

Provision of Free Period Products: Public Consultation

Analysis of the responses to the public consultation

November 2023

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Executive summary

Key findings from survey responses

The below provides a summary of the main quantitative findings from responses to the consultation survey.



A total of 1,647 responses to the consultation were received. Of these, 1,630 responded to the survey questions only, 12 provided written responses only, and five provided both.



Of those who answered the survey questions, 94% were individuals and 6% responded on behalf of an organisation.



Nine in ten respondents (91%) would use free period products if they were available.



The most commonly identified potential barrier to respondents using free period products was not knowing where to get them.



Almost four-fifths of respondents (79%) would be prepared to collect free period products for themselves, while 72% would collect for another person in their household and 56% for another person not in their household.



A majority of respondents (57%) said that reusable products were either very or quite important to them.



Approximately eight in ten respondents said that period products should be made available as an online or text 'click and collect' service (83%), and/or via collection in person from a physical location (80%).



Community venues, public buildings and public libraries were identified by respondents as the best locations for obtaining free period products.



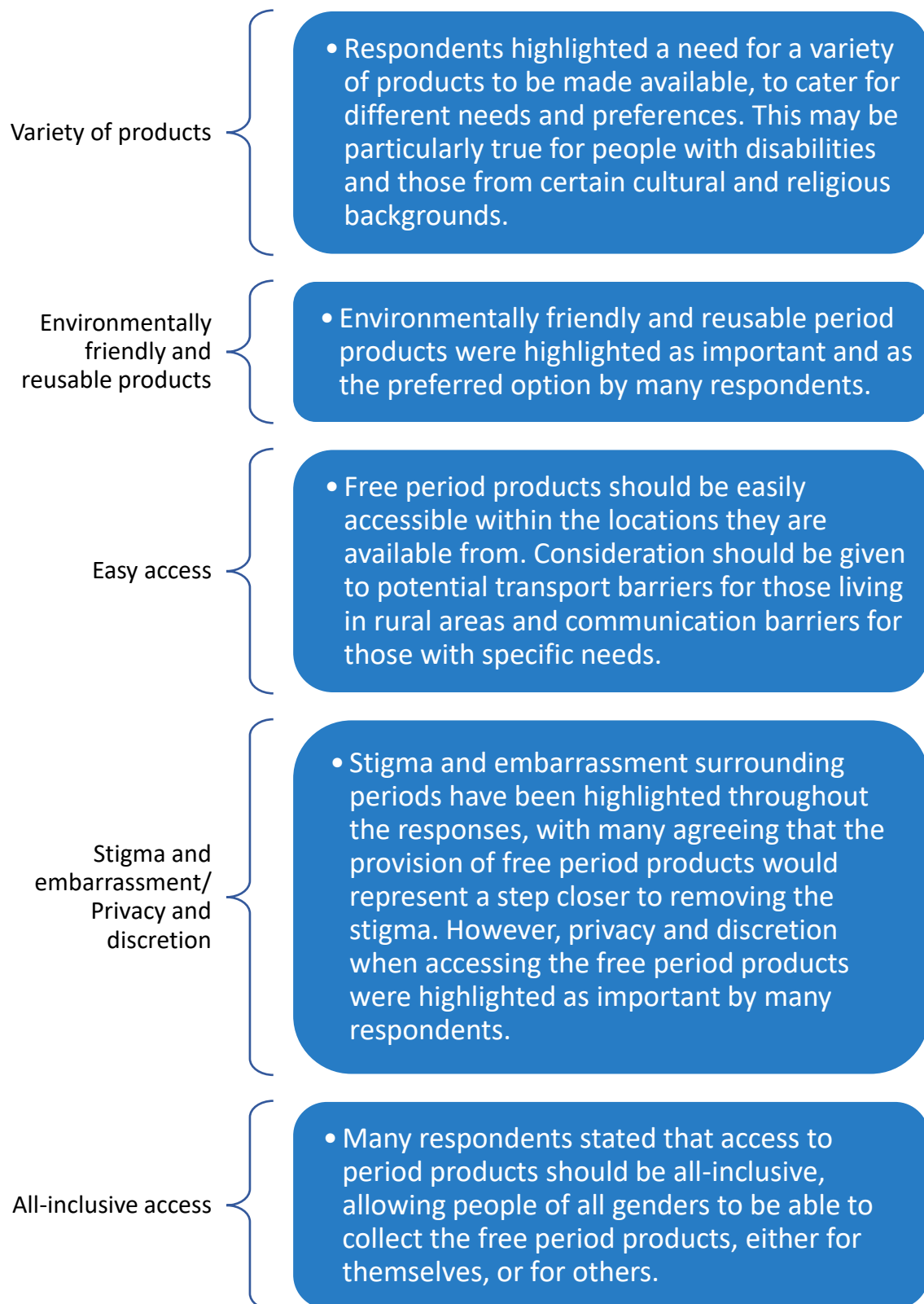
Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) would feel comfortable obtaining free period products in the toilets of relevant buildings.



Social media was the most common response when respondents were asked how the provision and location of free period should be publicised.

Cross-cutting themes

A number of common themes emerged from the responses to the requests for further comment throughout the survey and the written responses:



The 'How', the 'Where', the 'What'

The below provides a summary of the main issues that emerged, categorised within the 'How', 'Where' and 'What' themes outlined in the introduction.

The 'How'

'or the ways in which users ought to be able to obtain period products free of charge'

- The products should be easily accessible and available in a variety of ways, including pre-order click and collect, collection from a physical location, and delivery.
- Delivery was mentioned particularly by those who may face access barriers, such as those living in rural areas, those with disabilities or mobility issues, or those with limited or no access to transport.
- The main potential barrier to accessing free period products identified by respondents was not knowing where to obtain them.
- Privacy and discretion were mentioned throughout the responses as important factors when accessing the free period products.

The 'Where'

'or the locations in which period products ought to be obtainable free of charge'

- Community venues were the most frequently selected location for obtaining free period products. When asked to provide further detail on their response, large numbers identified community centres, community halls and leisure centres as appropriate locations.
- Public buildings were also selected by a large proportion of respondents as a location for obtaining the free products. When asked to provide further detail on their response, healthcare facilities, such as GP surgeries, hospitals, as well council buildings and offices were commonly mentioned.
- Public libraries were also selected by a majority of respondents as suitable locations for obtaining free period products.
- Many respondents also mentioned pharmacies or chemists, supermarkets and local shops as suitable and convenient locations.
- Many suggested that relevant service providers should distribute the products to certain groups who may have specific needs, such as the homeless.

The 'What'

'or the types of period products which ought to be obtainable free of charge'

- There was a general consensus that a variety of products will need to be available to suit everyone's needs.
- Over half of the survey respondents said that reusable products are important to them.

Introduction

The Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) 2022¹ was made pursuant to a Private Member's Bill in the last Assembly and received Royal Assent in May 2022. The Act aims to provide universal access to free period products to all persons who need them in Northern Ireland. It states that free period products should be made available in Northern Ireland from May 2024.

The Act introduces two new duties, one of which, arising under Section 1, places a duty on the Executive Office (TEO) to ensure that period products are obtainable free of charge to meet the needs of "all persons who need to use them ... while in Northern Ireland". The other duty is placed on specified public sector bodies and relates to the provision of free period products that a person needs whilst in particular premises.

A public consultation, seeking views on how best TEO ensures that period products are obtainable free of charge, by all persons who need to use them while in Northern Ireland, was launched on 26 June 2023. The consultation ran for 12 weeks, until 18 September 2023. Specifically, the consultation sought views on:

- the ways in which users ought to be able to obtain period products free of charge (the "how");
- the locations in which period products ought to be obtainable free of charge (the "where"); and
- the types of period products which ought to be obtainable free of charge (the "what").

As part of the consultation, an online survey was developed and managed by TEO. This was hosted using the Citizen Space consultation platform and provided a range of supporting documents and information.² The survey provided a structured way for views to be submitted, although written responses in the form of email and postal submissions were also welcomed. Where written submissions were received in the format of the online survey, these were added to the database of online survey responses.

This report presents findings of:

- the analysis of responses to the consultation survey; and
- the analysis of written responses which did not match the format of the online survey.

This report has been produced by the Analytical Unit, NISRA statisticians outposted to TEO. It will be used to inform the development of the arrangements to implement the Act.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/25/contents/enacted>

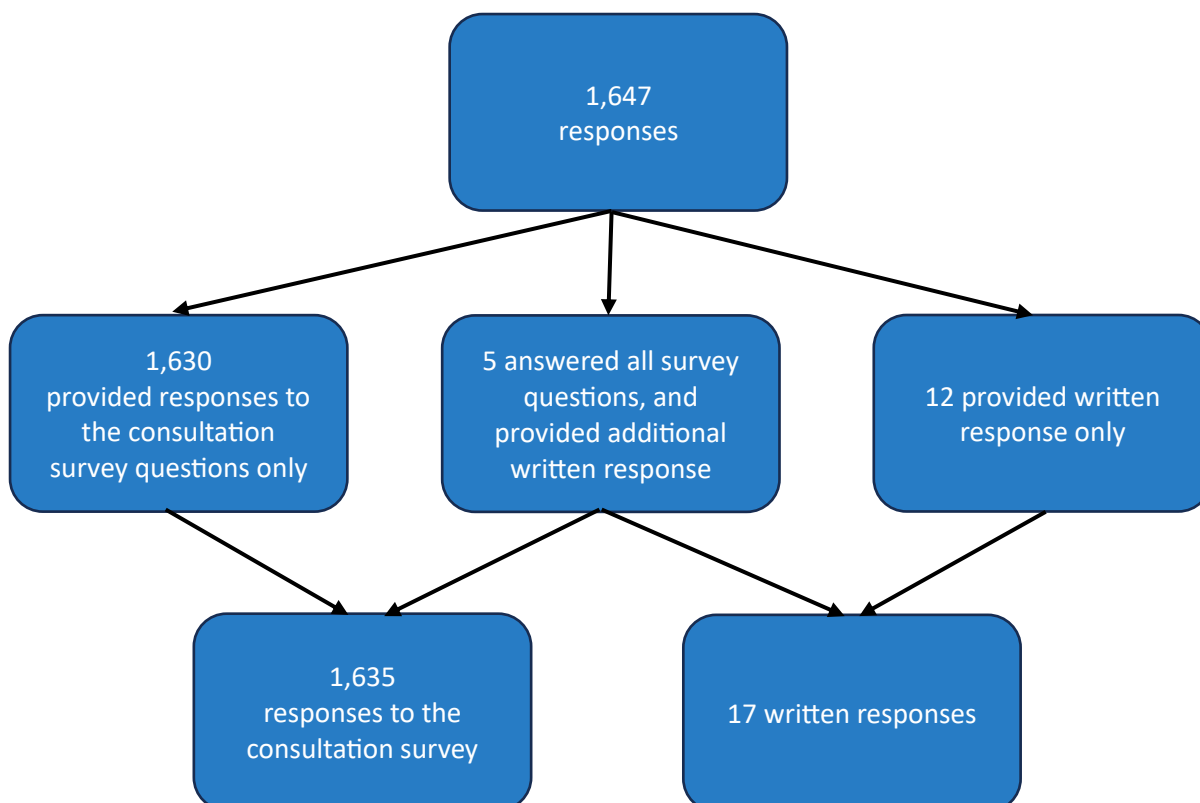
² This included: a Consultation Document (with easy-read and children's versions also provided); Human Rights and Rural Needs Impact Assessments; Data Protection Impact Assessment and Section 75 Screening documents; a privacy notice; and an online video explaining the background to and purpose of the consultation.

