What is “Corporate Social Responsibility” (CSR)?

CSR describes the way a company accounts for the impact of its business activities in various ways – often environmentally as well as socially – and the policies and practices they may follow to improve business standards. It has both national and international implications and is generally about raising standards above the legal minimums that companies are obliged to follow. Responsible business isn’t just about philanthropy, companies donating to charity for example, but about ensuring that their core operations are informed by good ethical standards.

Awareness of the impacts companies make has grown substantially, facilitated by a greater access to information across the world, and a concern for ‘ethical lifestyles’. Corporate responsibility has taken account of environmental issues for many years, in part due to extensive campaigning by environmentalist groups. The idea of social responsibility is relatively more recent, but is growing alongside a greater concern for human rights and social justice. Businesses, as one of the most powerful organisations in the world with a transnational reach, can play a vital role in advancing and protecting, or hindering, the pursuit of these goals. For example, although an international business may have a more ‘direct’ impact in a particular country, or be involved more closely in particular issues (health, conflict etc.), locally-based companies are still involved in supply chains and contracts and make investments in other operations, which extend their influence and responsibility.

For more of an introduction to the growth of CSR, try the booklet Corporate Responsibility in Context produced by Context (www.econtext.co.uk) a corporate responsibility and communications and strategy consultancy.

Why be responsible? Implications for business

While there are obvious moral and ethical arguments for operating in a responsible manner, many companies are also now realising there are sound financial and ‘business’ reasons. It may be that it helps a company to attract or retain customers or investment for example. In some industries, such as energy, along with useful counter-responses, take a look at these links - the personal site of Mallen Baker, a writer, commentator and strategic advisor on corporate social responsibility (CSR), and the chief executive of Business Respect (an online CSR magazine with useful links and resources as well as news and jobs). An update version of this article is available at http://mallenbaker.net/article/clear-reflection/reply-to-the-case-against-csr-updated

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

www.wbcsd.org

Their site has various CSR related reports.

Corporate Citizenship


Has case studies of businesses who have successfully integrated CSR, including a Long Term Value project.

CSR Europe

www.csreurope.org

A European business network for corporate social responsibility with around 50 multinational corporations and around 40 national partner organisations as members. Its mission is to support member companies in integrating CSR into the way they do business, every day.

Mallen Baker

http://mallenbaker.net/article/category/arguments-against-corporate-social-responsibility-and-some-responses

There are many arguments cited against CSR; to get an idea of what they are, along with useful counter-responses, take a look at these links - the personal site of Mallen Baker, a writer, commentator and strategic advisor on corporate social responsibility (CSR), and the chief executive of Business Respect (an online CSR magazine with useful links and resources as well as news and jobs). An update version of this article is available at http://mallenbaker.net/article/clear-reflection/reply-to-the-case-against-csr-updated

CSR in UK Business

The idea that ‘good business is responsible business’ is beginning to earn greater currency, and in response many businesses have set up specific departments or created CSR positions, some refer instead to ‘corporate citizenship’, to provide dedicated staff to monitor and develop good practice in their operations, and stay ahead of wider national and international policy and legislative changes. In some large companies you will find fairly senior staff with a responsible business remit, and there are also a growing number of...
consultancies offering advice in this area, some focusing exclusively on CSR; an indication of the growing importance that businesses attach to addressing these concerns, and the expanding market for consultancy. Some examples include:

- Article 13 - [www.article13.com](http://www.article13.com)
- Corporate Citizenship - [https://corporatecitizenship.com/](https://corporatecitizenship.com/)
- Context - [www.econtext.co.uk](http://www.econtext.co.uk)
- CSR Europe - [https://www.cserieurope.org/](https://www.cserieurope.org/)
- SustainAbility - [www.sustainability.com](http://www.sustainability.com)

The UK Government has also recognised the importance of CSR creating the CSR Academy ([www.csracademy.org.uk](http://www.csracademy.org.uk)) to develop resources to assist companies seeking to improve their CSR skills. In addition, there is an All-Party Corporate Governance Parliamentary Group: [www.appcgg.co.uk](http://www.appcgg.co.uk)

**Outside the UK**

The United Nations Global Compact ([www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)) is a UN initiative to join businesses with UN agencies and civil society to advance ten principles focusing on human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption. It is a voluntary initiative with no regulatory power.

In Europe CSR is covered by the EU Director General for Employment and Social Affairs, ([http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/)) which gives information on EU initiatives and policies and compares national programmes across Europe.

**What does CSR policy involve?**

The UK government’s policies and guidance on sustainability are collected at [https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/sustainable-development](https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/sustainable-development)

There are a few established markers to look for when looking for a company’s evidence of and involvement in good practice, such as:

- **Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes**
  ‘Tracking the financial performance of the leading sustainability-driven companies worldwide’.

- **Fair Trade Mark**
  [www.fairtrade.net](http://www.fairtrade.net)
  From the Fair Trade Labelling Organizations (FLO) – 24 organizations working to secure better deal for producers.

- **FTSE4Good**
  [www.ftse.com/Indices/FTSE4Good_Index_Series/index.jsp](http://www.ftse.com/Indices/FTSE4Good_Index_Series/index.jsp)
  ‘Designed to measure the performance of companies that meet globally recognised corporate responsibility standards’.

