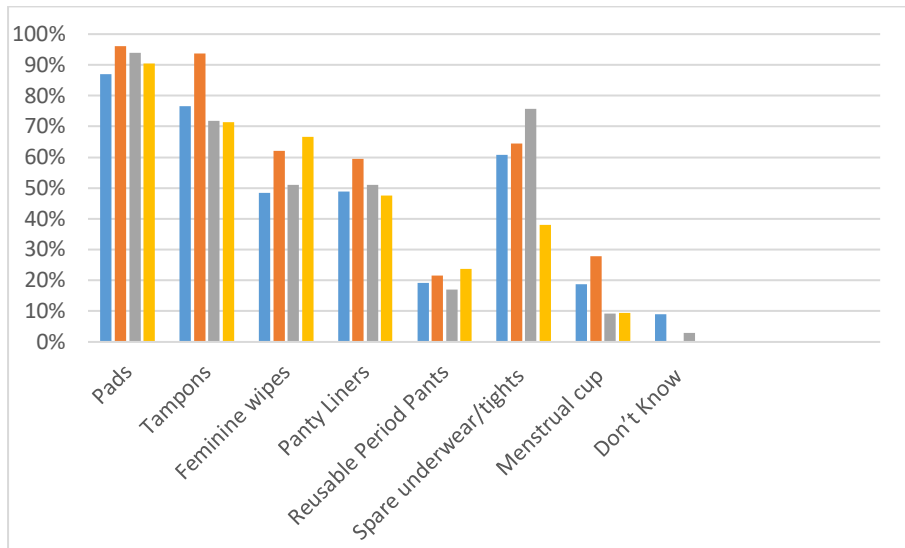
Figure 3: Proportion of respondents whose school/college provide the following free period products



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The majority of responses from the four questionnaires highlight that pads are the most common period product provided in schools and colleges (91.0% of pupils, 100% of students, 91.1% of teachers and 85.7% of FE Staff). Reusable period pants and menstrual cups were the least common items provided in schools and colleges.

Figure 4: Proportion of respondents who think the following products should be offered in school



Pupils
FE Students
Teachers
FE Staff

The most common period product respondents think should be provided at school is pads (87.1% of pupils, 96.2% of students, 93.9% of teachers and 90.5% of FE Staff). Reusable period pants are the items respondents least thought should be provided in schools/colleges. Other items suggested that should be provided in schools and colleges included pain relief and heat pads.

4.2 Pupil Questionnaire

Number of respondents: 1,711

Table 1: Respondent Age

	Number	Percentage
8–11 Years	32	1.9%
12–15 Years	1,088	63.6%
16–19 Years	567	33.1%
20 Years and above	24	1.4%
Total	1,711	100%

Table 2: Respondent Gender

	Number	Percentage
Boy	115	6.7%
Girl	1,510	88.3%
Prefer not to say	48	2.8%
* Other	38	2.2%
Total	1,711	100%

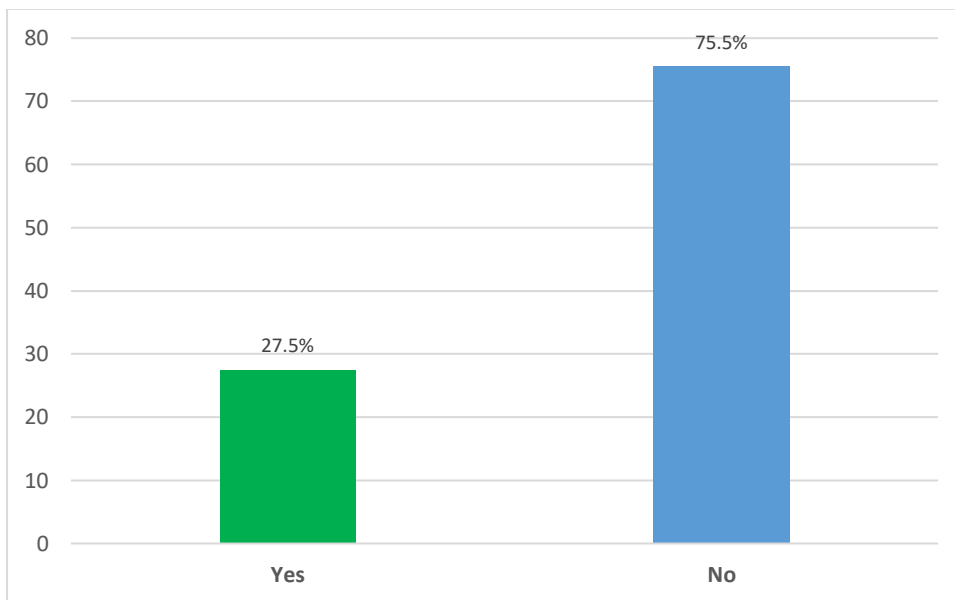
* Other included: Non-binary; Gender fluid; Demiboy; Demigirl and Trans.

Table 3: Number of respondents who have a period

	Number	Percentage
I have already started my period	1,391	81.3%
I expect to take my period in the future	185	10.8%
I will not have a period	108	6.3%
* Other	27	1.6%
Total	1,711	100%

* Other included: I'm a boy; Prefer not to say

Figure 5: Proportion of respondents who had difficulty accessing period products



Over a quarter of respondents (27.5% N=382) who have a period have had difficulty accessing period products.

