



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Education

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Period Products (Free Provision) Bill:
Committee Report

2 February 2022

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Chris Lyttle (Chairperson)
Mr Pat Sheehan (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Nicola Brogan
Mr Robbie Butler
Mrs Diane Dodds
Mr Daniel McCrossan
Mr Justin McNulty
Mr Robin Newton

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I refer members to correspondence from the Minister of Education regarding proposed amendments to the Bill. Are members content to include that correspondence in the Committee report on the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I refer members to a draft report on the Committee Stage of the Bill and remind them that, as the Committee Stage is about to conclude, the Committee report must be agreed today. Are members content to proceed to formal consideration?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): I will proceed through the report by section, asking the Committee whether it is formally content.

Are members content with the contents page as drafted? Members should give me audible "Agreeds".

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are members content with the "Powers and Membership" section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are members content with the list of abbreviations and acronyms used in the report, notwithstanding our request for a culture change in relation to acronyms?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are members content with the "Executive Summary" section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are members content with the "Introduction" section?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are members content with the "Clause by Clause Scrutiny of the Bill" section as drafted?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Are members content with the appendices?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): It is prudent at this point to recap our intention to agree the report and write to the Executive Office. Are members content to order the report on the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill to be printed as the second report of the mandate?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Do members agree that an electronic copy of the Committee report be published on the Committee's web page and sent to all the organisations that provided evidence to the Committee on the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. It is worth our agreeing the action to write to the Executive Office. Pat, do you want to comment on that briefly?

Mr Sheehan: Yes, I agree, after my discussion with the deputy First Minister yesterday, who is very supportive of the Bill. I outlined the difficulties that had arisen about which Department would take lead responsibility for the Bill, and it was suggested that the Committee should write to the Executive Office. In that letter, we could explain and outline to the Executive Office that, while the Committee had agreed clause 1, which attributes lead responsibility to the Health Department, Health is reluctant to take on that lead responsibility. We could ask the Executive Office for advice on how to resolve that difficulty, given the cross-cutting nature of the Bill. We could also ask the Executive Office to take lead responsibility for responding at Consideration Stage.

I am sure that Aoibhinn can make some sense out of that.

The Committee Clerk: Yes, I can, Deputy Chair. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thanks, Pat.

The Committee Clerk: If members are content, I can also draft a paragraph to include that action in the report.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK. Are members content to agree that proposal?

Members indicated assent.

Mr Sheehan: Yes, that is a good idea. Thanks.

The Committee Clerk: Thank you. I would just take members back to the report for one thing. I ask them to look at the recommendations, where I have tried to describe the educational programme, which was also, I think, a proposal of the Deputy Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): That is on page 42 of members' tabled packs. Which paragraph is it, Clerk?

The Committee Clerk: Paragraphs 49 and 50, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Paragraphs 49 and 50 on page 42. Thanks, Clerk.

The Committee Clerk: I also have a note at paragraph 51 on the Department for the Economy's response, which referred to the good practice in Scotland in developing an app to inform product users. I do not know whether the Committee wants to recommend that as well. Maybe you could leave that one for now.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Clerk, just to reprise those, paragraph 49 states:

"The Committee recommends ... implementation of the Bill should be accompanied by a[n] ... educational programme which addresses societal attitudes that give rise to period stigma, and helps explain and demystify periods and period products [including] sustainable options."

Paragraph 51 notes:

"The [Department for the Economy] response ... refers to Scotland's good practice in developing an app to inform product users of locations"

and other relevant information.

Are members content with the inclusion of those recommendations in the report?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): OK, Clerk?

The Committee Clerk: Yes. I will round out paragraph 51. Thank you, members.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): No problem.

OK. Before I confirm the conclusion of the Committee Stage of the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill, do members have any other comments? No? OK.

That concludes the Committee Stage of the Period Products (Free Provision) Bill. Are members content that the report be published, as advised, on Friday 4 February?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson (Mr Lyttle): Thank you, members. Thanks for the work that everybody undertook to complete the Committee Stage of this really important Bill. As I have said a number of times, the Education Committee was not, by logic, the lead Committee for the Bill, but it required us to take on a lead Committee role for a Committee Stage of the Bill to be completed. We can be glad that we took that on, that we reached this point and that a Consideration Stage of the Bill to address some of the wider issues will now be possible.

I also thank the Bill sponsor, Pat Catney MLA, for his proactive engagement on the Bill at all stages of Committee Stage.