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Department  
for Education

Guidance

# Period product scheme for schools and colleges in England

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No-one should be held back from accessing education due to their period. We have introduced this period product scheme to provide free period products for all learners who need them.

This means learners at all state-maintained schools and 16 to 19 education organisations in England will have access to free period products in their place of study.

To make sure organisations have access to a wide range of period products in the most cost-effective and efficient way, we have a contract with Personnel Hygiene Services Limited (pHS). This allows you to order period products and have them delivered when you need them.

This guidance contains information on:

- choosing and ordering period products
- distributing products within institutions
- tackling stigma

# Overview

Period products, such as pads and tampons, should be available for all who need them, when they need them, in order to access education. Having periods should not be a barrier to education for any learner. Making learners aware of the scheme is vital to making sure they can access period products when they are needed and to reducing the stigma surrounding periods.

This scheme is for all learners who need to access period products in their place of learning in order to access education. It is not a universal offer of free period products to everyone under the age of 19. This would be prohibitively costly and would not represent good value for taxpayers' money.

When ordering products, you should consider the specific needs, characteristics and preferences of all learners.

When deciding how to distribute products, you should consider the potential impact that any perceived stigma around periods could have on learners accessing products.

## Who is eligible

Girls, non-binary and transgender learners who have periods may all need to access this scheme. Any language, communications and the way(s) in which products are made available to learners should reflect this.

All learners in schools and 16 to 19 organisations should be able to access period products if they need them. This may include, for example, where learners:

- have forgotten their products
- cannot afford products
- have come on their period unexpectedly

Learners under 19 in the current academic year may receive support from the scheme.

Learners aged 19 or over are only eligible for support if they:

- are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers')
- have an education, health and care plan

## Not covered by the scheme

The scheme does not cover:

- learners on higher education qualifications
- apprentices

## How to order products

We have awarded a contract to phs to stock and deliver period products. They will also offer customer service support relating to the ordering and delivery of products.

You will be able to order a range of period products and have these delivered free of charge. There will be a spend cap on the amount you have to spend. Find out how we calculate this and [what you will get](#).

You can order products from 20 January 2020.

You can order at any point in the year. To reduce waste, you should wait until any stocks of existing period products you may have are low before ordering.

When ordering products, you should think carefully about the types of products selected and consider the environmental impact of the frequency of deliveries.

### Recommended ordering frequencies

Annual budget	Maximum recommended deliveries per year
Up to £40	2
£41 to £720	3
£721 to £1,800	6
Over £1,800	11

We have recommended these ordering frequencies based on your annual budget for period products. Find out how we calculate this and [what you will get](#).

## Setting up an account

We have provided phs with one email address for each organisation. This is linked to your account on the phs portal. phs will send an activation email to this email address, which will allow you to:

- set up a password

- log in
- order products

If you have not received an activation email by 23 January 2020, check your 'admin@' and 'enquiries@' account(s) and spam folder. If you cannot find the activation email in any of these locations, call phs on 01827 255500.

To change the email address linked to your account or request extra log-in accounts, call phs on 01827 255500.

## **Accounts for organisations with multiple addresses**

Each organisation will be set up with one account which has:

- one spend cap
- one delivery address

An activation email will be sent to the email address linked to this 'parent site' account.

If you are the parent site in a multi-site organisation, you can choose whether to:

- order products and have them delivered to your registered delivery address
- order products and request that they are delivered to other registered sites - you must place these orders by phone and the delivery address will be amended for that order only
- divide the spend cap between your registered sites

You can also request log-in accounts for staff in other sites to order and have products delivered to their registered addresses. A senior member of staff from the parent site (such as the headteacher or finance director) must contact phs to arrange this. To verify each new site, you will need to provide a:

- URN and/or UKPRN for the organisation
- staff name and email address
- full postal address

As a parent site, you can place orders and arrange deliveries for other sites if required.

## **Ordering process**

You will be able to access the scheme using the [phs portal](#). We recommend you use the portal as it contains the information you need to place the right orders. If

you need an alternative method for ordering, you can call phs.

## Online

The [phs portal](#) contains:

- information about the products available to order (including safety information and ingredients)
- spend caps for the year

phs will send you a welcome email, together with a [detailed user guide](#) explaining how to access the portal and order products. If you have not received the email by 23 January 2020, call phs on 01827 255500.