Table 4: Respondents reasons for not being able to access period products

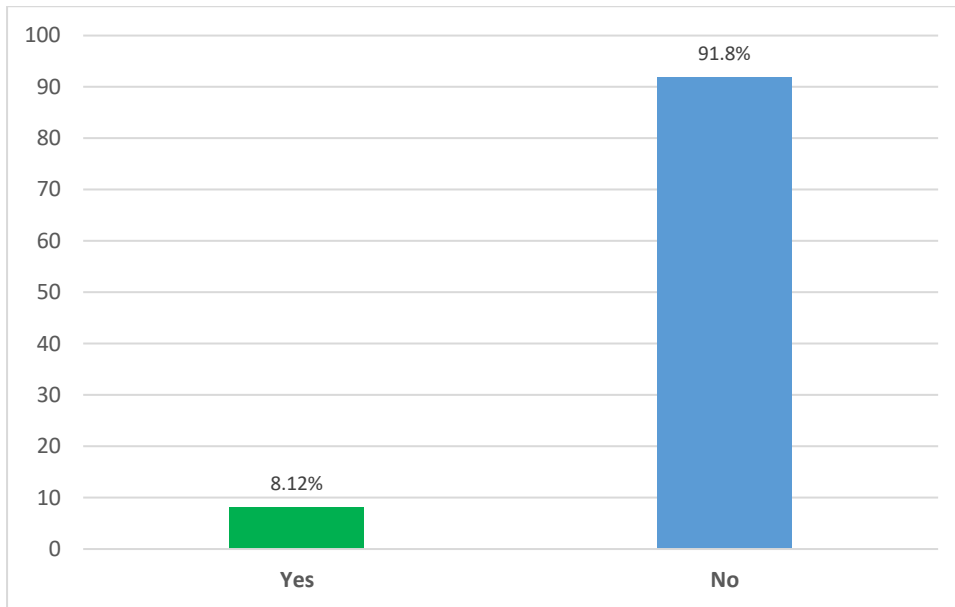
	Number	Percentage
Did not have the period products I needed with me in school	318	83.2%
Not available in school	201	52.6%
Did not have time to get to shop to buy period products	145	37.9%
Did not have the period products I needed at home	104	27.2%
Was embarrassed to ask my parent/guardian for period products	88	23.0%
Could not afford period products	45	11.8%
Parent/Guardian could not afford period products	25	6.5%

The most common reason given by respondents (N=318 83.2%) for not having access to period products was that they didn't have what they needed with them in school. 6.5% cited their parent/guardian not being able to afford such products as their reason for a lack of access, whilst 11.8% stated that they could not afford them.

Some of the other reasons given for not having access to period products included:

- Expense of period products in school (N=2).
- Not easily accessible in school (N=2).
- Difficult home life, unable to ask for help buying period products (N=1).
- Embarrassed to buy them (N=1).
- Local shop had no stock during lockdown (N=1).
- Didn't have the product I needed (N=1).

Figure 6: Proportion of respondents who have missed school because they didn't have necessary period products



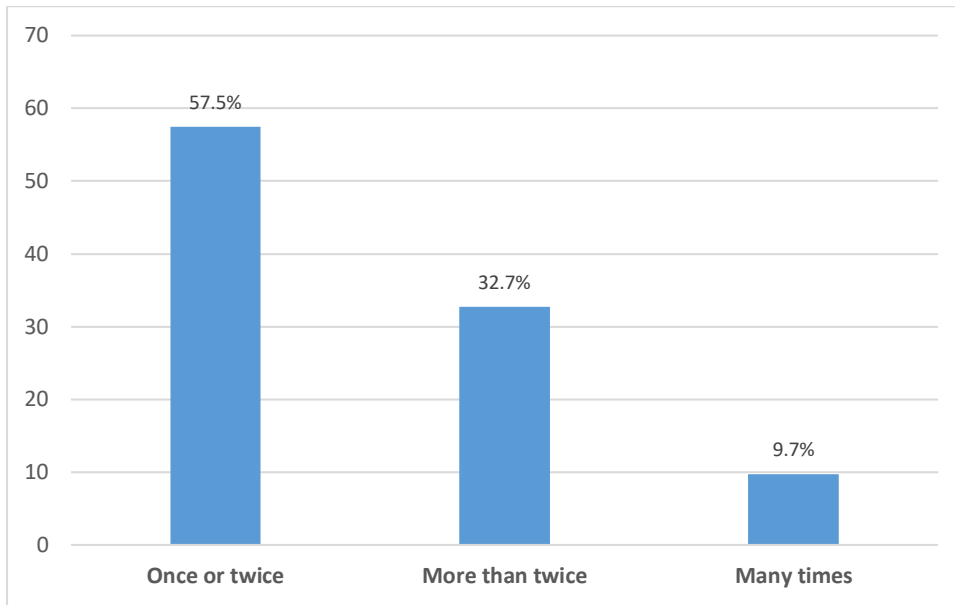
Eight per cent of respondents (N=113) said that they have missed school because they did not have sufficient period products.

Table 5: Reason respondents gave for missing school

	Number	Percentage
Period	29	26.1%
Sickness not related to period	74	66.7%
Prefer not to say	8	7.2%
Total	111	100%

The most common reason those who missed school because they did not have sufficient period products gave to their school was sickness not related to period (66.7% N=74).

Figure 7: Number of times respondents have missed school because they did not have sufficient period products



Over half of those who missed school because they did not have sufficient period products did so ‘Once or twice’ (N=65), while 11 (9.7%) respondents have missed school ‘Many times’ because they did not have sufficient period products.

Table 6: Number of respondents who experienced the following because they did not have access to period products

	Number	Percentage
Had to ask a friend or teacher for period products	789	56.7%
Had to use an alternative e.g. toilet roll	724	52.0%
Felt worried or anxious	659	47.4%
Felt unable to concentrate at school	493	35.4%
Had to leave school early	220	15.8%
Had to use a cheaper period product	181	13.0%

A number of respondents have experienced incidents at school because they did not have sufficient period products, the most common being; ‘Having to ask a friend or teacher for period products’ (N=789 56.7%).

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Some of the other things experienced by respondents who did not have enough period products are as follows:

- Had to use products provided in school (N=3).
- Leaked onto clothes (N=2).
- Only because I did not have products with me (N=2).
- Had to go home for a while but came back (N=1).

Table 7: Number of respondents whose school offer free period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	756	44.2%
No	422	24.7%
Don't know	533	31.2%
Total	1711	100%

Almost half of respondents' (N=756: 44.2%) schools already provide free period products.

Table 8: Number of respondents who have used the free period products provided at school

	Number	Percentage
Yes	318	48.9%
No	332	51.0%
Total	650	100%

Almost half of respondents (48.9%) whose school provide free period products have used these.

