The Ethical Buyer · Teacher sheet

GCSE D&T · AQA 3.2.3 ecological and social footprint, 3.2.4 sources and origins · application lesson · 50 minutes · works solo

The idea

Each student is a buyer for a retailer in their chosen material area. Each brief offers two suppliers. Students choose one, give two footprint reasons, and suggest one improvement using the 6Rs.

How the buying decisions work

There are three buying decisions (Bronze, Silver, Gold) for each of the six AQA areas, plus multi-material Platinum buying decisions. Students **start with the three buying decisions in their own chosen area**, then do any others.

Print (per student)

- Footprint Guide (pages 2–3). Can be shared or laminated.
- Supplier Board (pages 4–5), double-sided.
- Buying Report (pages 6–7), double-sided.

Running it

1. **5 min:** PowerPoint to the worked example (a school hoodie; not on the Supplier Board).
2. **30 min:** students work alone: their own area's three buying decisions first, then any others, Platinum last.
3. **10 min:** students mark their OWN report in green pen using the answer slides.
4. **5 min:** totals and ranks. **The Audit:** anyone claiming Senior Buyer or Head of Sustainability brings their report to you.

Fees

Bronze £100 · Silver £200 · Gold £300 · Platinum £500. **Full fee** = right supplier + two footprint reasons with **so…** + one 6R improvement · **Half fee** = right supplier with one reason, or an accepted alternative · **£0** = wrong supplier · **+£50** = names a drawback of the chosen supplier too.

Ranks

£0–399 Trainee Buyer · £400–899 Ethical Buyer · £900–1,599 Senior Buyer · £1,600+ **Head of Sustainability**

Footprint Guide

Use this to judge every supplier. A good buyer looks at the whole life of a product: material, making, transport, use and disposal.

The 6Rs

R	Meaning	Example
Reduce	Use less material and energy	Thinner walls, less packaging
Reuse	Use again, for the same or a new purpose	Refillable bottles, jars as storage
Recycle	Break down to make new material	Aluminium cans, PET → fleece
Repair	Fix instead of replacing	Screws not glue, spare parts
Rethink	Question the design and how we live	Rent not buy; fewer collections
Refuse	Say no if it is unsustainable	Single-use straws and bags

Life cycle: what to check

1 Material (renewable? recycled? certified?) → **2 Making** (energy, chemicals, working conditions) → **3 Transport** (distance and type) → **4 Use** (how long does it last? energy needed?) → **5 Disposal** (recycle, repair, landfill?)

Transport footprint

Transport	CO_2 per tonne per km (approx.)
Ship	Very low (about 10 g)
Rail	Low (about 25 g)
Lorry	Medium (about 100 g)
Air	Very high (about 600 g)

Labels that help

FSC / PEFC: timber and paper from managed forests. **Fairtrade**: fair price and decent conditions for producers. **Recycling symbols**: help people sort waste. **Conflict-free**: minerals not funding war.

Footprint Guide: where materials come from

Material	Where it comes from	Ecological / social issues
Paper and board	Trees (softwood pulp) or recycled fibre	Deforestation if unmanaged; bleaching chemicals; FSC = replanted
Timber	Managed forests or rainforest	Illegal logging, habitat loss; look for FSC or PEFC
Metal	Ores mined from the ground (bauxite, iron ore)	Mining scars landscapes; lots of energy to extract; recycling saves energy
Polymers	Crude oil (or plants for bioplastics)	Finite oil; drilling and spills; plastic in oceans
Textiles	Cotton plants, animals (wool) or oil (polyester)	Pesticides, huge water use, low wages; Fairtrade helps
Electronics	Mined metals: copper, gold, tin, tantalum	Conflict minerals, child labour, toxic e-waste

Social footprint

Ask: are workers paid fairly? Are hours and conditions safe? Is there child labour? Does the factory damage the local community? Fair Trade and co-operatives help.

Carbon footprint

The total CO_2 released over the product's life. Lowered by recycled or renewable materials, less energy in making, local or sea transport, and products that last longer.

