

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION – DRAFT GUIDANCE TO ‘SPECIFIED PUBLIC SERVICE BODIES’ ON THE PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2022

Background

1. The Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 (The Act) requires DE to provide Guidance to the Public Service Bodies specified in The Period Products (Department of Education Specified Public Service Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.
2. DE consulted with the following Specified Public Service Bodies (SPSBs) on its draft Guidance document between 16 April 2024 and 15 May 2024. A short consultation period was deemed appropriate as DE had been engaging with SPSBs on the draft Guidance since October 2023.
 - a. The Education Authority
 - b. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
 - c. The Catholic Council for Maintained Schools
 - d. General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
 - e. Voluntary Grammar, Maintained, Grant Maintained Integrated and Independent Schools.
3. The Guidance can be accessed on the publications section of DE’s website and contains the topics listed at Annex A.

Summary of responses and outcome

4. 69 responses were received. These were from the Education Authority, CCEA, GTCNI and 66 schools from across all management types. The vast majority of responses were positive, agreeing that the Guidance topics were clear and comprehensive.
5. The table at Annex B provides a summary of issues raised through the consultation and an explanation of how the draft Guidance was updated as a result.
6. The Guidance has also been updated to provide details of the newly launched Executive Office scheme, available to all citizens, through all libraries in Northern Ireland. This will be helpful for women and girls requiring products to use at home, so that DE budgets can be focused on making provision for use on the premises, which is required under the Act.

Acknowledgement

7. DE is very grateful to SPSBs for taking the time to respond to its consultation and is here to assist them in implementing their legal duties under the Act. Queries should be addressed to afirstart@education-ni.gov.uk.

TOPICS CONTAINED IN DE GUIDANCE TO 'SPECIFIED PUBLIC SERVICE BODIES' ON THE PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2022

Topic	Required Under the Act?
Meeting Individual Need	Y
Arrangements for Providing Free Period Products	Y
Reasonable Ease of Access	Y
Respecting Dignity, Privacy and Confidentiality	Y
Providing Reasonable Choice (including having regard to articles which are reusable)	Y
Publicising the Availability of Free Period Products	Y
Consideration: Environmental Impact of Single Use Products	N
The Statutory Requirement to Consult with Product Users and the Requirements of that Consultation	Y
Written Statements on Arrangements	Y
(Departments') duty to publicise locations of free period products	N
Safety Considerations	N
Value for Money	N
Timescales to have arrangements in place	Y
Funding Arrangements	N
Additional Guidance Specific to School, EOTAS and Statutory Youth Settings	N
Annexed templates for Written Statements on Arrangements and CCEA Period Dignity Policy template	N

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION – DRAFT GUIDANCE TO ‘SPECIFIED PUBLIC SERVICE BODIES’ ON THE PERIOD PRODUCTS (FREE PROVISION) ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2022

This table provides a summary of issues raised through the consultation and an explanation of how the draft Guidance was updated as a result.

	Issues Raised	Summary of issue	Summary of Guidance Update	Further Comment
1	<p>Timetable for implementation (to include consultation with product users and development of Written Statements on Arrangements.)</p> <p>The timetable indicated that Written Statements on Arrangements should be complete by mid-August 2024.</p>	<p>13/69 respondents, including the Education Authority, indicated that the timetable for implementation, set out in the draft Guidance, was not reasonable or practicable. A number of respondents also referred to pressures on teacher time.</p>	<p>DE has added the following paragraph to the Guidance:</p> <p><i>Some SPSBs indicated in their consultation responses on the Guidance that the timetable was not reasonably practicable.</i></p> <p><i>Those SPSBs should make progress as swiftly as possible to meet their legal duties under the Act and seek support from DE if required.</i></p>	<p>DE acknowledges the pressures on teacher time.</p> <p>The Guidance provides suggestions to ease pressure on teacher time, such as involving pupils in topping up the free period products.</p> <p>DE also considers that pressures on teacher time should reduce, once arrangements are in place. Schools who have participated fully in the Period Dignity pilot scheme will be well on the way to provision being ‘business as usual’.</p>
2	<p>Primary school guidance</p>	<p>One respondent indicated that primary school specific guidance could have been clearer but did not suggest how this might be achieved.</p>	<p>Updates have been made to the Additional Guidance Specific to School, EOTAS and Statutory Youth Settings section.</p> <p>This provides further Guidance in relation to primary schools. A link to CCEA’s Period Dignity educational resources for primary schools has also been provided.</p>	

	Issues Raised	Summary of issue	Summary of Guidance Update	Further Comment
3	Guidance around reusable and environmentally friendly items.	A number of respondents commented that reusable and environmentally friendly options can be expensive.	The Guidance has been updated to acknowledge the need to consider available budget when developing arrangements to provide free period products.	The Guidance provides advice on appropriate locations for more expensive items such as reusable period pants.
4.	Publication of availability of free period products.	One respondent asked how often SPSBs should publicise the availability of free period products	The Guidance has been updated to encourage ongoing publication (for example through websites and posters) to support the legal requirement that free period products be reasonably easy to access.	
5.	Procurement details	A number of respondents asked for further clarification on procurement arrangements.	The Value for Money Section has been updated to provide further detail on the existing EA Period Products contract. SPSBs choosing not to use the EA contract are advised to follow their organisation's own procurement procedures when purchasing period products.	
6	Consultation with product users	A number of respondents said that it would be helpful to have a set of suggested questions.	A set of questions has been added as an annex to the Guidance.	These questions are simply a starting point. SPSBs should ensure that they are adapted appropriately to meet the requirements of their own organisation and its product users.
7.	Budget	Some respondents asked for further clarification on how budget for free period products would be allocated.	The section on funding has been clarified as far as possible.	DE is hopeful that funding will be made available for this provision however funding pressures are an on-going concern for all departments.

	Issues Raised	Summary of issue	Summary of Guidance Update	Further Comment
8	Spare underwear and tights	Some respondents took the opportunity to emphasise the need for spare underwear and tights to be provided for pupils in schools.	The Guidance now indicates that DE will explore with EA, how these items may potentially be made available to schools.	
9	Safe use of Period Products	Some respondents requested further clarification and materials to promote safe use of period products.	The Guidance provides a link to CCEA's educational resources on Period Dignity.	DE will explore with the CCEA the possibility of providing posters on the safe use of period products.