Table 9: How respondent access the free period products provided at school

	Number	Percentage
Toilets	552	73.0%
Through a teacher	100	13.2%
* Other	104	13.7%
Total	756	100%

*Other included: Matron/Nurse, Reception and both

The majority of respondents whose school offers free period products do so in the toilets (73% N= 552).

Table 10: Number of respondents whose schools offer the following free period products

	Number	Percentage
Pads	688	91.0%
Tampons	378	50.0%
Panty liners	185	24.5%
Spare underwear/tights	79	10.4%
Feminine wipes	21	2.8%
Reusable period pants	3	0.4%
Menstrual cup	2	0.3%
Don't know	95	12.6%
* Other	6	0.8%

*Other included: Reusable pads; Clothes; All of above; and Heat pads

The most common period product item provided in schools was pads (91.0%); while 12.6% (N=95) did not know what period products were provided in school.

Table 11: Number of respondents who think their school should offer the following period products

	Number	Percentage
Pads	1,490	87.1%
Tampons	1,310	76.6%
Spare underwear/tights	1,039	60.7%
Feminine wipes	828	48.4%
Panty liners	836	48.9%
Reusable period pants	328	19.2%
Menstrual cup	322	18.8%
Don't know	152	8.9%
* Other	25	1.5%

*Other included: All of above; Pain relief; and Spare clothes

Over half of respondents agreed that the following products should be provided in schools: pads (87.1%), tampons (76.6%), and spare underwear/tights (60.7%). Fewer respondents agreed that reusable period products should be provided such as reusable period pants (19.2%) and menstrual cup (18.8%).

Table 12: Respondent’s rating of how embarrassed they were buying period products

	Number	Percentage
Very embarrassed	224	16.1%
Embarrassed	513	36.9%
Neither	280	20.1%
Not embarrassed	207	14.9%
Not at all embarrassed	167	12.0%
Total	1391	100%

Over half of respondents were either ‘Very embarrassed’ (16.1%) or ‘Embarrassed’ (36.9%) when buying period products. There were a number of qualitative comments in response to this question, the themes of which are summarised below:

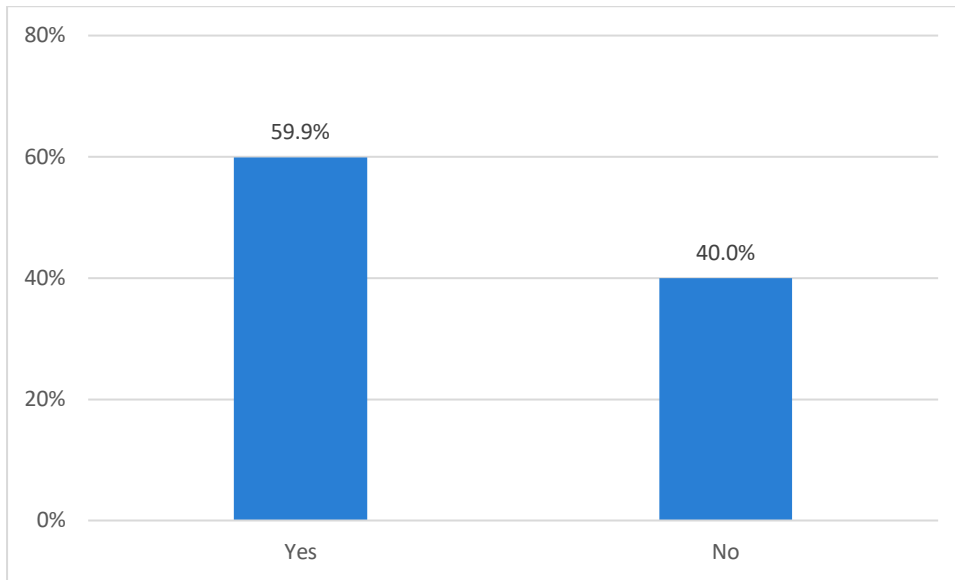
- Do not feel embarrassed as it is normal (N=37).
- Yes, I did feel embarrassed (N=29).
- Parent buys them (N=24).
- There is an unnecessary stigma attached to periods (N=6).
- When I was younger, I felt embarrassed (N=6).
- No strong feelings either way (N=5).

Table 13: Number of respondents who think period products are too expensive

	Number	Percentage
Yes	1,144	66.9%
No	197	11.5%
Don’t know	370	21.6%
Total	1,711	100%

Two thirds of respondents (66.9%) agreed that period products were too expensive.

Figure 8: Proportion of respondents who have a brand of period products they prefer to use



Over half of respondents (59.9% N=834) have a brand of period products they prefer to use. Some of the brands respondents prefer to use are as follows:

- Always
- Bodyform
- Tampax
- Carefree
- Kotex
- Lil-lets
- Silk and Satin
- Tena
- Tesco brand

Table 14: Number of respondents who agreed eco factors are significant when choosing period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	417	24.4%
No	488	28.5%
Don't know	806	47.1%
Total	1,711	100%

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Almost a quarter of respondents (24.4%) agree that eco factors are important when choosing period products. Respondents were given the opportunity to provide qualitative comments, which are summarised below:

- Eco factors are an important issue and should be given consideration when buying period products (N=45).
- Eco products are expensive (N=25).
- Comfort and cleanliness are the main priorities when buying period products (N=13).
- Tried the eco products but didn't like them (N=9).
- Eco products are not easily accessible (N=7).

Table 15: Number of respondents who agreed that talking about period products can make individuals feel embarrassed

	Number	Percentage
Agree	1,044	61.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	517	30.2%
Disagree	150	8.8%
Total	1,711	100%

A large proportion of respondents (61.0%) agreed that talking about period products can make individuals feel embarrassed. Similar results are evident in the qualitative responses, which are summarised below:

- Some people can be embarrassed due to the stigma around periods, especially if they are young or around males (N=128).
- Periods are normal and should be talked about to reduce the stigma (N=56).
- Do not feel any embarrassment talking about periods (N=17).
- Don't know if some people are embarrassed (N=6).
- There is no embarrassment talking about periods or period poverty (N=6).

