Should every load of waste be tracked online?

A debate pack for key stage 4 and post-16: teacher's notes

Learning objectives

By the end, pupils can:

- explain what Digital Waste Tracking is, who has to use it and when
- build an argument for or against the motion, using evidence and naming where it comes from
- answer the other side's strongest point fairly
- say what a piece of evidence can and can't prove, such as what fly-tipping figures tell us about who dumps waste

For pupils.
Share these at the start. They're on the lesson sheet (page 5). We are learning to:

- explain what Digital Waste Tracking is and who has to use it
- build an argument from evidence, and say where the evidence comes from
- answer the other side's strongest point

You've done it if you can:

- give two reasons for your side, each backed by a named source
- answer one point from the other side fairly
- say what one piece of evidence can and can't prove

Curriculum links

English, key stage 4.
Spoken English: "selecting and organising information and ideas effectively and persuasively for formal spoken presentations and debates", and "using Standard English when the context and audience require it". Writing for purposes that include to "argue". Reading: "distinguishing between statements that are supported by evidence and those that are not", which the answers pick up. A debate speech can also be practice for the GCSE spoken language endorsement, marked with your exam board's own criteria.

Citizenship, key stage 4.
"The legal system in the UK, different sources of law and how the law helps society deal with complex problems". The key stage 4 programme also asks pupils to "weigh up evidence, make persuasive arguments and substantiate their conclusions".

Post-16.
There's no national curriculum, but the pack suits a debating society, an enrichment session or general studies.

Timings

Lesson 1, about 50 minutes.
Read the opening aloud, share the objectives and take the first vote (5 minutes). Read the briefing in pairs and check it with the four questions under How to run it (15 minutes). Teams sort the argument cards and pick their best evidence (20 minutes). Plan speeches with the writing frame (10 minutes).

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Lesson 2, about 50 minutes.
Set up the room (5 minutes). The debate, following the running order (30 minutes). Closing questions and the exit task on the lesson sheet (10 minutes). Feedback with the marking guide, and set the written argument as homework (5 minutes).

Short of time?
Use lesson 1 only, then do the closing questions and finish with the written argument instead of the debate.

What to print

The PDF has 13 pages: these notes first, then the pupils' materials, then the marking guide and the answers.

- Teacher's notes, pages 1 to 4: one for you.
- The lesson sheet (objectives, success criteria, closing questions and exit task), page 5: one per pupil.
- The briefing, pages 6 and 7: one per pupil, double-sided.
- The argument cards, pages 8 and 9: one set per team, cut out. Each row is a topic, so you can also keep the sheet whole for a side-by-side comparison.
- The debate running order, page 10: one for the chair.
- The writing frame, page 11: one per pupil.
- The marking guide, page 12: one for you, or one per pupil for peer marking.
- The answers, page 13: one for you.

How to run it

The opening, to read aloud.
From October 2027, businesses that carry waste anywhere in the UK will have to record every load they move on one national online system, called Digital Waste Tracking. The idea is to make it harder for criminals to dump waste or hide where it goes. But it takes time and money, it puts a lot of business information in one place, and it's too new for anyone to know yet how much waste crime it will stop. So people disagree about it. Over two lessons you'll read a briefing, weigh up the evidence on both sides, then argue one side in a formal debate and in writing. The motion is: This house believes every load of waste should be tracked online.

1. Read the opening aloud. Share the objectives and success criteria from the lesson sheet.
2. Read out the motion and take a vote: for, against or undecided. Write the numbers on the board.
3. Pupils read the briefing in pairs. Check it with four questions: who has to record loads from October 2026 in England and Wales? When do waste carriers start? Do paper waste transfer notes stop? Who isn't required to use it yet?
4. Split the class into two teams of three speakers, plus a chair and an audience. Give sides at random: pupils argue the side they're given, whatever they think themselves.
5. Each team reads all ten cards, both sides, and ranks its own five by the strength of the evidence. Ask them to predict which of the other side's cards they'll face, and plan an answer to it. The two blank cards are for arguments of their own.
6. Run the debate from the running order, then vote again. The team that moved more minds wins.

