



- Further Education
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- National Citizen Service
- Enterprise

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Best Practice Guide on How to Facilitate Period Equality at Your School, College, or University

Contents

03	What is period equality?	>
04	About this Guide	>
05	The big question What is the best way to distribute period products?	>
06	Keep period products in the washrooms	>
	Not require learners to ask for products	
	Ensure access is discreet	
07	Raise awareness	>
	Provide guidance and advice on using the products	
08	Provide products for school holidays	>
	Give full access to toilets	
	Communicate with everyone	
	Shout about sustainable products	
09	Case Studies	>

10	Facing the challenges	>
	Preventing the misuse of period products	
	Ride it out!	
	Educate Engage	
11	Get talking: Having open conversations about periods	>
12	Ask your learners	>
13	Being inclusive: Period equality is not a 'girl problem'	>
13	Practical ideas	>
	Debunk the myths	
14	The Blobcast: Free the Period	>
15	Why phs?	>

What is period equality?

Period equality is about ensuring that anyone who needs period products has access to them when they need them, and that menstruation is not a barrier to education or well-being.

Period equality removes the stigma and feelings of shame surrounding periods, and instead promotes education, understanding and empowerment. It allows people to have periods with dignity.

While huge advances have been made towards period equality in schools and colleges, with teen learners now having access to free period products, period inequality still exists. Learners are not always able to access the period products they need for a variety of reasons.

We don't talk about 'period poverty' because research has shown that people do not like that term, and because period inequality is not always related to the affordability of period products, although it can often be a big factor.

There are many barriers to period equality and that is why having a period remains the single biggest cause of school and college absences for girls in the UK.

54% of girls are taking time off school because of their period, according to phs Group's research.*

On average, girls miss three school days each term due to menstruation – that's the equivalent of 11 academics weeks over the course of their teenage education (13-18 years old).*

That has to change, and creating period equality in our schools and colleges is the key.



1 in 12 of the girls surveyed by phs Group in their latest report said they **did not have access to any period products.***

About this guide

This guide has been created by the Period Equality team at **phs** Group to support teachers and learners as they strive for greater period equality in their schools and colleges.

phs Group is leading the way with period equality, supporting the UK government in delivering free period products to schools and colleges to distribute to those who need them. However, having the products does not guarantee period equality.

This guide will tackle some of the main barriers that are preventing learners from accessing the free period products that they are entitled to. It looks at ways that period conversations can be opened up in schools and colleges to support greater inclusivity, better education, and improved well-being.

There is advice on the best ways to distribute products and how to take on the challenges that can bring. There are tips on normalising periods at school and engaging with learners, allowing them to embark on an empowering period equality journey together.

There are also some best practice case studies, which are aimed at inspiring school leaders to look at different and creative ways of promoting period equality.

This guide is supported by research carried out by **phs** Group which examined period equality in the UK in 2023. **phs** Group works with the UK government and councils across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland to deliver greater period equality for all.

The Period Equality: Breaking the Cycle report looked at how periods affect the daily lives of millions of women and girls, and girls who have periods at school or college, and how awareness, knowledge and access to essential period products are crucial to their academic progress.

If statistics or data from the report are being quoted in this guide, the term 'girl' will be used as only teenage girls were surveyed. However, some transgender and non-binary people will also be affected by periods in school or college, so this guide uses the inclusive term 'learner' instead if it is not quoting data from the report.

For a copy of the report, please email the **phs** Period Equality team on press@phs.co.uk



The big question

What is the best way to distribute period products?

Period products are made available at schools and colleges in the UK free of charge through government funding. However, research has shown that they are often not distributed in a way that promotes period equality and that can be damaging to young people's health and wellbeing.

The aim is to make periods inclusive so that period products are freely available, and that any barriers to period equality are overcome. This includes getting past the challenges that providing period products to teens may bring in a positive, dignified way. This guide looks at that in more detail later.



How should period products be distributed? To promote true period equality, you should:

Keep period products in the washrooms

Over half of the girls surveyed by **phs** Group (52%) did not find period products freely available in their washrooms*. 14% did not know if they were available at all.*

Learners often report that period products are stored away from the washrooms, sometimes in pastoral care or even staffrooms. Keeping period products hidden away and out of sight further adds to the stigma and feelings of shame that many people experience when having their period.

