



ACCESS TO PERIOD PRODUCTS: MONITORING AND EVALUATION STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2024/25



PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES

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Introduction

The strategy set out in this document provides the approach and principles for how the Scottish Government will use evidence and analysis to:

- assess the appropriateness of funding allocations to local authorities, colleges and universities to support the provision of free period products in community and educational settings.
- track, document, and understand the delivery of policies to provide access to free period products in educational and community settings.

The strategy covers data collection and reporting arrangements, including planned outputs, from April 2021 to October 2025.

Policy background

Scotland is a world-leader in the provision of access to free period products. Between 2017 and 14 August 2022, the Scottish Government delivered policies to provide non-statutory access to free period products in a range of settings. The aim of this policy area was to support equality, dignity and rights for those who menstruate and to ensure that lack of access to period products does not impact on an individual's ability to fully participate in day-to-day activities, including work and education at all levels.

Non-statutory provision included support to access free period products in educational settings – schools, college and universities - from August 2018 and in community settings – such as libraries and community centres – from December 2019. Funding provided to the charity FareShare has supported targeted provision of free period products to lower income groups.

The Scottish Government convened a Working Group¹ with membership from internal policy colleagues and external stakeholders. The working group developed and agreed on a set of guiding principles for delivery in educational settings, which were adapted for delivery in community settings. The guiding principles are set in [Annex A](#).

The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021

In November 2020, Scotland became the first country in the world to introduce a law making period products widely available for all who need them. The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill gained Royal Assent on 12 January 2021 to become the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021² (the Act). The Act commenced on 15 August 2022 and places a duty on local authorities to make period products obtainable free of charge in their areas by 'all persons who need to use them' to meet their needs arising while in Scotland.

¹ [Access to free sanitary products: EQIA - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

² [Period Products \(Free Provision\) \(Scotland\) Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

The Act also requires education providers to provide free period products in locations within each institution, including at least one location in each building which is normally used by pupils or students unless, following consultation, it is decided that a building is unsuitable for the provision of period products.

The Act also sets out that period products must be obtainable (i) reasonably easily, (ii) in a way that that reflects the dignity of persons obtaining them and (iii) offer a reasonable choice of period products.

Funding

Since 2017, the Scottish Government has invested over £33 million to fund access to free period products across a range of settings including schools, colleges and universities, wider public spaces and targeted access through community groups for those on low incomes. The Scottish Government has committed to continue funding to local authorities, grant-aided schools and governing bodies of further and higher education institutions to meet their duties under the Act.

For 2022/23, the Scottish Government is providing almost £3.4 million for access to free period products for students at school, college or university and £2.8 million per year to local authorities to provide wider access to period products in schools and community settings across Scotland.

Based on data collection, current funding allocations are expected to continue to be sufficient to meet the duties under the Act. Therefore, no uplift will be applied to full-year funding allocations for 2023/24 to 2025/26. If however, local authorities, colleges and universities can evidence that as a result of increased uptake their full funding allocation for that year is going to be insufficient to meet their duties, additional funding can be applied for through a “bid-in” fund. The bid-in fund will be open for applications from October to December each year during the financial years 2022/23 to 2025/26, with the Scottish Government’s Financial Wellbeing Unit aiming to inform the outcome of applications as soon as is practical following the deadline for bids.

An independent evaluation will be carried out between May to September 2025 to examine statutory provision by local authorities, colleges and universities, with a final report published in October 2025. One of the key objectives of this evaluation is to inform Scottish Government funding allocations to local authorities and education providers to ensure proportionate funding to support uptake and costs. Data collection from local authorities, colleges and universities will be sought to help inform the process. It is anticipated that funding will then be baselined from 2026/27.

In the meantime, funding for the provision in educational settings is based on:

- The number of people in the menstruating pupil and student population.
- An assumed uptake rate, defined as the proportion of the menstruating pupil and student population taking their full annual product requirement.
- Product costs, costed on the basis of an annual requirement of 300 disposable products per person.
- An additional uplift for administration (£5 per head).

Funding for provision in community settings is separated into two strands:

- **Wider population access:** The funding allocation is based on 20% of the eligible population taking 5% of their annual product requirement (15 products per person at 11.6p each).
- **Tackling poverty:** The funding allocation is based on 35% of the eligible population taking their full annual product requirement.

