

#FreePeriods Toolkit

NUS has created this toolkit to help students' unions to cut the cost of menstruation by providing cheaper or where possible, free sanitary products to all students who need them.

Introduction

Periods are bloody expensive. The average person spends approximately £6 per 28-day cycle on sanitary products - that's more than £77 per year. The arbitrary way in which businesses profit from periods and add to the living costs of people who menstruate is unfair and sexist.

That's why we at NUS have created this toolkit to help students' unions to cut the cost of menstruation by providing cheaper or where possible, free sanitary products to all students who need them. This toolkit is also packed with plenty of information about the economical, ecological and health benefits of investing in sustainable and organic sanitary products.

Students' Unions up and down the country are already leading the way on this and we've included many case studies that hopefully will inspire you to join the movement for free periods.

In Solidarity,

Susuana Amoah
NUS Women's Officer

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4 Reasons to cut the costs of periods

Some people struggle to grasp why there's a need to cut the costs of sanitary products. However, when you're prepped with strong arguments, you'll be able to have the important discussions that will help others understand. Here are four key reasons why the costs of periods need to be axed:

- **To be fair**

Menstruation is an involuntary occurrence which makes sanitary products vital to the health and dignity of half of society. Being made poorer due to a natural bodily function is discriminatory.

- **Why pay the price?**

Sexual health products such as condoms and contraceptives are available for free from many sexual health clinics across the country. Surely, if people are able to obtain free sexual health products because they choose to engage in sexual activity, people should be able to get free sanitary products for periods.

- **Profiting off Periods**

As well as being taxed on top of the costs of these products, major companies make a profit from selling items that are essential to the health and wellbeing of half the country.

- **Periods of Poverty**

As the costs of living rises, more and more people find themselves unable to buy essentials and in some cases have to choose between paying for things like food and travel and buying sanitary products. Campaigns such as #TheHomelessPeriod have highlighted the difficulty of menstruating while homeless.

Campaigning on campus

There are many create ways to campaign for Free Periods on campus. Student groups around the UK have created online petitions, photo and video campaigns and even put up stalls on campus to engage students. Here are five tips for campaigning on campus.

- **Be inclusive** - Try and reach out to different student groups to be involved in the campaign
- **Watch your language** - Remember that not everyone who identifies as a woman menstruates and to use trans-inclusive language
- **Use the media** - Contact your local campus and community news outlets to get your message out there. Me sure you have a consistent message that is also shared access multiple social media platforms
- **Get creative** - Using photos, videos and multimedia art work is a great way to engage students and increase the visibility of your campaign.
- **Make a petition** - Petitions are good to prove that there is a student demand to cut the costs!

Case Study

Newcastle University

"We researched how to make our campaign inclusive and appropriate i.e. to avoid cisnormativity we refer to 'people who have periods' rather than 'women'. Furthermore, we use the term 'menstrual products/care' over sanitary as the latter can increase period stigma over fears of periods being unclean/abnormal.

We started my holding stalls around campus handing out leaflets about the tampon tax, tampons and surveys about periods. We soon realised this was not an effective way to gain support as the majority of people we encountered still believed in the stigma around periods.

Instead we created a change.org petition to pressure the SU to provide free menstrual care and started doing bake sales to raise awareness of our cause. We used the money raised from bake sales to buy materials (tampons, pads, gloves, sweets, socks etc) to make packs for homeless shelters. Rohan ran a workshop about period pride. We wrote a motion to council which I put forward. The motion received no questions and no one argued against it. It passed with 100%."

More examples of campus action

- LUU Launch 'Tampons Don't Grow on Trees' Campaign - <http://www.thegryphon.co.uk/2015/10/luu-launch-tampons-dont-grow-on-trees-campaign/>
- UEA to sell tampons at cost in protest at VAT on sanitary products - <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/uea-to-sell-tampons-at-cost-in-protest-at-vat-onsanitary-products-9876173.html>
- Free Periods – Promotion Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wkszgd2Ns9o>
- Students Making It Happen: Sanitary Products https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=45ms_8tlwjE The Homeless Period <http://thehomelessperiod.com>

Community Action

It's important to remember the issues that come with the rising costs of living don't just exist for students. Acts of solidarity from student groups can make a huge difference to people in the local community who may be also struggling to make ends meet.

The Homeless Period

One group of people who are heavily affected by the cost of sanitary products are Homeless people. Shelters get an allowance every year to buy items like condoms, but nothing for sanitary products. The organisation #TheHomelessPeriod has set up a petition to change this - <https://www.change.org/p/help-the-homeless-on-their-period-thehomelessperiod> Students unions' can help by donating sanitary products to their local shelters. You can find your local shelter via this web page - <http://www.homelessuk.org/search/searchAccomSimple.asp>

Case Study:

Leeds University Students' Union

"We stopped making a profit on tampons and sanitary towels in our Union shop, so we now sell these products at cost price. We also bought the cheapest range available to us so now you can buy sanitary towels for like 55p! We've also done a homeless period campaign called 'Tampons don't grow on trees' to raise awareness of the struggles of homeless people who menstruate. We encouraged students to donate tampons and towels, and any financial donations they could in RAG buckets at the tills in Essentials :) in one week we got over 1000 individual products, and enough money to buy almost another 1000!"