Once you have placed an order, you will receive a confirmation email. The order confirmation screen on the phs portal will tell you where the confirmation email is being sent.

This email allows you to access details about the products you have ordered, including important safety information. You can track the progress of your delivery via a link in the phs portal.

To minimise incorrect orders, you should check your order confirmation email as soon as you get it. If there are any issues, call phs on 01827 255500.

## Phone

You will also be able to order period products by phone. Lines will be open from 8.30am until 5pm on normal business days. This includes school holidays but excludes weekends and bank/public holidays.

phs customer services: 01827 255500

You will need to provide:

- your name
- your organisation's telephone number
- your organisation's postcode
- your organisation's URN and/or UKPRN

You will then receive an email confirming the order.



**If you believe your account has been compromised or you have received notice of an order that you did not place, contact phs immediately.**

## Delivery

You should receive your products within 5 working days. The first working day is the day after you place your order, or 2 days if you place your order after 6pm.

As this is the first year of the scheme, delivery may take longer for some products than others. Your delivery arrangements will be provided in the order confirmation email. You can track the progress of your delivery via a link in the phs portal.

You should check all items are present and undamaged before signing for a delivery. Any member of staff can sign for the package. All items should then be stored in a clean, dry environment.

You cannot get products delivered to addresses other than registered education sites. If you would like products delivered to a different registered education site, call phs on 01827 255500. Read more about [accounts for organisations with multiple addresses](#).

## Returning products

If any part of the delivery is damaged, sign for the undamaged items and refuse delivery of the damaged items. To arrange delivery of replacement products, either:

- complete and return the [customer service query form](#)
- contact phs on 01827 255500

If the damage is not visible until after you have opened the package, call phs as soon as possible to arrange the return of the damaged goods and delivery of replacement goods.

If you believe all or part of the delivery is incorrect, check your order confirmation form before contacting phs customer services on 01827 255500. phs cannot offer free replacement of correctly delivered goods.

If part of the delivery is missing, either:

- complete and return the [customer service query form](#)
- contact phs on 01827 255500

## Cancelling an order

If you wish to cancel an order, call phs as soon as possible on 01827 255500. Cancellations will be accepted up to 3pm on the day before delivery is due.

# What you will get

Between January 2020 and December 2020, you will have a total amount to spend. We have based this amount on 35% of the number of learners in your organisation whose legal gender is female and who, based on age, are likely to have started their periods.

35% is an assumed take-up rate, reflecting the fact that not all learners will have a need for products all of the time. This mirrors the assumed take-up rate used in the scheme to provide learners in Scotland with access to free period products.

You can see the amount you can spend for the first year on the [phs portal](#). If you have both secondary school learners and learners aged 16 to 19, or you are a middle or all-through school, you will receive one spend cap for the year.

Spend caps have been set for each organisation within a multi-academy trust.

You will be able to track spend against your spend cap throughout the year.

Larger organisations will be able to order up to 25% of their total spend for the year, each time they order. To keep our carbon footprint low, each order should have a minimum value of £5.

You will be responsible for monitoring and staying within your spend and order caps. The phs portal will ask you to reduce your order if you try to exceed your maximum spend or order cap.

## Products available

You will be able to select from a wide range of period products, varying in type, size and brand. When deciding which products to order, you should consider the needs and preferences of all learners.

You may want to speak to learners about the types of products to keep in stock. You could do this by:

- engaging with student councils
- holding informal discussions with learners
- sending out anonymous surveys

Our research found that learners thought it was important their views were heard when organisations were making decisions about ordering period products. When choosing products, they would prioritise comfort, familiarity and value for money.

Parents or carers may object to the use of some period products. You should consider the views of learners and parents or carers from all religious and cultural backgrounds when ordering products. More information is available in the [equality](#)

[requirements](#) section.

You must provide learners with safety information for each product in an accessible format before they use the product. Further information is available in the [your responsibilities](#) section.

You do not need to order the same products throughout the year. You may wish to trial some products in smaller quantities to begin with. We may adjust the product range available to you following feedback and monitoring of purchasing patterns.