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7. Pupils answer the closing questions on the lesson sheet, from recall to evaluation, then do the exit task: "In one sentence: do you agree with the motion now, and what is the strongest piece of evidence that made you decide? Then say whether the debate changed your mind." Model answers are with the answers.
8. For homework, each pupil writes a persuasive argument on the motion using the writing frame. They may switch sides.

Stay neutral yourself. The cards are written in pairs of about the same length, from the same kind of source, so neither side starts ahead.

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

The four nations share one online service, but each has its own law and its own regulator: the Environment Agency in England, Natural Resources Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

- Wales started with England: receiving sites from October 2026.
- Scotland and Northern Ireland start receiving sites in January 2027. An earlier government announcement gave a different date for Northern Ireland, and the latest GOV.UK guidance says January 2027, which makes a good small lesson on checking dates.
- Penalties differ. In England and Wales the regulator can impose fixed or variable money penalties as well as prosecute. Scotland's regulations give SEPA no money penalties: it uses compliance notices, and serious cases go to court. We couldn't find Northern Ireland's regulations on legislation.gov.uk in October 2026.
- The fly-tipping figures on the cards are for England only. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland publish their own.
- The duty of care code of practice in the sources covers England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own.

The curriculum links above are England's. The pack suits debate and persuasive writing work in the other nations' curricula too, but we haven't mapped it to them.

Sources

Developing the digital waste tracking service
Defra and Environment Agency, GOV.UK, 2026
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-waste-tracking-service/digital-waste-tracking-service

Report receipt of waste
Defra, GOV.UK, 2026
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-receipt-of-waste

Digital waste tracking: check if you need to report the waste you receive
Defra and Welsh Government, GOV.UK, 2026
https://www.gov.uk/guidance/digital-waste-tracking-check-if-you-need-to-report-the-waste-you-receive

Implementation of mandatory digital waste tracking: government response
Defra, GOV.UK, 2023
https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/implementation-of-mandatory-digital-waste-tracking/outcome/government-response

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Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2024 to 2025
Defra, GOV.UK, 2026
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fly-tipping-statistics-for-england/fly-tipping-statistics-for-england-2024-to-2025

Waste Crime Action Plan
Defra, GOV.UK, 2026
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/waste-crime-action-plan/waste-crime-action-plan

The Digital Waste Tracking (England) Regulations 2026
legislation.gov.uk, SI 2026/729
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2026/729/made

The Digital Waste Tracking (Wales) Regulations 2026
legislation.gov.uk, WSI 2026/105
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2026/105/made

The Digital Waste Tracking (Scotland) Regulations 2026
legislation.gov.uk, SSI 2026/145
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2026/145/made

Digital Waste Tracking
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Northern Ireland
https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/digital-waste-tracking

National curriculum in England: English programmes of study
Department for Education, GOV.UK
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study

National curriculum in England: citizenship programmes of study for key stages 3 and 4
Department for Education, GOV.UK
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-3-and-4

Waste duty of care code of practice
Defra and Environment Agency, GOV.UK
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/waste-duty-of-care-code-of-practice

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Lesson sheet

We are learning to:

- explain what Digital Waste Tracking is and who has to use it
- build an argument from evidence, and say where the evidence comes from
- answer the other side's strongest point

You've done it if you can:

- give two reasons for your side, each backed by a named source
- answer one point from the other side fairly
- say what one piece of evidence can and can't prove

Closing questions

1. Recall
Which businesses have had to record each load on the service since October 2026 in England and Wales?

2. Recall
When do waste carriers, brokers and dealers have to start?

3. Understand
Give one reason a small, honest waste firm might welcome tracking, and one reason it might not.

4. Analyse
Both fly-tipping cards use the same Defra figures. How can the same statistics support both sides?

5. Evaluate
Which argument from the other side was hardest to answer, and why? Has it changed your view?

Exit task

In one sentence: do you agree with the motion now, and what is the strongest piece of evidence that made you decide? Then say whether the debate changed your mind.

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Pupil briefing

The motion: This house believes every load of waste should be tracked online.

What is the debate about?

When a business gets rid of waste, the law says it must hand it only to someone allowed to take it, and keep a record of what it handed over. This is called the duty of care. The record is usually a waste transfer note: a form, on paper or on a computer, that says what the waste is, how much there is, and who took it where. Businesses must keep these notes for two years.