It also adds to the anxiety and embarrassment of starting your period in a place where there are no products immediately available to you. Learners often talk about the 'walk of shame' from the washrooms to the place where products are kept, worrying about bleeding through clothes and others seeing them accessing the products.

Not require learners to ask for products

Requiring learners to ask a teacher or member of staff for access to period products is another barrier to period equality. 15% of those surveyed have had to ask a teacher for period products.*

It adds to the anxiety felt by learners during a vulnerable time and often causes unnecessary embarrassment, especially if the member of staff is male. It can be particularly challenging for those with special educational needs, transgender and non-binary learners and learners whose first language is not English.

It can result in learners not accessing the products they need.

10% of those surveyed have had to use something else other than a period product when on their period, and 17% have worn period products for longer than they should, increasing the risk of health problems like Toxic Shock Syndrome.*



Ensure access is discreet

The best practice is to leave period products freely available in toilet cubicles. This could be in a basket or even a bag on the back of the toilet door. This ensures the product is immediately available in a discreet way, removing any barriers to access. Learners can help themselves freely to products in the quantities needed, at the time they need them.

You should be inclusive in this access and not just consider female toilets. The same provisions should be in gender-neutral washrooms, male toilets, disabled toilets, PE changing rooms and in pastoral care or SEN facilities too, ensuring that everyone has discreet and simple access to the products they need, when they need them. If you don't already have gender-neutral toilets, this is something to consider.

Raise awareness

It's important to let learners know that period products are available to anyone who needs them, and where to find them. Many schools forget this when distributing products so learners may be unaware they are available or unsure if they are allowed to use them.

The products are not only for learners who may not be able to afford them, but also for learners who forget their own products, get caught out by their period, or even need to take some for friends or family.

14% of the girls surveyed said they did not know if there were period products available and only 31% had accessed them through the funded scheme, with most (69%) doing so because they forgot to bring their own. 63% have not accessed period products at school or college through the period equality scheme.*

More needs to be done to close the gap between potential provision, perceived availability, and actual take-up.

You can support this with posters, emails, assemblies or even events highlighting that the scheme is open to anyone who needs it and informing them clearly about where they can find the products.

It is also important to open discussions about periods in school to reduce the stigma, promote understanding and reduce the anxiety felt by those who have them. There is further advice on this later on in this guide.



Provide guidance and advice on using the products

Learners may need to be supported in how to safely use the products provided or require further information on the products themselves. Best practice suggests providing posters on the back of toilet cubicle doors, keeping the products in their original packaging, and providing an assembly or class on the topic, with regular refreshers for those wanting to try new products as their confidence grows.

It is also important to talk to learners about good hygiene practices when using period products, emphasising that a variety of products are available and how they should be regularly changed to avoid health complications like Toxic Shock Syndrome. It is important for learners to know the signs of Toxic Shock Syndrome, as well as how to prevent it.

When providing information on using period products and discussing periods at school, be inclusive and consider all learners' needs, including those with disabilities and special educational needs and learners whose first language is not English.



Provide products for school holidays

80% of those surveyed said they are not being provided with free period products to take home during the school holidays, yet 15% of girls say they cannot afford period products.* Support for periods should continue outside of term time.

Running a reminder campaign at the end of term or having a pop-up stall at the school gates for people to help themselves will support learners who need products during the school holidays. Engage with learners themselves to find out how they think this support can be improved.

Give full access to toilets

Learners cannot choose when their periods will start or when their products may need changing, and putting restrictions on the use of toilets in lessons will increase anxiety and damage the health and well-being of learners. If learners do not feel they have access to toilets when needed, they may not attend school.

If there are problems with misuse of toilets during teaching time, these should be addressed in a way that does not disadvantage the learners who need them during their periods. Learners also should not have to raise the topic of their periods in class in order to access a toilet facility.

Communicate with everyone

Every person at your school or college should know about the provisions in place, not just the learners who may need them.

Every member of staff, visitor, parents and even those learners who do not have periods themselves should know that products are available for free and where to find them. This reduces the stigma and puts in place important support systems, both at home and at school, for those who need to access the products.

Shout about sustainable products

There are free sustainable period products available through the government funding, including menstrual cups, period pants in all sizes and environmentally friendly, organic pads and tampons. If you have these products, be sure to shout about them and educate people on how they are sustainable. Learners often respond well to eco-friendly initiatives like these and appreciate being given the choice.

