

Background

Companies across Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom currently dispose of tens of millions of pounds worth of computer equipment every year. This is largely due to poor or non-existent information technology (IT) lifecycle management policies. Often equipment is disposed of to make way for newer, faster, more high tech systems when simple upgrading of components or software on current systems would suffice. As a result of such policies, there has been a huge growth in the volumes of computer equipment, and electronic waste more generally, being sent to landfill in the UK, with the same trend being observed across Europe. As a result of the increased demand for and manufacture of electronic equipment, coupled with the necessity to provide a coherent strategy for handling the volumes of electronic waste going to landfill, the European Union passed the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment¹ (WEEE) Directive on 27 January 2003. This piece of legislation, which utilises the polluter pays principle, requires producers of WEEE to pay for environmentally sound disposal of electronic waste in an attempt to divert the majority of this type of waste from landfill.

¹ Electrical and Electronic Equipment is defined by the Directive as: "equipment dependent on electric current or electromagnetic fields in order to work properly and equipment for the generation, transfer and measurement of such currents..."