Overall response and methodology

In total there were 1,647 responses to the public consultation. Of these, 1,630 responded to the consultation survey, either directly online or in the survey format via email. Twelve provided written responses, not in the survey format. In addition, five provided a response in the survey format with additional detail in the form of a written response.

For the purposes of this report, this meant 1,635 responses to the consultation survey were analysed together. In addition, 17 written responses³ were analysed together. Figure 1 outlines this process.

Figure 1: Breakdown of consultation responses



The survey contained 18 questions. Most of these were multiple choice questions, which enabled quantitative analysis.⁴ Percentages are presented for quantitative data. The results are presented as charts, infographics and maps. Quantitative results are accompanied by a brief commentary for each question.

For many of these questions, respondents were invited to provide further comments – for example, to provide further detail on their initial response or if they selected ‘other’. In addition, the survey also contained several open-ended questions. The qualitative data collected via both these elements of the survey was analysed thematically, and a summary is provided for each relevant question, alongside

³ The 12 ‘standalone’ and the relevant element of the five ‘combined’ responses.

⁴ Note: many of these questions allowed respondents to select more than one answer option. For these questions, the sum of the percentages who answered each category may be greater than 100%.

the quantitative analysis. Direct quotes from respondents are used to illustrate the main points throughout.

A response was not required for all questions within the survey, therefore the number of responses for each question varies. Detail of this is provided in the analysis of each individual question.

The 17 written responses that did not match the format of the online survey have been analysed thematically and are presented separately.

Throughout the report, the findings of the qualitative analysis have been aligned with the “How”, “Where” and “What” themes, as outlined in the introduction.

Analysis of responses to consultation survey

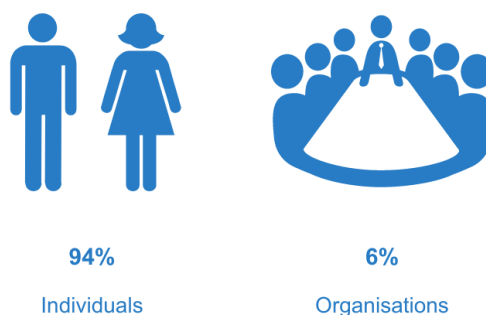
This section presents the analysis to the responses received to the consultation survey, either directly online or via a written submission in the survey format. Each question in the survey is analysed in turn, with the exact wording of the question provided in each case.

Section 1: Respondent information

Question 1: Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? Please select only one item.

A total of 1,631 respondents answered this question.⁵ Of these, 94% (1,529) responded as an individual and 6% (102) responded on behalf of an organisation. The list of organisations is provided in Appendix A.⁶

Figure 2: Breakdown of respondents to consultation survey by type



Question 2: What council area of Northern Ireland do you currently live in? Please select only one item.

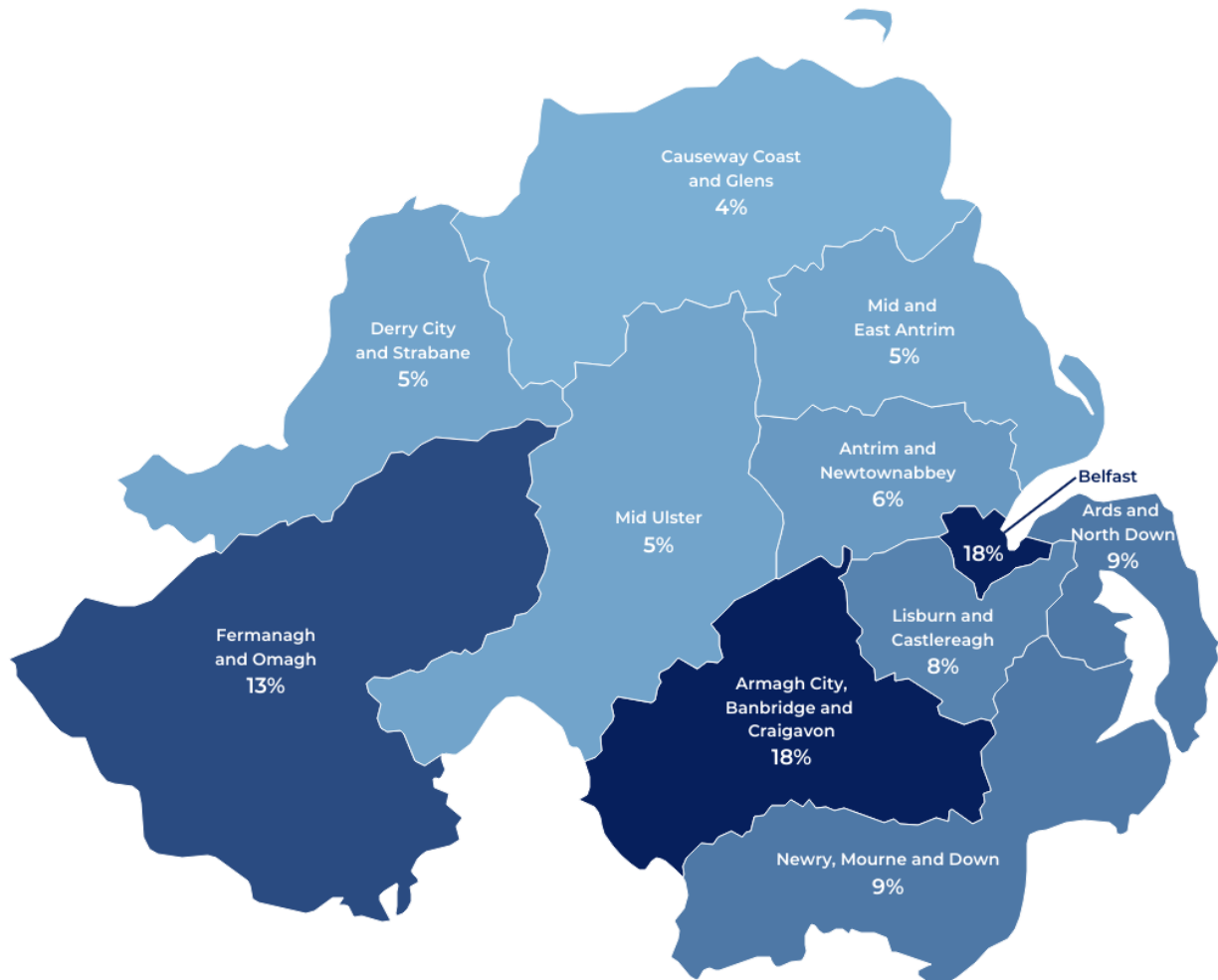
All 1,529 individuals answered this question and Figure 3 presents the results⁷. The largest number of respondents lived in Belfast City Council (18%) or Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (18%).

⁵ Four respondents did not answer this question.

⁶ The name of the organisation was not provided in all instances, and there were, in some cases, more than one response from the same organisation.

⁷ Organisations are excluded from this analysis.

Figure 3: Individual responses by council area⁸



Less than one percent of individual respondents selected 'Other' when asked what council area they lived in. Where possible, information provided in the further details text box was used to assign a council area. A small number of respondents lived outside Northern Ireland and are therefore not represented in Figure 3.

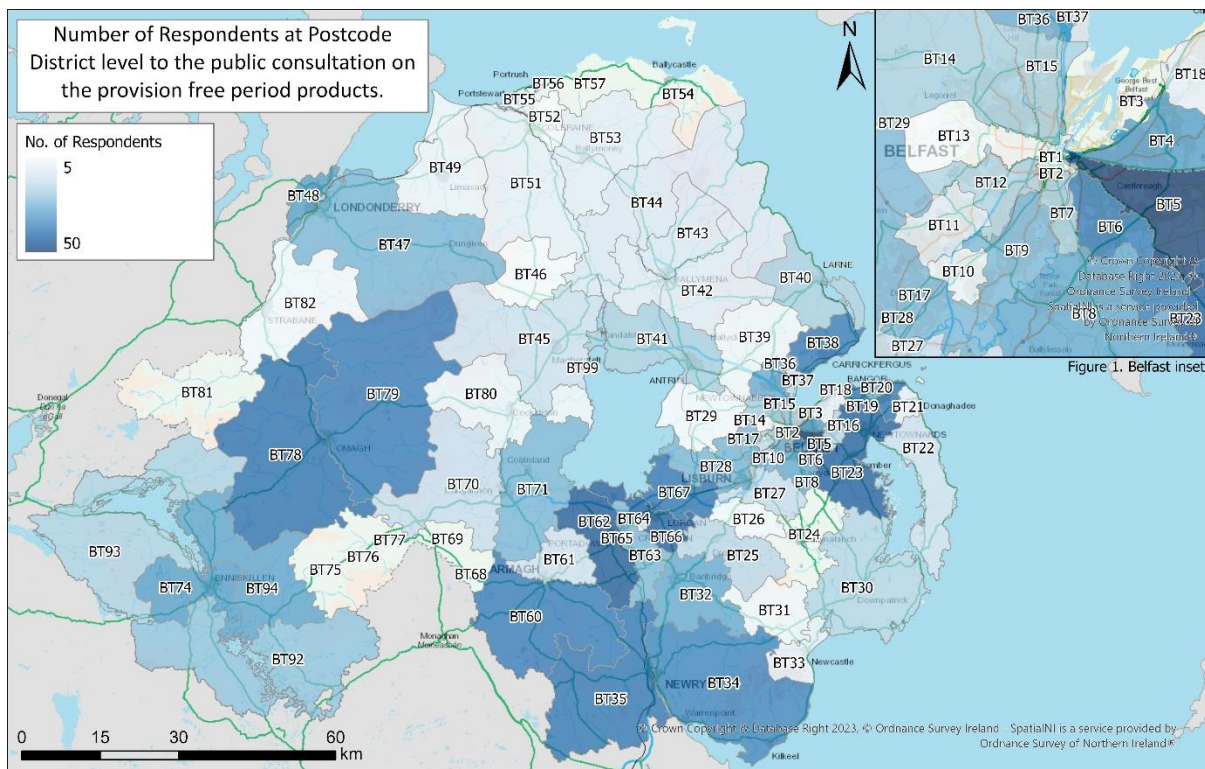
Question 3: What is the first half of your postcode?

To identify the general location of respondents, the survey asked for the first half of their postcode, and Figure 4 presents these results for individuals only. While all 1,529 individuals answered this question, a small number (less than 1%) were removed for being non-specific, non-valid or living outside of Northern Ireland. In addition, any truncated postcodes with counts of less than five respondents were removed to avoid potential disclosure. Truncated postcodes for 1,493 individual respondents are displayed in the map below.⁹

⁸ Note: council names have been truncated for presentational purposes.

