

Brigit's Basket

EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY,
INCLUSIVITY AND EQUALITY



Brigit's Basket is a joint initiative at National College of Ireland (NCI), where NCI Students' Union and college management have collaborated to make period products available for free to all staff and students. The project was launched February 1st (St Bridget's Day) 2022 and named in honour of the goddess (or saint, depending on your point of view!) whose feast day is February 1st.

NCI and NCISU - history



National College of Ireland's mission is to change lives through education. A not-for-profit, third-level institution, with 6,500 students across its key areas of human relations, business, computing, education and psychology, NCI has recently extended its foothold in the North-East Inner City and will open an additional campus next year.

The college was founded on an ethos of social justice, which remains a core value across all activities, but is most obvious in the practice of the Early Learning Initiative, which works to eliminate educational disadvantage in marginalised communities. Research is highly valued at NCI, and pedagogy is underpinned by the Centre for Education and Lifelong Learning, which supports academic staff in their professional development as well as delivering programmes to students.

National College of Ireland takes a 'whole person' approach to education, informed by values of inclusion, community, integrity, dynamic innovation, centring the learner, and excellence, striving for the latter quality both as an institution and in fostering it in our students. This approach has proactively extended to staff in recent years, with HR drawing on NCI's core values to centre wellness at the heart of NCI's working life.

There is strong collaboration between college management and NCI Students' Union. NCI and NCISU were one of the first five pilot higher education institutions to join the National Student Engagement Programme (NSTEP – a HEA-funded joint-initiative with QQI) and this year signed a Partnership Agreement that supports union autonomy at the same time as providing pathways for cooperation.



The Challenge

Why should we have free access to period products for women and people who menstruate?

In Ireland, as evidenced by the report, [Period Poverty](#) in Ireland

- Overall annual costs of period products per woman are estimated at €96.72. With the inclusion of pain relief, this can be estimated at a minimum of €121 per annum.
- National data regarding consistent poverty rates would suggest that approximately 53,000 - 85,000 women and girls may be at risk of period poverty, in Ireland.
- For people who menstruate, period poverty is not just a result of austerity or economic strain; it can stem from lack of education and generations of taboo and stigma. [Anne Rabbitte T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for Disability at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth](#)
- [Research by Plan International Ireland](#) found that 50% of young Irish women have experienced issues around affording sanitary products and the Plan International survey found 61% of young women felt too embarrassed to talk about their periods. 59% of the girls surveyed felt lessons on their period from school were not helpful, with 110 respondents stating they did not receive any lesson in school on their period at all.
- Plan International also note that in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, girls can miss up to five days from school a month or drop out entirely, due to insufficient access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and sanitary supplies.

5 Period Facts (via [UNICEF](#))

1. Approximately 26% of the global population menstruates.
2. Most will require sanitary products for 2-6 days each month.
3. Over a lifetime, this can add up to 7 years' menstruation.
4. Poor menstrual hygiene can pose physical health risks and lead to urogenital disease.
5. It is important that everyone understands periods, even if they will never have one themselves: menstruation is just a fact of life and should not be taboo.



Background and team

In response to the issue of period poverty, NCISU started supplying free period products from their limited resources in September 2021. This was initiated by Jennifer Treadwell, then Vice President, who used little baskets to hold the products, leaving them on the sink/vanity areas in bathrooms around the college.

In consultation with the NCISU Vice President, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Manager raised, with the college's Senior Management Team, the possibility of funding this as an NCI initiative; the proposal met immediate acceptance just before Christmas 2021.

Straight away in the New Year, the NCI Gender Equality Working Group, which is made up of staff and a number of NCISU executives, chaired by the EDI Manager, began planning to make the proposal a reality. NCI's facilities team efficiently carried out research into products and a supplier.

NCISU 2021/22:

Conor O'Reilly, President; Jennifer Treadwell, Vice President; Naomi Halpin - Club and Societies Officer; Siobhra Weir-Sharkey, Communications Officer; Lorcan Mills, Entertainments Officer

NCI Senior Management Team:

Gina Quin, President of NCI; Professor Jimmy Hill, Vice President (EDI); Karen Jones, Registrar; Donnchadh Ó Madagáin, Finance Director; Mary Connelly, HR Director; Robert Ward, Marketing Director.

Gender Equality Working Group:

Deirdre McCarthy (Chair), EDI Manager; Jennifer Treadwell, NCISU President; Cristian Bailint, NCISU VP; Caroline Dolan, HR Consultant; Stephen Jennings, Senior IT Technical Specialist; Teresa Murray, Head of Communications; Darren Crowe, Accounts Assistant; Isabel O'Connor, Programme Coordinator School of Business; David Ochieng, Accounts Assistant; Emily Ferns, Head of Marketing; Lána Cummings, Assistant Director Early Learning Initiative.



Jennifer Treadwell, President of NCISU (former VP) and Deirdre McCarthy, EDI Manager

NCI Facilities Team:

Bertie Kelly, Commercial Manager; Owen Delaney, Facilities Manager; Joyce Lloyd, Conference Administrator; Harry Gough, Premises Supervisor; Dave Redmond, Maintenance Technician, Dave O'Brien, Maintenance Technician; Noel Martin, Facilities Officer; Lorraine Dudley, Facilities Officer; James Keogh, Security Officer.

