

# Access to free period products: baseline survey results



**PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES**

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# Baseline survey results exploring access to free period products: a visual summary

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## Background

Local authorities have been providing access to free period products within primary and secondary schools since August 2018, and in public buildings since January 2019.



The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent on 12 January 2021. From 15 August 2022, it placed a duty on local authorities and education providers to provide access to free period products for all those who might need them, without a means-tested approach.

We conducted a baseline survey to understand the attitudes, knowledge and experiences of periods and free period products prior to the Act coming into force.



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## Research findings

### Preference



Most respondents stated that they normally use disposable products.

The most commonly reported period product was single use sanitary towels or liners (81%).

Most respondents were able to use their preferred period product.

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### Current concerns



For two-thirds of respondents there was some degree of worry or concern about having their periods. These concerns were often due to their health or the physical symptom of periods.

Respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with period and period product related concerns. The majority of respondents....

### ...agreed...



they had adequate information concerning their periods



they felt comfortable talking to others about their period

### ...disagreed...



they were embarrassed when buying period products



they were afraid of others teasing them when on their period

Two key groups were more likely to have concerns or worries regarding their periods or using period products:

Young people  
(compared to adults)



Respondents living in lower income households  
(compared to those living in higher income households)



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## Affordability

Respondents who struggled to afford period products over the past 12 months to enable them to continue with their day-to-day activities were more likely to be:



Living in a lower income household



Unaware of access to free period products



Disabled



Living in rural areas

The majority of adults spend up to £10 per month on period products (82%).



The majority (90%) are able to afford enough period products to continue with their day-to-day activities. For those who sometimes struggle (10%), they most commonly....



use the same type of products, but cheaper brands



use different types of period product



wear products for longer than normal



use other products such as toilet roll

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## Awareness of access to free period products

Around three quarters (76%) were aware that they could access free period products in Scotland. But, awareness was lower amongst those who struggled to afford period products (compared to those who could afford products)



The most impactful channels for raising awareness are as follows:

Social media



News



Word of mouth



The preferred methods for obtaining free products were:



sent to the respondent's home



at work



at school, college or university



at a health centre

## Experiences of obtaining free period products thus far

Just under half of respondents had accessed free period products.  
The majority had done so due to not having enough period products with them or due to a period starting unexpectedly.



One in five respondents stated they had accessed free period products due to challenges with the cost of living.

Accessing free period products was largely seen to be convenient with buildings easy to access, and products easy to obtain.

The majority of respondents who had accessed free period products were able to access enough to meet their needs and were able to access free provision in a non-judgemental way.



For many respondents, access to free period products had...



...made them more able to continue with day-to-day activities



...made them less worried about their periods



...a positive impact on their household finances

## Conclusions on what next for access to free period products

### Affordability

Low-income households and respondents who struggled to afford period products were key groups where the cost of living and the affordability of period products were seen to be a concern.



Highlighting the need for this policy area to support equality and dignity for all those who require period products in Scotland



### Positive culture

While there generally appears to be a positive culture surrounding menstruation, low-income households and young people (those aged 12-15 years) were key groups likely to have concerns around their periods or period products



This suggests the need for cultural change to normalise menstruation and ensure all those who require period products feel informed and free from stigma.

### Awareness of free period products

Awareness was low amongst those who were most likely to need free period products most (low-income households and those who struggle to afford period products)



This suggests steps could be taken to promote awareness and visibility amongst key groups

### Positive impact of access to free period products

Access to free period products were seen to contribute positively to wellbeing and individual household finances



Emphasising the need for this policy in terms of supporting equality and reducing the cost of living for households with menstruating people.

## What next?

The data presented in this report is from a baseline survey undertaken in 2022. We intend to replicate this survey in 2025 in order to allow direct comparisons to be made between the two time periods. This will allow us to evaluate and assess how views and experiences have changed over time.





# Introduction

This report provides an overview of findings from a quantitative online survey exploring the attitudes and experiences of people who may use period products (aged 12 years and over). The survey sought to help assess any potential impact that the Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 (the Act) may have on attitudes and experiences of people accessing free period products. The data collection for this baseline survey was completed before the commencement of the Act on 15 August 2022.

This survey contributes to the wider monitoring and evaluation strategy on access to free period products<sup>1</sup>. The key objectives of the monitoring and evaluation strategy are to:

- Inform Scottish Government funding allocations to local authorities and education providers to ensure proportionate funding to support current uptake and costs.
- Inform understanding of current delivery, including reach, uptake, costs and accessibility.
- Inform future delivery of the policy, including through the identification of 'best practice'.

## Background

Local authorities have been providing access to free period products within primary and secondary schools since August 2018 and in public buildings since January 2019.

The Act gained Royal Assent in January 2021 and came into force from 15 August 2022. It places a duty on local authorities and education providers to provide access to free period products for all those who need them, without a means-tested approach. The Act sets out that period products must be obtainable (i) reasonably easily, (ii) in a way that that reflects the dignity of persons obtaining them and (iii) offer a reasonable choice of period products. The wider policy aim is to: support equality, dignity and rights for those who menstruate; and, to ensure that lack of access to period products does not impact on an individual's ability to fully participate in day-to-day activities, including work and education at all levels.

Since 2017, the Scottish Government has invested a total of over £33 million to fund access to free period products across a range of settings including schools, colleges and universities, wider public spaces and targeted access through community groups for those on low incomes. For 2022/23, the Scottish Government is providing almost £3.4 million for access to free period products for students at school, college or university and almost £2.8

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<sup>1</sup> The monitoring and evaluation strategy for access to period products (2021/22 – 2024/25) outlines the approach to evaluating and monitoring the implementation of The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021. More information is available here: [Access to period products: monitoring and evaluation strategy 2021/22 to 2024/25 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-petitions/embedded/Access-to-period-products-monitoring-and-evaluation-strategy-2021-22-to-2024-25-gov.scot)

million per year to Local Authorities to provide wider access to period products across Scotland.

The survey, and associated findings, detailed in this report provide a baseline as to attitudes, knowledge and experience of free period products prior to the Act coming into force. This is part of a wider monitoring and evaluation strategy.

## Aims and objectives

The aim of the survey was to provide a baseline of attitudes, knowledge and experiences towards free period products amongst those who may need to use them.

Key topics explored in the survey were:

- Worries and concerns regarding menstruation and using, and access to, period products
- Preferred period products – and ability to access these preferred products
- Affordability of period products
- Reasons for accessing free period products
- Experiences of those who have accessed free period products to date.

## Methods

The data collection was carried out by BMG Research. Analysis of responses was undertaken by Scottish Government analysts.

Two versions of the questionnaire were designed, one suitable for young people aged 12 to 15 years and one for adults aged 16 years and over<sup>2</sup>. Differences between the two questionnaires were minimal to allow for the data to be merged and analysed as one wider dataset. Both sets of respondents were recruited via online panels. Young people (aged under 16 years) were recruited via their parent/carer. Data collection was carried out between 19 and 24 July 2022. A total sample of 1400 responses was achieved.

Representative quotas were set on age, Scottish Parliamentary Region, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) classification<sup>3</sup> and urban-rural classification<sup>4</sup>. The data was then further weighted by age, region, SIMD classification, urban-rural classification and

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<sup>2</sup> 'Young people' refers to the 12 to 15 years age group. 'Adults' represent respondents aged 16 years and over.

<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a tool that helps to identify areas of poverty and inequality across Scotland. It is a relative measure of deprivation across small areas. The measure looks at multiple deprivation which considers people having fewer resources and opportunities and not just 'low income'. More information is available here: [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016: introductory booklet - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/Scottish-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation-2016-introductory-booklet.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification provides a consistent method of defining urban and rural areas across Scotland. The classification considers population and accessibility. The classification is available in multiple forms. In this report we use the 2-fold measure ('urban' and 'rural'). More information is available here: [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/Scottish-Government-Urban-Rural-Classification-2020.pdf)

household income to ensure representativeness of the menstruating population aged 12 years and over.

Further details on the methodology and weighting applied can be found in [Annex A](#).

