

## DMSP school visit to see Period Dignity Drive – Media briefing

<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	Tuesday 20 February 2024 – 09:15-10:15
<b>Interviewers</b>	ITV Wales – <b>Redacted – Section 40</b> BBC - TBC
<b>Format</b>	In person, pre-recorded
<b>Venue</b>	Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni Gellihaf Campus, Gellihaf Road, Blackwood, NP12 3JQ
<b>Press Officer &amp; others attending</b>	Redacted – Section 40
<b>Brief summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is running a Period Dignity Drive that aims to inform pupils about the reality of periods, dispel myths and empower young girls to talk about their bodies in a confident way.</li><li>• Deputy Minister for Social Partnership Hannah Blythyn will be meeting pupils and teachers to see how they have embedded period dignity into their studies and see the progress of their Period Dignity Drive.</li><li>• Our Period Proud Wales plan outlines how we aim to ensure period dignity and eradicate period poverty over the next five years.</li></ul>
<b>Key messages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A Period Proud Wales sets out our ambitions to ensure period dignity and eradicate period poverty for women, girls and people who have periods.</li><li>• Achieving period dignity is a key element of the Welsh Government wider vision and ambition to achieve a gender equal Wales.</li><li>• Normalising having a period and removing any sense of shame or stigma around periods is a key priority of the plan.</li><li>• We are striving to improve education resources around periods and ensuring period dignity is considered in guidance for schools, local authorities and colleges.</li><li>• Menstrual well-being is included in our curriculum through the mandatory Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Code, which is currently being rolled out in our schools.</li><li>• We're also working with the Higher Education sector to promote period dignity as part of institutions' well-being policies and practices</li></ul>

### **Why have you come to this school today?**

- Achieving period dignity is a key element of the Welsh Government wider vision and ambition to achieve a gender equal Wales.
- Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is a perfect example of embracing this, as their Period Dignity Drive aims to inform pupils about the reality of periods, dispel myths and empower young girls to talk about their bodies in a confident way.
- It is important to have this conversation, as it embodies period dignity and shows how it's not a taboo subject to talk about the likes of periods, menstrual cycles and period products.
- We are committed to removing the stigma of talking about periods and the menstrual cycle. A Period Proud Wales sets out our ambitions to ensure period dignity and eradicate period poverty for women, girls and people who have periods.

### **What do you think about the Period Dignity Drive?**

- Tackling period dignity is a key part of our Period Proud Wales plan. We must do more to improve education around menstrual cycles if we are going to tackle period dignity in schools.
- "It has been a privilege to see first-hand the 'Period Dignity Drive' being carried out at Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni and their efforts to empower young pupils to talk about their bodies in a confident way.

### **What is currently taught about menstrual cycles in schools?**

- Menstrual well-being and learning about the menstrual cycle is mandatory within the new Curriculum for Wales. This includes learning about where to get further information and support.
- It is important that learning about menstrual well-being is not simply a 'one-off lesson', which is why the RSE Code sets out that it should be taught over time as children grow.

### **How do you ensure teaching is age appropriate when it comes to menstrual cycles?**

- In early development, learners need to experience contexts for understanding the importance of maintaining personal health and well-being, including hygiene, and how this impacts on themselves and others. This progresses to applying broad principles of health and hygiene within sexual health.
- As learners develop, teaching and learning needs to include focus on exploring how physical changes have an impact on well-being and relationships ensuring the representation of LGBTQ+ experiences and lives.
- Learning also focuses on menstrual well-being and conditions which can affect the reproductive system; as well as developing understanding of the possible outcomes of the decisions made relating to sexual health and relationships.

- All of this learning will focus on recognising the diversity of human body types, how perception and understanding of the human body is shaped by society, the law, science and technology and the impact of this on well-being.

### **How are you improving education about periods in schools?**

- We are striving to improve education resources around periods and ensuring period dignity is considered in guidance for schools, local authorities and colleges.
- Menstrual well-being is included in our curriculum through the Relationships and Sexuality Education Code, which is currently being rolled out in our schools. We're also working with the Higher Education sector to promote period dignity as part of institutions' well-being policies and practices.