Agreed approach to data collection

An overview of data collection arrangements in relation to non-statutory provision in educational settings in 2018 to 2019 is presented in [Annex B](#).

Subsequently an approach to data collection on the provision delivered by local authorities was agreed between the Scottish Government and COSLA in April 2021. This reporting was to capture more robust baseline costs, and help to understand changes in uptake and cost that occur as we move forward.

Monitoring and evaluation objectives

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for:

- **Accountability:** the Scottish Government needs to be able to respond to scrutiny about use of public resources and that the levels of funding they are providing is appropriate.
- **Learning:** to understand how access to free period products is being provided, including costs, challenges and impacts.

The key objectives of monitoring and evaluation from the period 2021/22 -2024/25 are to:

- Inform Scottish Government funding allocations to local authorities and education providers to ensure proportionate funding to support current uptake and costs.
- Inform understanding of current delivery, including reach, uptake, costs and accessibility.
- Inform future delivery of the policy, including through the identification of 'best practice'.

Key research questions

A basic logic model has been produced for the access to period products policy area, including the inputs, anticipated outputs and short and long-term outcomes ([Annex C](#)). This logic model has been used to guide the research questions and approach to data collection set out in this strategy.

Monitoring and evaluation will address the following five key research questions:

Q1: How much does delivering access to free period products cost?

- a) What was local authorities' and education providers' total spend on providing access to free period products?
- b) What was local authorities' and education providers' total spend on purchasing period products?
- c) What is the average unit cost of period products purchased by local authorities and education providers?
- d) What additional costs did local authorities' and education providers' incur (e.g. marketing, ongoing delivery, staffing)?

Q2: What level of demand is there for free period products?

- a) How many period products were purchased by local authorities and education providers? How does this compare to the number required to meet the requirements of the whole menstruating population in Scotland?
- b) What proportion of period product users reported accessing free period products from their local authority or education provider? Did this differ by area or user demographics?
- c) How often are product users accessing period products from their local authority or education provider?

Q3: How is access to free period products being provided by local authorities and education providers?

- a) Where are free products being provided?
- b) What product types, brands and absorbencies are being made available?
- c) Are product users aware of where and how they can access free period products from their local authority or education provider?

Q4: Does delivery of access to free period products meet user needs?

- a) Among those accessing free period products from their local authority or education provider, what were the reasons?
- b) Were product users able to access their preferred product types?
- c) Were product users able to access products in a sufficient quantity to meet their needs?
- d) Did product users experience any barriers to accessing free period products?
- e) Do product users feel that delivery allows for dignified access to free period products?
- f) Do product users feel able to influence the delivery of access to free period products by their local authority or education provider?

Q5: What impact did the availability of free period products have on users?

- a) As a result of the availability of free period products, are product users less worried about having their period?
- b) As a result of the availability of free period products, do product users feel more able to continue with their day-to-day activities (including attending work and education)?
- c) Has the availability of free period products had any impact on household finances?

Approach to monitoring and evaluation

The approach to monitoring and evaluation will comprise three key elements:

1. **Baseline data collection (2021/22)**. Key monitoring data requested from all local authorities, colleges and universities on the costs associated with delivery of access to free period products incurred during 2021/22. Additionally, a survey to gather baseline data about the current attitudes and experiences of people who may need to use period products took place in July/August 2022 to gather data on experiences over the 2021/22 period prior to the Act coming into force. Findings will be published shortly.
2. **Evidence-based additional funding (2022/23 – 2025/26)**: Additional funding will be made available to all local authorities, colleges and universities in financial years 2022/23 to 2025/26 to support delivery where their full funding allocations have been used. Bids to this additional funding will require submission of robust evidence, as detailed in the following section.
3. **Independent evaluation (2022/23 – 2025/26)**. Process and impact evaluations will be conducted in May to September 2025 covering the three-year period from 2022/23 to 2025/26.

A detailed overview of research questions and data sources are presented in [Annex D](#). An overview of benefits and risks to the proposed approach are presented in [Annex E](#).

The following sections provide more detail on each of these elements.

1. Baseline data collection (2021/22)

The aims of baseline data collection are to:

- contribute to understanding of the costs associated with the delivery of access to free period products in educational and community settings
- contribute to understanding of the current attitudes and experiences of people who may need to use period products.
- enable the Scottish Government to respond to scrutiny about the use of public resources and what has been achieved.