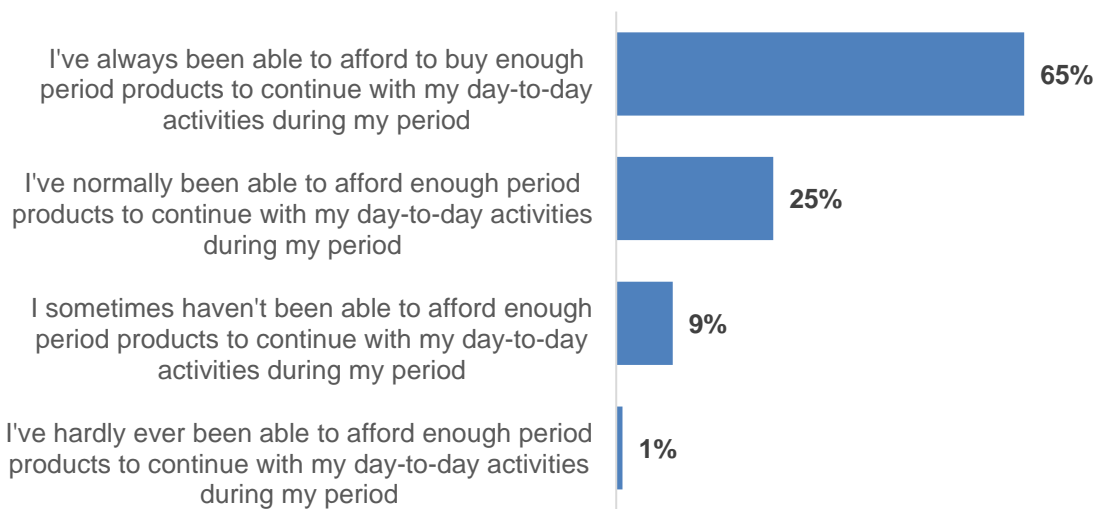
# Profile of period product users

It is important that provision of free period products reflects current preferences and routines of menstruating people. As a result, in order to understand current affordability and usage of period products of those who need to use them, the survey included a range of questions on: ability to afford period products; period products normally used; preferred period products; and, average spend per month on period products.

Over the past 12 months, nine in ten (91%) of respondents were able to generally afford period products (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Ability to afford enough period products to continue with day-to-day activities**

QA3. Over the past 12 months, which of the following best describes your ability to afford enough period products to allow you to continue with your day-to-day activities as normal?



Base: All adults 16+ who bought their own period products (1199)

Respondents who struggled to afford period products over the past 12 months to enable them to continue with their day-to-day activities<sup>5</sup> were more likely to be<sup>6</sup>:

- Living in a lower income household (24%, compared to 4% for those living in a higher income household).
- Disabled (19%, compared to 6% for those with no disability).

<sup>5</sup> This sub-group consists of respondents who selected 'I sometimes haven't/I've hardly ever...been able to afford enough period products to continue with my day-to-day activities during my period.'

<sup>6</sup> The differences highlighted in this list are statistically significant. A statistically significant result indicates that differences are likely to represent a real difference between two groups and are not due to chance. Where results are statistically significant throughout this report this will be stated. If results are not statistically significant terms such as 'some variation' or 'slight difference' will be used to describe the variation between groups.

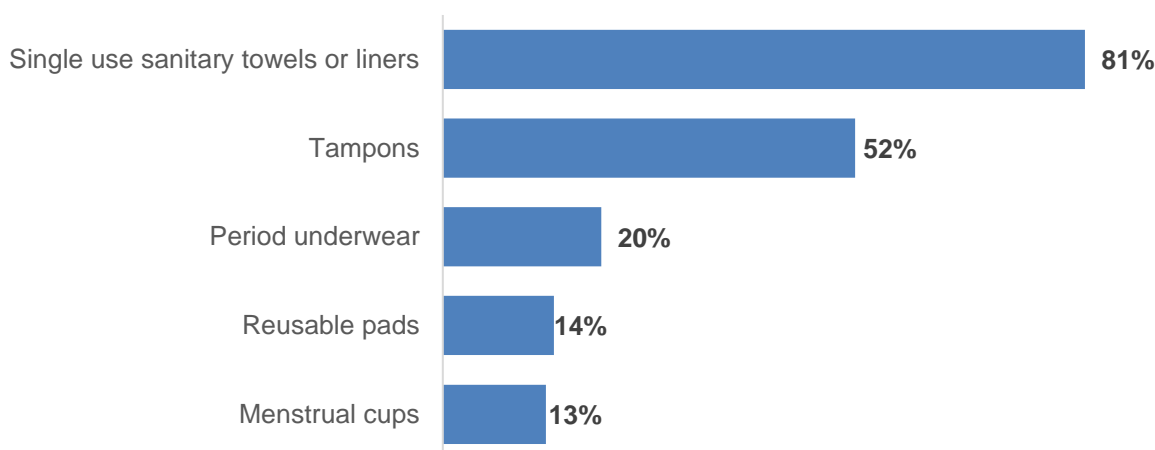
- Unaware of access to free period products (15%, compared to 7% for those aware of period products).
- Living in rural areas (14%, compared to 8% for those living in urban areas).

This highlights the need for the Act given that sub-sections of the Scottish population were found to be unable to obtain enough period products to meet their needs.

In order to provide those who menstruate with products that meet their needs, it is crucial to understand the products that are most typically used. Most respondents stated that they normally use disposable products (Figure 2). The most commonly reported period product was single use sanitary towels or liners (81%). The least commonly reported period products were menstrual cups (13%) and reusable pads (14%).

**Figure 2: Period products normally used (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

QA6. Which period products do you normally use?

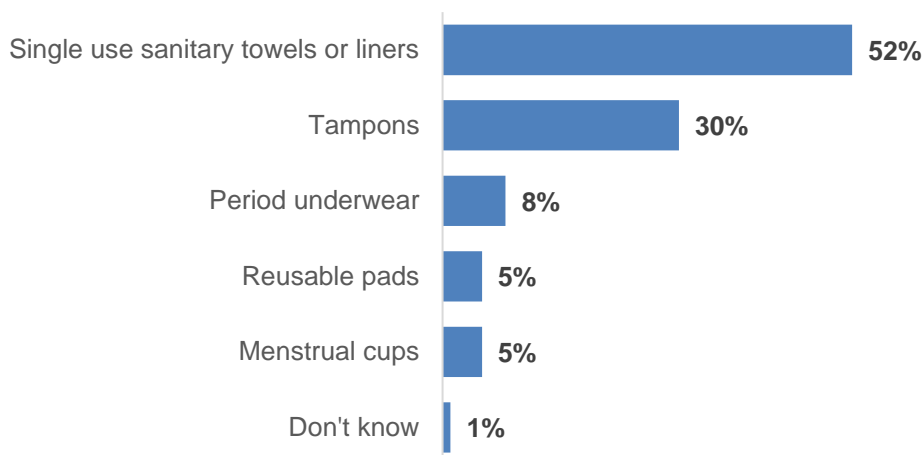


Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

Current usage reflects general preferences too, suggesting that most respondents were able to use their preferred period product. The preferred period product for the majority of all respondents were single use products (82%). 52% reported single use sanitary towels or liners as their preferred period product and a further 30% reported tampons as their preferred product (Figure 3).

### Figure 3: Preferred period product

QA7. And which of these is your preferred period product?



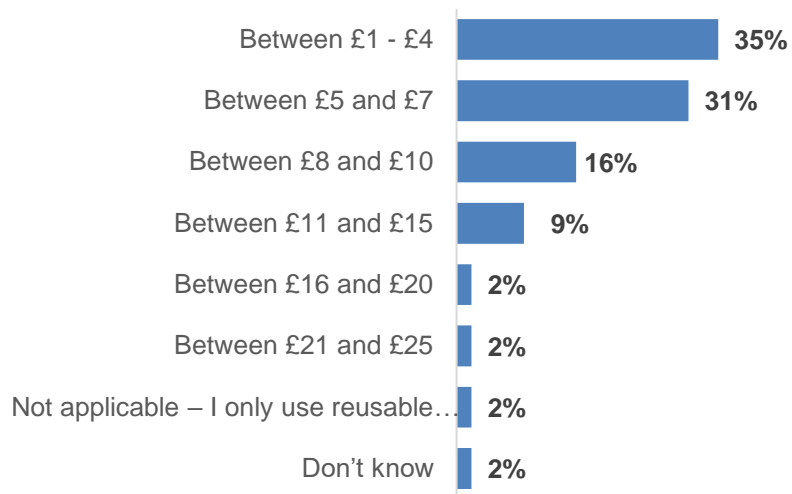
Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

There were some marked, and statistically significant, differences in preference by age. Reusable products were more likely to be preferred by young people compared to other age groups. For example, 41% for young people with this falling in each subsequent age group, 18% in 16-34, 12% in 35-44, 11% in 45+. For young people single use sanitary towels or liners (52%) and period underwear (27%) were the preferred period products. For adults, the most commonly reported preferred period products were single use sanitary towels or liners and tampons (52% and 30%, respectively).

In relation to monthly expenditure on period products, the majority of adults spend up to £10 per month on period products (82%). One in ten (11%) reported spending between £11-20 per month and a small minority (2%) of respondents reported spending over £20 per month on period products (Figure 4).

#### Figure 4: Average spend on period products each month

QA8. On average, how much do you spend on period products for yourself each month?