Supplier Board

Do the three buying decisions in YOUR material area first. Write the client's name on your report.

Papers and boards

GiftWrap Co — BRONZE £100	Daily Paper — SILVER £200	SnackPack — GOLD £300
“Gift boxes. A: virgin board, bleached white, plastic-laminated. B: 100% recycled board, unbleached, no laminate.”	“Newspaper stock. A: FSC paper from a mill 80 km away. B: unlabelled paper shipped by air from 9,000 km away.”	“Crisp tube. A: card tube with metal base and foil lining (cannot be separated). B: all-card tube with a card base and water-based coating.”

Timber

GardenSeat — BRONZE £100	FlatPack Ltd — SILVER £200	ToyBox — GOLD £300
“Garden bench. A: FSC-certified oak from a managed UK forest. B: tropical hardwood with no certificate.”	“Shelf unit. A: solid pine from Sweden by ship. B: MDF made from sawmill waste, bonded with formaldehyde-free resin, made locally.”	“Wooden toy. A: beech, non-toxic water-based paint, made by a co-operative. B: cheaper pine, solvent paint, factory with unpaid overtime.”

Metal

CanDo Drinks — BRONZE £100	BikeWorks — SILVER £200	KitchenPro — GOLD £300
“Drinks cans. A: aluminium with 70% recycled content. B: new aluminium from freshly mined bauxite.”	“Bike frame. A: steel, painted, local welder. B: carbon fibre composite flown in, cannot be recycled.”	“Saucepan. A: stainless steel, lifetime guarantee, replaceable handle. B: cheap non-stick, coating wears off in a year.”

Supplier Board (continued)

Polymers

FreshBottle — BRONZE £100	PhoneShell — SILVER £200	PicnicWare — GOLD £300
“Water bottle. A: single-use PET bottle. B: reusable PP bottle, used 500 times.”	“Phone case. A: virgin ABS from oil. B: recycled ABS with a recycling symbol moulded in.”	“Picnic cutlery. A: PLA bioplastic (needs industrial composting). B: PS single-use. C: reusable PP set.”

Textiles

TeeShop — BRONZE £100	FleeceCo — SILVER £200	FastFashion — GOLD £300
“T-shirt. A: Fairtrade organic cotton. B: conventional cotton, heavy pesticide use, low wages.”	“Fleece jacket. A: polyester from 25 recycled PET bottles. B: virgin polyester.”	“A store sells 52 "micro-collections" a year, each worn a few times. Advise on a more ethical approach.”

Electronic and mechanical systems

TorchCo — BRONZE £100	SoundBox — SILVER £200	GadgetHub — GOLD £300
“Torch. A: replaceable alkaline batteries. B: built-in rechargeable battery with USB charging.”	“Speaker. A: glued shut, battery cannot be replaced. B: screws together, standard battery can be swapped.”	“Phone components. A: tin and tantalum from conflict zones, child labour risk. B: audited "conflict-free" supply chain, costs 10% more.”

Multi-material Platinum

Cafe Chain — PLATINUM £500	Office Chairs — PLATINUM £500
“Choose cups for 1 million coffees a year. A: plastic-lined paper cups. B: reusable cups with a deposit scheme. Do a life-cycle comparison.”	“400 office chairs. A: cheap, glued, from overseas. B: screwed, parts replaceable, take-back at end of life, local.”

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Buying Report

Name: _____ My area: _____ Mark in GREEN pen

Example: *Supplier B · so… recycled polyester saves oil · so… shipped not flown, less CO_2 · 6R: Repair: offer spare zips.*

Client	Supplier	Reason 1 (so…)	Reason 2 (so…)	6R improvement	Fee £

Buying Report (page 2)

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Client	Supplier	Reason 1 (so…)	Reason 2 (so…)	6R improvement	Fee £

TOTAL EARNED: £_____ Rank: Trainee Buyer · Ethical Buyer · Senior Buyer · Head of Sustainability (circle)