

94% of secondary schools provide free period products to students

New data on the government's free period product scheme shows schools and colleges stepping up to make sure no student has to miss lessons because of their period.

The data published today (Thursday 27 January) shows the value of products being ordered increased by almost a quarter (23%) in 2021 to £3.4 million compared with £2.8 million in 2020.

The number of environmentally friendly or reusable products ordered increased from less than a third in 2020 (30%) to almost half (48%) of all products in 2021.

In total, 13,822 individual organisations (68% of all those eligible) have ordered free period products since the scheme began in January 2020, helping reduce stigma around menstruation. This includes 94% of secondary schools and 90% of post 16 organisations.

The government is encouraging more primary schools to order products, with less than two thirds (61%) of primary schools currently engaging in the scheme.

The data also shows where take up across the country is especially strong, including the London borough of Redbridge which engaged the highest percentage of its schools and colleges in the scheme. Darlington has seen the biggest jump in uptake year on year.

Minister for Children and Families, Will Quince said:

I am pleased to see our free period products in such high demand in schools and colleges across the country, making sure there is no reason for any student to miss lessons or worry about coming on their period.

We strongly encourage everyone to make the most of this scheme – demand should be no different from Stockport and Slough, to Manchester and Middlesbrough.

I encourage every school and college to check their stocks and continue to order products before the end of the academic year. It is the quickest and simplest way of making sure they are available to everyone who needs them.

The locations topping the charts for engagement in the scheme are*:

Percentage of eligible schools and colleges making at least one order since January 2020

London Borough of Redbridge (91%)
 Leicestershire and Luton (88%; joint)
 Leicester and Slough (85%; joint)

Percentage increase of schools and colleges making at least one order in 2021 compared with 2020

Darlington (58% up from 26%)
 Runcorn and Widnes (Halton) (60% up from 34%)
 Hartlepool (48% up from 28%)
 Warrington (55% up from 38%)
 Torbay (59% up from 41%)

The most ordered products are*:

Type of product	2020 Number of packets ordered	2020 Percentage of all packets ordered	2021 Number of packets ordered	2021 Percentage of all packets ordered
Pads	458,023	66%	615,064	75%
Tampons	221,656	32%	179,723	22%
Menstrual cups	9,477	1%	22,619	3%
Standard Type	483,551	70%	423,331	52%
Eco friendly/reusable	205,605	30%	394,075	48%

Chris Brown, head of public sector at phs, said:

The success of this partnership means that thousands of learners across England are able to access the period products to which they're entitled. Period products are a necessity, not a luxury, and providing access to these products through schools doesn't just increase the days learners can be in the classroom, it alleviates stress, increases dignity and protects their health and wellbeing.

We are proud to be a part of this movement, but recognise we have a way to go to ensure that all learners are aware of the availability of period products across both primary and secondary schools. We will continue to work to increase awareness of this important topic, working with educators and young people to uphold our commitment to creating period equality for everyone.

The free period product scheme is for all young people in English state schools and 16-19 organisations, providing products to those who need them, including students who cannot afford products, have forgotten them, or come on their period unexpectedly.

The programme is supplied by phs Direct, part of phs Group and has been designed so schools and colleges can easily order the quantity and type of free products they need, with no delivery charge. The scheme has been extended until July 2022 as part of the Government's drive to end period

poverty and support disadvantaged pupils.

The government is expected to announce plans in the coming weeks for the future of the scheme from academic year 2022/23.