Base: All adults 16+ who bought their own period products (1199)

# Attitudes and concerns about periods

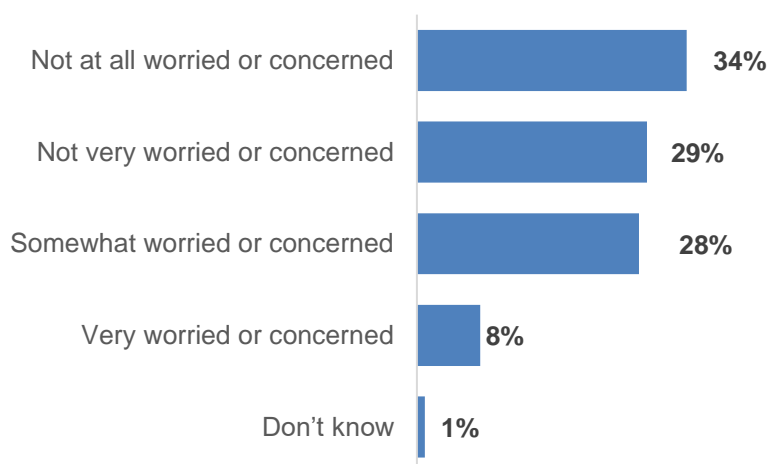
Understanding the attitudes, experiences and concerns of people who may need to use period products will be important in helping future consideration of how free period product provision is provided in Scotland. It is also fundamental in potentially breaking down any barriers to providing convenient, free of charge, and as required period products to those who need them.

## Concerns regarding periods

For just over a third of respondents, having their period causes no worry or concern (34%). However, for the rest of the respondents (two-thirds), there was some degree of worry or concern about having their period (see Figure 5 for detail).

**Figure 5: Respondents worried or concerned about their period**

QA1. How worried or concerned, if at all, are you about having your period?



Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

Those most likely to be very worried or concerned about having their period were those who:

- Had less frequent periods. 12% of those who had periods less frequently than once a month were very worried or concerned about their period (compared to 8% who have a period at least once a month).
- Had irregular periods (13%, compared to 7% who had regular periods).
- Were concerned about their monthly spend on period products (14%, compared to 4% for those who monthly spend is not a concern).
- Had used reusable products (18%, compared to 6% of respondents using single use products).



- Had accessed free period products (13%, compared to 5% who had not accessed free period products).
- Had a disability (11%, compared to 8% who have no disability).

All respondents who had raised some level of concern or worry were asked what specifically worries them. The most likely reasons referred to their health or the physical symptom of periods. In particular, the most commonly cited worries were: pain, cramps and discomfort (28%); heavy or prolonged bleeding/large clots (14%); and leaking (12%) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Worries and concerns of those menstruating (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

|   | Percentage of respondents |
|---|---------------------------|
| Pain/cramps / discomfort                              | 28%                       |
| Heavy / prolonged bleeding / large clots              | 18%                       |
| Irregular bleeding                                    | 14%                       |
| Leaking / bleeding through                            | 12%                       |
| Being prepared / having sanitary products when needed | 10%                       |
| Other health conditions / medication                  | 5%                        |
| Negative attitude towards period                      | 4%                        |
| The price of products (too expensive)                 | 3%                        |
| Hormones / mood swings / PMS                          | 3%                        |
| Sickness / nausea                                     | 3%                        |
| Tiredness/sleep issues/fatigue/lack of energy         | 2%                        |
| Embarrassment   | 2%                        |
| Other   | 9%                        |
| Don't Know  | 9%                        |

Base: All who were worried or concerned about their periods (908)

Question: A2. If you are worried or concerned, in your own words, please explain what aspect(s) of having your period causes this worry/concern.

The price of period products was reported by 3% as being a concern. However, this increased amongst groups who had previously raised the financial implications of menstruation. For example, 15% of those who struggled to afford period products reported

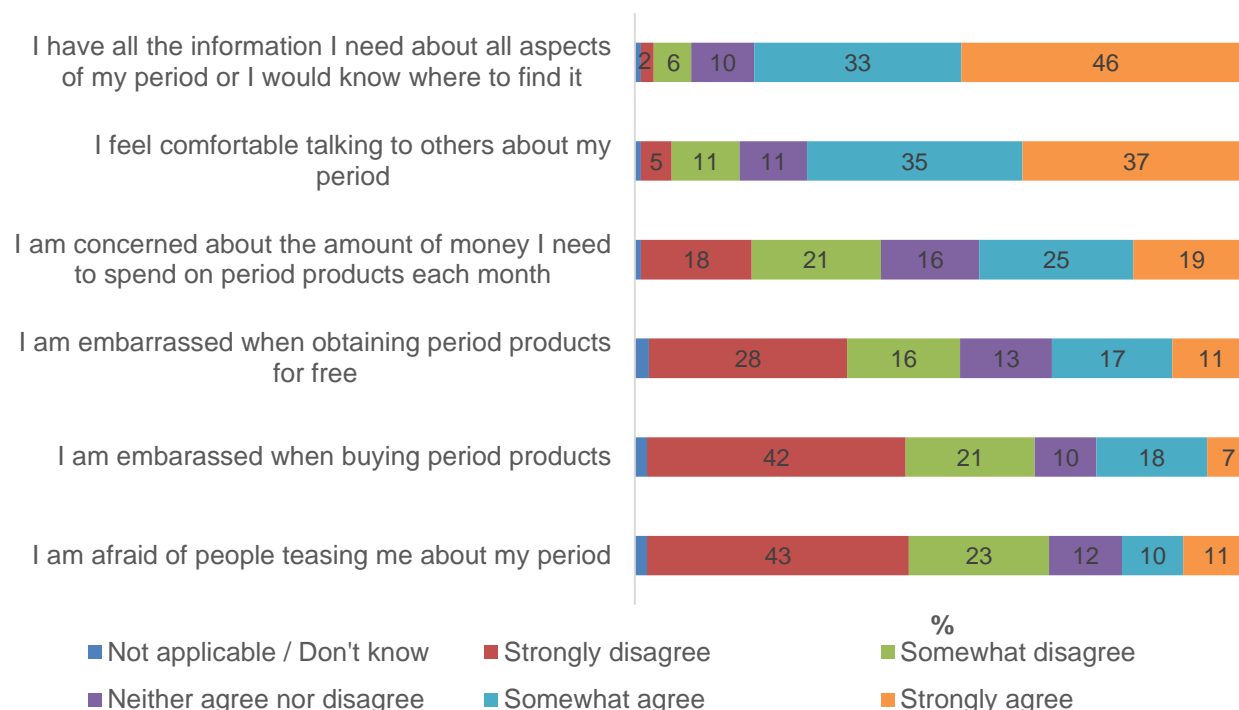
the price of period products as a concern (compared to 2% for those able to afford period products).

Respondents were asked to consider multiple statements and indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement. These statements covered possible concerns or worries people may have regarding their periods or use of period products (Figure 6). Key findings include:

- Eight in ten of respondents felt they had adequate information concerning their periods (80%).
- 44% of respondents disagreed with the statement 'I feel embarrassed when obtaining period products for free'. The responses for this statement had a higher level of 'not applicable' or 'don't know' than all other statements (15%, compared to between 1-2% for the other statements in Figure 6). This is most likely due to respondents not having accessed free period products and therefore they were unable to answer this statement with an 'agree' or 'disagree' response.
- In relation to embarrassment when buying period products and being afraid of others teasing them when on their period, these statements both had high levels of disagreement (63% and 66%, respectively). Similarly, a high proportion of respondents agreed that they felt comfortable talking to others about their period (72%).
- 44% of respondents agreed that they were worried about the amount they spend on period products each month (38% disagreed with this statement).

**Figure 6: Agreement with period and period product related concerns**

QA12.1-A12.6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400), apart from the statement 'I am concerned about the amount of money I need to spend on period products each month' which was all adults 16+ (1288)

Notes: Figure 6 displays the summary disagreement and agreement levels of respondents. QA12 in the data provide a breakdown of the response options on a five point agree/disagree scale. Where data labels for each statement do not reach a total of 100% this is due to the 'Not applicable/Don't know' percentage not being included in the chart as a data label. Where this is the case, the proportion is 2% or lower. These exact proportions can be found in the Tables. Where stacked bars do not total 100% it is due to percentages being rounded to the nearest whole.

An overview of statistically significant differences by sub-group is provided below for the statements on possible concerns or worries people may have regarding their periods or use of period products (Table 2).

On the whole, Table 2 highlights that amongst some sub-groups there were two key groups who were more likely to have concerns or worries regarding their periods or using period products. These were young people (compared to adults) and respondents living in lower income households (compared to those living in higher income households).