To achieve these aims, there are two main strands to the baseline data collection. The first focusing on the financial costs of implementation. The second looking at attitudes and experiences of those who are eligible for free period products.

Financial information

To understand whether funding allocations were sufficient, the following funding data was collected from local authorities, colleges and universities:

- Total spend on delivery of the policy (including costs associated with period products and administration)
- Total spend on period products, broken down by disposable/reusable period products if available.
- Total number of period products (units) purchased, broken down by disposable/reusable period products if available.

This baseline funding data was intended to determine whether any uplift was required to funding allocations. The uplift was to be applied if:

- funding allocations recalculated using the median product unit price and
- the median estimated uptake rate³ exceed the non-adjusted (i.e. transferred) funding allocations. The criteria for applying an uplift was to be agreed with COSLA and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in advance of this process.

However, while data collection took place, this was done over the course of an academic year highly impacted by pandemic restrictions. This meant that footfall in educational and community settings were significantly reduced. Therefore, analysis of demand did not provide a meaningful overview of actual delivery costs.

At the time of this report, analysis of the available data did not support applying an uplift to the quantum for 2022/23. This is because overall spend was only 53% of quantum, although individually there was a significant range between local authorities.

2. Evidence-based additional funds

The Scottish Government also recognised that there is an unknown level of risk which may be significant should there be a sharp risk in uptake of free period products, following the commencement of the Act.

Taking this potential risk into account, and as agreed by COSLA Leaders in April 2021, the Scottish Government agreed to operate an additional, 'bid-in' evidence-based fund, which will be available to local authorities, as well as colleges and universities, across the

³ Estimated uptake will be calculated for each local authority, college and university by dividing the reported number of period products purchased by the total number of period products required to fulfil the full product requirement of the whole menstruating population accessing products from that local authority, college or university. Where provided, data for disposable products only will be used. If a breakdown by product type is not provided, the total number of product units purchased will be used which may result in a slight overestimation of uptake for these bodies.

period of 2022/23 to 2025/26. This will allow local authorities, colleges and universities who have used their full funding allocation in a financial year to apply for additional funding to allow them to provide more products to those who need them. The Scottish Government has developed details of this fund in collaboration with COSLA and SFC.

The fund will be open to bids only where evidence is provided demonstrating full spend (or projected full spend) of allocated annual funding allocations. The fund will be open to bids to cover either:

- **One-off costs**, such as marketing or promotional campaigns, expansion or revisions to existing delivery approaches that cannot be met from existing allocations; or
- **Ongoing delivery costs**, arising due to uptake in excess of the funded level.

Bids to the fund will require bodies to provide evidence of delivery, which is likely to include:

- Evidence of spend against full year allocations, including a breakdown by product costs and administrative costs;
- Projected spend for the remainder of the financial year to 31 March and a narrative explaining the basis for this projection;
- Numbers and types of products purchased;
- Product unit cost (where this information is not provided, the median unit cost from 2021/22 baseline data will be assumed).

Attitudes and experiences around free period products

In addition to funding information, the evaluation seeks to understand the impact the policy will have on those benefitting from it. Baseline data on the current attitudes and experiences of people who may need to use free period products has been collected during July/August 2022. This was collected through a nationally representative survey of 800-1000 people aged 16 and over who may need to use period products. This approach enables direct comparisons between the baseline data and the forthcoming 2025 data, as the survey can be replicated as part of the 2025 evaluation.⁴

The survey gathered information on the current attitudes and experiences of menstruating people in terms of:

- Being worried about having their period
- Being worried about using period products
- Having difficulties in accessing period products

⁴ Research of non-statutory provision of free period products during 2018/19 was carried out and is being published as a supporting file to this monitoring and evaluation strategy. Although this doesn't provide baseline data prior to the provision of free products, the report provides analysis and learning around the experiences of those who had accessed products in the initial year they were made available in educational settings.

- Being able to continue with day to day activities during their period, including attendance at work/and or education
- Experiences of the amount of money having to spend on period products on a regular/monthly basis
- Ability to afford the range of period products which meet their own needs
- Whether there are any differences in attitudes/experiences amongst those who have been able to access free period products already

It also gathered information on the current reach / take up of free period products so far, considering:

- Reasons for accessing free period products
- Whether people are able to access their preferred product types and sufficient quantity of products to meet their needs
- Whether users are experiencing any barriers to accessing free period products
- Whether product users feel they have been able to achieve dignified access to free period products.