Ethically-sourced from an Irish supplier

After exhaustive research, prioritising sustainability, value, comfort and choice, our products were sourced from an Irish company, [Riley](#), who prioritise ethical production of sustainably eco-friendly, pads and tampons. Riley allows NCI to carry through an ethical approach to the provision of period products.



Timing and Title

The working group identified Brigit (including this specific spelling of the name) as a figure that is uniquely Irish but also has resonance beyond any one religion or culture, through her dual aspect as a Christian saint and a Pagan goddess. Brigit was a rebel who defied gender expectations and was known for her open generosity to anyone in need: a perfect fit.

When NCISU first started to distribute products, baskets were an achievable interim solution (never let perfection get in the way of doing good!), however they have drawbacks in terms of capacity, security (easy to accidentally knock over) and hygiene (not easy to clean!). When moving to a more suitable distribution method, NCI did not want to forget the roots of this initiative and so a call-back to the original baskets was deemed essential. In its research, the working group came across a story - Brigit was presented with a basket of apples and, rather than eating them herself, gave them away to those in greater need - which further supported the alliterative title of the initiative: Brigit's Basket.

Having progressed with remarkable speed and seeing no reason to create a delay, St Bridget's Day was then identified as an ideal launch date, especially since, from 2023 it will be a Bank Holiday. Therefore, NCI will historically have an important institutional initiative associated with a special day.

Putting it in Place

Special dispensers were purchased to permanently affix to the walls of bathrooms in the college used by both staff and students. We decided that dispensers should be in all women's and gender-neutral bathrooms as well as one men's bathroom, to be as inclusive as possible to all girls, women, trans men, non-binary and gender fluid people, who might find themselves in need.

NCI are currently spending around €700 a month during term time, providing these supplies to all our staff and students who require them.

Dispensers are designed to make it easy to see what they contain and easy to grab the contents. They have been placed at a height to make them accessible to all. The stock is maintained through facilities, with maintenance and cleaning staff ensuring they are always in supply.

A brief and copy were developed and sent to our marketing team, who quickly turned around artwork for the poster and dispensers, as well as supporting the initiative with a social media campaign, all of which was put before the committee for approval on Monday 24 January 2022. The initial artwork was redrafted to ensure that it was more dyslexia friendly (the colours and font were slightly changed to ensure better contrast). With the good will behind this project extending to all aspects of its delivery, branding collateral was ready for the launch on Tuesday 01 February 2022. Graphic Designer, Brian Kehoe, joined the facilities team to help in the installation and wrap of the dispensers.

National College of Ireland @NCIRL · Feb 1

We are delighted to join together with @NCISU to launch Brigit's Basket today to make period products available for free to staff and students - Launched on #StBrigidsDay in honour of the historical figure who defied the gender expectations of her day bit.ly/3Hf1FLw



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Response

"I am proud that NCISU and NCI are working together on this initiative and look forward to future collaborations across the NCI community, making things better for staff and students. None of us designed the human body this way; it just is how it is. Periods are not a choice, so I have always believed that people who get periods should receive the essential products they need for free. No one should have to worry about being unable to afford products that are a basic hygiene requirement, as well as ultimately protecting your dignity and wellbeing."

Jennifer Treadwell, President of NCISU

What impressed me most in facilitating this project is the instant good will with which it was met, followed through by speedy action. Truly a college-wide effort, many hands made this work in less than two months from proposal to launch."

Deirdre McCarthy, EDI Manager

"We had some concerns that products would be misused, for example to block toilets, particularly those in the men's toilets, but this has not happened, and they have very much become part of the fixtures and fittings. I think, only noticed by those who need them."

Owen Delaney, Facilities Manager

"I am perimenopausal, which means I literally have no idea if I will get a period or not, or when it might happen. It really is a comfort to know that if I am caught unprepared that there will always be products available for me in the bathroom. This is not about the cost, but the comfort of knowing products are – literally - to hand if I need them. Anyone who is perimenopausal will tell you that you can, at times, be caught very unawares!"

Staff member

Student quotes, taken from NCISU's follow-up survey on the initiative:

"When an unexpected start happens, you have the comfort of knowing the products are waiting for when they're needed."

"Saved me from having to go home early."

"The products are good quality and the design welcoming because it's open at the front so it's easy to grab and it doesn't cause a scene trying to get the products."

"Honestly when it comes to choosing between food and products after paying rent, it's such a good thing to have these!"

"First place I've ever seen something like this, helps save the embarrassment of trying to find a pad or tampon when you've forgotten one and eases the overall panic of starting unexpectedly."

"Irregular cycle and, with changing bags and stuff, I sometimes forget to make sure I have products in my bag. It's good knowing that there'll be some there."



Pictured: Jennifer Treadwell, Vice President NCISU (2021/22, President of the SU 2022/23) and Professor Jimmy Hill, Vice President for Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, National College of Ireland.



NCI President Gina Quin, NCISU President Conor O'Reilly, Joyce Lloyd (Facilities), Brian Kehoe (Graphic Design), Deirdre McCarthy (EDI Manager), Dave O'Brien (Facilities) Deirdre Giblin (Director of Development & External Engagement) at the launch of Brigit's Basket