

Rt Hon. Gillian Keegan MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
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26<sup>th</sup> May 2023

CC Maria Caulfield Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Mental Health and Women's Health  
Strategy and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women

**Announce a new action plan to tackle period poverty, shame and inequality this Global Menstrual Hygiene Day (28<sup>th</sup> May).**

Dear Minister Keegan,

As organisations and individuals working with young people, in schools, and/or on women's rights issues we are writing to express our support for the ['Every Period Counts'](#) campaign which calls on you to create a period poverty action plan. Led by [Empower Period](#), a community of youth activists, the campaign brings together young people from around the UK to tackle period poverty, shame and inequality in their schools.

We're concerned that despite the UK Government's vision of ending period poverty and shame in the UK by 2025, the situation for young people in schools is actually getting worse: the Every Period Counts campaign has collected hundreds of stories of negative experiences from around the UK, including girls being banned from using the toilet during class even during their periods, pupils using improvised materials like socks to manage their period in school despite free period product schemes being in place, and many young people struggling to access free period products and support in schools due to stigma and shame.

*"During my year 10 English Language exam, I leaked on my exam chair and went 2 hours sitting and not saying a word, at this time products were hidden away in the cupboards and none were available in the exam venue. At the end of the exam I broke down as I didn't know what to do. My school had locked the girls toilets and [the girls toilets] were destroyed, no locks on the doors, always dirty, sinks falling off dirt spreading around the walls. My period became a big issue for me in school, not being able to focus and the constant fear of leaking and people seeing." – Tilly, age 16*

The latest data, jointly commissioned by Irise International, In Kind Direct, Freedom4Girls, Bloody Good Period and Cysters as part of the Every Period Counts campaign found that nearly half of girls in the UK report not being able to access free period products at school because they're too hard to get hold of, a third have had to take time off because they haven't been given the right care or access to period products and 61% have had issues accessing a toilet when on their period.

**The Every Period Counts campaign is calling on the Government to create a new action plan to tackle period poverty and shame in UK schools**, including evaluating and improving existing free period product schemes and menstrual education in schools, and restarting the UK Period Poverty Taskforce to find innovative policy solutions to this issue in the UK.

This Menstrual Hygiene Day, let's put this issue firmly back on the agenda and take steps to ensure that no one has to miss school because of their period in the UK.

Best wishes,

Emily Wilson, CEO, Irise International

Rose Caldwell, CEO, Plan International UK

Rachel Grocott, CEO, Bloody Good Period

Helen Marshall, Chief Executive, Brook

Angela Salt, Chief Executive, Girl Guiding

Laura Sercombe, CEO at GFS (Girls Friendly Society)

Paul Buchanan, Interim CEO, In Kind Direct

Bethan Walters, UN Women UK Delegate to CSW67 2023, Sikh Human Rights Group

Neelam Heera-Shergill, Founder, Cysters

Laura Coryton, Co-founder and Managing Director, Sex Ed Matters

Molly Fenton, Founder of the Love Your Period Campaign

Gemma Williams, Research Fellow Birmingham City University

Tina Leslie MBE, Founder Freedom4Girls

Tonia Nixon, CEO, Tees Community Hub

Jasmine Watson, Youth Engagement Lead, Element Society

Tanya Basharat, CEO, Shipshape Community Hub

Dr Sharon Dixon, NIHR Doctoral Research Fellow and General Practitioner, Donnington Medical Partnership, Oxford

Professor Krina Zondervan, Head of Department for the Nuffield Department of Women's and Reproductive Health, University of Oxford

Chella Quint, Founder, Period Positive

Dr. Maria Tomlinson, Lecturer in Public Communication and Gender, University of Sheffield

Ina Jurga, International Coordinator Menstrual Hygiene Day, WASH United







## **Our Asks-**

### **Here's what we'd like government to do to make period dignity a reality in UK Schools**

Every Period Counts is a youth led campaign, backed by 17 UK charities, demanding period dignity. To this end, they are asking Government for the following:

- Acknowledge that more needs to be done to tackle period poverty and shame in the UK schools and lay out an action plan for their next steps
- Provide an update on the future of the Period Poverty Taskforce, which has not met since before the pandemic and was allocated a £250,000 budget to develop long term solutions to this issue in the UK
- Legislate a long-term commitment to meet young people's right to Period Dignity in schools in England and Wales (in England the government had only committed to provide free period products in schools and colleges to the end of 2024)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the current free period product scheme in England to understand barriers to effectiveness (particularly for types of school with low take up such as alternative provision, special schools and primary schools) and collate learning from free period product schemes in other parts of the UK to generate and action recommendations for improvements.
- Collect new data on current levels of menstrual related absenteeism in UK schools as part of the evaluation and continue to monitor this
- Amend guidance and policy on the scheme in England to address barriers, including to
  - set a stronger expectation that schools will use the scheme unless there is some good reason not to do so and explore making enrolment mandatory under certain conditions
  - set stronger expectations about schools making products accessible in stigma-free way
  - removing stigmatizing paragraph suggesting it's only for those in poverty
  - make reference to need for schools to allow children to go the toilet
  - Provide good practice examples of the product scheme working well
  - Encourage schools to provide education and broader support for periods alongside the free product scheme
- Extend commitment to the England scheme in terms of length of time, institutions covered and review how spending cap is calculated, with a view to increasing per school cap, particularly for primaries.
- Promote the England scheme to schools, particularly types of school and geographic areas with low take up
- Reverse the recent cuts to the budget for free period products in schools in Northern Ireland
- Collect Office for National Statistics (ONS) data on spending on period products
- Ofsted (and equivalent) to review of extent, nature and effectiveness of Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), particularly with regard to its effectiveness in tackling menstrual education.
- Central government to invest in Relationships, RSHE training and resources, particularly to promote good practice for menstrual education.

## Every Period Counts Survey Findings

As part of the Every Period Counts campaign Irise International commissioned a nationally representative survey of girls across the UK, with support from campaign allies Bloody Good Period, In Kind Direct, Freedom4Girls and Cysters.

The research was carried out online by Research Without Barriers between 4<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023. The sample comprised 1,007 girls aged 13-18.

Key findings include:

- A third of girls (344 out of 1,007) are missing school due to a lack of care or access to period products - that's over 3 million days missed every year.
- Nearly half of all school girls (434 out of 1,007) are struggling to access period products at school.
- 61% of girls (610 out of 1,007) have had issues accessing toilets in lessons when on their period.
- Further 44% of girls (446 out of 1,007) feel too embarrassed to ask for period products at school.
- A quarter (24% 240 out of 1,007) have been too embarrassed to notify a teacher when they have started their period.
- A further 25% (251 out of 1,007) have had to justify exactly why they needed to go to the toilet.
- One in four girls (24% 245 out of 1,007) have to hide their period products when accessing a toilet at school.
- More than 1 in 10 schools still don't provide free period products, with 13% of girls (128 out of 1,007) stating that their school/college doesn't offer free period products at all.
- A huge 52% of girls (527 out of 1,007) say they have never been taught how to use period products at school or college.