The baseline survey results will be published shortly.

3. Independent evaluation

An independent evaluation will be commissioned by the Scottish Government in April 2025 to examine statutory provision by local authorities, colleges and universities from 2022/23 to 2024/25. The evaluation will be carried out between May to September 2025, with a final report published in October 2025.

The evaluation will consider process and impact (for an overview of research questions that will be considered see [Annex D](#)), alongside making recommendations for future delivery of the policy. The quantitative data obtained through the evaluation on uptake and costs will be used to update funding allocations for 2026/27.

The evaluation scope will be refined through engagement with external stakeholders, including COSLA, SFC, local authorities, colleges and universities.

The evaluation will take a mixed methods approach in collecting qualitative and quantitative data. The views and experience of product users will be gathered to inform understanding. Direct comparisons will be made with the baseline data collected on attitudes and experiences of people who need to use period products over the 2021/22 period. This will allow the evaluation to assess how views and experiences have changed over time since the Act has come into force.

A project steering group will be established by the Scottish Government to oversee this evaluation.

Evaluation outputs

Two key outputs will be published:

- A summary report of baseline data collected during 2021/22.
- A comprehensive evaluation report covering delivery between 2022/23 to 2024/25, which will synthesise learning, take-stock of the evidence base, make policy recommendations and identify gaps.

Evaluation timeline

Dates	Milestone
Baseline survey data on attitudes and experiences of people who may need to use period products gathered	July/August 2022
Publication of summary report of baseline data	November 2022
Bid in fund operates	2022/23- 2025/26
Independent evaluation of delivery from 2022/23 to 2024/25 commissioned	April 2025
Independent evaluation of delivery from 2022/23 to 2024/25 carried out	May to September 2025
Final outputs published from independent evaluation	October 2025
Funding baselined	2026/27

Annex A – Guiding principles

The working group was instrumental in developing the policy's Guiding Principles, which all partners should consider when developing their delivery models. The guiding principles are:

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

Annex B – Data collection approach to non-statutory provision in educational settings

The Scottish Government carried out an evaluation, in partnership with COSLA and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), of the implementation of the Scottish Government's policy to provide access to free period products in educational settings during the first full academic year of delivery, from 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019. The evaluation considered the period products provision delivered in Scotland by local authorities, colleges and universities.

The evaluation was carried out to gain insight into the different models of access being implemented by schools, colleges and universities, including what works well in providing access to period products and any lessons learned, and to gain insight into the views and experiences of students, including what impact, if any, providing access to sanitary products has had on them.

Referring to delivery in the 2018/19 academic year, the six overarching objectives of the evaluation were to understand:

- What delivery models were used to provide access to free period products and the advantages and disadvantages of each delivery model.
- How co-ordination and distribution of products/the means to purchase products was managed and what challenges were encountered?
- The level of demand for period products among pupils and attending whilst attending schools, colleges and universities.
- The volume, types and cost of products provided in educational settings.
- The cost of delivering access to free period products in educational settings.
- What impact the availability of free period products had on pupils and any barriers faced in access.

A mixed methods approach was taken to the evaluation of provision. The evaluation used data from several sources, including quantitative and qualitative monitoring data provided by all local authorities, colleges and universities, covering 1 September 2018 to 1 February 2019 and 2 February 2019 to 31 August 2019, and a survey of 3,000 young people **attending schools, colleges and universities across Scotland**, carried out by Young Scot on behalf of the Scottish Government between 19 June and 2 September 2019, to gather their views and experiences of accessing period products in educational settings during the first full academic year of delivery and any impacts.

Annex C – Logic model

Inputs	<p>Appropriate governance, funding and resource provided at a national level.</p> <p>Appropriate governance and resource provided by local authorities and education providers.</p> <p>Consultation with product users on the types, range and accessibility of products.</p>
Outputs	<p>Provision of a range of period products free of charge.</p> <p>Provision of period products that meet user needs in terms of types, brands and absorbencies (as identified through consultation with product users).</p> <p>Provision of period products in sufficient quantities to meet user needs arising while in Scotland.</p> <p>Provision of period products in a range of settings that are reasonably easily accessible to those that need to use them.</p> <p>Products are obtainable in a way that provides dignity and avoids embarrassment.</p>
Short-term outcomes	<p>High levels of take up of period products.</p> <p>People who need to use period products are less worried about having their period.</p> <p>Fewer people reporting difficulties accessing period products.</p> <p>People who need to use period products feel more able to continue with day-to-day activities during their period, including attendance at work and education.</p> <p>People who need to use period products feel involved in the delivery of access to free period products.</p> <p>People who need to use period products are less likely to resort to using unsuitable alternatives or using products for unsafe durations.</p>