Table 16: Number of respondents who support the new government scheme that supplies free period products to schools in Northern Ireland

	Number	Percentage
Yes	1681	98.2%
No	30	1.8%
Total	1,711	100%

Almost all respondents (98.2%) support the new government scheme that supplies free period products to schools in Northern Ireland. The majority of qualitative comments reflected the support for the new government pilot scheme, which are summarised below:

- This is an excellent scheme and will be very beneficial (N=115).
- Providing free period products should be extended to other places, including public places and other countries (N=9).
- Free period products in school are vital for when pupils need period products but didn't bring any to school (N=8).
- Don't know if I support this scheme (N=8).

Additional Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments, which are summarised below:

- Period products should be free in all public places; those with periods should not be disadvantaged (N=51).
- Period products should be easily accessible in school, pupils should not have to ask someone for them, and empty boxes should be refilled (N=19).
- Remove the stigma around periods by educating all pupils in school. Normalise talking about periods and things like leaking (N=18).
- Period poverty should have been addressed a long time ago (N=9).
- Will be good to have period products in school for times you don't have enough products with you (N=8).
- Don't have any issues accessing period products (N=7).
- Pupils should not be stopped from going to the toilet by a teacher (N=6).

4.3 Further Education Student Questionnaire

Total responses – 79

Table 17: College respondents attend

	Number	Percentage
Southern College	2	2.5%
Belfast Metropolitan College	61	77.2%
South Eastern Regional College	6	7.6%
Northern Regional College	5	6.3%
North West Regional College	5	6.3%
Total	79	100%

Table 18: Respondent age

	Number	Percentage
16–18 Years	26	32.9%
19 and above Years	53	67.1%
Total	79	100%

Table 19: Respondent gender

	Number	Percentage
Boy	1	1.3%
Girl	74	93.7%
Prefer not to say	3	3.8%
* Other	1	1.3%
Total	79	100%

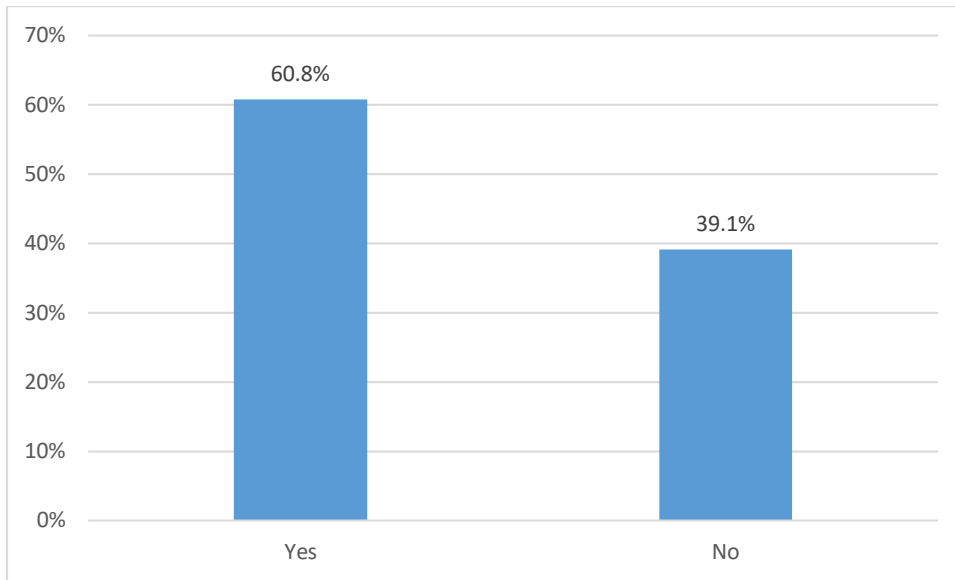
* Other included: Non-binary.

Table 20: Number of respondents who have/have not a period

	Number	Percentage
I have already started my period	74	93.7%
I expect to take my period in the future	2	2.5%
I will not have a period	1	1.3%
* Other	2	2.5%
Total	79	100%

* Other included: I'm a boy; Prefer not to say

Figure 9: Proportion of respondents who had difficulty accessing period products, either at home or in school, in the last year



Over half (60.8% N=45) of those who responded to the questionnaire had difficulty accessing period products.

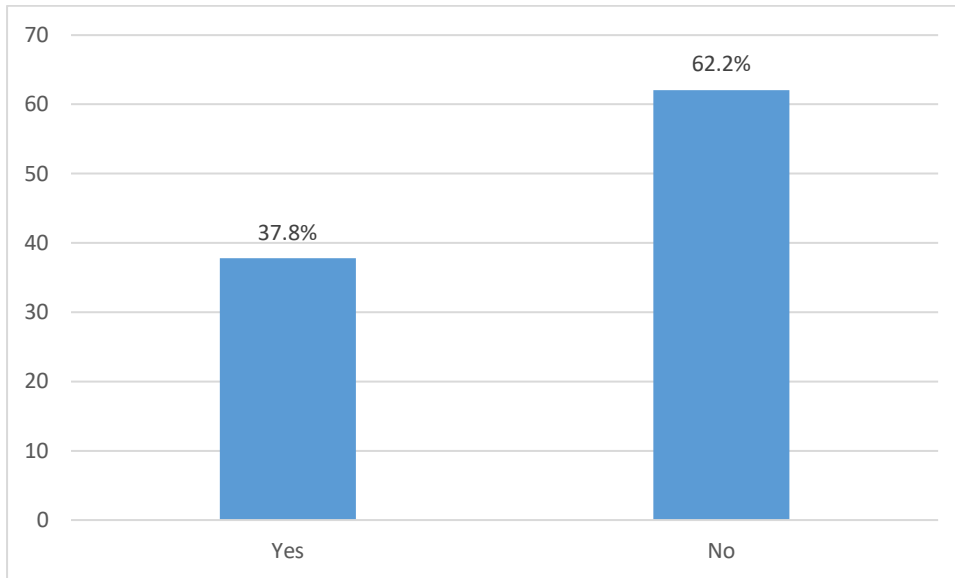
Table 21: Respondent reasons for not being able to access period products

	Number	Percentage
Didn't have the products I needed with me at college	38	84.4%
Did not have time to get to shop to buy period products	26	57.7%
Not available in college	23	51.1%
Could not afford period products	21	46.6%
Did not have the period products I needed at home	14	31.1%
Was embarrassed to ask my parent/guardian for period products	11	24.4%
Parent/Guardian could not afford period products	7	15.5%
* Other	1	2.2%

*Other reason: Domestic abuse

As with the school pupils, the most popular reason given by FE students (N=38 84.4%) for not being able to access period products was they ‘Didn’t have the products I needed with me at college’.