- **GoodCorporation standard**
  [www.goodcorporation.com](http://www.goodcorporation.com)
  This was developed ‘against a background of increasing demands on businesses and organisation to behave in a transparent, responsible way’ to provide a ‘verified standard that looked at all of the key relationships and impacts in a consistent way’.

**CSR reporting**

Business in the Community in conjunction with the FT present annual Responsible Business Awards ([http://awards.bitc.org.uk/](http://awards.bitc.org.uk/)) and publish guidelines that all businesses can follow. For an idea of what working in CSR may involve look at the websites of various companies associated with these.

You can also look at CSR reports at Corporate Register who provide an online library of reports (CSR, environmental, etc.) for organisations around the world: [www.corporateregister.com](http://www.corporateregister.com)

**Reading more about CSR**

Many companies actively promote their CSR activities via their twitter feed. You may also find it useful to search and follow these accounts:

- @3BLMedia a good source for finding other companies involved in CSR they specialise in “content marketing and distribution platform for themes including #CSR #Sustainability #SocEnt #SocInn #Health #Energy #Education and more”
- @globalcompact UN campaign “Helping to align business with #TenPrinciples on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and to catalyze actions in support of broader #UN goals
- @Ethical_Corp Ethical Corporations twitter feed, “Helping business do the right thing through global events, magazine and research reports. Our aim is to continually advance the CSR and business ethics agenda.”
- @CSRwire The twitter handle of the CSR group, “The latest #news, views and reports in #CSR and #sustainability.”
- @Justmeans a “global community for #CSR #sustainability news. Content includes #energy #health #environment #socent #education”

Individual accounts with CSR content include @elainecohen, @AmanSinghCSR @davidcoethica

You may find the following websites and resources useful for finding out more about what CSR involves and how it is implemented by business.

**Amnesty International’s Business Group**

Deals with human rights issues in business and encourages companies to commit to uphold them.

**Business & Human Rights Resource Centre**
[www.business-humanrights.org](http://www.business-humanrights.org)

An independent, international, not-for-profit organisation, set up in collaboration with Amnesty International and leading academic institutions.

**Business in the Community**
[www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)
A business-led charity with over 800 members whose approach is to inspire, engage, and support and challenge companies to improve continually the impact they have on society. The website includes regional case studies.

**Business for Social Responsibility**

www.bsr.org

An international not-for-profit organisation that provides information, tools, training and advisory services to businesses.

**Corporate Watch**

www.corporatewatch.org.uk

A research group supporting campaigns against the negative impact of large corporations and globalisation. They strive for a society that is ‘ecologically sustainable, democratic, equitable and non-exploitative’. The website has many articles and links of interest.

**CSR Asia**

www.csr-asia.com

Provider of information, training, research and consultancy services on sustainable business practices in Asia. Operating as a social enterprise, CSR Asia occupies the middle ground between civil society organisations and fully commercial consultancies.

**Ethical Corporation**

www.ethicalcorp.com

An independent publisher and conference organiser aiming to encourage debate and discussion on responsible business. Their website is a good source of news articles, current issues, links and jobs- all searchable by region of world.

**The Ethical Company Organisation**

www.ethical-company-organisation.org

Aims to establish an overall benchmark Corporate Social Responsibility regarding human rights, animal welfare and the environment.

**Forum for the Future**

www.forumforthefuture.org

Promotes sustainability in business and collaborates with government and other associations on research and policy. Also offers internships and run a Masters in Leadership in Sustainable Development. There is also a UK specific area of their website - https://www.forumforthefuture.org/regions/our-work-uk

**Institute of Business Ethics (IBE)**

www.ibe.org.uk

IBE tries to raise public awareness of the importance of doing business ethically, and collaborate with other UK and international organisations with interests and expertise in business ethics.

**Social Accountability International**

www.sa-intl.org

SAI is a non-governmental, multi-stakeholder organization promoting the ethical treatment of workers globally.

**World Business Council for Sustainable Development**

www.wbcsd.org

Draws together over 180 international companies to provide ‘business leadership as a catalyst for change toward sustainable development’.

**Looking for CSR Jobs**

While there are a few sites with a CSR or ethical focus given below, many CSR positions will be advertised on the usual vacancy boards, such as King’s Career Connect (www.kcl.ac.uk/careerconnect) Also see some of the sites already listed on this sheet, as several include job listings or links.

- 2degreesnetwork connects professionals with an interest in sustainability and advertises related vacancies www.2degreesnetwork.com
- https://www.environmentjob.co.uk/jobs has a focus on vacancies in the environmental and ecology sector, and donates a percentage of its profits to a range of charities.
- Allen & York are recruitment consultancy specialist that focus on sustainable business in built and natural environments https://www.allen-york.com/
- Acre are another recruitment consultancy company with a focus on CSR and ethical jobs http://acre.com/

**King’s CareerConnect**

www.kcl.ac.uk/careerconnect

King’s CareerConnect is our exclusive online career portal enabling students and recent alumni to engage with our services. Once logged in, you can access our vacancy board and search hundreds of part-time roles, placements, internships and graduate-level opportunities, book one-to-one careers or application guidance appointments, apply for exclusive King’s Internships and view our full events calendar to book attendance at our many events throughout the year.

Updated: November 2018

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