

# School Uniform Exchange

How to guide

**BDR** Barnsley  
Doncaster  
Rotherham  
Waste Partnership

**3SE**  
renewi SSE



# Introduction

We consider education in the UK to be free but this is far from the truth. A 2014 inquiry by youth commissioners and The Children's Commission on Poverty found that the average cost of school uniform alone was a staggering £251 per child in primary school and £316 per child in secondary school. The inquiry found that more than two thirds of parents had struggled with the cost of school, with over a half of all parents saying they had cut back on essentials such as food, clothes or heating to meet the costs of school. Over a quarter of pupils said they had been bullied as a result of their family struggling with the cost of school.

As the number of children living in poverty in the UK increases, so does the average annual cost of school uniform and many of these require uniform from specialist suppliers which can result in significantly higher costs than uniform made up of generic pieces readily available from the High Street and supermarkets.

Every year in the UK we throw away 300,000 tonnes of clothing much of which is still in fantastic condition. Many clothes, especially in the case of children and young people, are discarded because they no longer fit. A uniform re-use project aims to give these pieces a new home. By running these locally within a school, community group or community facility, it makes possible pairing items with a specific school logo or tie pattern etc. with young people who need them.

# What is a School Uniform exchange?

A school uniform exchange is a really simple way of pairing clothes with new owners, stopping good quality clothing going in the bin and helping save money.

There are two main ways to run a uniform exchange - a **token system** or a **request service**. These each differ in the way they work, the time, space and equipment required and the expectations families can have of each. A brief description of each can be seen on pages 3 and 4 along with some of the main considerations.



Check with your school to see if any swapping groups have been set up on Facebook already

# Token system

A simple token system typically operates on the principle that you leave with items equivalent to what you bring. For example, if you bring a pair of trousers, a coat and a polo shirt you would receive three tokens. You would then select three items and redeem these for the tokens.

This can be run as a simple three items, three tokens system or tokens can be for specific items e.g. a token for trousers, shorts, skirts or dresses, a token for shirts or polo shirts, a token for jumpers or cardigans and a token for coats, for example. Whichever system you select, ensure you make this clear to everyone participating.

Token systems typically require a larger amount of space for a shorter amount of time, this allows the items brought in to be displayed for others to be able to browse what is available, though these are typically run over a set timeframe.

A token system either requires a large number of volunteers or for items to be brought in in advance of the event to allow you to sort and display items.

With a token system it is really important to stress to all involved that contributing items does not guarantee that a suitable swap will be available and that the items contributed cannot be returned. As such it may not always be possible to redeem all tokens.



# Request service

A request service relies on donations of uniform from individuals and lost property boxes that are sorted, stored and then used to provide the uniform requested for the young people who need it.

A request service typically requires less space but for a much longer time period or on a permanent basis. It is also beneficial to have storage boxes that will keep clothes clean, dry and organised between their donation and distribution.

With a request service it is really important to stress how requests can be made and that it is not always possible to meet all of the requirements of an individual.

How people access your project is up to you, but needs to be made clear when you promote your project. Some projects accept referrals from professionals, children's centres and schools, while others allow families to self-refer. It is worth considering the support systems available in your area and how easy these are to access as well as the number of young people who may come from families who don't meet traditional support thresholds but for whom the cost of uniform presents a tremendous financial burden.

It is recommended that you use some form of request form for tracking purposes and to make it easier to prepare uniform packs or bundles based on an individual's requirements. A sample form can be seen at the end of this guide.



# Important things to consider

No matter which type of school uniform exchange you run you should also consider the following:

## 1. Where to source uniform

There are three main ways that uniform can be sourced. Donations of good-quality, clean pieces of uniform from parents, items of uniform in the lost property box at the start of each term and parents bringing pieces of uniform to exchange for different sizes.

It is really important to be clear about what you can accept, distribute or exchange and that pieces brought in must be clean and in good condition.