## Products available from January 2020

You will be able to order:

- [period pads](#)
- [environmentally friendly period pads](#)
- [reusable period pads](#)
- [applicator tampons](#)
- [non-applicator tampons](#)
- [menstrual cups](#)

Where products are sold in packs, the number of products per pack is outlined on the [phs portal](#).

## Things to consider when choosing products

### Period pads

The period pads:

- are available in regular ('normal') with wings and long with wings
- are made of polyolefins, absorbent wood cellulose with polyolefin, absorbent gel, rayon, or polyester
- can be stored for up to 2 years

The environmentally friendly period pads are:

- are available in regular ('normal') with wings and super with wings
- are made of organic cotton, biodegradable corn starch film, siliconised paper and hotmelt latex-free adhesive
- can be stored for up to 3 years

In 2018, Scotland began funding a scheme providing learners with access to

period products. Their scheme found that period pads made up 73% of all products purchased by schools.

Evidence from our research suggested that pads were the most popular product amongst our participants. Learners perceived them as being easier to use than other products.

### **Reusable period pads**

The reusable period pads:

- are available in mini with wings and midi with wings
- are made of brush nylon, polyester, polyester microfibre and PU laminate
- last for up to 10 years

You would need to provide these products for your learners to keep. If learners were to use these products for the duration of their period, they would need approximately 10 to 12 pads. You may wish to consider the long-term cost and the environmental benefit of providing these products.

The safety information for this product indicates that the pads must be washed after being worn for 4 to 6 hours. Washing instructions for this product advise that users rinse products immediately after use with cold water, before storing them in the 'out and about' bags and then washing them at 40 degrees with other laundry items.

If you choose to provide reusable pads, you must make sure learners have access to 'out and about' bags and appropriate facilities to rinse the products before placing them in the bag. 'Out and about' bags are available to order through this scheme.

Our research found that participants had concerns that these products were less sanitary than disposable pads. They also held the misconception that these were shared rather than individual products and would need to be washed and returned after each use.

You should provide learners with the relevant health and safety information and make them aware of the risks of improper use. This will help dispel any myths learners may have about using these products.

### **Tampons**

Both applicator and non-applicator tampons (including organic non-applicator tampons) are available to order.

The applicator tampons:

- are available in regular, super and super plus
- are made of rayon, polyester, cotton
- can be stored until the expiry date on the pack

The non-applicator tampons:

- are available in regular, super and super plus
- are made of viscose with a polyester/polyethylene cover and a cotton and/or polyester string
- can be stored until the expiry date listed on the pack

The organic non-applicator tampons:

- are available in regular, super and super plus
- are made of organic cotton with a polypropylene wrapping
- can be stored for up to 5 years

In the scheme to provide learners in Scotland with access to period products, tampons made up 57% of the products purchased by colleges.

Our research found that while some learners used tampons, others had concerns about how to insert the product properly and found them difficult to use.

Tampons are an internal product and you should think about learners' age and individual needs when considering which products to buy. Internal period products carry the additional risk of [toxic shock syndrome \(TSS\)](#).

If you choose this product, you must provide learners with the relevant health and safety information and make them aware of the risks of improper use. You should read about [your responsibilities](#) before distributing tampons to learners.

You should also be aware of religious and cultural beliefs around tampons when considering which products to buy and you should consider the views of parents and carers before distributing tampons to learners. Please see the [equality requirements](#) section for more information.

Flushing any period product down the toilet is harmful to the environment. It may also result in drain blockages and/or damage to the plumbing. You should make learners aware of the importance of disposing of tampons and other products correctly.

## **Menstrual cups**

The menstrual cups:

- are available in size A and size B
- are made of medical grade silicon
- last for up to 10 years

Menstrual cups can be reused and last for up to 10 years if cleaned and stored correctly. These are extremely environmentally friendly, and you may wish to consider the long-term cost and environmental benefit of providing these products to your learners.

The safety information for this product indicates that cups must be removed, emptied and washed at least every 4 to 8 hours during the learner's period. You should consider whether you have the facilities (such as sinks in individual toilet cubicles) to allow for this to happen discreetly, safely and hygienically.

Menstrual cups are internal period products. You should provide learners with relevant health and safety information in an accessible format. You must make them aware of the risks of improper use, including [TSS](#). You should read about [your responsibilities](#) before distributing menstrual cups to learners.