### **What's your response to campaigners who say your RSE code sexualises children?**

- I encourage people to read what the Welsh Government has published which make it clear what RSE is.
- The High Court was very clear that the RSE Code and guidance did not do this.  
Schools are legally required to make sure learning is appropriate for the age and development of each child. The RSE Code which sets out what schools must cover gives clear requirements on what should be taught and when to ensure it is appropriate. At early years the Code requires learning about friendships and family and how to treat each other with kindness and respect. Schools are legally required to make sure learning is pluralistic and so presents a range of views and values on different issues.

### **What do you have to say to parents who are concerned about what their children are going to be learning about?**

- RSE is designed to protect children and keep them safe. I think all parents, and indeed society can agree that is what we want.
- If parents are concerned, I would urge them to read the Code for themselves to see what it really says, and if they still have concerns after doing so, to speak to their child's school.
- The judge agreed with what we have said all along that parents can expect the teaching their children receive to be appropriate for their child's age and maturity: this is a legal requirement. It must also be factual and neutral.
- We have encouraged schools to discuss their proposals on RSE teaching with parents and carers in an engaged and constructive way and we understand that many parents have found this useful.
- Any resources that schools do use must be in line with the legal requirements: they must be in line with the Code, they must be developmentally appropriate

and must be part of a pluralistic approach - they cannot simply present one set of views or values.

### **Why are children having gender lessons?**

- The RSE Code is clear on this. Children in the early years will learn about their rights to be treated fairly, kindly and with respect and in a later phase recognise and know how to safely respond to gender stereotypes.
- RSE will be realised in a way that is inclusive in accordance with the principles of equality. This helps ensure that all learners can see themselves, their families, their communities and each other reflected across the curriculum and can learn to value difference and diversity as a source of strength.

### **What is the point of period dignity? Is it just virtue signalling?**

- If we can remove the stigma of talking about periods and dispel the myths and taboos that surround them, we can improve the menstrual wellbeing and awareness of pupils in schools across Wales. This will in turn benefit their health as they become adults.

### **Are you making any progress in tackling period poverty?**

- The Welsh Government's Period Dignity Grant is worth £3.9m and aims to provide free period products in every school in Wales and in more community venues including (but not limited to) food banks, libraries, leisure centres, family centres, community hubs, youth services.
- We have evaluated both the process and the impact of the Period Dignity Grant to ensure we are reaching vulnerable communities across Wales and targeting those families who most need access to products funded through the grant. The final report was published on 26 October 2023.
- The evaluation found that progress is being made in improving the availability of period products, including through schools, for those who struggle to access them.
- The report also recommends there should be more information provided to people, alongside education, about periods in a bid to overcome the stigma and taboos around talking about them.

### **How much of the Period Dignity Grant gone to educational establishments?**

- From the total budget of £2.9 million in the financial year 2022-23, £2.4 million was spent on period products
- 941 Primary schools were supported by the grant
- 221 Secondary schools were supported by the grant
- £80K of the grant was used for training costs
- £170K spent on uniform where learners do not have a change of clean clothing available and menstrual bleeding has stained or soiled their clothing – limited to underwear trousers, skirts, tights in school settings.

## **If you are committed to tackling period poverty, why are you cutting funding to the Period Dignity Grant?**

- Period products will still be widely available to those who need them.
- Whilst there has been some reduction in the overall funding, we are planning for this and there are no overall reductions in the number of local authorities we support.
- For the Financial Year 2023 – 2024, we were able to retain last year's cost-of-living uplift to the grant which has continued to strengthen local authorities' response to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on period poverty.
- For the Financial Year 2024 – 2025, there will be a **£200K reduction across the grant**
- Local authorities administer the grant and decide where products are placed, prioritising schools and those on low incomes via community settings.

## **How has the cost-of-living crisis affected period poverty?**

- Period products are not a luxury item and should be available to everyone who needs them. This is more important than ever as many struggle during the continuing cost-of-living crisis.
- Our Period Dignity Grant ensures that period products are available in every school in Wales and across a range of community venues including (but not limited to) foodbanks, libraries, leisure centres, family centres, community hubs and youth services.
- Sport, cultural venues and employers are also being encouraged to provide free products for staff and visitors in our 'A Period Proud Wales' plan. The plan outlines how everyone should have access to period products, whenever they are needed.