**Table 2: Worries and concerns of those menstruating by key sub-group variation**

| Statement   | Sub-group variation   |
|---|---|
| I feel comfortable talking to others about my period  | <p>Most likely to be comfortable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those who used reusable products (79%, compared to 70% of respondents using single use products)</li> <li>• Those who had already accessed free period products (76%, compared to vs 69% of those who had not accessed free period products)</li> </ul>  |
| I am concerned about the amount of money I need to spend on period products each month            | <p>Most likely to have concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Those aged 16-24 years (59%, compared to 46% for those aged 25-34 years and continuing to fall to 37-38% for those in the age categories 35 years and over)</li> <li>• Those unaware of free period products (49%, compared to 43% who were aware of free period products)</li> <li>• Those from lower income households (60%, compared to 39% of higher income households)</li> </ul>                                      |
| I am afraid of people teasing me about my period  | <p>Most likely to be afraid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people (12-15 years) (59%, compared to 17% of adults)</li> <li>• Those who had already accessed free period products (31%, compared to vs 12% of those who had not accessed free period products)</li> <li>• Those who had struggled to afford period products (28%, compared to 16% who felt they were able to afford period products)</li> </ul>  |
| I am embarrassed when buying period products  | <p>Most likely to be embarrassed buying period products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people (55%, compared to 22% of adults)</li> <li>• Those who raised concerns about their monthly spend on period products (32%, compared to 12% who did not have concerns about their monthly spend)</li> <li>• Those who had already accessed free period products (31%, compared to vs 19% of those who had not accessed free period products)</li> </ul>                                   |
| I am embarrassed when obtaining period products for free  | <p>Most likely to be embarrassed obtaining free period products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people (58%, compared to 25% of adults)</li> <li>• Those who had faced barriers when obtaining free period products (49%, compared to 32% who had faced no barriers)</li> <li>• Those from lower income households (26%, compared to 19% of higher income households)</li> </ul>  |
| I have all the information I need about all aspects of my period or I would know where to find it | <p>Most likely to have enough information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people (89%, compared to 79% of adults)</li> <li>• Those aware of free period products (82%, compared to 74% who were unaware of free period products)</li> <li>• Those who had not accessed free period products (82%, compared to 78% of those who had already accessed free period products)</li> <li>• Those from higher income households (86%, compared to 74% of lower income households)</li> </ul> |

Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

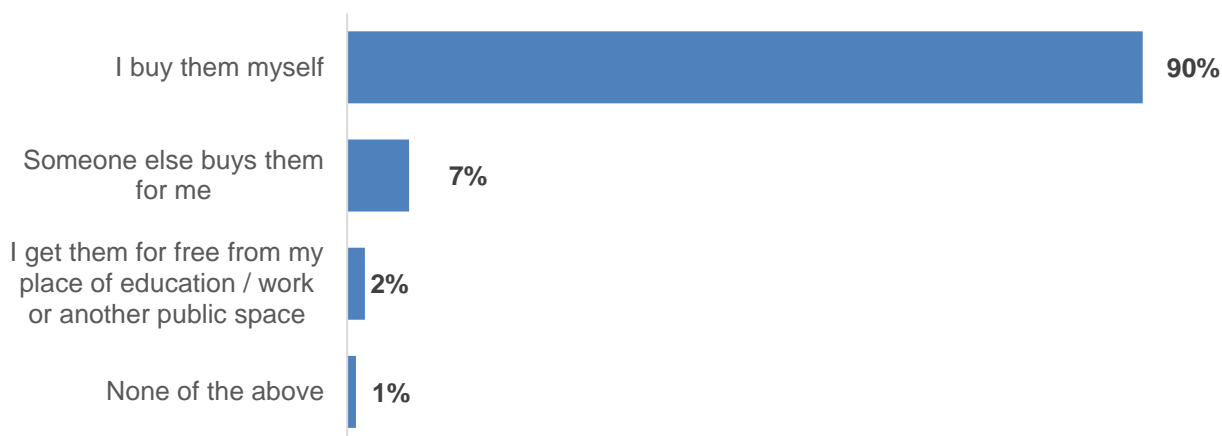
Questions: A12.2-A12.6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

## Access to period products

The majority of respondents purchased period products by themselves (90%) (Figure 7). This proportion falls for young people (54% compared to 93% for adults).

**Figure 7: How period products are obtained by respondents**

QA3A. How do you normally get your period products?



Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

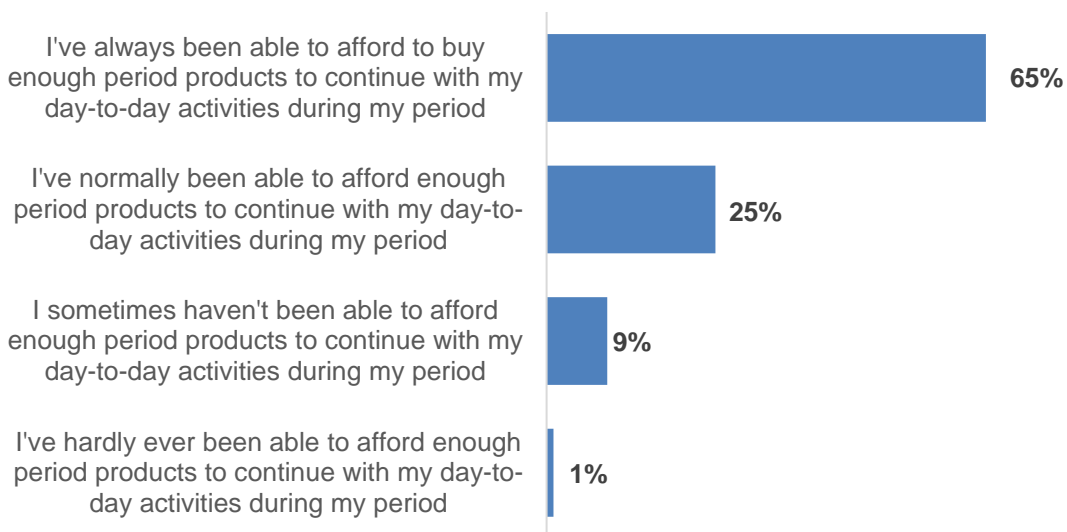
A small proportion of all respondents (2%) relied upon free period products. This is more likely among younger age groups. However, it is important to consider the context of when the survey data was collected. The Scottish Government introduced The Period Products in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020, which placed a legal duty on local authorities and grant-aided schools to provide free period products for pupils. This meant young people, who are more likely to be in education, had free period products more widely available to them. As local authorities expand access to free period products, an increase in uptake amongst adult age groups is expected.

Further, a statistically significant proportion of respondents from lower income households obtained their period products for free compared to those from higher income households (4% and 1%, respectively). This suggests that access does appear to be benefitting those potentially most in need.

Survey respondents were asked to consider whether they were able to afford enough period products each month to continue with their day-to-day activities (Figure 8). The majority of the respondents reported being able to afford to buy enough period products, with 65% reporting always being able to afford to buy enough products to continue with their day-to-day activities. A further 25% reported normally being able to afford enough period products. This totals a net of 91% generally being able to afford period products. 9% reported sometimes not being able to afford enough products and 1% of respondents were hardly ever able to afford enough period products.

### Figure 8: Ability to afford period products to continue with day-to-day activities as normal

QA3. Over the past 12 months, which of the following best describes your ability to afford enough period products to allow you to continue with your day-to-day activities as normal?



Base: All adults 16+ who bought their own period products (1199)

By sub-groups, there were some statistically significant variations:

- For those with awareness of free period products they were generally able to afford enough period products, compared to those who were unaware of access to free products (93% and 85%, respectively). This suggests awareness raising is required for those most in need of free products.
- Respondents who agreed with the statement that they were concerned about their monthly spend on period products were more likely to struggle to afford period products compared to those with no concern over their monthly spend (16% and 4%, respectively).
- Respondents living in lower income households were less likely to report generally being able to afford period products than those living in higher income households. 76% for those with a household income of under £10,000 compared to 98% for those with a household income of over £40,000.

Respondents who were unable to access enough period products to meet their needs<sup>7</sup> were asked how they managed their period (Table 3). The most common alternative was to: use the same type of products, but cheaper brands (54%); use different types of period product (e.g. sanitary towels or liners instead of tampons) (37%); wear products for longer than normal (30%); and, use other products such as toilet roll (27%). The least commonly reported alternatives to managing their period was stopping some of their day-to-day activities and borrowing free products from friends or family (both 11%).

<sup>7</sup> These respondents selected the following response options at QA3. 'I've normally been/I sometimes haven't/I've hardly ever been able to afford to buy enough period products to continue with my day-to-day activities during my period'.

**Table 3: Management of period when unable to access enough period products to meet respondent needs (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

|   | Percentage of respondents |
|---|---------------------------|
| I use the same type of products but cheaper brands  | 54%                       |
| I use different types of period products from my preferred option (e.g. sanitary towels or liners instead of tampons)             | 37%                       |
| I wear the products for longer durations than I would normally do   | 30%                       |
| I use other products such as toilet roll  | 27%                       |
| I try to obtain free period products from my place of education / work or another public place                                    | 19%                       |
| I get / borrow free period products from friends or family  | 11%                       |
| I stop some of my day-to-day activities such as going to work or my place of education, going out or practicing sports/exercising | 11%                       |
| Other   | 1%                        |
| Don't know  | 1%                        |

Base: All adults 16+ who were unable to afford enough period products to meet their needs (416)

Question: A5a. When you are unable to buy sufficient products to meet your needs during menstruation, what do you normally do to manage your period?

There are variations in response by sub-group, particularly by age. Younger adults (aged 16-24) were more likely to:

- Report borrowing from friends or family (18%, compared to 11% of the total).
- Report obtaining free period products (29%, compared to 19% of the total).

The negative impact of not being able to buy sufficient products appeared exacerbated amongst older adults (aged 45 to 54 years). They were more likely to report stopping their day-to-day activities as a result of not being able to buy sufficient products to meet their menstruation needs (20%, compared to 11% of the total).