⁹ Organisations are excluded from this analysis.

Figure 4: Individual responses by postcode district level



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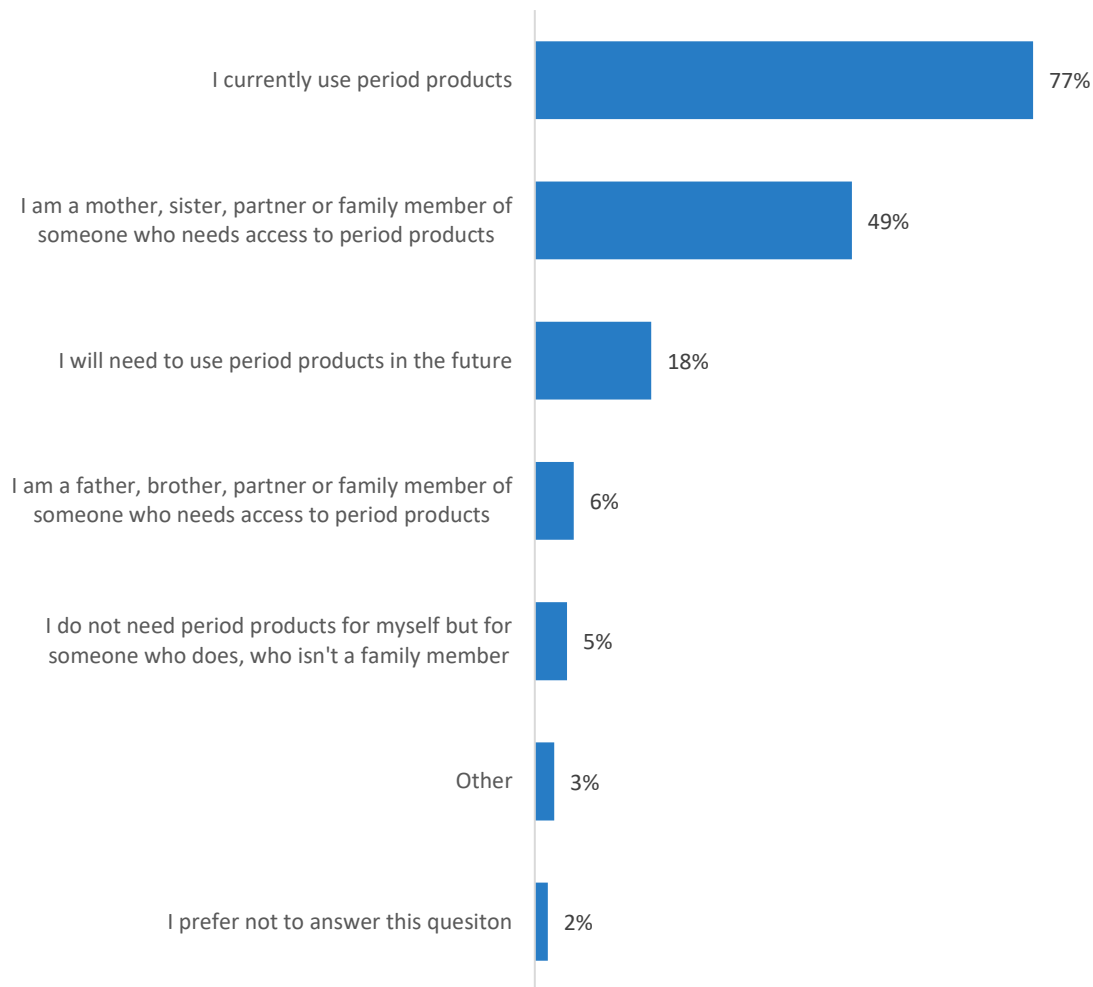


Note: map provided by OSNI GIS Specialist, Good Relations and T:BUC Division, TEO.

Question 4: In order to make sure we are asking a broad section of the community for their views, please tell us a bit more about yourself by ticking all that apply below. Please note that this information will remain anonymous and be treated as such. If you are answering on behalf of an organisation, please tick all that apply to your members.

All 1,635 survey respondents provided an answer to this question. Of these, a majority (77%) said they currently use period products. Almost one-half (49%) said they were a mother, sister, partner or family member of someone who needs access to period products and 18% indicated that they would need to use period products in the future. Of the 1,635 respondents, 3% selected 'Other'.

Figure 5: Respondents' use and need of period products



Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected 'Other', but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment. A total of 51 free-text responses were received to this question.

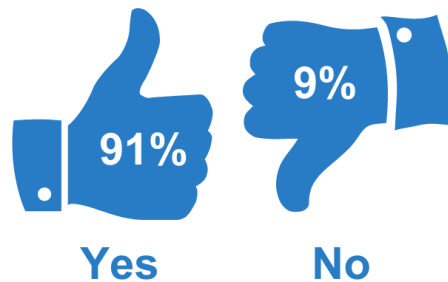
The most common were from those who responded on behalf of organisations representing the views of a wide range of individuals, who would belong to all the outlined categories. Several responses were from individuals who used period products previously, but no longer required them now. Other respondents said they worked with service users or had organisation/club members that needed period products.

Section 2: Use, access, and availability of period products

Question 5: Would you use free period products if they were available? Please select only one item.

All 1,635 survey respondents answered this question. The vast majority (1,493 or 91%) said they would use free period products if they were available. The remaining 142 respondents (9%) responded 'no' to this question.

Figure 6: Responses to the question: 'Would you use free period products, if they were available?'



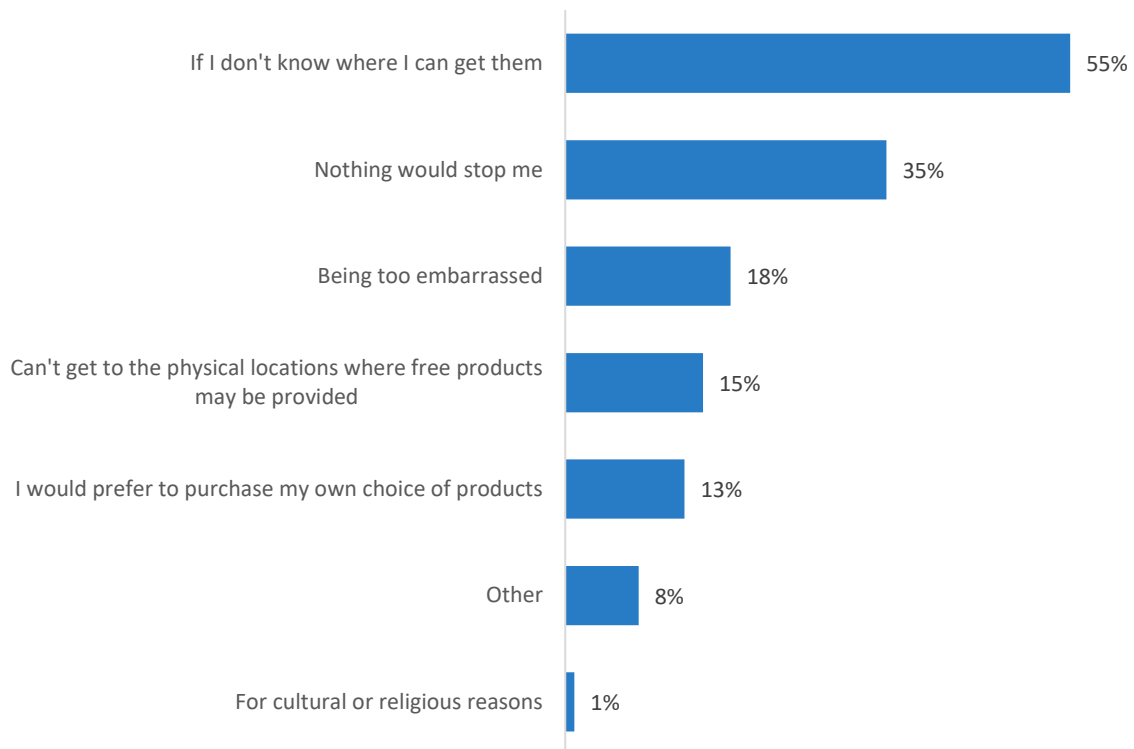
Question 6: What, if anything, would stop you from accessing these free period products? Please tick all that apply. Please also remember that these products will be available for everyone, whether or not they can afford to purchase them themselves.

All 1,635 survey respondents provided an answer to this question. Just over one-third (35%) responded that nothing would stop them from accessing free period products.

The most common potential barrier to accessing free period products, selected by 55% of respondents, was if they did not know where they could get them.

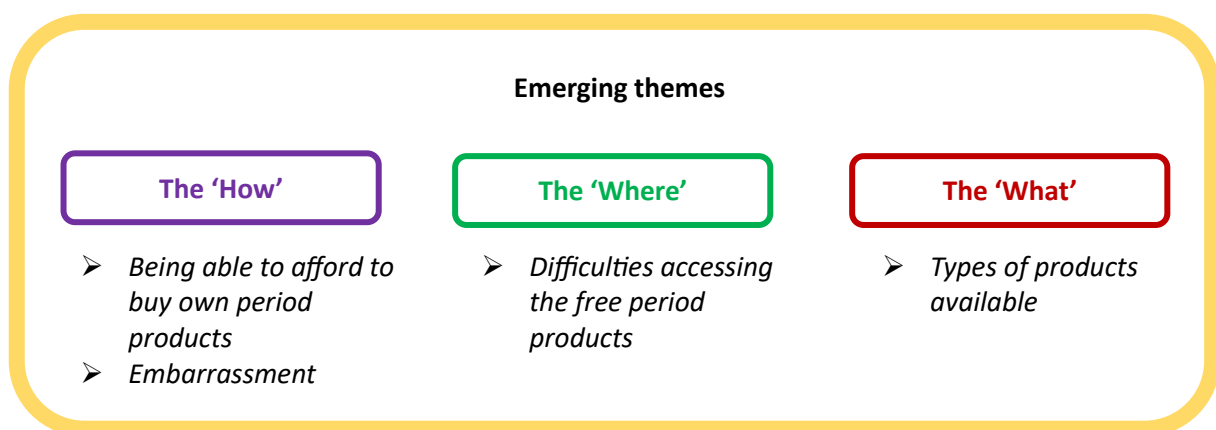
Of the 142 respondents who said they would not use free period products (Question 5), almost one-half (48%) said they would prefer to purchase their own choice of products; only 10% of those who responded 'yes' to question 5 selected this option for question 6.

Figure 7: Potential barriers to accessing free period products



Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected 'Can't get to the physical location', 'For cultural or religious reasons', or 'Other', but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment.

A total of 224 free-text responses were received to this question. The major themes that emerged from the analysis, in relation to potential barriers to accessing the free period products, are highlighted below:



Being able to afford to buy own period products (The 'How')

Many respondents commented that they were currently able to afford to buy their own period products and would therefore not use the free ones if they were available. Instead, these respondents

said that they would rather leave the free period products to those in need, who could not afford to pay for them.