Figure 10: Proportion of respondents who have missed college because they didn’t have sufficient period products



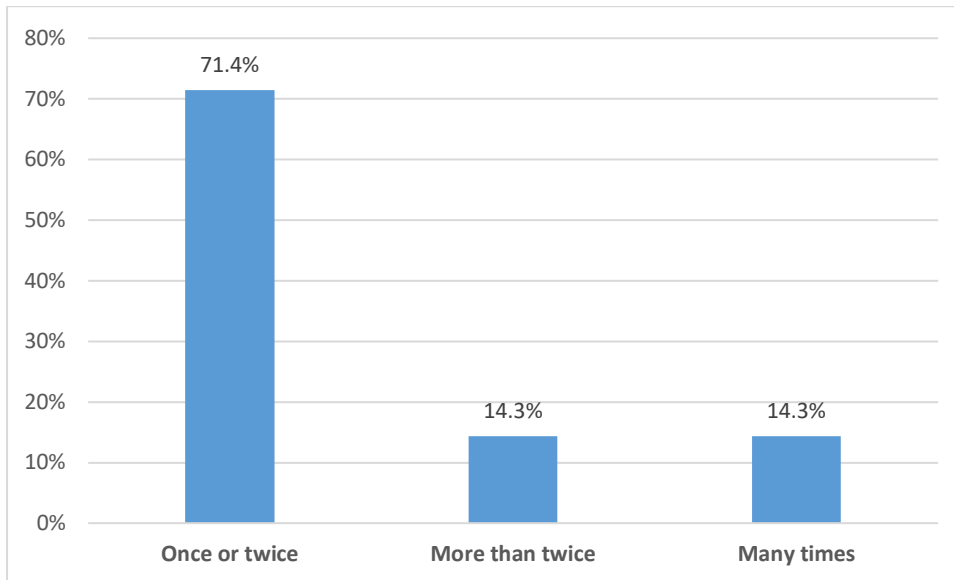
Just over a third of respondents (37.8%% N=28) have missed college because they didn’t have sufficient period products.

Table 22: Reason respondents gave for missing college

	Number	Percentage
Period	1	3.6%
Sickness not related to period	24	85.7%
Prefer not to say	3	10.7%
Total	28	100%

The majority of those who missed college because they did not have sufficient period products gave the reason as sickness not related to periods (85.7% N=24).

Figure 11: How often respondents have missed school because they did not have sufficient period products



The majority of those who missed school because they didn't have sufficient period products did so 'Once or twice' (71.4% N=20), while four respondents missed school 'More than once' and four missed it 'Many times'.

Table 23: Number of respondents who experienced the following because they did not have access to period products

	Number	Percentage
Had to use an alternative e.g., toilet roll	60	81.1%
Felt worried or anxious	55	74.3%
Had to ask a friend or teacher for period products	51	68.9%
Felt unable to concentrate at school	41	55.4%
Had to leave school early	27	36.5%
Had to use a cheaper period product	26	35.1%
Other	2	2.7%

Over four fifths of respondents (81.1% N=60) 'Had to use an alternative' because they did not have access to period products, while 74.3% 'Felt worried or anxious' because they did not have sufficient period products.

Table 24: Number of respondents whose college offer free period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	7	8.9%
No	38	48.1%
Don't know	34	43.0%
Total	79	100%

A small number of respondents' (8.9% N=7) colleges provide free period products.

Table 25: Number of respondents who have used the free period products provided at school

	Number	Percentage
Yes	3	50%
No	3	50%
Total	6	100%

Half of those (50% N=3) whose college provides free period products have used them.

Table 26: Where respondents feel is the best place to keep period products

	Number	Percentage
Toilets	74	93.6%
Students' Union	16	20.3%
Designated staff member	14	17.7%
College office	5	6.3%
* Other	3	3.8%

*Other included: All toilets; Students should not have to ask for them

The majority of respondents (N=74 93.6%) to this survey thought period products should be kept in the toilets. A number of respondents also felt that it would be appropriate to keep period products in the student's union (N=16) or with a designated staff member (N=14).

Table 27: Number of respondents whose college offer the following free period products

	Number	Percentage
Pads	7	100%
Tampons	3	42.8%
Feminine wipes	0	0.0%
Panty liners	3	42.8%
Reusable period pants	0	0.0%
Spare underwear/tights	1	14.3%
Menstrual cup	0	0.0%
Don't know	0	0.0%
* Other	0	0.0%

*Other included: Reusable pads; Clothes; All of above; and Heat pads

All (N=7) of the respondents' colleges who provide free period products provide pads, while three provide tampons.

Table 28: Number of respondents who think the following period products should be provided free at college

	Number	Percentage
Pads	76	96.2%
Tampons	74	93.7%
Feminine wipes	49	62.0%
Panty liners	47	59.5%
Reusable period pants	17	21.5%
Spare underwear/tights	51	64.6%
Menstrual cup	22	27.8%
Don't know	0	0.0%
* Other	2	2.5%

*Other included: Reusable pads; All of the above

Almost all respondents agreed that pads (N=96.2%) and tampons (93.7%) should be provided free in school.