# Awareness and understanding of free period products

Despite the Act not coming into force until 15 August 2022, awareness of access to free period products was quite widespread. This is possibly a reflection of the early introduction in educational settings and some public places.

Around three quarters (76%) were aware that they could access free period products in Scotland. Reflecting the early free access in educational settings, those most likely to be aware of access to free period products were younger (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Respondent awareness of access to free period products by age**

QB1. Before today, were you aware that you can access free period products in Scotland?



Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

Amongst those who struggled to afford period products, awareness was lower (at 57% compared to 75% for those who reported they could afford period products). This suggests that greater awareness raising activity may be needed.

For those who reported being aware of their ability to access free period products, they most commonly found out about this through the news or social media (20% and 25%, respectively). Respondents were least likely to find out at a community centre (1%) (Table 4).



**Table 4: Sources of finding out about access to free period products**

|  | Percentage of respondents |
|--|---------------------------|
| On social media  | 25%                       |
| On the news  | 20%                       |
| From friends / family                                    | 10%                       |
| At work  | 10%                       |
| At college / university (Adult only)                     | 9%                        |
| On television  | 8%                        |
| At a healthcare setting (e.g. GP, hospital)              | 5%                        |
| At school / college (Child only)                         | 3%                        |
| Through my local Council building/website/communications | 3%                        |
| At a community centre                                    | 1%                        |
| Other  | 2%                        |
| Don't know / can't remember                              | 5%                        |

Base: All who were aware that they can access free period products (1057)

Question: B2. Where did you find out about the access to free period products?

Evidence suggest that the most impactful channels for raising awareness are as follows:

- For young people (aged 12-15 years): school/college, social media and from friends/family
- For older age groups (45 and over): the news, social media and work
- For those struggling to afford period products: social media and college/university
- For those concerned about their monthly spend on period products: social media and the news
- For those living in a lower income household: social media, the news and from friends/family.

For respondents aware of their ability to access free period products, they were most likely to report 'school, college or university' and 'health centres' as settings to obtain these products (72% and 57%, respectively). Respondents were least likely to receive free period products through them being sent to their home (9%) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Awareness of where to access free period products (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

|                                  | Percentage of respondents |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| At school / college / university | 72%                       |
| At a health centre               | 57%                       |
| At a community centre            | 30%                       |
| At a public library              | 28%                       |
| At work                          | 28%                       |
| At a leisure centre              | 24%                       |
| At another council building      | 20%                       |
| Sent to my home                  | 9%                        |
| Other                            | 2%                        |
| Don't know                       | 8%                        |

Base: All who were aware that they can access free period products (1057)

Question: B3. As far as you are aware, where can you obtain free period products from in Scotland?

There was some variance in awareness of where to access free period products by age. For example, young people were more likely than adults to be aware of access at school, college or university (94% compared to 70%), from a health centre (64% compared to 56%), from a public library (37% compared to 27%), from a leisure centre (35% compared to 23%).

On the whole, when asked of their awareness of their ability to access free period products, respondents in lower income households tended to be less aware of settings where they could access these products. For example:

- 18% of those earning under £20,000 a year were aware of public libraries providing access to free period products. This is compared to 28% for those earning between £20,000 and £40,000 a year, and 32% for those earning over £40,000.
- 17% of those earning under £20,000 a year were aware leisure centres provided free period products. This is compared to 25% for those earning between £20,000 and £40,000 a year, and 27% for those earning over £40,000.

All respondents were asked, 'If you needed to obtain free period products, where would be the most convenient place for you to get them?' (Table 6). The preferred methods for obtaining free products were: sent to their home (33%); at work (20%); at school, college or university (16%); and, at a health centre (16%). The least preferred locations were at a leisure centre (2%) and at another council building (1%).

**Table 6: Most convenient location for accessing free period products**

|                                    | Percentage of respondents |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sent to my home                    | 33%                       |
| At work                            | 20%                       |
| From school / college / university | 16%                       |
| From a health centre               | 16%                       |
| At a community centre              | 4%                        |
| At a public library                | 4%                        |
| At a leisure centre                | 2%                        |
| At another council building        | 1%                        |
| Other                              | 1%                        |
| Don't know                         | 5%                        |

Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

Question: B5. If you needed to obtain free period products, where would be the most convenient place for you to get them?

When looking at age more closely, there was some variation:

- The preferred methods for obtaining free periods for young people were: school, college, university (51%) and a health centre (23%).
- The preferred methods for obtaining free periods for adults was: sent to their home (35%); work (21%); health centre (15%); or, school, college, university (13%).
- Adults were more likely than young people to report free period products being sent direct to their home as their preferred method of accessing products (35% compared to 16%, respectively).

# Experiences of accessing free period products

## products

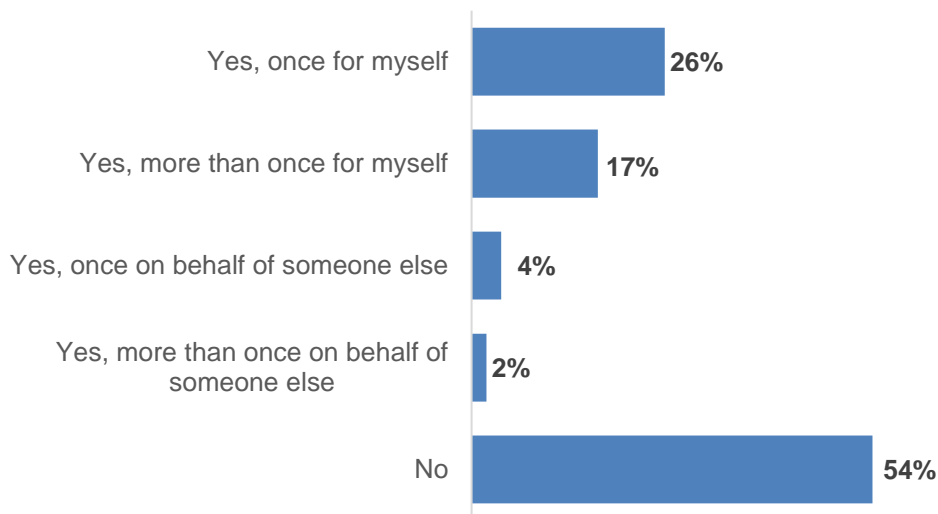
In order to understand the policy impact of free period products, it is crucial to understand the experiences of those accessing free period products, including how and where they obtain products, any challenges they have in doing so and the effect, if any, that access to free products has on their standard of living. Therefore, the survey asked questions on: accessibility, availability, and barriers to obtaining products; and the impacts on wellbeing and standard of living.

### Access and availability to free period products

When respondents were asked if they had accessed free period products in Scotland so far (prior to the introduction of the Act), one in four reported 'yes, once for myself' (26%). Just over half had not accessed free period products (54%) (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Respondents who have accessed free period products (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

QC1. Have you accessed free period products in Scotland so far?



Base: All respondents (adult and children) (1400)

By sub-groups there were some statistically significant differences in accessing free period products in Scotland.

Given the early access in educational settings, young people were more likely than adults to have accessed free period products once for their self (69% compared to 22%). However, adults were more likely than young people to have accessed free period products more than once for their self (18% compared to 6%).

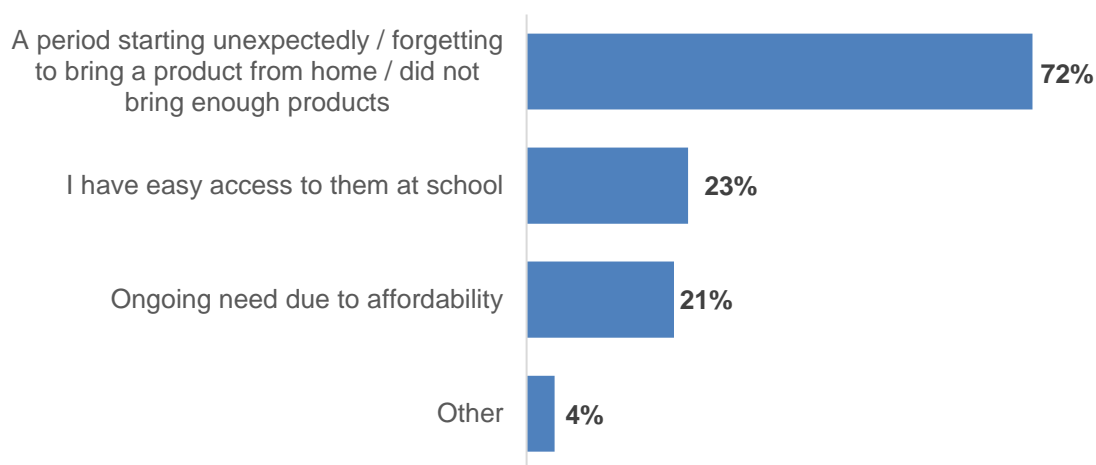
Further, 22% of respondents in households with an income under £20,000 reported accessing free period products more than once for their self. This reported figure was

higher than those living in higher income households (17% in households with an income of between £20,000 and £40,000 and 15% for those living in households with an income over £40,000).