“I am in the fortunate position that I can afford period products. I would not want to use free products because there are people in NI that desperately need them, and they should be firmly prioritised for them. It would be awful if those that could afford them created a shortage of products preventing people in more need from accessing them.”

Several respondents, however, commented, that despite being able to afford to buy their own period products, they would use the free ones if they needed to.

“I would feel guilty about taking free products when I can afford to buy them, however, if I was out and caught short, this would be really useful.”



Difficulties accessing the free period products (The ‘Where’)

Many respondents commented that they might not be able to avail of the free period products if they were not able to access the physical locations where the products were kept. For many, this was due to living in rural areas, where there are fewer amenities.

Related to this, transport was mentioned as a potential barrier to accessing the free products, either due to respondents not being able to drive because of disabilities or other mobility issues, not having access to their own mode of transport, or the public transport in their area being unreliable. Several mentioned that getting to the designated locations would potentially mean having to go out of their way. Opening hours of the buildings where free period products might be kept were also seen as a potential barrier to access, especially for those working full-time.

“Living in remote area of Fermanagh with poor transport and infrastructure. It may not always be accessible for me to collect period products depending on location. Provision in local pharmacies would be best.”

“Not all people have access to public or private transport to take them to collection points. A large proportion of the Council area is rural which can add to isolation and lack of access to collection points. People with disabilities may also have challenges when trying to access collection points.”

“If the locations that provide the products free are inaccessible by public transport or easily accessed by walking then this will exclude those who need the free access the most.”



It was also important to many respondents that the free period products were placed in easy to reach and appropriate locations within the buildings. While many respondents would prefer the products

being located within bathrooms, others saw this as a problem, if they were placed exclusively in female only bathrooms.

“Wouldn’t leave the bathroom during a period emergency, i.e. if in a school/college and products are at reception then wouldn’t use them.”

“Dependent on where the products are available - it would be assumed/highly likely these would be in female toilets therefore fathers/male relations/other would not have ready access for a daughter etc.”



It was also mentioned that some may have difficulties leaving house to go access the free period products. This could be due to physical disabilities or mental health difficulties, but also experiences of domestic violence.

Types of products available (The ‘What’)

A number of respondents stated that they would be discouraged from using free period products if the type of product they need, or prefer, was not available. Many mentioned the quality of the products as being very important to them. For example, some said they could only use unscented or plastic-free products due to adverse skin reactions. Others could only use products made of certain materials, such as bamboo. Having a range of products, which have the right absorbency, was also mentioned by some.

“I would require specific skin sensitive products and don't know if these would be available free of charge.”

Sustainability and reusability of period products was important to some respondents who said they would not use disposable ones.

“Period products need to be environmentally friendly in order for me to use them.”

“I like to use reusable period products. Washable underwear and pads because I am conscious of the impact of waste on the planet. Other people are not so lucky to be able to afford them.”

Embarrassment (The ‘How’)

A few respondents mentioned they may feel embarrassed if they had to ask someone for free period products.

“I would not feel comfortable if men were in my space when I needed to access these products.”

“I am concerned that a stigma would develop around accessing free period products. That people would take the attitude that if you can afford to buy period products or if people perceive that you should be able to afford to buy period products that you are not entitled to access free period products. I am also concerned that the people who desperately need to access free period products will not access them due to pride or fear that other people will think them poor.”

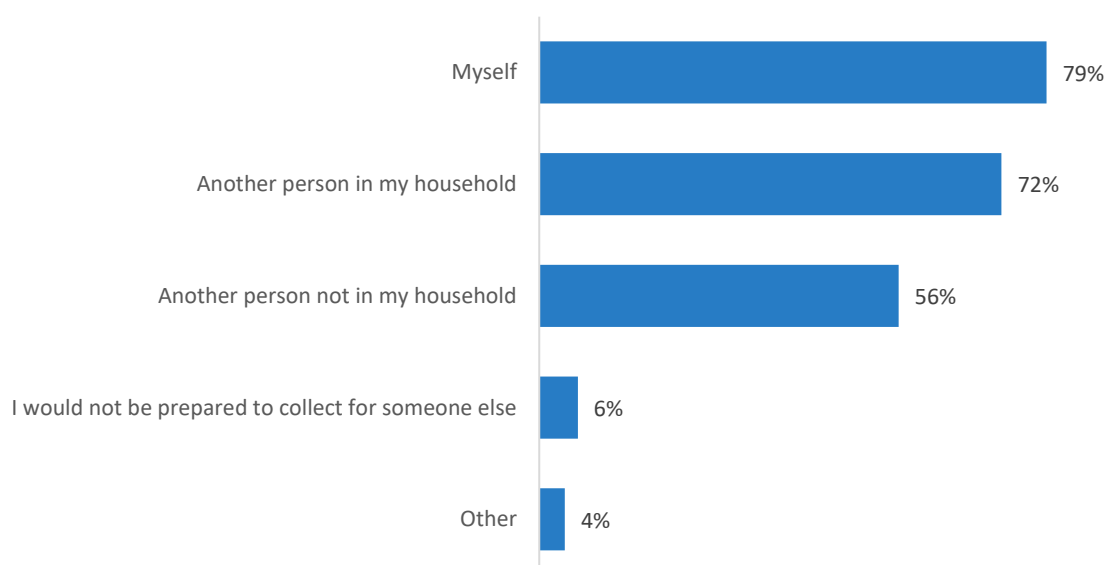
Other notable comments

Most respondents agreed that the products should be available free of charge, and especially for those who cannot afford to pay for them themselves.

Question 7: Who would you be prepared to collect the free period products for? Please tick all that apply.

All 1,635 survey respondents answered this question. Almost four-fifths (79%) would be prepared to collect the free period products for themselves, 72% would be prepared to collect them for another person in their household, and 56% would be prepared to collect them for another person not in their household. Only 6% of respondents indicated that they would not be prepared to collect for someone else.

Figure 8: Responses to the question: “Who would you be prepared to collect the free period products for?”



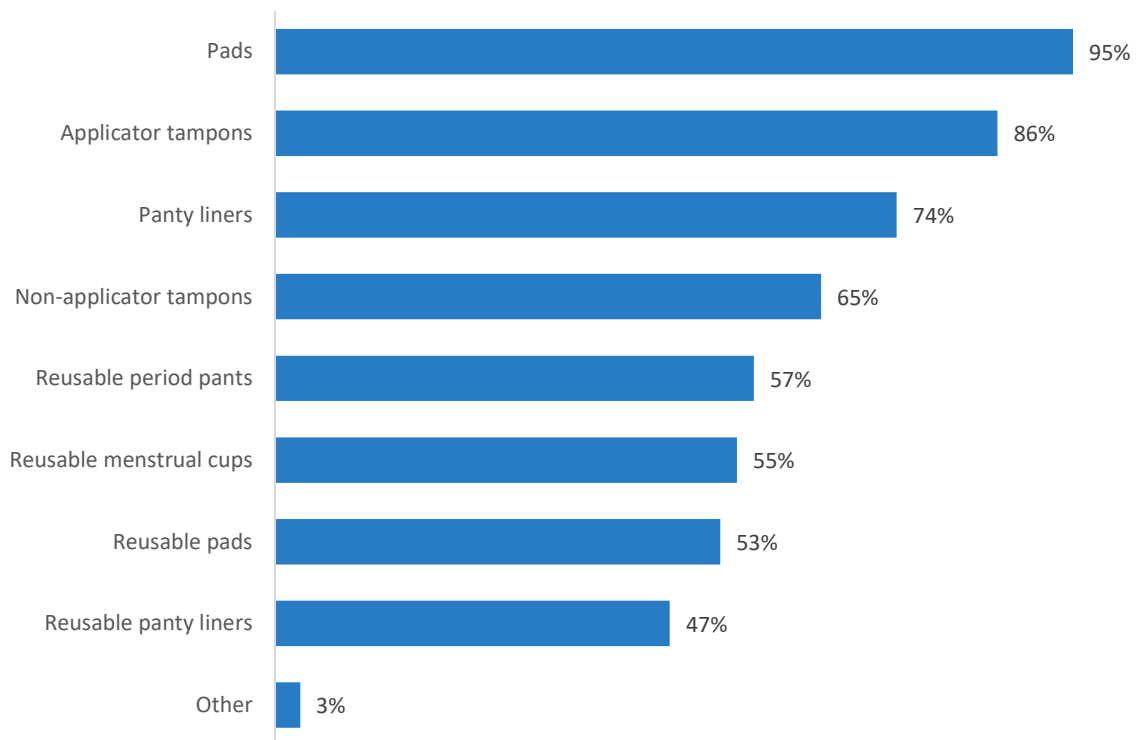
Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected ‘Other’, but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment.

A total of 73 free-text responses were received to this question. Most who provided a response said that they would be prepared to collect the free period products for anyone who needed them. Others said they would collect them for members of their organisation, visitors or service users.

Question 8: What free period products do you think should be made available? Please tick all that apply.

All 1,635 survey respondents provided an answer to this question – the proportion who selected each option is presented in Figure 9. The most common responses were pads (95%), applicator tampons (86%), and panty liners (74%).

Figure 9: Responses to the question: “What free period products do you think should be made available?”



Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected ‘Other’, but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment. A total of 72 free-text responses were received to this question. The major themes emerging from the responses are outlined below:

Emerging themes

The ‘What’

- *A variety of products should be available*
- *Environmentally friendly products*

A variety of products should be available (The ‘What’)

Many respondents explained that it would be important that a variety of different products are available, so as to suit everyone’s individual needs.

“Whatever products are appropriate to the women's requirements. They come in lots of different sizes, based on need.”

“Everyone is different and prefers different products. So they should all be available.”

Environmentally friendly products (The 'What')

Some respondents commented that the available products should be sustainable and environmentally friendly. This should include reusable products, although some agreed that reusable products may not be the best option for everyone.

"[Responding organisation] would be keen to promote sustainable items such as the reusable period pants, reusable menstrual cups, reusable pads and reusable panty liners, but is aware that an education piece must accompany such items in order for them to be successfully used and hygienically reused."