Table 29: Respondent’s rating of how embarrassed they were buying period products

	Number	Percentage
Very embarrassed	13	17.6%
Embarrassed	27	36.5%
Neither	9	12.1%
Not embarrassed	12	16.2%
Not at all embarrassed	13	17.6%
Total	74	100%

Over half of the respondents to this survey were either ‘Very embarrassed’ (N=13 17.6%) or ‘Embarrassed’ (N=27 36.5%) when buying period products. Respondents were asked to provide a qualitative comment, these are summarised below:

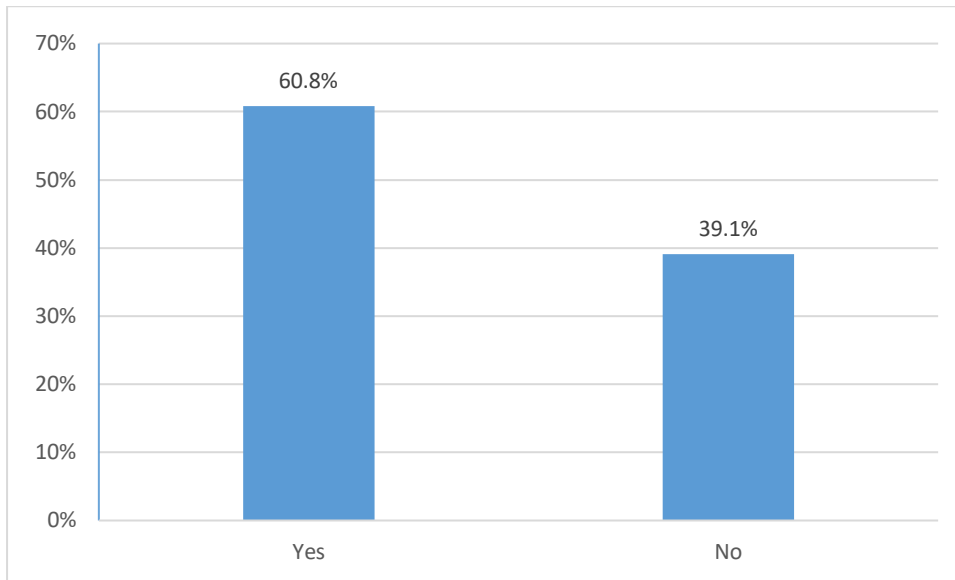
- Sometimes feel embarrassed (N=2).
- There is no need to feel embarrassed; it’s perfectly normal (N=2).
- I felt embarrassed when I was younger (N=1).

Table 30: Number of respondents who think period products are too expensive

	Number	Percentage
Yes	74	93.7%
No	3	3.8%
Don’t know	2	2.5%
Total	79	100%

The majority of respondents (N=74 93.7%) agreed that period products were too expensive.

Figure 12: Proportion of respondents who have a brand of period products they prefer to use



Over half (N=45 60.8%) of those who responded to this questionnaire agreed that they had a brand of period products they preferred to use. The brands mentioned by respondents that they prefer to use are as follows:

- Always
- Tampax
- Tena
- Tesco own brand
- Bodyform
- Lil-lets

Table 31: Number of respondents who agreed eco factors are significant when choosing period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	24	30.4%
No	38	48.1%
Don't know	17	21.5%
Total	79	100%

Eco factors are important to almost a third (N=24 30.4%) of respondents, while 21.5% don't know. Respondents provided qualitative comments, which are summarised below:

- Eco products are too expensive (N=4).
- I use eco products when I can (N=3).
- Eco products are not convenient (N=1).
- Don't think eco factors are important when using period products (N=1).

Table 32: Number of respondents who agreed that talking about periods and period poverty can make individuals feel embarrassed

	Number	Percentage
Agree	55	69.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	16	20.3%
Disagree	8	10.1%
Total	79	100%

Over two thirds (N=55 69.9%) of respondents agree that talking about periods and period poverty can make some individuals embarrassed. There were a number of qualitative comments, which are summarised below:

- Some people may be embarrassed but talking about periods more will stop this (N=4).
- Periods should be talked about more to remove stigma (N=4).
- Some younger people might be embarrassed (N=1).
- Trans individuals can be embarrassed (N=1).

Table 33: Number of respondents who would support a pilot scheme that supplies free period products to colleges

	Number	Percentage
Yes	78	98.7%
No	1	1.3%
Total	79	100%

Almost all respondents (N=78 98.7%) would support a pilot scheme to provide free period products in colleges. Respondents provided additional comments, which are listed below:

- It would be an excellent idea to provide free period products in school (N=2).
- The products should be included in all bathrooms (N=1).
- Eco products should be provided (N=1).

Additional Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments, which are summarised below:

- Period products should be free as those with periods should not be at a disadvantage (N=5).
- Period poverty is an issue for some individuals (N=2).
- It is very embarrassing when you don't have period products with you in school (N=1).
- A designated person would be better, as some individuals may take advantage of the free products in college (N=1).
- Survey should have been carried out in January (N=1).

4.4 Teacher Questionnaire

Total responses – 770

Table 34: Number of respondents who have heard of period poverty

	Number	Percentage
Yes	745	96.8%
No	25	3.2%
Total	770	100%

The majority of respondents (N=745 96.8%) have heard of period poverty.

Table 35: Respondents' knowledge of whether pupils have experienced any of the following

	Number	Percentage
Missed school because they did not have sufficient period products	205	26.6%
Had to leave school because they did not have sufficient period products	249	32.3%
Asked you or another member of staff for period products	539	70.0%
Displayed signs of distress that may be due to lack of period products e.g. Not concentrating during lesson	299	38.8%
Been made to feel uncomfortable by another pupil because they didn't have sufficient period products	91	11.8%
Don't know	168	21.8%

Respondents were aware of incidents which had occurred in school, with 70.0% (N=539) noting that a pupil had to 'Ask another member of staff for period products', while 38.8% (N=299) of respondents recognised 'Signs of distress in pupils due to lack of period products'. Respondents were asked if they had an awareness of any other incidents that might have happened in school; these are summarised below:

- Have seen evidence of period poverty among pupils (N=4).
- Has seen a pupil ask for a change of underwear (N=1).
- Pupils find it embarrassing accessing period products in the toilets (N=1).
- Has seen a pupil leak because a teacher stopped them going to toilet (N=1).
- A pupil has missed class because they were sourcing period products (N=1).