The governments of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are bringing in a new system called Digital Waste Tracking. Each time a load of waste moves between businesses, it will be recorded on one national online service. There's no minimum size, so a van carrying three bags is recorded in the same way as a full lorry.

Why is it being brought in?

The governments say there's an information gap. Today each business keeps its own records, so the regulators can't see the whole picture of where waste goes, and that makes it easier for criminals to hide what they do with it. Waste crime includes fly-tipping (dumping rubbish where it isn't allowed), running illegal waste sites and sending waste abroad illegally. The governments estimate it costs the UK economy about £1 billion a year.

The plan is to give the regulators (the bodies that enforce the rules, such as the Environment Agency in England) a near-live view of waste as it moves. An officer stopping a lorry at the roadside, for example, could check whether its load is going to a legal site.

Who has to use it, and when?

- Sites that receive waste, such as recycling centres, transfer stations and landfill sites, record each load they take in within two working days. This applies from October 2026 in England and Wales, and from January 2027 in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Businesses that collect and carry waste (waste carriers), and the brokers and dealers who arrange its movement, follow from October 2027. That date has moved once already, from April 2027.
- Businesses that produce waste, such as shops and offices, aren't required to use it yet. The governments will decide about them later.

What does it cost?

Each organisation that creates or changes records on the service pays a charge of £26 a year, once it has to use it. The charge was set low on purpose. Businesses may also need a phone, tablet or computer and an internet connection, and some will pay for software to do the recording.

What changes, and what stays the same?

- Each online record holds more detail than most waste transfer notes do today, including a code for the type of waste, a plain description, its weight, whether it's hazardous, where it came from and where it's going.
- A weight can be estimated at first, but it must be updated once the load is weighed.

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- Paper and digital records run side by side for now. Businesses must still keep their duty of care records for two years, and some other reports carry on, so for a while some firms will record the same load in more than one place.

What if you can't get online?

Not everyone can. Where there's no signal at the time, the record can be made later, within two working days. There's also a separate route for people who can't reasonably use digital tools because of their age, disability or where they are, or because their religious beliefs rule it out. Preferring paper doesn't count, and nor does finding it slow or expensive.

Key words

- Controlled waste: waste from homes, shops, offices, factories and building sites, which the law controls.
- Duty of care: the legal duty on anyone who handles waste to keep it safe and pass it only to someone allowed to take it.
- Waste carrier: a business registered to carry waste as part of its work.
- Receiving site: a place with a permit to take in waste, such as a recycling centre, transfer station or landfill site.
- Regulator: a public body that checks businesses follow the law and can take action when they don't.
- Fly-tipping: dumping waste illegally on land, such as a roadside, a field or an alley.

Across the UK

The four nations share one service, but each enforces the rules on its own patch: the Environment Agency in England, Natural Resources Wales, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Penalties and details can differ from one nation to the next.

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Argument cards

Each row is one topic: the case for the motion on the left, the case against on the right. Cut along the dashed lines.

FOR

Cost to small firms

The government's charge is £26 a year for each organisation, about 50p a week, and it covers all of that organisation's sites. The government's own research found that firms already using waste tracking software strongly back it, because of its good effect on their business.

Source: GOV.UK guidance, Report receipt of waste and Check if you need to report (2026); Defra and Environment Agency, Developing the digital waste tracking service (GOV.UK, 2026)

AGAINST

Cost to small firms

The £26 charge is only part of the cost: firms may also need software, devices and training. About 300,000 carriers, brokers and dealers are registered, and the government says their digital skills vary. Its guidance says extra time or cost is no excuse for staying on paper.

Source: Defra and Environment Agency, Developing the digital waste tracking service (GOV.UK, 2026); GOV.UK guidance, Report receipt of waste and Check if you need to report (2026)

FOR

Privacy

The government says that, in general, only the businesses involved in a load can see its details. Anything shared with the public is added-up figures with no personal information in it. A paper note, by contrast, can be lost, copied or left on a van's dashboard.