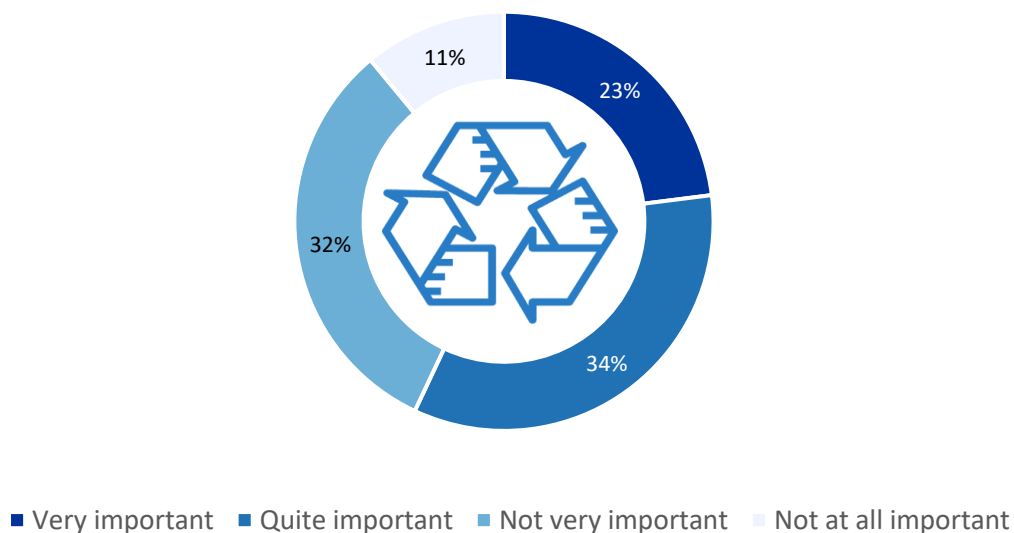
Other notable comments

Several comments also mentioned the need for hygiene products, such as hygiene wipes, and a couple mentioned pain relief products, such as heat patches.

Question 9: How important or unimportant are reusable products to you? Please select only one item.

A total of 1,634 respondents answered this question. A majority (57%) stated that reusable products were either very or quite important. Less than one-third said they were not very important (32%), with the remaining 11% responding that reusable products were not important at all.

Figure 10: Responses to the question: "How important or unimportant are reusable products to you?"



Question 10: Reusable products are more expensive. Alternative arrangements may be required to access these products. Would you be prepared to provide your contact details in order to obtain them? Please select only one item.

A total of 1,634 respondents provided an answer to this question. Almost two-thirds (66%) said they would be prepared to provide contact details to obtain reusable products. The remaining 34% said they would not be prepared to provide contact details for this purpose.

Figure 11: Responses to the question: “Would you be prepared to provide your contact details in order to obtain them (reusable products)?”

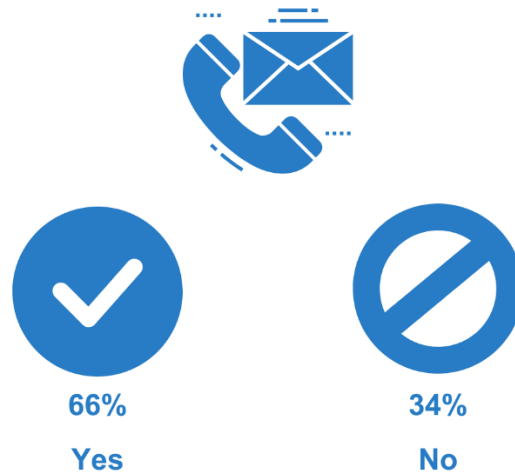
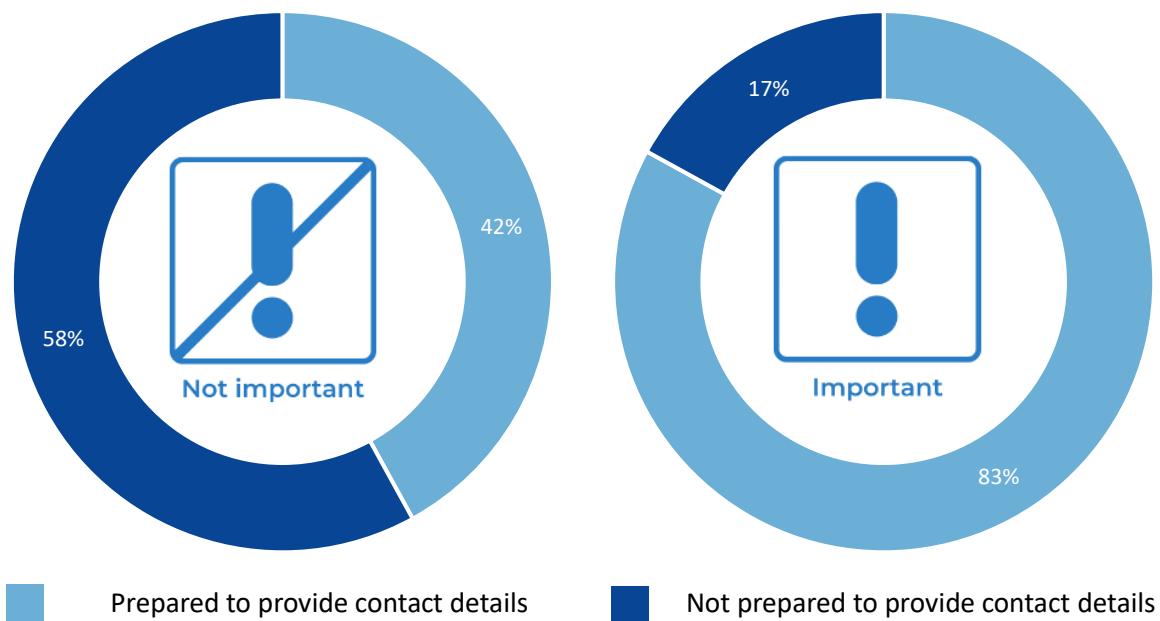


Figure 12 below shows that the majority of respondents (83%) who thought that reusable period products were quite or very important would be prepared to provide contact details to obtain them. In contrast, only 42% of respondents who thought that reusable period products were not very important or not important at all would be prepared to provide their contact details for this purpose.

Figure 12: Respondents’ preparedness to provide contact details to obtain reusable period products, by how important they perceive reusable period products to be.

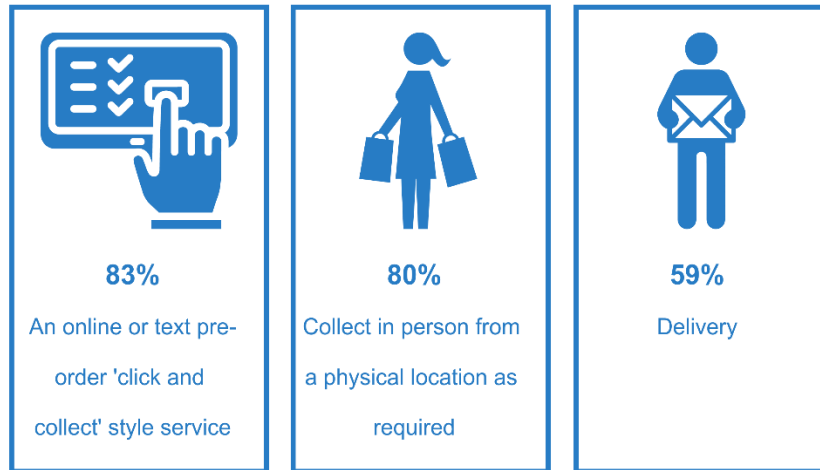


Question 11: How do you think period products ought to be made available? Please tick all that apply.

All 1,635 survey respondents answered this question. Of these, 83% stated that period products should be made available via an online or text pre-order ‘click and collect’ style service. Eighty percent

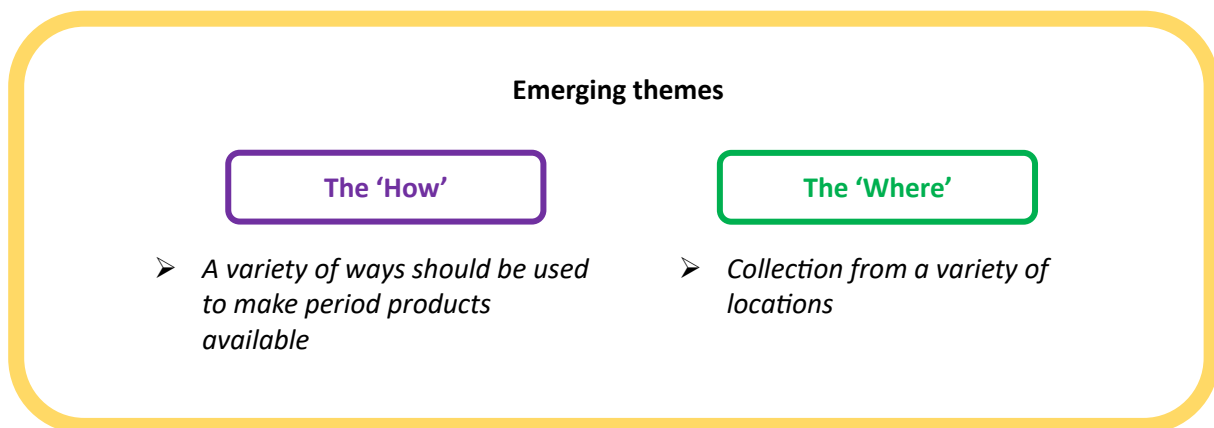
selected 'collection in person from a physical location as required', 59% selected 'delivery' and 8% selected 'other'.

Figure 13: Responses to the question: "How do you think period products ought to be made available?"



Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected 'Other', but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment.

A total of 150 free-text responses were received to this question. The major themes from these are outlined below:



A variety of ways should be used to make period products available (The 'How')

Many respondents believed that there should be multiple ways for people to obtain the free period products, including both collection and delivery.

"The more ways in which a person can do so, the more successful the scheme would be, and more people would be encouraged to access the products they need."

"Click and collect makes it easy, delivery probably is most dignified, as well as accountable, and a physical location helps to ensure those with no internet access or permanent address can also partake."

In relation to packing and delivery, those who commented on this believed that there should be no associated costs for recipients, as that would essentially create another barrier to accessing the free products, especially for those most in need of the service.

“For those with disabilities or with little to no disposable income to get to a location, there should be a free postage option. Each delivery should supply say 6 months’ worth, bigger quantities delivered less often.”

Collection from a variety of locations (The ‘Where’)

Many respondents suggested that it should be possible to collect the free period products from a variety of locations, primarily public places. Public toilets were mentioned in the majority of these comments, but pharmacies, chemists, healthcare facilities, schools and workplaces were also commonly mentioned.

Other notable comments

A few respondents mentioned a voucher scheme and free vending machines as options for obtaining the free products.

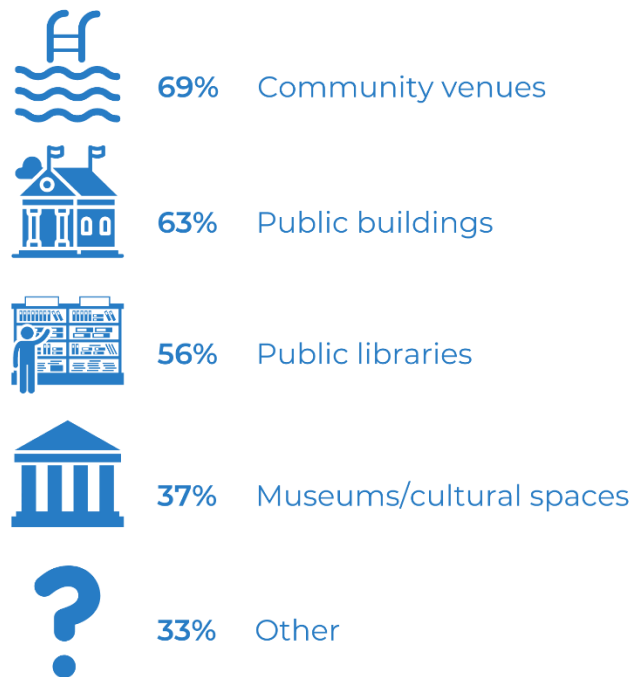
Question 12: In terms of physical locations where do you think would be the best places to obtain free period products from? Please tick all that apply.¹⁰

All 1,635 survey respondents provided an answer to this question. The most commonly selected location was community venues (69% of respondents) followed by public buildings (63%), and public libraries (56%). Thirty-seven per cent of respondents selected museums/cultural spaces and one-third (33%) selected ‘Other’.