Our research with learners found that knowledge of this product and how to use it was low. You should consider finding out if your learners would like this product on offer before ordering.

You should also consider the religious and cultural views of parents/carers and learners when purchasing this product. Please see the [equality requirements](#) section for more information.

## Your responsibilities

All management information on the phs portal will be available to the Department for Education. You will not need to routinely report on the scheme or how you have used it.

There is a relatively low risk of injury from the use of period products. All period products available through the scheme meet the relevant industry standards and regulations. You can find detailed information about the products on the phs portal and via your order confirmation email.

You will also receive safety guidance specific to each product you order. Product and safety information may be updated and you should always refer to the information provided with the product.

You must provide learners with safety information for each product in an accessible format before they use the product. This is particularly important for internal products, such as tampons.

To minimise the risk of injury from use of period products, you should:

- ask learners and/or their parents/carers if they have experienced an allergic reaction to period products or their materials
- provide all learners with the relevant safety and usage information for each product they are using
- provide expiry dates with each individual product
- keep a record of the batch numbers of products supplied
- follow safety guidelines when stocking products

- make sure all products remain individually wrapped
- dispose of any expired products - products past their expiry date must not be provided to learners

Incorrect usage of period products can, in some cases, result in [TSS](#). TSS can be a result of using a product for longer than the manufacturer recommends. Symptoms of TSS develop and worsen quickly, so it is important for staff and learners to be aware of the most common symptoms. These include:

- a sudden high fever
- flu-like symptoms (dizziness, sore throat, exhaustion, etc.)
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- dizziness

You should seek medical advice as soon as possible if a learner is experiencing a combination of these symptoms.

## Equality requirements

You are required to comply with the relevant requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](#) and should pay attention to the public sector equality duty (section 149 of the Equality Act).

Under the provisions of the Equality Act, schools and colleges must not unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of their age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership, or sexual orientation (collectively known as the protected characteristics). This includes transgender boys and non-binary learners who may have periods. You must also make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantage and be mindful of the [SEND code of practice](#) when implementing this scheme.

You should consider the gender, culture, religion and age range of your learners. This will help you decide if it is appropriate or necessary to provide additional support for learners with protected characteristics.

Religious and cultural beliefs concerning periods and the use of period products can restrict access to certain types of period products. Learners from certain backgrounds may be less aware of internal products such as tampons and menstrual cups and how these should be used.

Understanding pupils' religious and cultural beliefs and building relationships between the school and local faith communities will help:

- make sure you're providing learners with products which meet their needs
- learners, parents and carers feel comfortable with the way(s) in which products

are provided to learners

See the [period products scheme: impact assessment](#) for more information.

## Making products available to learners

Once products have been delivered, you need to decide how to make these products available to learners. There are a variety of methods you could choose, some of which are set out in this section.

When deciding how to make products available, you should make sure the needs of all learners are met. This includes learners who do not identify as female but still have periods, for instance, transgender boys and non-binary learners. You must follow the Equality Act 2010, under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics.

You should also consider:

- whether all learners can access the products easily and when they need them
- if learners have all the safety information they need for each product available in a format they can access and understand
- the individual needs of learners, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those with English as an additional language
- if the way in which learners access products minimises the risk of embarrassment
- if you have clean and dry storage space for the products you're ordering

Our research with learners found that they prefer products to be available to them without them having to ask (particularly male) members of staff, to avoid feelings of embarrassment. However, learners also indicated that the stigma and embarrassment around periods should not still exist and were keen to break this cycle.

## Distribution examples

This section provides some example methods of distributing period products. This is not an exhaustive list. You should use a different, or combination of methods if appropriate.

### **Making products available in learner toilets or communal areas**

Our research found that having products available for learners to take in toilets can reduce stigma and feelings of embarrassment. Products would also be available at the time and place they were most needed.

Having products in communal areas such as libraries or student services means that all learners, including those who would not use female toilets, can access the products.

