



Period Dignity Grant Evaluation

Summary report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Welsh Government has been prioritising tackling period poverty¹ for some time and has invested over £16 million to ensure children and young people, and those on low incomes have access to free period products.
- 1.2 Since 2018, the Welsh Government has been delivering the Period Dignity Grant. The aim of this grant has been to positively change how people experience periods in Wales.
- 1.3 **What is Period Dignity?** Period Dignity is about removing the stigma and shame around periods, educating people to help them understand that periods are normal and healthy, and making sure that everyone has what they need to manage their periods.

2. About the Period Dignity Grant and how it is delivered

- 2.1 The purpose of the Period Dignity Grant is to ensure everyone who menstruates (with a focus on learners, and those on low incomes) has easier access to free period products, experience less disruption in their day-to-day life, has the knowledge and positive experiences of reusable/plastic free period products, alongside the confidence to use these, and has increased economic resources.
- 2.2 Free period products are made available and / or offered to all learners who experience menstruation in educational settings, and to those from low-income households via local community settings such as libraries etc.
- 2.3 The Welsh Government distributes funding directly to all 22 local authorities (who then distribute to primary / secondary schools and community settings) and all 13 Further Educational Institutions (FEIs) across Wales.

3. Evaluation approach

- 3.1 To support the Welsh Government in assessing the implementation and impact of the Period Dignity Grant, M·E·L Research were commissioned to carry out an independent evaluation. This paper provides a summary of the evaluation findings and sets out key recommendations.

¹ The lack of access to sanitary products due to financial challenges.

- 3.2 The aim of the evaluation was to explore the efficacy of the current funding and free period product dissemination process, to identify the impact the grant is having on recipients of free period products, and to provide insight and recommendations to Welsh Government and organisations disseminating free period products.
- 3.3 The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, collecting primary qualitative and quantitative data through surveys and depth discussions, alongside the analysis of secondary monitoring data provided by the Welsh Government. Organisations and people accessing free period products provided feedback on the grant period from 2018 to 2022/23.
- 3.4 A rapid literature review was carried out prior to the evaluation data collection process to understand the wider context relating to period poverty and period dignity.
- 3.5 It should be noted that the findings are limited in the sense that the small sample sizes (ranging between 8 and 207 for the different engagement methods) meant it wasn't possible to stratify the main findings by the key under-served groups. That being said, the research does provide a strong insight. Future research activities should focus on under-served groups specifically.

4. Evaluation findings

- 4.1 Based on the organisations that fed back, each year on average, local authorities distributed the grant to 399 state maintained primary schools, 82 state maintained secondary schools² and 158 community settings³. In addition, each year 13 FEIs received funding directly from Welsh Government.
- 4.2 Of the organisations surveyed (n⁴=129) that received the grant:
- 59% (n=62) supported people who were facing poverty, 33% (n=35) supported people with a long-term health need and 32% (n=34) supported people from an ethnic minority group.
- “We’re able to promote period dignity with school children and also with parents who are predominantly low-income families”.***
- 41% (n=35) of organisations surveyed said at least 50% but less than 90%, of the products purchased were eco-friendly.
- 4.3 Of the end users (n=207) that provided feedback through the survey:
- 22% (n=45) said they used the free period products because they found it difficult to access or get hold of products generally.
- “I have saved a lot of money which has helped me to afford stationery and textbooks when my family was struggling financially.”***
- 35% (n=73) fed back that they had received information on eco-friendly products from their educational establishment or via a community setting.
 - 37% (n=77) said they had used plastic free pads, 18% (n=37) said they had used period pants, 15% (n=32) said they had used reusable pads, and 9% (n=18) said they had used menstrual cups. 48% (n=99) hadn't used any free eco-friendly period products.
 - 60% (n=109) of people surveyed said they are less worried about their periods now. People felt the grant helped to work towards addressing the stigmas around menstruation - but more needs to be done.

² Across all 1,382 maintained primary and secondary schools in Wales.

³ Based on an estimated 2,857 community settings.

⁴ 'n=' number of respondents.