For those who had accessed free period products, 72% had done so due to 'a period starting unexpectedly/ forgetting to bring a product from home / not bringing enough products'. 21% had done so due to an 'ongoing need due to affordability. For young people, 23% accessed free period products because they had easy access to them at school (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Primary reason for accessing free period products**

QC1B. What was the main reason why you got free period products?



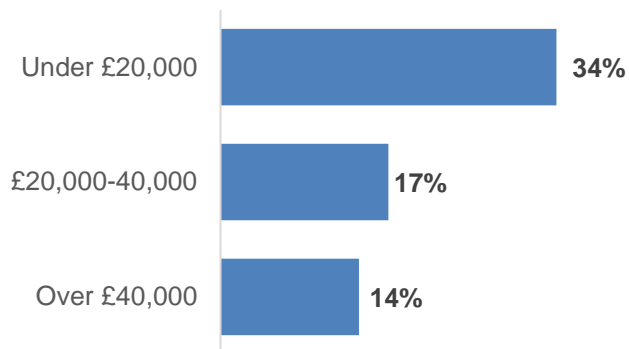
Base: All who had accessed free period products (643)

Notes: The reason 'Ongoing need due to affordability' differed in wording across the adult and young person questionnaire. Adult: 'Challenges with cost of living'. Young person: 'To save money / because I cannot afford products'. The reason 'I have easy access to them at school' was only asked to young people (aged 12-15 years).

Looking closely at the data by household income, there were some differences. Figure 12 highlights how as household income increases, the likelihood of needing to access free period products due to the challenges with cost of living tends to decrease.

**Figure 12: Accessing period products due to the cost of living by household income**

QC1B. What was the main reason why you got free period products?



Base: All adults 16+ who had accessed free period products (524)

For those who had accessed free period products, half had obtained products from a school, college or university (49%). This is unsurprising given the early free provision in educational settings. Work and health centres were other commonly reported settings for obtaining free period products (23% and 20%, respectively). Respondents were less likely to have obtained free products from 'another council building' or have them 'sent to their home' (3% and 8%, respectively).

By respondent type, young people were more likely than adults to report obtaining their free period products from a wider range of settings with higher proportions reported across a range of settings (Table 7). For example, half of young people had obtained products from a health centre (51%), while a third had obtained products from a public library (compared to 15% and 9%, respectively, for adults).

**Table 7: Locations where respondents accessed free period products (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

|                                | Percentage of respondents | 12-15 year old respondents | 16+ respondents |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| At school / college university | 49%                       | 91%                        | 42%             |
| At work                        | 23%                       | 0%                         | 26%             |
| At a health centre             | 20%                       | 51%                        | 15%             |
| At a public library            | 12%                       | 32%                        | 9%              |
| At a leisure centre            | 10%                       | 30%                        | 7%              |
| Sent to my home                | 8%                        | 4%                         | 8%              |
| At another council building    | 3%                        | 5%                         | 3%              |
| Other                          | 4%                        | 0%                         | 4%              |
| Don't know                     | 1%                        | 0%                         | 1%              |

Base: All who had accessed free period products (643); young people (12-15 years) who had accessed free period products (86); (adults 16+) who had accessed free period products (557)

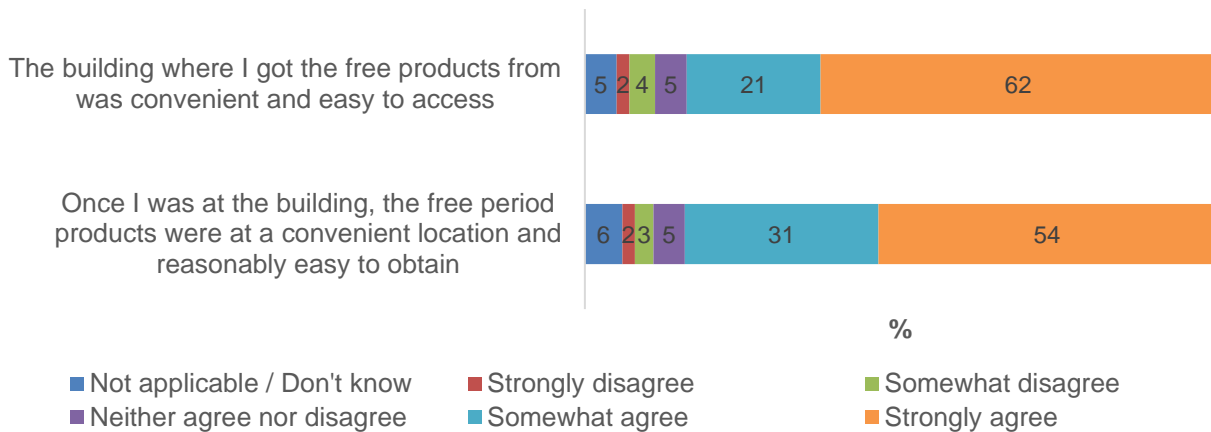
Question: C2. Where did you get free period products from?

Understanding experiences of obtaining free period products is important as the Act places a duty on period products to be obtained reasonably easily and in a way that that reflects the dignity of persons obtaining them. Therefore, respondents who had accessed free period products were asked to consider two statements: 'The building where I got the free products from was convenient and easy to access'; and, 'Once I was at the building, the free period products were at a convenient location and reasonably easy to obtain' (Figure 13).

Agreement with both these statements was high, with 83% agreeing the building was convenient and easy to access and 85% agreeing that once inside the building, free period products were conveniently located and easily obtained.

**Figure 13: Ease of access to free period products**

QC3.1-C3.2. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Base: All who had accessed free period products (643)

Notes: Figure 13 displays the summary disagreement and agreement levels of respondents. Tables C3.1-C3.2 in the data provide a breakdown of the response options on a five point agree/disagree scale. Where stacked bars do not total 100% it is due to percentages being rounded to the nearest whole.

Generally, young people were more likely than adults to agree with these two statements. 96% of young people agreed the building where they obtained free period products was convenient and easy to access (compared to 81% of adults). 95% of young people agreed once inside the building here they obtained free period products, the products were conveniently located and easy to obtain (compared to 83% of adults).

The Act further sets out that when obtaining free period products those people who need to use them should be offered a reasonable choice of period products. Therefore, the survey asked respondents if they were able to obtain their preferred period product when accessing free provision in order to obtain a baseline understanding of provision. Nine in ten respondents were able to obtain their preferred period product (88%). A further 10% were unable to access their preferred period product and 2% could not recall. Access to preferred free period products was relatively consistent across sub-categories.

For those who had accessed free period products but had been unable to obtain their preferred product, 86% would have preferred to access single use products, such as single use sanitary towels or liners (54%) or tampons (41%). 25% would have preferred to have access to reusable products, such as reusable pads (18%), period underwear (17%) or menstrual cups (10%) (Table 8).



**Table 8: Preference of product when accessing free period products for those who were unable to access their chosen product (respondents were invited to select all that apply)**

|                                      | Percentage of respondents |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Single use sanitary towels or liners | 54%                       |
| Tampons                              | 41%                       |
| Reusable pads                        | 18%                       |
| Period underwear                     | 17%                       |
| Menstrual cups                       | 10%                       |
| Other                                | 6%                        |
| Prefer not to say                    | 1%                        |

Base: All who had accessed free period products and were unable to obtain their preferred product (64)  
 Question: C6. Which period products would you have liked to access for free that weren't available? (Adult: 16+ years) / Which period products would you have liked to get that weren't available for free? (Young person: 12-15 years)

## Challenges in accessing free period products

For those who had accessed free period products, most did not encounter any challenges, with 83% reporting no difficulties or barriers in accessing these products. Overall, there tended to be agreement with this statement across sub-groups.

For respondents who had faced difficulties or barriers when accessing free period products, the most common reasons were due to unavailability (25%) or embarrassment/anxiety (20%). The least commonly reported reason was comments discussing the cost of period products (1%) (Table 9).

**Table 9: Difficulties or barriers faced by respondents who had accessed free period products and encountered difficulties or barriers**

|  | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Products unavailable                               | 24                    | 25%                       |
| Felt embarrassed/anxious taking them               | 18                    | 20%                       |
| Not private / discrete pick-up place               | 9                     | 9%                        |
| Access barrier, e.g., difficult to find            | 7                     | 8%                        |
| Not given enough                                   | 4                     | 4%                        |
| Quality issues with the products                   | 3                     | 4%                        |
| No sanitary pads available, only tampons available | 2                     | 2%                        |
| Unsuitable options available                       | 2                     | 2%                        |
| Comments discussing cost                           | 1                     | 1%                        |
| Other  | 9                     | 10%                       |
| None   | 15                    | 16%                       |
| Don't know   | 5                     | 5%                        |

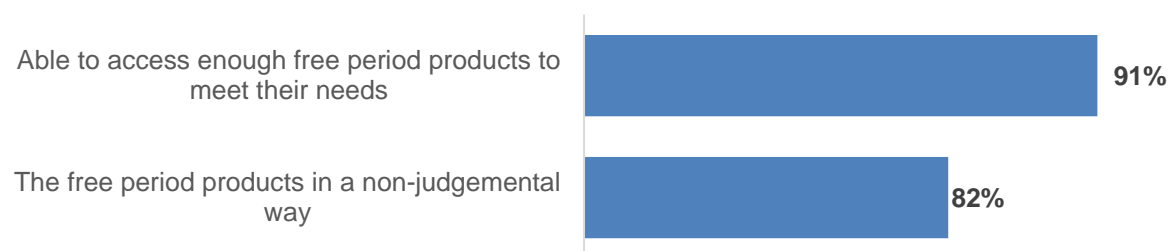
Base: All who had accessed free period products and faced difficulties or barriers (94)

Question: C8a. What barriers or difficulties did you experience when accessing free period products?