Money Matters

When deciding how to become a #FreePeriods campus, you'll have to work out how to cover the costs of providing cheaper alternatives. This involves deciding if you are going to offer products profit-free or completely free. Your ability to provide cheap or free products will heavily depend on the size of your campus and if your student's union or institution owns the student shops.

Case Studies

Kings College London Students' Union - Last year, the interfaith officer Noor Khan and Women's officer Hareem Ghani passed a motion to get free sanitary products on campus. We managed to secure £200 every term from the students Union, which is allocated to sanitary products, meaning free sanitary products (tampons and sanitary towels) are available at all student centres.

Kent Union - "Kent Union started absorbing price of VAT in our two shops from September 2015 following campaigning work by the KU Women's Campaign and previous VP Welfare. We worked out the rough cost to the organisation to be less than £500 so the decision was made to just absorb the cost."

Leeds University Students' Union - "It wasn't a big deal for us really - once I'd raised it with the Commercial team they were totally on board with it! Commercial take a lot of guidance on what we should stock from students - i.e. we don't sell Nestle products or The Sun. I guess we're pretty lucky because we have a large Commercial arm at LUU so it probably didn't hit us too hard."

Purchasing & Distribution

Before you select your products, here are a few things that you should know about what's in sanitary products and how to provide the best selection for students.

Personal Health Issues

- Most Feminine Hygiene Products Contain Toxic Ingredients.
- Tampon create a favorable environment for bacteria growth. One infamous risk is Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS).
- Conventional tampons and sanitary pads are bleached white using chlorine dioxide, which can be toxic.
- Conventional sanitary pads can contain other potentially hazardous ingredients, such as odor neutralizers and fragrances.

Providing Eco Friendly Alternatives

- Organic cotton tampons and sanitary towels
- Menstrual cups & menstrual sponges
- Reusable sanitary towels and panty liners
- Reusable storage purses and bags for reusable sanitary products.
- Degradable plastic bags

NUS National Purchasing Consortium

The NUS national purchasing consortium has a range of different sanitary products. We have a range of products listed with a range of different prices to purchase. You can order them online here: www.nusconnect.org.uk/strong-students-unions/sanitary-products

Distribution

If you are providing free sanitary products, finding an accessible and convenient way for students to collect them is very important. Here are some examples of how you could distribute free sanitary products:

- In toilets (boxes in cubicles or at sinks)
- At the campus health centre
- At the Students' Union Reception
- At the receptions of student accommodation buildings
- Anywhere that condoms and other sexual health products are provided.

Case Study

Sussex University Students' Union

The Free Periods campaign at Sussex University Students' Union is sponsored by Natracare. Natracare manufactures and distributes sanitary products made out of certified organic cotton and totally chlorine free, plastic free, biodegradable materials. On Wednesdays between 12-2pm students can collect their free Mooncup, Natracare tampons or sanitary towels at a stall at SU Reception.

Model Motion

A way that you could get your university or college to support the free periods campaign is through raising it with your student council. As well as democratically mandating your students' union to support the campaign, it also raises awareness. Below is model motion which you can edit and use:

#FreePeriods

This Union Notes

1. Sanitary items are necessary for health and hygiene.
2. Several Student Unions offer Sanitary products profit free or completely free. (Sussex, University of the Arts London, University of East Anglia).
3. Conventional sanitary products often contain ingredients such as, chlorine dioxide odour neutralizers and fragrance which are harmful to human bodies.

This Union Believes:

1. Sanitary products should be as a principle free.
2. The cost of sanitary products is an unfair burden.
3. Investing in Eco Friendly sanitary products such as Organic Cotton Tampons and Sanitary Towels has ecological and health benefits.

This Union Resolves:

1. To offer (profit free/free) sanitary products by September 2016
2. To look at providing a wider selection of sanitary products including organic and eco-friendly products.
3. To work with the NUS Women's Campaign to lobby the government on this issue.
4. For a member of the SU exec to write a statement affirming the Union's position on this issue.

Useful Links

- Seeing Red – a three-part radio documentary series for the community media sector based around menstruation. <http://tinyurl.com/SeeingRedDoc>
- Women Beware: Most Feminine Hygiene Products Contain Toxic Ingredients. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-mercola/feminine-hygiene-products_b_3359581.html
- Find out how we supported Period Pride Day! – <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/find-out-how-we-supported-period-pride-day>