Source: Defra, government response to the consultation on digital waste tracking (GOV.UK, 2023)

AGAINST

Privacy

Regulators, tax authorities and possibly councils will see detailed records. Firms worried that councils which run their own waste businesses could gain an unfair advantage over rivals. And one national database is a bigger prize for hackers than a filing cabinet.

Source: Defra, government response to the consultation on digital waste tracking (GOV.UK, 2023)

FOR

Fly-tipping

Councils in England dealt with 1.26 million fly-tips in 2024/25, up 9% in a year. The government says tracking will make fly-tipping harder for rogue operators, because officers at roadside checks can quickly see whether a load is heading to a legal site.

Source: Defra, Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2024 to 2025 (GOV.UK, 2026); Defra and Environment Agency, Developing the digital waste tracking service (GOV.UK, 2026)

AGAINST

Fly-tipping

62% of fly-tips in England in 2024/25 involved household waste. The most common sizes were a small van load (31%) and a car boot or less (27%). A person dumping an old sofa from a car fills in no waste record, so tracking businesses may not stop most of it.

Source: Defra, Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2024 to 2025 (GOV.UK, 2026)

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Argument cards

Each row is one topic: the case for the motion on the left, the case against on the right. Cut along the dashed lines.

FOR

Paperwork

The government calls today's way of recording waste outdated, and says digital records will make it easier for honest firms to follow the rules. It says it's committed to a simple way to record regular collections of the same waste without a new record for every trip.

Source: Defra and Environment Agency, Developing the digital waste tracking service (GOV.UK, 2026); Defra, government response to the consultation on digital waste tracking (GOV.UK, 2023)

AGAINST

Paperwork

For now, paper waste transfer notes carry on alongside the new service, so firms must keep both. In the government's research, users said typing records into the service was time-consuming and burdensome, because each record asks for so much detail.

Source: GOV.UK guidance, Report receipt of waste and Check if you need to report (2026); Defra and Environment Agency, Developing the digital waste tracking service (GOV.UK, 2026)

FOR

Enforcement

With every load on one system, regulators can spot a site taking in more waste than its permit allows, and check which carriers delivered it. A business that keeps breaking the rules can be taken to court, and for serious cases the law sets no upper limit on the fine.

Source: Defra and Environment Agency, Developing the digital waste tracking service (GOV.UK, 2026); Digital Waste Tracking Regulations 2026 for England, Wales and Scotland (legislation.gov.uk)

AGAINST

Enforcement

A record is only as good as what's typed into it: someone can enter false details, and a load nobody records leaves nothing to check. The government says regulators will start by educating businesses rather than punishing them, so rule-breakers may not be caught quickly.

Source: Defra, government response to the consultation on digital waste tracking (GOV.UK, 2023)

FOR

Your own argument

Write a reason for the motion that isn't on the other cards.

Source: _____

AGAINST

Your own argument

Write a reason against the motion that isn't on the other cards.

Source: _____

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Debate running order

Two teams of three. The proposition speaks for the motion and the opposition speaks against it. A chair keeps time and calls each speaker, and everyone else is the audience, who ask questions and vote.

Before you start, the audience votes for, against or undecided. Write the numbers on the board.

2 min Chair
Reads the motion, introduces both teams and explains the rules.

3 min First proposition speaker
Explains what the motion means and gives the team's two strongest reasons.

3 min First opposition speaker
Gives the team's two strongest reasons against, and answers one point the proposition made.

3 min Second proposition speaker
Answers the opposition, then adds a new reason with evidence from a card.

3 min Second opposition speaker
Answers the proposition, then adds a new reason with evidence from a card.

10 min Floor debate
The audience asks questions or makes short points. Either team may answer. The chair keeps it fair between the sides.

2 min Opposition summary (third speaker)
Sums up the debate from the opposition's side. No new evidence.

2 min Proposition summary (third speaker)
Sums up the debate from the proposition's side. No new evidence.

2 min Chair
The audience votes again. The chair compares the two votes: the team that moved more minds wins.

When you use a card, say where the evidence comes from: "According to the government's fly-tipping figures...". A point with a named source is harder to knock down.

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Writing frame: your argument

Use this to plan a persuasive speech or essay on the motion. Pick your side first. You can argue either side, whatever you think yourself.