If you decide to place products within toilets or other communal areas, you will need to consider how you can:

- provide safety information and advice for learners before they use the products
- monitor the products to ensure learners are not taking more than they need
- check the products to make sure they have not been tampered with

### **Making products available on request from a member of staff**

Our engagement with stakeholders and teachers found that it was easier to provide learners with safety information and advice when supplying products on request from members of staff. They also reported that it was easier for organisations to keep track of the number and type of products going to learners.

Our learner research found that:

- asking a member of staff for products was embarrassing and, in some cases, learners would rather go without products than ask
- some learners would feel more comfortable asking a student representative rather than a member of staff
- having posters or stickers on the back of toilet doors directing learners to where they can access products would be useful - find ideas and suggestions on [how to reduce stigma](#)

If you decide to make products available on request from a member of staff, you will need to consider how you can:

- minimise any embarrassment for learners, particularly those with non-standard needs, for example, non-binary learners and those who experience very heavy periods
- make the scheme accessible to all learners, for example, those with English as an additional language

### **Making products available via restricted access**

Another option is making products available via restricted access. This could be through token vending machines or lockers placed in or near bathrooms.

If making products available in this way, you must make sure learners have access to safety information and advice before using the products.

Research with learners found that they felt this distribution method was a safe option. It meant that products could not be tampered with and were more likely to be taken based on need. Learners also felt a key benefit of this approach was that they did not need to ask a member of staff for help. However, learners thought it may be embarrassing to obtain products in front of other people.

If you decide to make products available via restricted access, you will need to consider how you can:

- use a token system for vending machines or lockers without causing embarrassment for learners
- provide safety information and advice for learners before they use the products
- provide access to learners who would not use female toilets

## **Case studies**

### **Example from a large sixth-form college**

The college has a population of over 5,000 learners. We have provided period products for many years from our own funds and from a scheme which provides colleges with free period products. We currently bulk buy online. We then distribute to learners using our student services base in one of the central buildings. We chose to house the box in a building that has a high percentage of female learners.

We have always provided a mix of products to give the learners a choice to suit their needs for both their comfort and confidence. We feel that it is important that a scheme should be based on individual needs, especially given the range of courses students follow, including those participating in water sports, for example.

We never advertised that we hold these products. Learners have simply come to student services to ask if we have anything that they can use. They then help themselves from the supply held in a discreet cupboard. This system has worked well for both staff and learners as it is discreet yet readily available to anyone in need. We have never needed to distribute or watch learners as they have been respectful of others and only taken what they needed at that time.

Since joining the scheme, we have only used advertising to identify a second location rather than raise awareness of the scheme.

### **Example from a primary school in Scotland**

Kirn primary school, in Scotland, has 285 pupils. At the end of the academic year, the school consulted with a group of girls in year 5 and 6 about the initial set-up of free period product provision. They discussed what products should be made available and where would be appropriate for easy access for all. The discussion generated talk about sanitary bin provision in school, which the girls felt was inadequate. As a result of this collaboration, a sanitary bin and box with supplies (pads, nappy bags, deodorant, wet wipes and a guidance leaflet) were placed in the disabled toilet between the year 5 and 6 classrooms. The young people felt that when in school, the disabled toilet was the most sensible place for them to access period products.

The school informed parents that education on the menstrual cycle and sanitary products would take place. All year 5 and 6 girls took part in a discussion which focused on the menstrual cycle but also allowed the girls to familiarise themselves with period products, how to use them and apply them to underwear.

While usage of the products is not high, the school keeps it topped up termly. Staff felt that having a supply available removed the embarrassment factor of having to ask.

### **Example from a secondary school in Scotland**

Tynecastle High School is a diverse inner-city high school in Scotland, with 609 pupils speaking 42 different languages between them. Pupils at the school have shared their experiences of the period products scheme.

There are individual products, a mixture of tampons and towels, available in toilets in every faculty as well as the disabled toilets, which are gender neutral. We have some pupils in the school who are transitioning so we spoke with them and our LGBT group to plan where would be the best place to put these.

Toilets, where free sanitary protection is available, have a poster on the door and there is a list of teachers, from whom products can be collected, on the poster too. We think that it's important that pupils can collect them in bulk if they want so they can get them from the named teachers or there is a classroom on the first floor where they can help themselves to boxes of tampons or sanitary towels. There are stocks available in PE too. It's good to be able to get them in more than one way.

