

# **A Level Business**

**Summer Independent Learning: Y11-Y12**

**Introduction to ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability and disruptive technologies**

# Introduction

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## Core Questions

1. What is ethics?
  2. What is corporate social responsibility?
  3. What is sustainability?
  4. What is disruptive technology?
  5. Which is more important for business success; ethics, sustainability or technological innovation?
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## Skills You Will Develop

During this introductory project, you will develop independent research skills as you research about ethical and sustainable business practices. You will also develop analytical skills as you assess real world case studies related to ethical and sustainable business practices. You will also be required to make a judgement regarding whether ethical behaviour, sustainability or technological disruption is more important for business success.

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## What You Will Learn

You will learn about what ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability means and how businesses face pressures to become more sustainable.

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# Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethics

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## Key Vocabulary / Definitions

| Key Term                                     | Definition                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Corporate social responsibility (CSR)</b> | The duties of a business towards employees, customers, society and the environment. |
| <b>Ethics</b>                                | Moral principles that can shape the way a business behaves.                         |

## Key Ideas and Themes

### Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethics

Corporate social responsibilities (CSR) are the duties of a business towards employees, customers, society and the environment. People argue that businesses should not merely operate within the law, but should consider the effects of their activities on society as a whole.

Consumers in the UK and elsewhere are better informed about the activities of businesses with respect to the environment and their stakeholders (anyone with an interest in the business). Businesses have to care about being socially responsible because their customers do.

A number of studies have shown that a business's CSR policies increasingly influence consumers spending decisions. Been judged to be socially responsible can help organisations to attract the best employees and build a strong employer brand. Acting in a social manner can also help businesses to access new markets and this can be very attractive at a time when globalisation is increasing competitive pressures.

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## Activity 1 - Nike

Find out more about Nike and the criticism they faced regarding their ethical business practices. Complete the questions in the table below to summarise your learning.

| Question                           | Answer |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| What ethical issues did Nike face? |        |

|                                                                                                                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Which stakeholders were impacted by the issues?<br>Identify at least 3 stakeholders and explain how they were impacted.           |  |
| How did Nike respond to the ethical issues faced?                                                                                 |  |
| Do you think that Nike's actions represent a genuine concern for CSR or what it more to protect their brand? Justify your answer. |  |

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## Sustainability

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### Key Vocabulary / Definitions

| Key Term              | Definition                                                                      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sustainability</b> | The use of resources and suppliers which does not lead to environmental damage. |

### Key Ideas and Themes

Sustainability in business means operating in a way that meets current needs without harming the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

It focuses on three key areas which can be summarised in Elkington's Triple Bottom Line:

- **People** – treating workers, customers, and communities fairly
- **Planet** – reducing environmental impact (e.g., cutting waste, pollution, and carbon emissions)
- **Profit** – ensuring the business remains financially successful long-term

A sustainable business thinks about long-term responsibility, not just short-term profit.

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## Activity 2 - Patagonia

Patagonia promotes sustainability through recycled materials, repair programmes, environmental activism and encouraging customers to buy less.

Conduct your own research on Patagonia and answer the following questions in the table below.

| Question                                                                                                                           | Answer |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Explain Patagonia's sustainability strategies.                                                                                     |        |
| How could Patagonia's sustainability strategies increase costs?                                                                    |        |
| Why do you think that customers support Patagonia, despite the higher prices?                                                      |        |
| Does sustainability give a business a competitive advantage? Justify your answer by using either Patagonia and Nike as an example. |        |

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## Disruptive Technologies

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### Key Vocabulary / Definitions

| Key Term              | Definition                                                                                  |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Disruptive technology | A technology that displaces an established technology or creates a completely new industry. |

## Key Ideas and Themes

Disruptive technology is a new innovation that changes the way an industry operates by replacing older methods, products, or services.

Examples include AI, smartphones, streaming services, electric cars, and online shopping.

These technologies often start small but quickly grow and transform whole markets, forcing businesses to adapt or risk falling behind.

### Why Is Disruptive Technology Important?

Disruptive technologies create both opportunities and threats for businesses.

#### Opportunities

- **New products and services**  
AI can help businesses develop smarter apps, personalised recommendations, or automated customer support.
- **Lower costs and higher efficiency**  
Automation can reduce repetitive tasks, speed up processes, and save money.
- **Competitive advantage**  
Early adopters can attract more customers and differentiate themselves from rivals.
- **Better customer experiences**  
For example, AI chatbots provide instant responses, improving customer satisfaction.

#### Threats

- **Increased competition**  
New companies using advanced technology can overtake established businesses (e.g., Netflix vs. Blockbuster).
- **Job losses or workforce changes**  
Automation can replace some roles, requiring retraining or restructuring.
- **High investment costs**  
Businesses may need to spend money on new systems, software, or staff training.
- **Risk of falling behind**  
Companies that ignore new technologies may lose customers or become outdated.

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## Activity 3 – Disruptive Technologies

Choose any two of the following business examples to research how disruptive technology has changed the competitive environment within the industry:

- Netflix
- Uber
- Tesla
- Amazon
- AI in retail

| Question                                         | Case Study 1: | Case Study 2: |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| How has technology disrupted the industry?       |               |               |
| What ethical or social challenges did it create? |               |               |
| What opportunities did it create for businesses? |               |               |



## Summary

Which do you believe is more important for business success: ethical behaviour, sustainability or technological innovation? Support your answer using examples from the case studies that you have studied.

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