DOWNLOAD OUR PERIOD EQUALITY CASE STUDIES

BLAENAU GWENT

HARLOW COLLEGE

PORTLAND COLLEGE

**PORTLAND ACADEMY
SUNDERLAND**

Facing the challenges

Preventing the misuse of period products

There will of course be challenges to face in achieving period equality, and the misuse of period products and vandalism can be one of them. Many schools or colleges have experienced it to some extent, but we should not let it become another barrier to access or we are letting down the learners who need them.

Throwing products around the washroom, sticking sanitary towels to the walls or clogging toilets with tampons – it can happen. When products suddenly appear in washrooms, the novelty of them can lead to misuse. Many schools and colleges have successfully tackled this and paved a way for greater period equality. These are some of their best, tried-and-tested strategies:



Ride it out!

It won't last forever, and the novelty will wear off. Period products in washrooms need to become the norm and misuse by the minority should not affect access for the large numbers of learners who need them.



Educate

Misuse tends to happen most when learners are not educated about why the period products are available and who they are for. Pre-empting any negative behaviours and highlighting the consequences of misuse and vandalism (both for the individuals who carry them out and for the people who need the products) are key.

Discussions around respecting fellow learners and their personal needs will be important in promoting the right behaviour from the start.



Engage

Engaging learners and giving them responsibility over their washrooms is another way to promote positive behaviour towards period products.

Consider forming a learner committee who can develop ways for learners to report misuse and when supplies are running low. They can also consider ways to reduce misuse that they feel will work and decide appropriate consequences.

Engaging learners in the cause is a positive way to tackle this challenge and embrace more period-friendly washrooms.



Get talking: Having open conversations about periods

For too long periods have been kept under wraps at school, treated as a secret no-one wants to talk about. Shying away from discussions about menstruation and the struggles of having a period at school only perpetuates the stigma.

Of the girls surveyed, 67% say that period equality is not being taken seriously by teachers.*

Opening up conversations is known to improve the wellbeing of learners and breaks down further barriers to period equality.

Here are some ideas to kick-start discussions about periods at school and break the stigma.

Ask your learners

Consulting with the people who are having periods at school is the best place to start when promoting better period equality. The provision is for them after all.

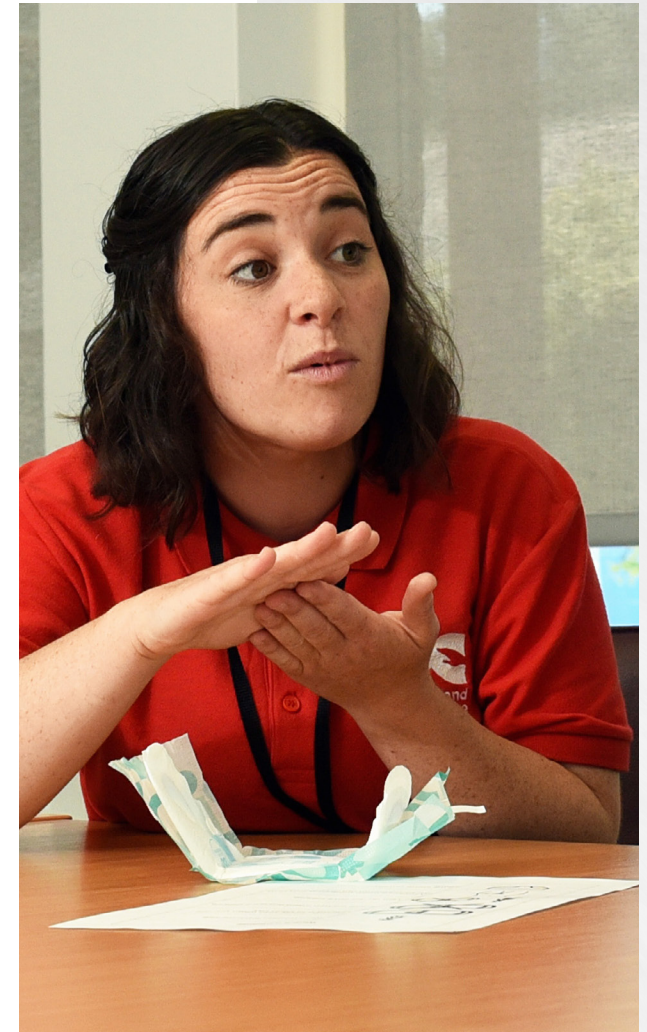
Talk to them about the specific barriers and challenges they face when on their period and how they would like to see period equality addressed at their school or college. Ask them what discussions they think need to be had to achieve period equality - and act on it.