1. Your view

Say which side you're on and why, in one or two sentences. "I believe every load of waste should / should not be tracked online, because..."

2. Your first reason, with evidence

Make the point, give evidence from a card and name its source, then explain why it matters. "The first reason is... For example, ... This shows that..."

3. Your second reason, with evidence

"Another reason is... According to ... This means..."

4. The other side, and your answer

Give the strongest point against you fairly, then answer it. "Some people argue that... However, ..."

5. Your conclusion

Bring your reasons together and end with what you want your reader or audience to think or do. No new evidence here.

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Marking guide

Use this for a debate speech or a written argument. Each skill has three bands. Mark the band that fits best, and give one thing done well and one thing to work on.

Argument

Developing:
States a view. Reasons are given but not explained, or drift from the motion.

Secure:
Gives a clear view with two or more reasons, each explained and linked to the motion.

Strong:
Builds a case where the reasons support each other, and makes clear which matters most and why.

Evidence and sources

Developing:
Uses some facts, but doesn't say where they come from.

Secure:
Uses evidence from the cards accurately and names the source.

Strong:
Picks the evidence that fits the point best, names the source, and notices what it can't prove.

Dealing with the other side

Developing:
Ignores the other side, or dismisses it without a reason.

Secure:
States a point from the other side fairly and answers it.

Strong:
Picks out the other side's strongest point and answers it with evidence of its own.

Language and delivery

Developing:
Mostly clear. Little use of persuasive techniques. Spoken: reads from notes most of the time.

Secure:
Uses Standard English and some persuasive techniques, such as questions to the audience or contrasts. Spoken: audible, with some eye contact.

Strong:
Chooses words and techniques for this audience on purpose. Spoken: confident and clear, and responds well to questions.

This guide is not an exam board's mark scheme. For the GCSE spoken language endorsement, use your board's own criteria.

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Answers

The motion has no right answer, but the questions below do.

The briefing questions, in the order asked under How to run it:

- Sites that receive waste, such as transfer stations and landfill sites, have recorded loads from October 2026 in England and Wales.
- Waste carriers, brokers and dealers start in October 2027.
- No. Paper waste transfer notes carry on alongside the new service for now.
- Businesses that produce waste, such as shops and offices. The governments will decide about them later.

The closing questions, with model answers, from recall to evaluation:

1. Recall. Which businesses have had to record each load on the service since October 2026 in England and Wales? Model answer: Sites that receive waste, such as recycling centres, transfer stations and landfill sites.
2. Recall. When do waste carriers, brokers and dealers have to start? Model answer: October 2027. The date has moved once already, from April 2027.
3. Understand. Give one reason a small, honest waste firm might welcome tracking, and one reason it might not. Model answer: Welcome: the government says it will make the rules easier for honest firms to follow and harder for rogue operators, who undercut honest firms on price. Not welcome: the yearly charge, devices, software and the time it takes to type in so much detail for every load.
4. Analyse. Both fly-tipping cards use the same Defra figures. How can the same statistics support both sides? Model answer: The total shows the problem is big and growing, which supports tracking. The share of household waste and the small sizes suggest much fly-tipping happens outside the businesses the system covers, which supports the other side. The figures say what was dumped, not who dumped it or what would stop it.
5. Evaluate. Which argument from the other side was hardest to answer, and why? Has it changed your view? Model answer: There's no single right answer. Strong answers name the card and its source, explain why the evidence is strong (official figures, or what the law says), and say what would change their mind.

The exit task.
Any answer that names a side and a piece of evidence from the pack meets the task. Compare the exit task with the two votes to see who moved and why.

What the evidence can't prove.
The fly-tipping total shows how big the problem is, but not that tracking will shrink it. The household waste figure tells us what was dumped, not who dumped it: a householder's rubbish could have been dumped by someone they paid to take it away. Several cards report what the government says it intends or expects. When we wrote this pack in October 2026, we found no published evidence yet on whether the service cuts waste crime, which is no surprise for something so new. And the yearly cost of waste crime that governments cite comes from the Environmental Services Association, an industry body, as the Waste Crime Action Plan says. Strong pupils will spot the difference between a fact, an estimate and a plan.

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