## **Why have you launched this plan?**

- In February 2023, we published our Period Proud Wales Action Plan. This plan sets out our ambitions to eradicate period poverty and ensure period dignity for women, girls and people who have periods by 2027.
- The plan sets out the ambition to embed period dignity in schools and improve appropriate education resources around menstrual cycles.
- Periods impact women, girls and those who menstruate in many ways and this impact goes beyond the time they bleed.
- The entire menstrual cycle has profound impacts on people's mental and physical health and the ways in which they can live their lives.
- The effect of mid-cycle symptoms and changes associated with a range of gynaecological conditions and cycle changes relating to menopause and perimenopause can impact on work, health needs, wellbeing and confidence

## **What does the plan hope to achieve?**

By 2027 we will live in a Wales where:

- periods are fully understood, accepted and a normalised topic of conversation. It is widely recognised that periods are not a choice and period products are not a luxury
- women, girls and those who have periods have easy, respectful and open access to good quality and safe products of their choice, when and where necessary
  - the stigma, taboos and myths which exist have been challenged through provision of information and educational resources. No-one is ashamed or embarrassed about periods and can speak openly and confidently about them, whether they have periods or do not

### **What is period poverty?**

- Eradicating period poverty means ensuring that having a period does not lead to missed education, absences from employment or withdrawal from sport and social activities.
- Everyone should have access to period products, as and when they are required, to use in a private space that is safe and dignified.

### **What is period dignity?**

- This Plan outlines a broad vision to achieve period dignity in Wales.
- This vision involves ending any sense of stigma and shame associated with periods; normalising people's experience whilst also acknowledging the distress and pain suffered by those whose periods are not "normal" and considers the impact of periods across a person's life course and lifestyle.

### **How will you achieve the ambitions in this plan?**

- Since 2018 we have invested around twelve million pounds to ensure that children and young people and those on low incomes have access to free period products.
- The Welsh Government is proud of the impact this funding has had and of the work we have done in partnership with local authorities and health boards to disseminate products through our schools, colleges and communities.
- In 2022 the Welsh Government increased funding to ensure that period products can be accessed free of charge by learners in schools, Further Education Institutions and to those in need in communities to £3.7 million. Work begins to develop a national campaign on period dignity and to co-produce education resources on menstrual wellbeing.
- In October 2021 we published the Period Dignity Strategic Action Plan for consultation. Over £3 million pounds is made available to ensure that period products can be accessed free of charge by learners in schools, Further Education Institutions and to those in need in communities

### **How will you improve the provision of free period products?**

- The Welsh Government's Programme for Government commits to the expansion of free period provision in communities and the private sector.

- We will do this by providing funding to local authorities via the period dignity grant, encouraging trade unions and private/public sectors to make period products freely available for staff and visitors, provide further funding to Further Education Institutions through the period dignity grant and assess provision in healthcare settings.
- Free period products will be available in every school in Wales and in more community venues including (but not limited to) food banks, libraries, leisure centres, family centres, community hubs, youth services.
- Free period products will be available in every Further Education Institution in Wales to all learners and those in the college community who require access to period products
- Via the Wales TUC and third sector partners, there will be an increase in provision of free period products for staff and visitors.
- Period products will be available to staff and visitors at sports and cultural venues (including the museum and library estate and CADW run sites)

### **What do you mean by ‘normalisation’ of talking about periods?**

- We recognise that some people may not feel comfortable using this language or seeing this imagery initially and that in some cultures, the term “period” is a word that isn’t often used and is in itself, a barrier to discussion.
- However, by normalising language and images around periods and ending the shame and stigma associated with them we aim to build confidence in discussing periods in open and straightforward terms.

### **Why do you use the phrase ‘women, girls and people who menstruate’?**

- The language within this plan aims to be inclusive and to consider the experience of women, girls and anyone who menstruates.
- Menstruation is an experience of the female sex and the plan refers frequently to women and girls for this reason.
- However not all women or people who are assigned female at birth, menstruate.
- Conversely, there are people whose sex or gender is not female such as trans men, intersex and non-binary people, who do menstruate.