It is also worth considering what you will do with clothes that already contain a name label. This is a clear way for others to see that a young person is wearing pre-loved clothes and can have some stigma attached. Consider removing existing name labels from items when they are donated or brought in.

## 2. The items that you will accept / distribute / exchange

It is important, when requesting donations, to be clear about the items that you will accept and the condition you will accept them in and how the system will work.

If you have a willing volunteer who can hem items like trousers and skirts, re-attach buttons and make small repairs you may be able to accept slightly more.

Think about the items that young people need not just in school but to get to and from school as well. A suggested list of requested items can be seen at the end of this guide.

## 3. Timeframe

This could be a one-off exchange, run at the start of every term, set up for a fixed period of time or a permanent project. You may choose to start with a one-off event and if there is the need or interest consider the frequency and timescale after you have given it a try.

It is also worth considering that some items are likely to be donated at a different time of year to when they are required. For example, you are more likely to receive donations of summer dresses at the end of the summer term but have very few requests for these until the following spring. It may therefore be necessary to store these items.



## 4. What to do with leftover items?

If this is a permanent project this will not be an issue but for a one-off event it is worth considering what you will do with leftover items before you hold your event.

If you have the space and intend to run another event in the future these should be stored and added to the next event. If not, these should be given to other projects locally or a near-by charity shop if in good condition or sent for recycling if not.

# What will you need?

The items you will need will vary depending on the type of project you decide to run, a brief list of some of the things you may need for each of the examples above can be seen below.

## Token system

If you operate a token system where people simply exchange their items for the same number of items in different sizes you will potentially need more equipment:

- Clothes rails – real or improvised
- Clothes hangers
- Tables to display items
- Clothing size / age / gender markers
- Tokens – generic or specific
- A notebook or spreadsheet – it is really handy to record how many items are swapped either in total or by type, this is a great help when reporting on the success of your project
- A set of scales – recording the weight of clothes you have stopped going in the bin is a great way to measure your success
- Promotional materials
  - Social media cards
  - Posters
  - Advert in school newsletter
  - School email
- Plenty of volunteers

## Request service

- Storage boxes – organisation is your friend
- Labels to clearly mark the contents of a box
- A notebook or spreadsheet – it is really handy to record how many items are swapped either in total or by type, this is a great help when reporting on the success of your project
- A set of scales – recording the weight of clothes you have stopped going in the bin is a great way to measure your success
- Promotional materials
  - Social media cards
  - Posters
  - Advert in school newsletter
  - School email
  - Letter for local service providers such as children's centres
- A request form



## Handy extras

It may be useful to also have some top tip cards or posters about stain removal, washing and care instructions and simple repairs to help clothes last as long as possible.

Write your own or check out [loveyourclothes.org.uk](http://loveyourclothes.org.uk) for ideas.

## Sample request form

Requestor's details:

Name:

Role:

Organisation:

Uniform delivery point:

Date:

Date form received (office use only):

Clothing request:

Young person's surname / Ref no.:

Age:

Sex:

Build / height:

School name:

Delivery contact name:

Address:

Email:

Phone number:

Item - Uniform	Tick if required	Colour		Size	Available (office use only)		Item – PE kit / other	Tick if required	Colour		Size	Available (office use only)	
		1 <sup>st</sup> choice	2 <sup>nd</sup> choice		Yes	No			1 <sup>st</sup> choice	2 <sup>nd</sup> choice		Yes	No
Polo shirt							T-shirt						
Shirt / blouse							Hoodie						
Trousers							Rugby tops						
School shorts							Sports shorts						
Skirt							Joggers						
Pinafore dress							Sport leggings						
Summer dress							Football socks						
Jumper							Gym skirt						
Cardigan							PE bag						
Blazer							Trainers						
School tie							Football boots						
School bag							Swimwear						
Coat							Underwear						
Jacket							Vests						
Shoes							Socks						
Pumps							Tights						
Hat, gloves, scarf													

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