Young people understand the dynamics of a school or college better than anyone and their suggested strategies are likely to be the most successful. Listen to what they say.

Forming a learner group to champion the cause is a good start. It will improve engagement and is a great opportunity for the learners to build leadership, project management and research skills, as well as giving them a confidence boost.

Some topics they could research and discuss:

- What types of period product do our fellow learners want? (sanitary pads, tampons, period pants, etc.)
- What period equality barriers do our fellow learners currently face?
- Where do learners want to put products? (toilet cubicles, which washrooms, etc.)
- How do we want the products dispensed? (e.g. in a basket in the cubicle, from a bag on the back of the toilet door, from a free vending machine, etc...)
- How can we communicate where period products are, and who can access them? (e.g. posters, leaflets, emails, in class discussion)
- Who do we tell, and how? (learners, staff, parents, visitors)
- How can we get products to learners who need them in the school holidays? (e.g. reminder campaign before term breaks, bag giveaways at the school gates etc.)
- How can we tackle the stigma of periods at school? (e.g. assemblies, events, leaflets, dedicated lessons, tasks, games, activities, support materials etc.)





Being inclusive: Period equality is not a ‘girl problem’

Everyone needs education about periods, not just girls. Periods are natural and normal, yet understanding of them amongst learners and teaching staff is lacking. The concept of period equality also remains unclear to many, particularly men and boys.

73% of male teachers surveyed by the **phs** Group say they don't understand the problem of period equality, and 85% of boys admitted the same.*

It is clear that everyone, including those who don't have periods, needs to be part of the conversation if understanding and education is going to improve and real strides towards period equality are going to be made.

There also is work to be done in ensuring transgender and non-binary learners have the same access to period products and opportunities to share their experiences of menstruating.

Schools and colleges will often discuss periods and period product provision in female-only assemblies, classes, and events, further adding to the mystery and myths surrounding periods. Having gender-free discussions about period equality is an excellent way to destigmatise periods and improve understanding and empathy.



Practical ideas

Debunk the myths

Everyone is naturally curious about periods, even boys. Myth-busting sessions are a good place to start. As periods have been a taboo subject for so long, the gaps in knowledge, particularly amongst boys, has been filled with rumours and guesswork.

Tackle some of the myths by correcting common misconceptions with games and activities, or even by holding a pub-style quiz. Period education doesn't have to be boring.

This is really good opportunity for those who do not menstruate to put themselves in the position of those who do, which should open conversations about period equality.

THE BLOBCAST

FREE THE PERIOD

Introduce learners to a world where conversations about periods are not only normal but also empowering. The Blobcast: Free the Period is a groundbreaking podcast that talks about all things related to periods, from the shame and the pain to period care, with candour, humour, and expert insights.

The Blobcast is a great way for learners to hear first-hand experiences from other young people and hear discussions about menstruation that they may not have heard before.

The podcast can serve as a teaching aid and has a complementary learning pack, available on the **phs** Group website. It is a great way to engage learners in class, or they can listen to in their own time.

The Blobcast is available on **Spotify**, **Apple Podcasts** and **YouTube**. Learners and teachers can also stay connected with The Blobcast on **Instagram**, **X** and **TikTok**.

phs also has lesson plans and other free resources for teachers who want to further champion period equality with their learners.

Email the **phs** Period Equality team at press@phs.co.uk or visit [Period Equality in Education](#)

FIND OUT MORE





Why p-hs?

As the UK's leading hygiene services company, period equality is a subject very close to **p-hs'** heart. **p-hs** Group has been at the forefront of efforts to raise awareness and improve access to period products for millions of girls and young women across the country.

p-hs believes that access to period products should be everyone's right. That each morning someone wakes in their bedroom, they should feel reassured, confident, and positive about the day of learning that lies ahead. That no more girls go missing needlessly from classrooms.

www.p-hs.co.uk