### **Does this plan ‘erase women’ by using the phrase ‘people who menstruate’?**

- The FM has been clear that ‘transgender women are women’. We have strived to be as inclusive as possible and have in no way ‘erased women’.
- Where actions in this plan are aimed specifically at a particular group, specific language around that group is used.
- As a result, this plan includes use of the terms “women”, “girl”, “those who menstruate”, “learner” and “patient” throughout.
- In order to be inclusive, the term “women, girls and people who menstruate” will be used most frequently to encompass all affected by this plan and we hope that as we implement our communication aims, we will be able to improve awareness of why this language is important

## **How will you change attitudes to periods?**

- We will embed period dignity in schools and ensure a comprehensive suite of educational resources related to menstrual wellbeing will be available to learners, educators and parents across Wales.
- We will also work with schools, universities, higher education and further education to ensure menstrual wellbeing is embedded in their health and safeguarding policies.
- Education resources will also be provided to youth services across Wales to ensure that youth workers are able to offer safe, accurate information to young people on periods and menstrual wellbeing
- Information on how to access free period products in every local authority in Wales will be available via the NHS Wales Bloody Brilliant site

## **How will you improve attitudes for the next generation?**

- We want all children and young people to grow up healthy, safe and happy. Relationships Sexuality Education will enhance the new curriculum's focus on health and well-being, and one of its purposes of the new curriculum is that all young people leave education as "healthy, confident individuals". This includes being able to form relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

## **Gender equality**

- I believe our focus on intersectionality, equality of outcome and social justice is how we will move towards our vision of a gender equal Wales. No woman or girl can be left behind. Across Wales, we will work with and for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women, disabled women, LGBTQ+ women, women in poverty, older women, girls, and others to deliver equality and social justice.
- We all have a role to play in advancing gender equality in Wales. It is crucial that all players: stakeholders, activists, and politicians, stand ready to work in partnership, to turn the dial and make real, meaningful, and swift progress to achieve the change we all want to see – a gender equal Wales.

## **Period Dignity**

- In February 2023, we launched our plan to achieve period dignity and eradicate period poverty in Wales - 'A Period Proud Wales'.
- Commitments included in the Plan will help us understand the impact of periods on participation in sport and exercise and to design actions to improve participation levels.
- Embedding period dignity was prioritised in our Programme for Government and this plan will deliver on that priority. Here in Wales, since 2018, we have invested around £12 million to ensure children and young people, and those on low incomes, have access to free period products. Eradicating period poverty means ensuring that having a period does not lead to missed



education, absences from employment or withdrawal from sport and social activities.

- This plan sets out our ambition to go further by setting out our intention for free period products to be available in a wider variety of settings, providing education to all about periods and eliminating stigma related to periods.
- Our total Period Dignity annual grant now totals over £3.9 million. Period products are in every school and college in Wales as well as being widely available across a range of community venues, including food banks and pantries, libraries, youth centres and community hubs.

### **How will you improve the provision of period products in the workplace?**

- Work with our trade unions, public services, private and third sectors to create guidance and promote policies on period dignity and the menopause and to ensure educational and practical period dignity resources are available

### **What about the environmental damage of period products?**

- We will increase provision of plastic free products, products with reduced plastic content, reduced plastic packaging, packaging in general or reusable products year on year.
- This aim will be balanced with ensuring there is a choice of products available for those for whom reusable products are not culturally acceptable, restricted by the experience of poverty, living conditions (houses of multiple occupancy etc.) or are unsuitable due to an impairment or neurodivergence.
- By 2027 90 to 100% of the period products funded by the Welsh Government period dignity grant will be plastic free, products with reduced plastic content, reduced plastic packaging, packaging in general or reusable.
- This action will help support the Welsh Government's commitment to preventing plastic pollution and forms part of our wider response to the climate and nature emergencies.

### **Why don't you introduce legislation like Scotland Period Product (Free Provision) Act?**

- We have no current plans to introduce legislation similar to the Period Products Free Provision Act however we share very similar ambitions with the Act through our Period Dignity Grant and this Period Proud Wales plan.
- The Welsh Government has already taken a range of action to address period dignity and tackle period poverty in Wales. We provide funding to local authorities to provide free period products within all primary and secondary schools and to communities across Wales. Funding is also provided to all Further Education colleges for the same purpose. Period products are also available free of charge for all hospital inpatients.
- My officials are in regular contact with the Scottish Government to understand the impact of the Period Products (Free Provision) Scotland Act and if there are any lessons we can learn.

- I am proud of the work we are undertaking in Wales together to eliminate period poverty and achieve period dignity and believe we are well on our way to becoming a Period Proud Nation.

### **Why are products available in men's toilets?**

- Period Dignity means providing period products to those who need them in the most accessible and dignified way possible.
- We will take steps to ensure that products are not held by a gatekeeper, need to be asked for, or are locked away.
- During the time we have been funding provision of products they have overwhelmingly only been used by those who have a genuine need for them. Therefore, this represents good value for money in ensuring period products are freely available.