Table 36: Number of respondents whose school provide free period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	426	55.3%
No	212	27.5%
Don't know	132	17.1%
Total	770	100%

Over half of respondents (N=426 55.3%) said their school provides free period products. Qualitative comments relating to this are as follows:

- Teachers have provided period products for pupil use (N=3).

Table 37: Which period products are provided in those schools which provide free period products

	Number	Percentage
Pads	388	91.1%
Tampons	171	40.1%
Feminine wipes	30	7.0%
Panty liners	67	15.7%
Reusable period pants	0	0.0%
Spare underwear/tights	144	33.8%
Menstrual cup	1	0.2%
Don't know	37	8.7%

Teachers who responded to this questionnaire reported that the most common period product provided in school was pads (N=388 91.1%), while 40.1% (N=171) said their school provided tampons.

Table 38: Products respondents feel should be provided in school

	Number	Percentage
Pads	723	93.8%
Tampons	554	71.9%
Feminine wipes	393	51.0%
Panty liners	393	51.0%
Reusable period pants	131	17.0%
Spare underwear/tights	583	75.7%
Menstrual cup	71	9.2%
Don't know	23	2.9%

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The majority of teachers responding to this questionnaire agreed that pads (N=723 93.8%) should be provided in schools. Spare underwear/tights (N=583 75.7%) and tampons (N=554 71.9%) should also be provided in school. Respondents were asked to comment on other products that should be provided in schools; these are as follows:

- Reusable period products (N=5).
- Change of clothes, including PE clothes (N=3).
- Bags to take stained clothes home (N=1).

Table 39: Where respondents think free period products should be kept in school

	Number	Percentage
Designated contact within school	548	71.2%
Toilets	535	69.5%
Reception	244	31.7%
Office	221	28.7%

The largest proportion of respondents (N=548 71.2%) agreed that period products should be kept with a designated staff member, followed by the toilets (N=535 63.5%). Other suggestions for places to keep period products are listed below:

- Form teacher (N=23).
- Classroom (N=6).
- With teachers (N=6).
- Pastoral team (N=6).
- Designated area in school, so pupils can collect them (N=4).
- Changing room/PE Department (N=3).
- Designated toilets (N=2).

Table 40: Number of respondents who agreed there was a brand of period products pupils preferred to use

	Number	Percentage
Yes	70	9.1%
No	700	90.9%
Total	770	100%

Less than a tenth of respondents (N=70 9.1%) stated that they knew of a brand of period products pupils preferred to use. Some of the brands teachers were aware that pupils favoured are as follows:

- Always
- Tampax
- Lil-lets

Table 41: Number of respondents who agreed pupils felt eco factors were important when choosing period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	313	40.6%
No	457	59.4%
Total	770	100%

40.6% (N=313) of respondents agreed that pupils thought eco factors were important when choosing period products.

Table 42: Number of respondents who agreed with the new government pilot scheme to provide free period products to schools

	Number	Percentage
Yes	761	98.8%
No	9	1.2%
Total	770	100%

Almost all respondents (N=761 98.8%) agreed with the new government pilot scheme to provide free period products to schools. Similarly, respondents (N=758 98.4%) agreed that free period products would help pupils manage their period. Respondents provided qualitative comments, these are listed below:

- This initiative is long overdue (N=89).
- Have already been supplying period products in school (N=11).
- Those with a period should not be disadvantaged because of this (N=10).
- Initiative is vital for girls who need products in an emergency (N=9).
- Buying period products is the responsibility of family, not the school or government (N=4).
- Schools should talk openly to everyone about periods to remove the stigma (N=3).
- Period products are too expensive (N=3).
- Primary schools should be included too (N=3).
- Only those who genuinely need them should get them (N=2).

Table 43: Number of respondents who agreed they would find training on menstrual wellbeing and period poverty useful

	Number	Percentage
Yes	516	67.0%
No	120	15.6%
Not sure	134	17.4%
Total	770	100%

Over two thirds of respondents (N=516 67.0%) agreed they would find training on menstrual wellbeing and period poverty useful.

Table 44: Which of the following formats, those willing to take part in training, would like to do so via:

	Number	Percentage
Online training	326	63.1%
Face-to-face training	269	52.1%
Leaflets and online videos	261	50.6%

The method of training in 'Menstrual wellbeing' thought to be the most useful was online training (N=326 63.1%). Approximately half of respondents also supported training via face-to-face (N=269 52.1%) and leaflets and online videos (N=261 50.6%). Three respondents also suggested group discussion as a training method.

Additional Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments, which are listed below:

- A fantastic idea, not only for helping those who are experiencing period poverty, but also for any pupil needing period products in an emergency (N=56).
- Need training for all pupils to remove the stigma surrounding periods (N=23).
- School has already been providing period products (N=16).
- Have seen evidence that period poverty exists (N=9).
- Training for teachers to help them understand period poverty and girls' experiences of period poverty (N=8).
- Ensure primary schools are included (N=5).
- Free period products should be targeted to those who specifically need them (N=5).
- Include special schools also (N=2).
- Period products are expensive (N=2).
- Eco period products should be made available (N=2).
- Should be available through a designated staff member (N=2).
- Real period poverty exists in the third world, not in our schools (N=2).

4.5 Further Education Centre Staff Questionnaire

Total responses – 21

Table 45: College respondents work at:

	Number	Percentage
Southern Regional College	1	4.8%
Belfast Metropolitan College	12	57.1%
South Eastern Regional College	5	23.8%
Northern Regional College	1	4.8%
North West Regional College	1	4.8%
South West College	1	4.8%
Total	21	100%

Table 46: Number of respondents who have heard of period poverty

	Number	Percentage
Yes	21	100%
No	0	0.0%
Total	21	100%

All respondents (N=21) have heard of period poverty before.