We check supplies a few times a week and know they are really being used as we are doing lots of topping up. Both teachers and pupils see the differences this has made. The biggest one is that the young people are no longer having to go to the, often busy, welfare office to ask for products. It has removed the embarrassment. People can access sanitary protection where and when they need to, but also know where they can go for help if they want it.

## **Promoting the scheme**

Communicating about the scheme will help:

- reduce the stigma around periods
- encourage learners to access period products when needed
- make sure learners know where and how to access products and which products are available

When deciding how you will communicate about the scheme, you should think about:

- learners' ages
- learners' experiences of having periods
- relationships with parents/carers

There are several ways you can let learners know about the scheme. This could include:

- posters
- assemblies with learners
- letters to parents and guardians

You may wish to use the [template poster](#) provided by phs. There is also a range of other posters and materials available. Our research showed learners preferred posters which:

- had short, bold headlines
- used friendly, supportive and approachable language
- had positive can-do imagery
- avoided the use of stereotypes around girls
- used imagery which reflected the diversity of the school/college

Our research has shown that some words associated with periods may discourage learners from using the products and cause embarrassment. When talking about periods or promoting the scheme, you should avoid using words most negatively associated with periods like:

- sanitary (such as sanitary product) - learners may associate this word with uncleanliness
- hygiene - this could imply that periods are in some way unclean
- poverty - using language associated with poverty may discourage learners from using these products
- affordability - using this word or 'struggling' may imply that the products are only available for learners who cannot purchase the products themselves
- shame - this may discourage openness and reinforce the idea of stigma and embarrassment

## **How to reduce stigma**

The UK still experiences many challenges regarding stigma and taboo relating to periods, which works to create a sense of shame around what is a natural bodily process. You should consider what you can do to create healthy and respectful communication about periods amongst all staff and learners.

Our research with learners found that there was a significant amount of stigma relating to periods and asking for products. To help tackle this, you should

consider:

- including learners who do not have periods into your discussions - this could include inviting them to talks about periods, or placing posters in areas accessed by all learners
- extending conversations and tools to parents and carers
- making sure all staff (including male staff) have enough knowledge about periods and about the products available
- using open and positive language about periods

Educating all learners about periods is crucial to tackling the stigma which surrounds it. You may currently cover periods and the use of different period products in health education. From September 2020, teaching both boys and girls about periods and menstrual wellbeing will be compulsory in all state-funded schools, primary and secondary, as part of health education.

You can find a range of free resources online to help you discuss periods with your learners. You should assess each resource before using it to make sure it is appropriate for the age and maturity of learners and sensitive to their needs.

From spring 2020, all teachers will have access to a central programme of support for health education. This will include:

- an implementation guide
- access to high-quality resources
- case studies
- training materials

## Customer support

For customer service support or complaints, contact phs customer services on 01827 255500 or email [periodproducts@phs.co.uk](mailto:periodproducts@phs.co.uk).

phs will respond to questions about orders within 24 hours, and to other queries or complaints by the end of the following business day.

If your queries or complaint relates to the policy behind this scheme, including the funding available to each organisation, [contact the Department for Education](#). You will usually get a reply within 15 working days.

# Annex A: research

We used our research with teachers, learners and other stakeholders to develop this scheme. The results of our research have been included as part of our advice to schools and colleges on distributing products and promoting the scheme.

## Learner research

To inform this guidance, we carried out independent research with learners aged 9 to 19.

We commissioned Hopscotch Consulting Ltd to help us understand:

- learners' perceptions of the period products scheme
- different methods for making period products available
- how institutions could communicate the scheme with their learners

Hopscotch used an online forum for this research and recruited 62 learners from a range of:

- ages
- locations
- institution types
- free school meals and SEND statuses

See [period product scheme: the learner perspective](#) for more details.

## Stakeholder survey and discussion group

We held a discussion group and carried out a survey with charities and interest groups who shared their views and experiences regarding period product provision.

We asked stakeholders to share their perspectives on:

- what information institutions need when ordering period products
- the types of period products suitable for learners with different characteristics
- how organisations can make period products available
- how organisations can tackle period-related stigma

## Teacher engagement

We held discussions with staff in education organisations including:

- primary headteachers
- secondary headteachers
- teachers
- leaders from further education organisations

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