36 University of Exeter Students' Guild

Liberation Conference

Free period products in educational and workplace establishments in England

What's the issue and how does it affect students?

Period poverty is affecting anyone who has no or limited access to menstrual products. Period poverty impacts more than one in five people who menstruate in the UK. This amounts to an estimated 2.8 million people (1 million more than last year).

Having limited access to period products can have a far-reaching effect on people's health, education, and employment opportunities. Of those affected by period poverty, 41% kept pads/tampons in for longer, and 8% reused disposable pads, which are dangerous methods of period management (ActionAid). 18-24s were most likely to struggle to afford period products. Almost half of 18-24s have missed socialising while on their periods.

What changes would we like to see in society to change this?

Rishi's tokenistic VAT tax cut on period products in 2021 has had little impact - at least 80% of savings were retained by retailers instead of lowering the price. We need the next government to listen to activists and students and the WHO who have been calling for governments to make schools, workplaces, and public institutions supportive of managing menstruation with comfort and dignity.

We need to see real change in the form of making menstrual products free in FE/HE and for apprentices in the workplace. For students spending money on essential period products, they are left to choose between food, heating, and period dignity.

What action could NUS, students and SUs take to work on this?

NUS could agree to consistently provide period products. We have been at the forefront of many radical social changes, and we need to commit to this in the next year. The Scottish Government has already passed a Free Period Products Act; as the NUS we need to be pushing for period dignity.

How does it impact FE students / Apprentices?

Free period products need to be extended to the workplace for apprentices.

How does it impact on black*, disabled, LGBT+, trans and women students?

LGBT+ and Trans students are amongst the most likely to be financially disconnected from their families through no fault of their own, which means that whilst other students can rely on some degree of parental support, these students cannot.

How does it impact on International Students, Postgraduate Students, Part Time and Mature Students?

This has an impact on all student groups, especially during present cost of living crisis

Is there a particular impact or response for small and specialist institutions?

The cost of such a scheme for smaller institutions

Does this apply across the UK or specifically in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland?

The issue extends across the UK, however has been somewhat addressed in Scotland already meaning other areas of the UK need the most urgent attention