Table 47: Respondents' knowledge of whether students have experienced any of the following

	Number	Percentage
Asked you or another member of staff for period products	9	42.8%
Displayed signs of distress that may be due to lack of period products e.g. Not concentrating during lesson	8	38.1%
Had to leave college because they did not have sufficient period products	4	19.0%
Missed college because they did not have sufficient period products	3	14.3%
Been made to feel uncomfortable by another student because they didn't have sufficient period products	1	4.8%
Don't know	7	33.3%

Less than half of those (N=9 42.8%) who responded to this questionnaire were aware of a student asking a member of staff for period products. Over a third (N=8 38.1%) of respondents had seen a pupil 'Display signs of distress that may be due to lack of period products'. One respondent commented that they had witnessed a student in pain because of period cramps.

Table 48: Number of respondents whose college provide free period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	7	33.3%
No	4	19.0%
Don't know	10	47.6%
Total	21	100%

A third (N=7 33.3%) of respondents' colleges provide free period products for students.

Table 49: Which period products are provided in those colleges which provide free period products

	Number	Percentage
Pads	6	85.6%
Tampons	4	57.1%
Feminine wipes	0	0.0%
Panty liners	1	14.3%
Reusable period pants	0	0.0%
Spare underwear/tights	1	14.3%
Menstrual cup	0	0.0%
Don't know	1	14.3%

In those colleges which provide free period products, six provide pads, while four provide tampons.

Table 50: Products respondents feel should be provided in colleges

	Number	Percentage
Pads	19	90.5%
Tampons	15	71.4%
Feminine wipes	14	66.7%
Panty liners	10	47.6%
Reusable period pants	5	23.8%
Spare underwear/tights	8	38.1%
Menstrual cup	2	9.5%
Don't know	0	0.0%

Pads (N=19 90.5%) and Tampons (N=15 71.4%) were the most frequent items respondents thought should be provided in colleges. One respondent commented that it was family responsibility to buy period products.

Table 51: Where respondents think free period products should be kept in school

	Number	Percentage
Toilets	16	76.2%
Students' Union	4	19.0%
Office	4	19.0%
Reception Area	3	14.3%
Designated contact within college	3	14.3%

The most common place cited by respondents to keep period products was toilets (N=16 76.2%). There were two qualitative comments to this question, these are listed below:

- Students' Union (N=1).
- Students should take responsibility for their own hygiene (N=1).

Table 52: Number of respondents who agreed there was a brand of period products students preferred to use

	Number	Percentage
Yes	1	4.8%
No	20	95.2%
Total	21	100%

Only one respondent agreed that students have a brand of period products they prefer.

Table 53: Number of respondents who agreed pupils felt eco factors were important when choosing period products

	Number	Percentage
Yes	13	61.9%
No	8	38.1%
Total	21	100%

Almost two thirds of respondents (N=13 61.9%) agreed that students are conscious of eco factors when buying period products.

Table 54: Number of respondents who would support a pilot scheme that supplies free period products to colleagues

	Number	Percentage
Yes	19	90.5%
No	2	9.5%
Total	21	100%

The majority of respondents (N=19 90.5%) agreed they would support a pilot scheme to provide free period products to colleges. Respondent's qualitative comments are listed below:

- This is a very worthwhile scheme (N=2).
- All period products should be free (N=1).
- Already providing period products (N=1).
- Female staff would be happy to contribute to this (N=1).
- There are lots of other issues affecting students which also need addressed, such as FGM, arranged marriage and honour killings.

Almost all respondents (N=19 90.5%) agreed free period products would help students manage their period.

Table 55: Number of respondents who agreed they would find training on menstrual wellbeing and period poverty useful

	Number	Percentage
Yes	13	61.9%
No	7	33.3%
Not sure	1	4.8%
Total	21	100%

Thirteen respondents agreed that they would find training on menstrual wellbeing and period poverty useful.

Table 56: Which of the following formats, those willing to take part in training, would like to do so via:

	Number	Percentage
Online training	8	61.5%
Face-to-face training	9	69.3%
Leaflets and online videos	6	46.1%

Face-to-face training (N=6 46.1%) and online training (N=8 61.5%) were the favoured methods for staff in colleges to engage in training.

Additional Comments

There were some additional comments from FE Staff, which are summarised below:

- Training in colleges is necessary to remove the stigma around periods and period poverty (N=2).
- It is not the government's responsibility to provide period products (N=2).
- College already provides some products (N=1).

5.0 CONCLUSION

A number of key themes are evident from the results of the four questionnaires, and these can be summarised as follows:

Period Poverty

Period poverty does exist in schools and colleges in Northern Ireland. Results from the pupil and FE student questionnaire show that a number of pupils/students have missed school/college because they did not have sufficient period products. Although the numbers are relatively low, this is still representative of pupils missing out on vital hours of education because of their disadvantaged background. Teachers and FE Staff have also witnessed evidence of period poverty.

Access to period products at school

Results from the four surveys reveal that a number of schools and colleges already provide free period products. However, there is an inconsistency of approach across schools which leaves some pupils/students at a disadvantage because of the school/college they attend. As period products which are already provided rely on the goodwill of teachers, parents and charitable donations, there is no guarantee that the product a pupil needs will be available at their particular school/college.

A key message in support of the scheme to provide free period products is that pupils/students often need these in an emergency. The distress that pupils experience not having the products they need will have an impact on their school day. In fact, many respondents to all questionnaires went so far as to say period products should be freely available in all pupil toilets, likening them to the availability of hand soap and toilet roll.

Stigma around periods

Alarming, a majority of pupils (59.9%) and FE Students (54.1%) reported embarrassment when buying period products. To help overcome this, many respondents in their qualitative comments suggested periods should be talked about more often to remove the stigma around periods and period poverty. A large proportion of teachers and FE Staff were willing to take part in training relating to period poverty, exemplifying the widespread desire for more knowledge that will help dissipate the effects of period poverty.

Eco products

Eco factors are important for a large number of respondents. However, the accessibility and expense of such products make them less attractive.

Government scheme to provide free period products to schools

The majority of respondents support the new scheme to provide free period products to schools and would support the same scheme if it was available in FE colleges. There was a very small number of respondents who did not support this, suggesting that further training or information provision to some would be beneficial.

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