It is important to note that the ‘community venues’ and ‘public buildings’ options are, by design, intended to cover a wide range of potential buildings and the proportions of respondents who selected these should be viewed in that context.

¹⁰ Note: respondents to the survey were informed that schools were not included in the list of options as they are not accessible by the general public and provision is already made for those in schools by the Department of Education.

Figure 14: Responses to the question: “In terms of physical locations where do you think would be the best places to obtain free period products from?”



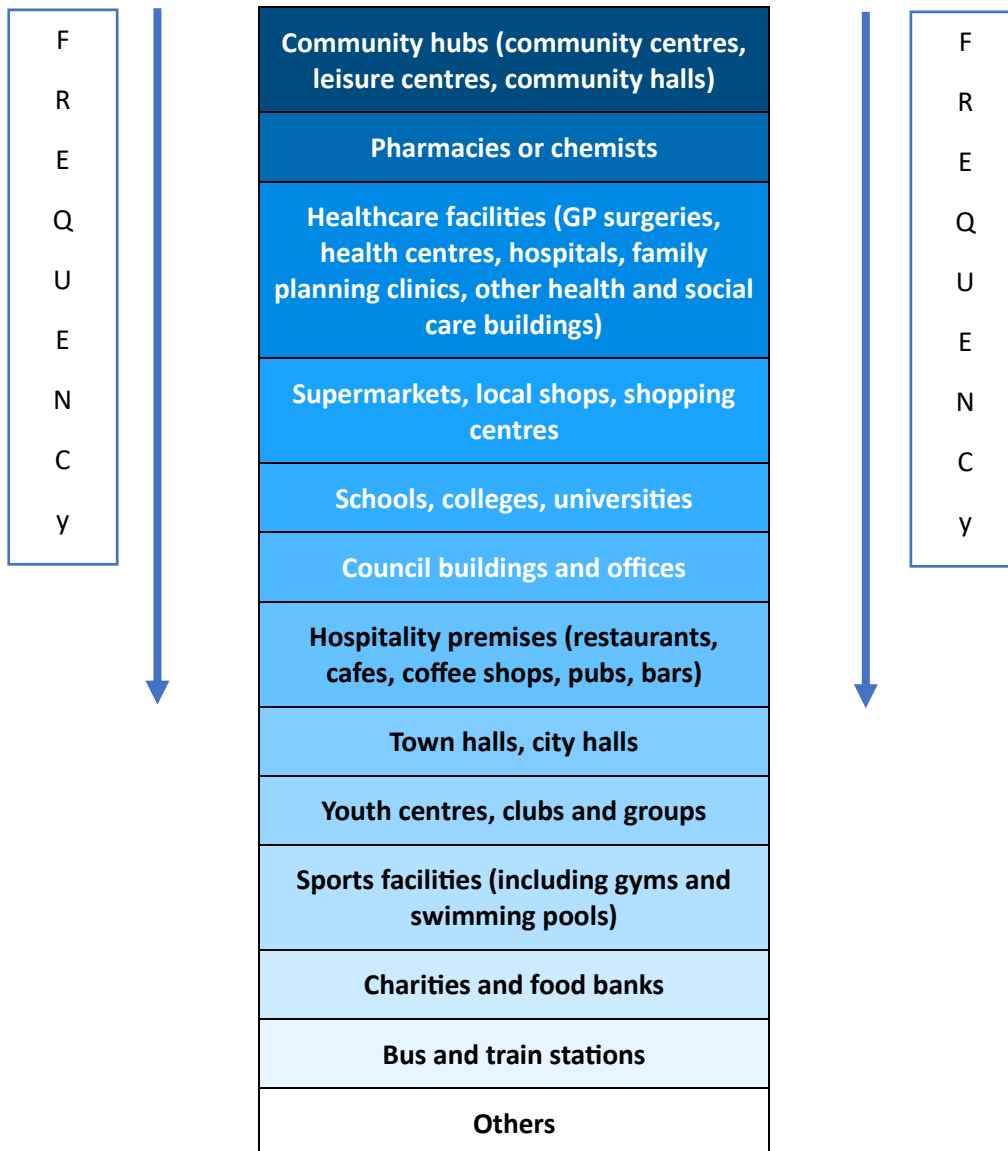
Those who selected ‘Public buildings’, ‘Community venues’ or ‘Other’, were specifically invited to provide further details, but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment.

A total of 1,175 free-text responses were received to this question. Where possible, these responses were coded into categories of physical locations, with many respondents providing more than one suggested location.¹¹

There was a large variety of responses, and the most commonly mentioned ones, in descending order of relative frequency, are outlined in Figure 15. The actual frequencies (counts) are not provided due to the subjective nature of the coding process.

¹¹ Note: Some responses suggested locations included in the original question (and presented in Figure 14)

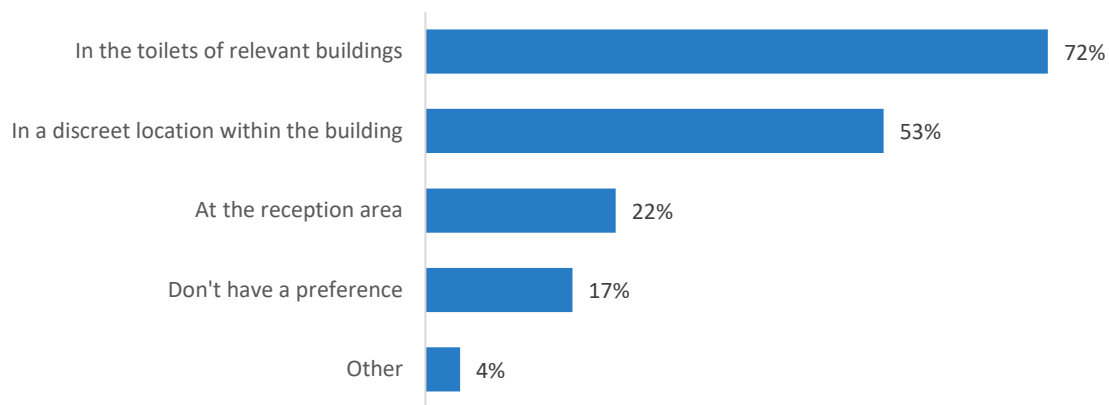
Figure 15: Most frequently mentioned physical locations for the free period products in ‘further details’ section, by descending order of frequency.



Question 13: Given the legislation indicates that the provision of free period products must respect privacy, dignity and confidentiality, where within a building would you feel most comfortable accessing free period products? Please tick all that apply.

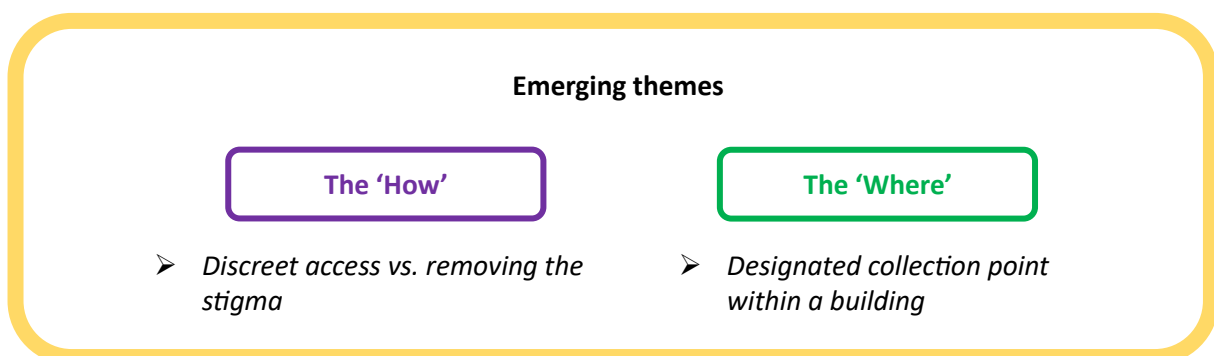
A total of 1,634 respondents answered this question. Almost three-quarters (72%) would feel comfortable accessing free period products in the toilets of relevant buildings. Just over one-half of respondents (53%) would feel comfortable if the products could be accessed in a discreet location within the building. Only 22% would feel comfortable if they were at the reception area, while 17% of respondents indicated that they do not have a preference.

Figure 16: Responses to the question: “Where within a building would you feel most comfortable accessing free period products?”



Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected ‘Other’, but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment.

A total of 118 free-text responses were received to this question. The responses were varied, ranging from very general to very specific, with a few respondents commenting that the products should be accessible in a number of different ways. The major themes from these responses are outlined below:



Designated collection point within a building (The ‘Where’)

Several respondents mentioned a designated collection point within a building, with clear signage. Toilets were mentioned quite a few times as being the most appropriate location, with some respondents suggesting that the products should be available within the cubicles to ensure privacy. Some have, however, highlighted potential problems with this location:

“You would think the toilets would be a sensible option for single use items. But if I was to collect for my children/spouse they would need to be available elsewhere.”

“... Providing them in female toilets would appear to be the most discreet location in which to minimise embarrassment however this would preclude males from acquiring for female partners/relatives where needed. A discreet location also increases the chances of certain individuals abusing the system and taking more than what is required for personal use leaving others who do require at a disadvantage.”

“I think that the best option generally is to have them available in toilets. However, if this is the case it may make it more difficult for trans people to access them so they should either be available in all toilets regardless of gender or available in an additional discreet location.”

Collection from reception areas or from free vending machines was also mentioned by several respondents.

Discreet access vs. removing the stigma (The ‘How’)

Many respondents highlighted a need to provide discreet ways of accessing the free period products. This would include locating products in a discreet place and/or dispensing in discreet packaging. Others, however, pointed out the importance of not creating stigma and embarrassment around periods by hiding the products away.

“Whilst I understand the reasoning for confidentiality, I also think "hiding" services like this is continuing to make periods a taboo subject.”

