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Digital society

Pre-released statement: Sustainable development

For use in May 2026

Instructions to students

- Pre-released statement required for higher level paper 3.

Managing pollution and waste

This pre-released statement outlines the real-world nature of a challenge and interventions related to the DP digital society higher level extension. The pre-released statement should be used by students to plan and conduct extended inquiries in advance of paper 3.

- Challenge topic(s): Sustainable development
- 5 • Area(s) for inquiry: Managing pollution and waste

In addition to the information contained in this statement, students should also consider relevant connections to additional digital society concepts, content, and contexts.

This pre-released statement will extend the concepts and content addressed at standard level. Teachers are recommended to address a number of scenarios within this context.

10 About the challenge

Large businesses, government agencies, and other organizations replace their digital devices (such as desktop computers, laptop computers, and mobile phones [cell phones]) after three to five years of use. This potentially leads to significant quantities of e-waste, with only about 25 % of these devices being reused or recycled.

- 15 The tendency now is for IT departments to make decisions regarding the end-of-life management of their digital devices that offer an alternative to contributing to e-waste.

- 20 These decisions are also influenced by considerations such as international waste trade laws (such as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal), health and safety regulations, environmental protection regulations, and public opinion.

There are two choices available for the disposal of digital devices (reuse or recycle), with each one having advantages and disadvantages.

- 25 The United Nations Global E-Waste Monitor 2024 report (<https://ewastemonitor.info/the-global-e-waste-monitor-2024/>), particularly chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5 and pages 64–105, provides an overview of the extent of the problem and the status of the reuse and recycle interventions in the main regions of the world.

About the interventions

Intervention 1: Reuse

30 Reuse involves taking an existing digital device or its components and using them again, either for the same purpose or a new one.

Businesses and organizations can use a company that collects digital devices at their end of life, refurbishes them, and donates or sells them for reuse.

Intervention 2: Recycle

35 Recycling involves breaking down a digital device into its raw materials, such as metals, plastics and glass, which are then processed and used to create new products.

Businesses and organizations can use a company that collects digital devices at their end of life and recycles them.

About the stakeholders

40 These interventions should be considered from the perspectives of different stakeholders. The stakeholders in this global challenge include:

- Businesses and organizations that use digital devices
- Companies that refurbish digital devices
- Digital device manufacturers
- Recycling companies
- 45 • Governments
- Recipients: individuals, families, businesses, charities and organizations
- Less economically developed countries (LEDCs)

Additional terminology

Corporate social responsibility

Data sanitization

End-of-life management for digital devices

International controls on e-waste

Recycling Industry Operating Standard™ (RIOS™) certification

Refurbishment

Responsible Recycling (R2) certification

Sensitive information / Personally identifiable information

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