While it does appear some respondents encountered issues in accessing free period products, the data suggests the majority of respondents who had accessed free period products were able to access enough to meet their needs and were able to access free provision in a non-judgemental way (Figure 14). Nine in ten respondents who had accessed free period products felt they were able to obtain enough to meet their needs (91%). While eight in ten of respondents who had accessed free period products felt they were able to do so in a non-judgemental way (82%).

**Figure 14: Respondent agreement with statements on challenges accessing free period products**

QC7 and QC9. Were you able to access...?



Base: All who had accessed free period products (643)

Agreement with the statement, 'did you feel you were able to access the free period products in a non-judgemental way?', varied by age group. Young people were less likely to answer 'yes' compared to adults (69% compared to 84%, respectively).

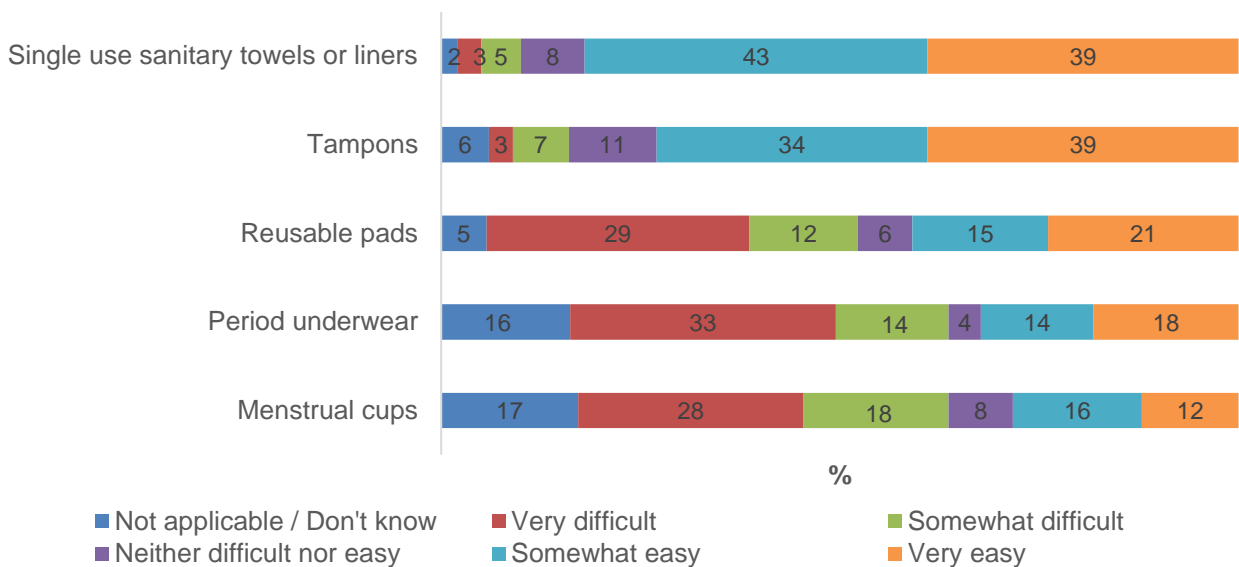
By sub-groups there were some statistically significant variances in agreement with the statement, 'were you able to access enough period products to meet your needs?'

- Young people were less likely than adults to agree with this statement. 78% of 12–15-year-olds said yes, while 93% of adults said yes.
- 85% of respondents who had faced barriers or challenges when accessing free period product provision agreed with this statement, compared to 92% who faced no barriers or challenges when accessing free period products.
- 79% of respondents living in the lowest income households agreed with this statement, compared to 94% of those in the highest income households.

Respondents who had previously accessed free period products were asked to report on how easy or difficult it was to obtain a range of period products for free (Figure 15). Single use products were more easily obtainable than reusable products. The most easily obtainable were single use sanitary towels or liners (83%) and tampons (74%). While menstrual cups were reported to be the least easy period product to obtain for free (28%).

### Figure 15: Ease of obtaining period products for free

QA10.1-A10.7. Looking at the period products listed below, how easy or difficult is it to obtain them for free?



Base: All who had accessed free period products (643)

Notes: Figure 15 displays the summary difficulty and ease levels of respondents. Tables A10.1-A10.7 in the data provide a breakdown of the response options on a five-point difficult/easy scale. Where stacked bars do not total 100% it is due to percentages being rounded to the nearest whole.

By sub-group, reusable products were reported to be more easily obtainable by young people compared to adults (Table 10). For example, 76% of young people reported being able to easily access reusable pads, compared to 29% of adults.

**Table 10: Reported ease of accessing free reusable products by respondent type**

|                  | Percentage of respondents | 12–15-year-old respondents | 16+ respondents |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Reusable pads    | 36%                       | 76%                        | 29%             |
| Period underwear | 32%                       | 72%                        | 26%             |
| Menstrual cups   | 28%                       | 64%                        | 23%             |

Base: All who had accessed free period products (643); young people (12-15 years) who had accessed free period products (86); adults 16+ who had accessed free period products (557)

Question: A10.1-A10.7. Looking at the period products listed below, how easy or difficult is it to obtain them for free?

### Impact of accessing free period products

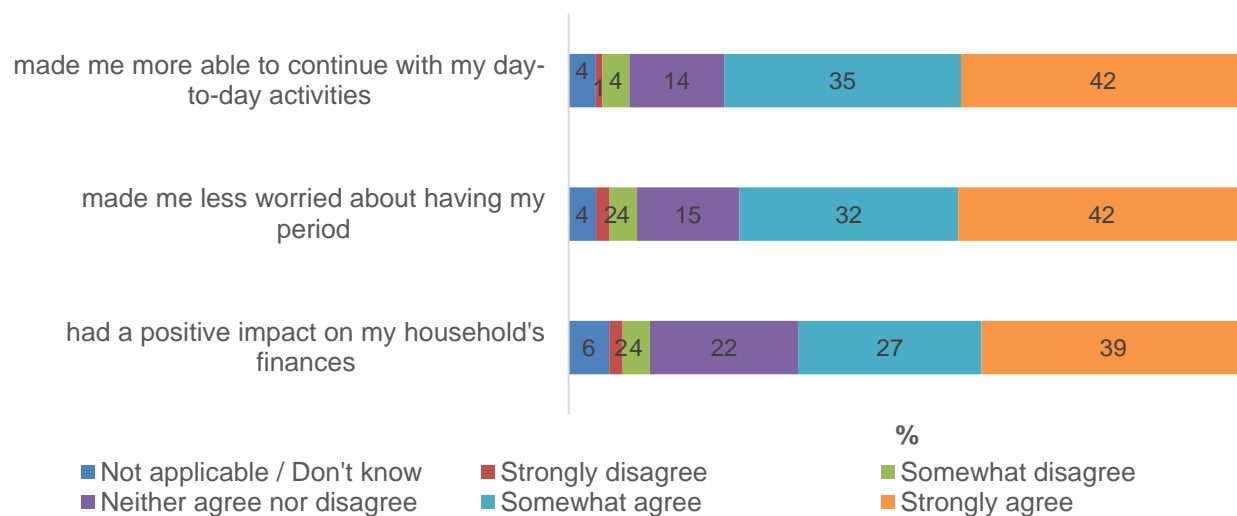
Respondents who had accessed free period products were asked to consider a range of statements assessing the impact being able to obtain free period products had had on

their life. The aim of the free period provision is to support equality, dignity and rights for those who menstruate and to ensure that lack of access to period products does not impact on an individual's ability to fully participate in day-to-day activities, including work and education at all levels.

Figure 16 highlights that for many respondents access to free period products had made them: more able to continue with day-to-day activities (77%), less worried about their periods (74%), and had had a positive impact on their household finances (67%).

**Figure 16: Impact of accessing free period products on respondent life**

QC10.1-C10.3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?  
Being able to obtain period products for free has...



Base: All who had accessed free period products (643) apart from for the statement 'Being able to obtain period products for free has had a positive impact on my household's finances' for which the base was: All adults 16+ who had accessed free period products (557)

Notes: Figure 16 displays the summary disagreement and agreement levels of respondents. Tables C10.1-C10.3 in the data provide a breakdown of the response options on a five point agree/disagree scale. Where stacked bars do not total 100% it is due to percentages being rounded to the nearest whole.