Long-term outcomes	<p>Culture change around menstruation ('period dignity'), reflected by reduced stigma and normalisation of menstruation.</p> <p>Increase in private sector organisations providing access to free period products.</p> <p>Reduced cost of living for households with menstruating people, particularly among those with lower household incomes.</p> <p>Increased educational attendance among pupils whilst on their period.</p> <p>Improved mental health and wellbeing among menstruating people.</p>
<p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued demand for free period products. 	
<p>Potential external influences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to collection arrangements (e.g. COVID-19 restrictions). • Private sector period product provision landscape. • Changes in product type and range. • Wider sociocultural norms surrounding menstruation. 	

Annex D – Research questions and data collection

Research question	Sub-questions	Data source
Q1: How much does delivering access to free period products cost?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What was local authorities' and education providers' total spend on providing access to free period products? b) What was local authorities' and education providers' total spend on purchasing period products? c) What is the average unit cost of period products purchased by local authorities and education providers? d) What additional costs did local authorities' and education providers' incur (e.g. marketing, ongoing delivery, staffing)? 	Baseline reporting, Routine monitoring & Independent evaluation
Q2: What level of demand is there for period products?	a) How many period products were purchased by local authorities and education providers? How does this compare to the number required to meet the requirements of the whole menstruating population in Scotland?	Baseline reporting & Independent evaluation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) How many period products were purchased by local authorities and education providers? How does this compare to the number required to meet the requirements of the whole menstruating population in Scotland? b) What proportion of period product users reported accessing free period products from their local authority or education provider? Did this differ by area or user demographics? c) How often are product users accessing period products from their local authority or education provider? 	Baseline survey data & Independent evaluation
Q3: How is access to free period products being provided by local authorities and education providers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Where are free products being provided? b) What product types, brands and absorbencies are being made available? c) Are product users aware of where and how they can access free period products from their local authority or education provider? 	Baseline survey data & Independent evaluation
Q4: Does delivery of access to free period products meet user needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Among those accessing free period products from their local authority or education provider, what were the reasons? b) Were product users able to access their preferred product types? c) Were product users able to access products in a sufficient quantity to meet their needs? d) Did product users experience any barriers to accessing free period products? e) Do product users feel that delivery allows for dignified access to free period products? 	Baseline survey data & Independent evaluation

	f) Do product users feel able to influence the delivery of access to free period products?	
Q5: What impact did the availability of free period products have on users?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) As a result of the availability of free period products, are product users less worried about having their period? b) As a result of the availability of free period products, do product users feel more able to continue with their day-to-day activities (including attending work and education)? c) Has the availability of free period products had any impact on household finances? 	Baseline survey data & Independent evaluation

Annex E – Benefits and risk of proposed approach

Benefits

The following benefits of the proposed approach to monitoring and evaluation have been identified:

- A proportionate, pragmatic approach to monitoring and evaluation that minimises the demand on data providers and ensures consistency across delivery bodies.
- A funding model that is fair and reflects spending
- The independent evaluation and externally commissioned baseline survey will gather the views and lived experience of product users.

Risks

The following risks have been identified:

- There is no exact measure of uptake. Uptake will be estimated based on the number of products purchased and from reported usage from a sample of product users in the independent evaluation.
- There will remain difficulties in interpreting routine monitoring data on spend as increased spend could result from increased uptake, higher cost products, or product stockpiling and bulk ordering patterns.
- Whilst conducting an independent evaluation after three years provides time for statutory provision to become established, it limits the availability of real-time data for learning and accountability purposes.
- The proposed approach is reliant upon the collaboration of local authorities, further and higher education providers in collecting and providing data to the Scottish Government on a non-statutory basis.
- COVID-19 restrictions may mean that baseline data collected in 2021/22 is not representative of typical delivery which may limit this data usefulness in adjusting ongoing funding allocations.
- Baseline data will not be available in advance of the finalisation of the 2022/23 funding allocations, requiring any adjustments on the basis of this data to be made in year (i.e. increases from 2021/22 allocations).



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