5. The key outcomes of the grant

- 5.1 **It helped people who would normally find it difficult, to access period products more easily.** Although the grant is open to all who menstruate, there is a need to make sure those who normally find it difficult to access period products - to make their periods more comfortable - are aware and have regular access to products across a range of settings. When looking at the different models across organisations, a straightforward approach of making products available in toilets so that people don't have to ask, seems by far the most effective approach.
- 5.2 **Learners and those on low incomes are less likely to be disrupted by their period and have improved experiences of menstruation.** The grant offered positive outcomes for people, such as financial savings, but the most positive reported outcome is that people are less worried and embarrassed about menstruating. People were also more comfortable when away from home and the grant allowed them to change more regularly and reduce any concerns around leakage etc. There were still gaps in support for under-served communities, such as having regular access to products (disposable or reusable) and understanding how to use and wash reusable products effectively. Being able to wash and clean these products present barriers for some end users, not just in their understanding of how to deal with the reusable products, but with the situation they were in such as not being able to afford to wash and dry them or even access facilities to wash them in.
- 5.3 **Learners and those on low incomes are more knowledgeable and confident in using reusable and / or plastic free period products because of the grant** - Positive efforts have been made in offering reusable period products (such as menstrual cups, period pants etc), however the standard disposable period pads were most commonly offered, followed by more eco-friendly plastic free disposable period pads. Further work needs to be done to improve the uptake of non-disposable eco-friendly options and to address concerns around the quality of the products, leakage concerns and hygiene- related concerns, such as how to clean them, the time required to clean them and having to carry bulky, dirty products around.
- 5.4 **The free period products and information has been widely and effectively distributed across schools and FEIs in Wales** - The grant is being allocated to all FEIs and local authorities, which is being filtered down to schools (local authority only), but more work is needed to reach community settings, such as voluntary groups and grassroots organisations, that are most likely to be supporting under-served communities – therefore resulting in greater reach. Local authorities require more resources to facilitate a joined-up approach and to enable better reach with schools and community settings across their areas.
- 5.5 **The stigmas and taboos around menstruation have been reduced** – but there were still concerns about the cultural taboos and stigmas around periods that exist in the home. There was an acknowledgement that further work and support needs to be done on breaking down the myths associated with periods and that this process will take time.

6. Recommendations for Welsh Government:

- 6.1 **Map out the community networks and grassroot organisations within communities** to make sure the grant is reaching those areas most in need.
- 6.2 **More flexibility in how and when money is spent** e.g. carrying monies over, using more of the grant on information and education etc. within a given financial year is needed, alongside the range of items the grant can fund.
- 6.3 Due to the growing amount of resource required to manage the grant, the Welsh Government should look to **include administration costs** especially for local authorities.

- 6.4 Provide a **standardised training and educational offer** which all organisations can adopt. But within this, offer tailored, accessible information to suit those with literacy or language barriers.
- 6.5 Look at offering a **centralised ordering system**, but this offer would need to be scoped out and co-designed by organisations for it to work effectively.
- 6.6 **Improve the way the grant is monitored** – in terms of the outputs - and the overall feedback – in terms of more regular, meaningful shared learning sessions - process from organisations. Overall this would improve the quality of data and consistency of data collected in order to track outcomes and impacts for both organisations and end users alike.

7. Recommendations for organisations

- 7.1 Make sure that there are **trained and dedicated staff in educational settings** that learners are both comfortable with, and are aware of, and capable of supporting more complex needs.
- 7.2 **Period products should be freely accessible** across all settings, **without the need to ask** staff for products.
- 7.3 **Improve the levels of co-design and co-delivery of free period products and education** in academic settings.
- 7.4 Organisations should look to **improve the availability of items** including the range of absorbency levels for both reusable, plastic free and standard disposable period products.
- 7.5 **Information, alongside education, needs to be offered** as wraparound e.g. education, information, financial support across all organisations, both with people who do and don't menstruate to help overcome the stigma and taboos around periods. This ideally needs to be started at a young age e.g., the later years of primary school.
- 7.6 **Learners' experiences with using reusable products need to be offered to other learners** in an educational setting. This would potentially help to overcome people's concerns around leakage, hygiene concerns etc. and encourage people to give these products a try.

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Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/evaluation-welsh-governments-period-dignity-grant>

Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
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