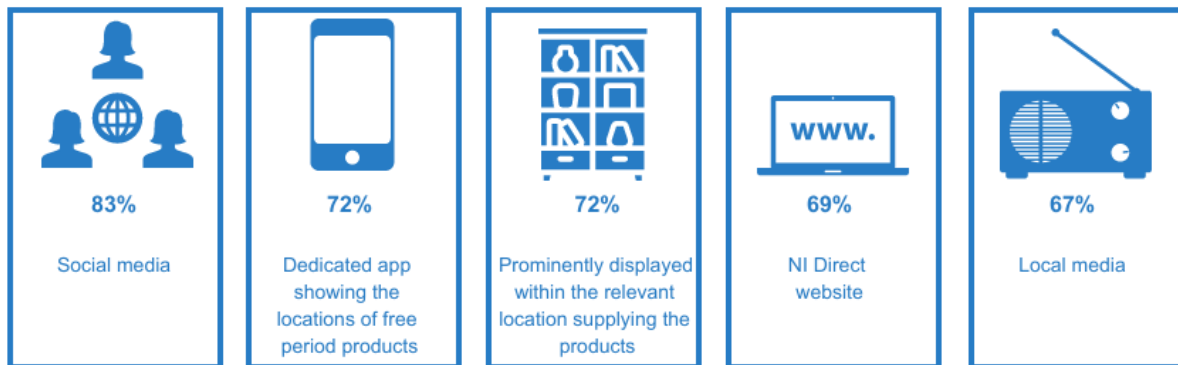
Other notable comments

Pharmacies were also mentioned by a few respondents, as people could get the period products there in prescription bags.

Question 14: How do you think that the provision and location of free period products should be publicised? Please tick all that apply.

All 1,635 survey respondents provided an answer to this question. The most common option for publicising the provision and location of free period products, selected by 83% of respondents, was social media. The other specific options were also popular among respondents, with approximately seven in ten selecting each of: a dedicated app (72%); the products being prominently displayed within the relevant location (72%); the NI Direct website (69%); and local media (67%). Five percent of respondents selected ‘Other’.

Figure 17. Responses to the question “How do you think that the provision and location of free period products should be publicised?”



Further comment was invited specifically from those who selected ‘Other’, but a number of those who provided an alternative response to the question also provided further comment. Analysis is based on the responses of all who provided further comment.

A total of 112 free-text responses were received to this question. A substantial number of respondents commented that the location of free period products should be publicised in a variety of ways. Many believed this would help to destigmatise periods and remove the taboo.

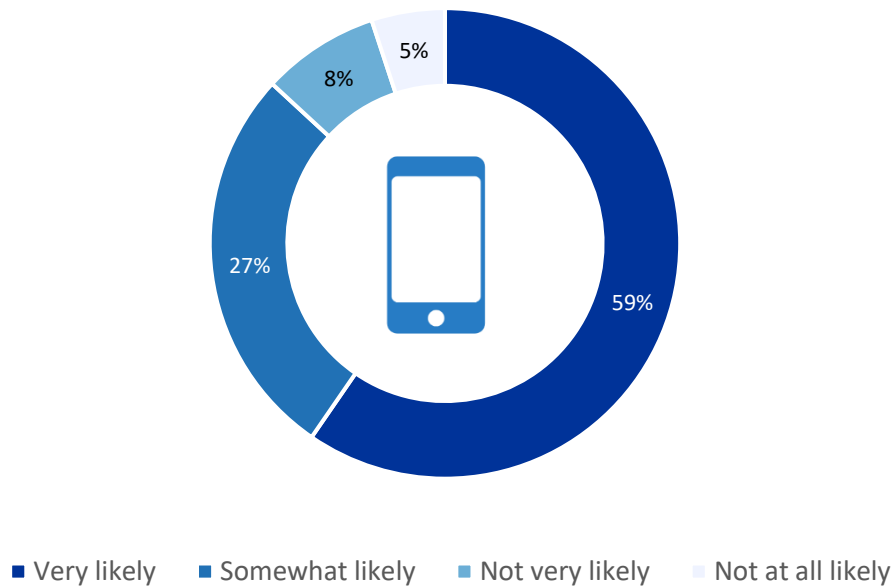
Specific suggestions included the media, and the use of flyers or posters in healthcare facilities, pharmacies, schools and toilets. It was also suggested that each venue providing the free period products could advertise this on its premises, for example by using a dedicated logo displayed in the window, similar to the JAM (‘Just A Minute’) card logo or the food hygiene rating.

“Discretely displayed within the relevant location supplying the products - perhaps a logo should be developed which would be easily recognisable to those who need to use the products without being in your face.”

Question 15: If the location of free period products was made available via an app how likely or not likely are you to use this app? Please select only one item.

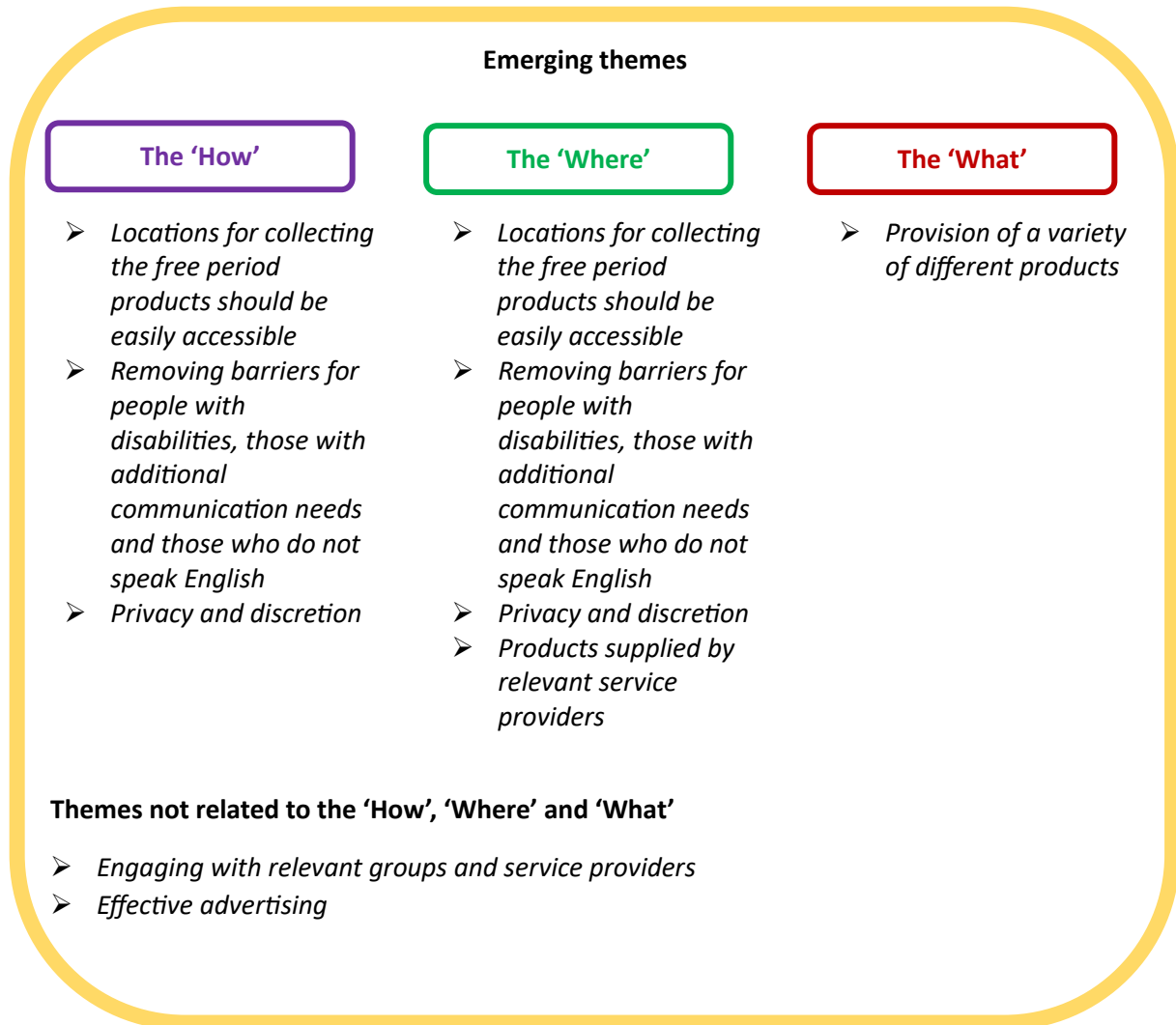
A total of 1,634 respondents provided an answer to this question. The vast majority (87%) selected either somewhat or very likely, while only 13% selected not very or not at all likely.

Figure 18. Responses to the question “If the location of free period products was made available via an app how likely or not likely are you to use this app?”



Question 16: Some groups (such as those from certain cultural backgrounds, those with a disability, those who are homeless, etc.) are likely to have certain specific needs when accessing free period products. Please provide any further information you think is relevant or should be taken into account to meet the needs of such groups in the space below.

There were 520 free-text responses to this question. The responses were varied, with the main themes outlined below:



Engaging with relevant groups and service providers

Respondents generally agreed that certain groups may have specific needs when accessing free period products and many suggested that the best way forward in this area would be to directly engage with individuals from, and representatives of, these groups, and the service providers who work with them.

“There are issues for homeless people accessing period products especially in public spaces as they are often treated differently and with disdain when entering public spaces. Care should be given to how they should be given access to period products. Working with homeless charities to gain this information would be vital.”

“It is very important to actually speak to people from the above mentioned groups in order to find out what would best suit their needs. These groups are often left out from these conversations and the majority group speaks over them.”

“Too often I find that the opinions and final say are dictated by people who are not part of the population that these provisions are for.”

Products supplied by relevant service providers (The ‘Where’)

A lot of respondents suggested that the free period products should be made available to the service providers that these groups are likely to engage with. This would include GPs, social workers, homeless shelters, or places of worship. These providers would then be able to distribute them and/or make them available from their premises.

“Make available in shelters and community spaces where homeless will not be deterred from entering.”

“Charities and other organisations who support hard-to-reach groups such as homeless, minorities, those in poverty etc. should have first, ringfenced access to products and be able to bring products directly to those in need. There must be no requirement for ID/address etc. which could limit the ability of certain people to access the products.”

“In the toilets of places of worship for women from certain cultural backgrounds.”

Locations for collecting the free period products should be easily accessible (The ‘How’ and The ‘Where’)

There was an agreement amongst respondents that in order to support these groups, the free period products should be located in easily accessible places. This is partly related to the above theme of the products being supplied by relevant service providers. Having the products available in places where these groups would normally go, such as places of worship or healthcare facilities, would enable easy access without putting additional pressure on the recipients. This was highlighted in relation to people with disabilities. In addition, some mentioned the need for 24-hour access, possibly through vending machines.

“Free period products should be made available in homeless shelters and/or spaces where these groups of people will likely visit. We need to find ways to prioritise their need.”

Pharmacies and public toilets were frequently mentioned as easily accessible locations. Some, however, suggested that the homeless may not feel welcome on certain premises.

“Public toilet provisions are more accessible to rough sleepers as they may not always be able/or feel welcome to access public buildings.”

“Need to be in a location that is freely accessible to all i.e. some public spaces although free to enter may (rightly or wrongly) not allow homeless people access to the toilets. So maybe a discreet dedicated area for collection would be beneficial in certain settings.”