Of those who had accessed free period products, young people were more likely than adults to agree with the statements on being less worried about their periods (87% compared to 72%) and feeling more able to continue with their day-to-day activities (92% compared to 74%).

For those who had accessed free products and responded to the statement, 'Being able to obtain period products for free has had a positive impact on my household's finances', there were some statistically significant variances by sub-groups:

- For those who struggled to afford period products, 85% agreed access to free period products had made a positive difference to their household finances (compared to 65% for those who could afford period products).
- 76% of those who were concerned about the amount of money they needed to spend on period products monthly found access to free products had a positive

impact on their household's finances (compared to 58% of those with no concerns about their monthly spend on period products).

- Those with higher monthly spend on period products reported higher levels of agreement with this statement, with 80% of those spending between £11-20 and 89% of those spending over £20 agreeing with this statement (compared to 64% for those spending up to £10 per month).

## Conclusion

The findings in this report provide an overview of experiences and attitudes towards periods, period products and access to free period products amongst those who may need to use them. The data presented in this report was gathered from an online survey of 1,400 respondents undertaken prior to the Act coming into force on 15 August 2022.

It is important to be aware of the context during survey data collection. Free period products have been available since August 2018 in educational settings and became a legislative requirement from October 2020. Therefore, the variation between young people and adults in awareness and use of free period products can partly be explained by this nuance.

Overall, respondents felt: informed about their periods and period products; comfortable talking to others about their period; and, unconcerned about being teased about their period. This hints towards a positive culture surrounding menstruation and period dignity. However, there are proportions of the population who do not agree with these statements. In particular, two key groups are likely to face such worries and concerns regarding their periods and using period products: young people (compared to adults) and respondents living in lower income households (compared to those living in higher income households).

The vast majority (91% of respondents) felt in a position to generally be able to afford enough period products to enable them to continue with their day-to-day activities. However, there were key sub-groups where agreement with this statement was lower. In particular, those living in lower income households were less likely to agree with this statement than those from higher income households. This highlights the need for this policy area in order to support equality and dignity for all those who require period products in Scotland.

Given the context, awareness and use of free period products was higher among young people compared to adults. However, awareness was low amongst those who perhaps needed the provision most. For example, respondents who struggled to afford period products had significantly less awareness than those who reported being able to afford period products. Further, respondents from lower income households were less aware of settings where they could obtain free period products, compared to those from higher income households.

Again, given the nature of the context and the aims of this baseline survey, it is not surprising that half of respondents had not accessed free period product provision. However, for those who had obtained products, these tended to have been obtained conveniently and with reasonable ease. Further, many were able to obtain their preferred period product. For the minority who faced challenges or barriers in accessing free period products this tended to be due to a lack of available products or due to feeling embarrassed or anxious. The former point is a supply issue and should be monitored, particularly as it was more widely reported to be an issue for those from lower income households (compared to those from higher income households). The latter point is one of stigma and the need for culture change to normalise menstruation and the right to access free period products.

Finally, the survey considered the wider impacts of access to free period products on wellbeing and individual finances. Around three-quarters of respondents reported the free products made them less worried about their period and more able to continue with day-to-day activities. A smaller majority of respondents reported free products had a positive impact on their household finances. However, it is significant to note that free products particularly had a positive impact on household finances for the following groups: those who had reported struggling to afford period products (compared to those who felt able to afford products); and those who were concerned about their monthly spend on period products (compared to those with no concerns about monthly spend). This reiterates the potential positive outcomes from this policy in terms of supporting equality and reducing the cost of living for households with menstruating people.

The data presented in this report is from a baseline survey undertaken prior to the Act coming into force on 15 August 2022. We intend to replicate this survey in 2025 in order to allow direct comparisons to be made between the two time periods. This will allow us to evaluate and assess how views and experiences have changed over time since the Act commenced.



## Annex A: Methodological note

In order to explore the attitudes and experiences of people who may need to use period products (aged 12 years and over) and their access to free period products in Scotland, BMG Research were commissioned to conduct an online, quantitative survey on behalf of the Directorate for Tackling Child Poverty and Social Justice.

The survey provides a baseline wave of data which can allow for future monitoring of changes in attitudes and experiences.

The questionnaire was designed around the research aims and objectives. The questionnaire was developed jointly by BMG Research and Scottish Government. The questionnaire was divided into five main sections covering: screening; demographics; attitudes and concerns; awareness and understanding of free period product provision; experience of free provision. The questions consisted of primarily single response questions for ease of completion for the respondent.

Two versions of the survey were created, one for adults (aged 16 years and over) and another for young people (aged between 12 and 15 years). Two versions were created so that questions or contents irrelevant to the target group were not asked (e.g. questions about school for adults; questions about household finances for young people). However, changes between the two versions of the questionnaire were minimal. Therefore, the data has been merged and treated as one wider dataset of respondents aged 12+ for the vast majority of survey questions.

Several questions were cognitively tested to support the questionnaire design process. A total of eight cognitive interviews were conducted via telephone. Interviews were conducted between 1 and 4 July 2022. Cognitive interview participants were emailed a copy of the questionnaire before the interview. The changes recommended from the cognitive interviewing were mostly nuances to question wording to enable greater respondent comprehension.

Data was collected using an online panel survey. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. A 'panel blend' approach was taken to fieldwork. This helped to: increase the overall sample size; ensure good coverage across key demographic groups; and reduce the risk of panel biases. The panels used for this project were:

- Pure spectrum
- Made in Surveys
- Lucid

The survey was created using Confront software, a bespoke survey software used throughout the industry. Fieldwork took place between 19 and 24 July 2022.

To be eligible to participate in the survey, potential respondents had to be:

- Someone who currently menstruates regularly; or

- Someone who doesn't menstruate regularly but is able to menstruate (i.e. due to a medical condition); or
- Someone doesn't currently menstruate but expects to do so in the future (i.e. due to pregnancy, use of particular types of contraception, or because they had not had their first period).

Eligibility was managed through a series of profiling and screening questions administered at the start of the survey. Young people under the age of 16 were only able to participate after consent was obtained from their parent/carer. Young people then had to provide consent before being able to complete the survey.

Consent from a parent or legal guardian is usually advised for children aged under 16 to participate in research. What processes are in place to ensure this is done? Remember

Representative quotas were set on age, Scottish Parliamentary Region, SIMD classification and Urban-Rural classification. Given the survey aimed to collect a representative sample of the menstruating population and not the population as a whole, certain broad assumptions had to be made about the profile of the sample.

A total of 1,400 respondents completed the survey (81 respondents aged 12-15 years and 1,319 respondents aged 16 years and over). The survey data used for this report was weighted by age, region, SIMD classification, urban-rural classification and household income to ensure representativeness of the menstruating population aged 12 years and over.

Table 11 below summarises the profile of the final sample.

**Table 11: Survey sample profile**

| <b>Variable</b>   | <b>Category</b>                | <b>Base Size (Unweighted)</b> | <b>% Unweighted</b> | <b>% Weighted</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Region</b>   | Central Scotland               | 241                           | 17%                 | 12%               |
|   | Glasgow                        | 182                           | 13%                 | 13%               |
|   | Highlands and Islands          | 95                            | 7%                  | 9%                |
|   | Mid Scotland and Fife          | 123                           | 9%                  | 12%               |
|   | North East Scotland            | 216                           | 15%                 | 14%               |
|   | Lothian                        | 205                           | 15%                 | 14%               |
|   | South Scotland                 | 147                           | 11%                 | 13%               |
|   | West Scotland                  | 191                           | 14%                 | 13%               |
| <b>Age</b>  | 12 to 15                       | 81                            | 6%                  | 8%                |
|   | 16 to 24                       | 216                           | 15%                 | 19%               |
|   | 25 to 34                       | 509                           | 36%                 | 26%               |
|   | 35 to 44                       | 392                           | 28%                 | 24%               |
|   | 45 to 54                       | 181                           | 13%                 | 19%               |
|   | 55 to 64                       | 21                            | 2%                  | 3%                |
| <b>Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Quartiles)</b> | 1 - Least deprived             | 283                           | 20%                 | 25%               |
|   | 2                              | 327                           | 23%                 | 25%               |
|   | 3                              | 429                           | 31%                 | 25%               |
|   | 4 – Most deprived              | 361                           | 26%                 | 25%               |
| <b>Household Income (16+ Only)</b>                        | Under £10,000                  | 82                            | 6%                  | 7%                |
|   | Between £10,000 and £20,000    | 195                           | 15%                 | 15%               |
|   | Between £20,000 and £30,000    | 277                           | 21%                 | 22%               |
|   | Between £30,000 and £40,000    | 217                           | 16%                 | 16%               |
|   | Over £40,000                   | 481                           | 36%                 | 36%               |
|   | Prefer not to say / Don't know | 67                            | 5%                  | 5%                |
| <b>Urban-Rural Classification</b>                         | Urban                          | 204                           | 15%                 | 18%               |
|   | Rural                          | 1196                          | 85%                 | 82%               |

### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this <statistical bulletin / social research publication>:

are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

are available via an alternative route at

<http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/9781805252467/documents/>

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact <email address> for further information.

cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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