Removing barriers for people with disabilities, those with additional communication needs and those who do not speak English (The ‘How’ and The ‘Where’)

Respondents generally agreed that a free delivery service should be available for people with disabilities and those with mobility issues, so as not to create another barrier to accessing the free

period products. Wheelchair accessible collection locations and products located at the appropriate height were also mentioned by respondents.

“I am a person with mobility problems so a facility to order and the products be delivered would be ideal.”

Some highlighted the importance of providing information about the location of the products in different languages for those who do not speak English, or using signs or logos, and different formats for those who are visually impaired.

For individuals with communication difficulties, it may be easier to be able to collect the products without having to speak to anyone, or to present a card with a specific meaning, similar to the JAM card.

“People with communication difficulties such as autism, sign language users etc. would face barriers if products had to be requested from reception areas and would in turn be disadvantaged from accessing products that non disabled people would have access to.”

“Instead of having to speak to someone at a busy reception it might be easier/more comfortable for someone to show a card, like the JAM card.”

“I'm autistic, and it would be particularly important to recognise different communication needs, and to train any staff who engage with the public on this scheme with that in mind. Some of us use AAC and some of us carry the JAM card, so if staff understood about these things, that would be great.”

Provision of a variety of different products (The ‘What’)

Many respondents stated that to enable those from certain cultural or religious backgrounds and people with different types of disabilities to avail of the free period products, a wide variety of products should be made available.

Some may not be able to use certain types of products for religious or cultural reasons, or due to issues related to their disability. The homeless may not have access to adequate washing facilities, and even though many respondents would prefer to see reusable period products, the consensus was that these would not be suitable for this particular group.

“The homeless won't have access to clean running water at times so cups and reusable won't work, while we need to be environmentally conscious let's start with tackling the issue of period dignity first and work our way up to environmentally friendly products.”

Privacy and discretion (The ‘How’ and The ‘Where’)

Respondents highlighted the need for privacy and discretion when accessing the free period products. This included:

- a discreet delivery service, with some commenting that this could be done through pharmacies;
- a discreet location where the products could be obtained;
- women-only locations; or
- dispensers within the individual cubicles of public bathrooms.

Respondents also mentioned that discretion could be ensured through the use of plain, unrevealing, packaging. Others mentioned that it should be possible to collect the products without the need to speak to anyone, which could avoid embarrassment.

“Women-only spaces may be a beneficial location for cultural, religious or other reasons.”

“Period products could be given out in blank packaging to avoid any embarrassment.”

Effective advertising

To ensure that those most in need have access to the free period products, many respondents mentioned the need for different and inclusive forms of advertising. It was stated that an app should not be the sole way for accessing these products.

“I think that every reasonable effort should be made to ensure that these groups are included in the scheme. I would add that I think the messaging needs to be clear that not all people who have periods are women and that any marketing or advertising needs to be inclusive in this way also.”

“Make sure that it’s advertised not just on social media but somewhere that a homeless person would be aware of the free products!”

Advertising through service providers who work with the vulnerable groups was mentioned as a potentially useful way of making people aware of the availability and locations of the free period products.

“Those organisations who work with above groups like housing associations, food banks and community organisations should be fully informed so they may let individuals know.”

A few suggested that an outreach service may be beneficial for those groups who do not have access to media.

“An outreach service should be made available for those who are difficult to reach, this could be supported by community and voluntary groups.”

“Homeless may not have access to internet, TV or radio to hear or identify locations, may require outreach to known shelters, the streets themselves etc. to let them know.”

Other notable comments

Other comments included the need for trained staff who would be aware of the cultural, religious and disability needs of the different groups. Some respondents would prefer there to be only female staff members involved in the dispensing of free period products.

A few respondents mentioned that the products should be available in all bathrooms and not only women’s bathrooms.

“Trans people also be using male gendered bathrooms. Therefore, it is advisable to have product provision in male gendered bathrooms to fully respect dignity, privacy, and confidentiality.”

Q17. A number of impact assessment screening exercises have been carried out and are listed separately at the link below.¹² If you have any additional comments or information please provide further detail in the space below.

There were 78 free-text responses to this question. The majority of respondents used the space to provide comments not directly related to impact assessments. Most of these are consistent with the

¹² Note: respondents were provided with a link to details on the impact assessment screening exercises.

themes highlighted in the sections above, including suggestions on how and where to access the products.

In relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment, a number of respondents commented that those living in rural areas may be potentially disadvantaged. Some areas have limited public transport and residents may therefore not be able to get to their nearest collection point. Again, a delivery service to those who live in rural areas and have no access to transport, was suggested as a potential solution.

Q18. Please provide any further comments and/or feedback you wish to make in relation to the provision of free period products in the space below.

There were 526 free-text responses to this question. Many respondents used this as an opportunity to express their direct support for the scheme, or to reiterate some of their earlier comments, such as the need to provide a variety of products to cater for different needs, the importance of reusable products, or ideas for access and locations of the free period products.

Emerging themes

The 'How'

- *Concerns about vandalism and system abuse*
- *Prioritise those in need*
- *All-inclusive access*

Themes not related to the 'How', 'Where' and 'What'

- *General support for the provision of free period products*
- *A step closer to removing stigma surrounding periods*
- *Opposition to provision of free period products*

General support for the provision of free period products

Most comments were generally supportive of the provision of free period products. Many respondents mentioned the current cost of living crisis and how some had to, either now, or in the past, choose between food and period products.

Respondents agreed that period products should be free, since women do not choose to have periods and the products are therefore essential.

“Only when you can't send your daughter to school as there are no period products available would you ever understand the pressure this puts on women and girls.”

A step closer to removing stigma surrounding periods

Some respondents believed that the provision of free period products would represent a step towards removing the stigma and embarrassment which often surround periods. This may be particularly

beneficial for young girls as it may help to normalise periods and allow them to talk about these issues freely.

“I believe having this kind of provision normalises periods and will allow young women to speak freely about issues they are having.”

“I am fully supportive of this provision; not only will it help further destigmatise periods for menstruators, it will also increase dignity for people with periods.”

Concerns about vandalism and system abuse (The ‘How’)

Some respondents raised concerns about the potential for antisocial behaviour, where the products could get vandalised if left unattended. Concern was also raised around people taking more products than they need, leaving others, who really need the products, without. Considering the initial higher cost of reusable products, it was suggested that people could take these and then resell them. To avoid this, some respondents suggested that it might be better to have the reusable products only available to order.

“I feel it is important to recognise that this system could be abused and taken advantage of. Consideration should be given to ensure that those who really need access to free products can get them.”

Prioritise those in need (The ‘How’)

Whereas many respondents agreed with universal access to free period products for all who need them, some suggested that provision should be means-tested and should be restricted to those who cannot afford to buy their own.

“Period poverty is definitely an issue, however if the financial impact of providing period products free to all is too great for the economy, perhaps it should be limited to those on benefits and under 18s.”

“As a principle I don't think it is a good use of public money to provide free period products. ... I would steer the availability towards where the most needy in society would be, instead of having them available more generally.”

All-inclusive access (The ‘How’)

A number of respondents highlighted the need to ensure that there was inclusive access to period products for all, irrespective of gender.

“Please consider that some members of the trans community may also need access to free period products and consider allowing them discreet access to products as well.”

“Period products should be accessible to every gender, in every bathroom. Some people may send their friends, family, partner etc. to retrieve these products from secretary for example, no one should be turned away because of how they look and many transmen or non-binary people will still have their periods so products should be readily available for them too.”

A few respondents raised an issue with the lack of use of terms such as ‘woman’ or ‘girl’ within the consultation survey and the associated documents.

“As previously stated, by not referring to women and girls is discriminatory in itself. The bland statement of “all persons who need to use them” is meaningless and will not promote equality of opportunity and this needs to be examined.”

“I note with disappointment the lack of the terms women and girls in your survey. This erasure of women sits at odds with your attempt to support underprivileged women and girls affected by period poverty.”

Opposition to provision of free period products

While the vast majority of respondents were supportive of the legislation, there was a very small number who expressed their disapproval with the provision of free period products throughout the consultation questions. Some of these suggested that the money would be better spent elsewhere.

Analysis of written responses not in the survey format

This section presents the main points raised in the 17 written responses to the consultation, either partly or wholly not in the survey format. These responses echoed much of what was raised by respondents to the main survey. The main themes were:

- Respondents were generally supportive of the legislation and agreed that it represents a positive step towards achieving gender equality.
- The majority were supportive of the provision of sustainable and reusable period products.
- A few mentioned the success of the pilot scheme ran by the Belfast City Council, which received positive feedback from the public, and experienced very little vandalism. **(The 'How')**
- A number of respondents stated that access to free period products should be all-inclusive, including for trans-men and non-binary people. **(The 'How')**
- A variety of products should be available in a range of different locations. Many commented that it would be better if these could be collected without having to speak to anyone. **(The 'Where' and The 'How')**
- Where delivery is provided, this should be free so as not to create another barrier to accessing the products. **(The 'How')**
- More education and public awareness around periods are needed, helping to eliminate any associated stigma.
- Attention should be given to the language used within the scheme – this should not be stigmatising. **(The 'How')**

Appendix A

The following organisations responded to the consultation¹³:

57th B Belfast Guide Unit

A Brownie unit and a Guide unit

Advice NI

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Armagh Roma Traveller Support

Belfast City Council

Business & Professional Women UK, NI Region

Bridge Gymnastics

Bryson Energy

Carnagat Community Association (six responses)

Charity for hygiene products

Community Finance Ireland

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Compassion Belfast

Consortium for the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Drumellan Community Association

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Emmanuel Church

Equality Period

The Family Nurse Partnership

Fane Street Primary School

Female Sports Forum

¹³ The name of the organisation was not provided in all instances, and there were, in some cases, more than one response from the same organisation.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
Footprints Women's Centre
Gets Active Youth Advisory Group
Glenelly Development Trust Ltd
Guildhall / Tower Museum (Derry City and Strabane District Council)
Homeless Connect
Hovis
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (two responses)
Kilcooley Women's Centre
Kilkeel Development Association
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council
Magherafelt Women's Group Ltd
Menstruation Research Network UK
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council (two responses)
Mid Ulster District Council
National Union of Students – Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI)
NICCY (two responses)
North West Regional College
Northern Area Community Network
Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA)
Northern Ireland Sports Forum
Northern Health and Social Care Trust (two responses)
Northern Ireland Resources Network
Parenting NI
Queen's University Belfast Students' Union
Rathenraw Youth Scheme
Red Cross Refugee Support NI
Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
Ruairi Og CLG Cushendall Health and well-being
Sinn Féin

Southern Health and Social Care Trust (six responses)

Splitz Gymnastics NI

Stranmillis University College

The Pink Ladies Cancer Support Group (two responses)

Triathlon Ireland

UNISON

Unite The Union

Ulster University Students' Union

Whiterock Childrens Centre

Women's Aid

Women's Platform

Women's Policy Group NI

YMCA

Note: several individuals who responded to the consultation also provided the name of their organisation. This information has not been added to the list of organisations above.