

Markscheme

May 2026

Geography

Higher level

Paper 3

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Paper 3 part (a) markbands

Marks	Level descriptor		
	AO1: Knowledge and understanding of specified content AO2: Application and analysis of knowledge and understanding	AO3: Synthesis and evaluation	AO4: Selection, use and application of a variety of appropriate skills and techniques
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.		
1–3	The response is general, not focused on the question, and lacks detail and structure.		
	- The response is very brief or general, listing a series of unconnected comments or largely irrelevant information. Evidence is general or relevant to the topic, but not to the question. - Evidence (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) is listed, lacks detail, and the relevance to the question is unclear. - Evidence is not used to formulate an argument or an analysis. - Everyday language is used; there is little use of geographical terminology or it is used with errors in understanding.	No evidence of synthesis or evaluation is expected.	- Information is listed but is not grouped together in paragraphs, or paragraphing is erratic. - If present, the conclusion is brief, does not summarize the argument and/or does not address the question.
4–6	The response only partially addresses the question; evidence is both relevant and irrelevant and is largely unstructured.		
	- The response partially addresses the question and/or does not meet the requirements of the command term. Key evidence is not included. - A mix of relevant and irrelevant evidence is outlined (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) and any links to the question are only listed. - The evidence presented supports only one element or interpretation of the question. - Key geographical terms are defined briefly. The terminology used is both relevant and irrelevant to the question.	No evidence of synthesis or evaluation is expected.	- Paragraphs do not reflect grouping of information that addresses a specific element of the question. - If present, the conclusion is one-sided, addressing only part of the question.

7–9	The response addresses most parts of the question and outlines an analysis supported by relevant evidence but may lack clear links between paragraphs. • The question is broken down into parts and most parts of the question are addressed in the response, with supporting evidence for each aspect of the question. The response meets the requirements of the command term. • Relevant evidence (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) is described, focused on the question and mostly correct. Links with the question are described. • The analysis outlines a two-sided argument briefly (if appropriate) and is mostly descriptive, using examples as explanation. • Correct definitions are given, and relevant and irrelevant specialist geographical terms are used with occasional errors; or everyday language is used.
10–12	The response addresses all aspects of the question; the analysis is explained using evidence integrated in the paragraphs, and it is well structured. • All aspects of the question are addressed and the response meets the requirements of the command term. • Detailed evidence (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) are integrated in sentences and paragraphs, and links made between evidence and the question are explained and relevant. • The response explains how the two sides of the argument (if appropriate) are supported by detailed evidence that is integrated in sentences. • Clear, correct definitions and use of geographical language is integrated in the sentences and throughout the response.

Paper 3 part (b) markbands

Marks	Level descriptor		
	AO1: Knowledge and understanding AO2: Application and analysis of knowledge and understanding	AO3: Synthesis and evaluation	AO4: Selection, use and application of a variety of appropriate skills and techniques
0	The work does not reach a standard described by the descriptors below.		
1–4	The response is general, not focused on the question, and lacks detail and structure.		
	- The response is very brief or general, listing a series of unconnected comments or largely irrelevant information. Evidence is general or relevant to the topic, but not the question. - Evidence (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) is listed, lacks detail, and the relevance to the question is unclear. - Evidence is not used to formulate an argument or an analysis. - Everyday language is used; there is little use of geographical terminology or it is used with errors in understanding.	- No synthesis or evaluation is expected at this level. - No links are presented between the response and (sub)topics in the guide. - No valid opinion or perspective on the issue is formulated.	- Information is listed but is not grouped together in paragraphs, or paragraphing is erratic. - If present, the conclusion is brief, does not summarize the argument and/or does not address the question.
5–8	The response only partially addresses the question with limited links to the guide; evidence is both relevant and irrelevant and is largely unstructured.		
	- The response partially addresses the question and/or does not meet the requirements of the command term. Key evidence is not included. - A mix of relevant and irrelevant evidence is outlined (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) and any links to the question are only listed. - The evidence presented supports only one element or interpretation of the question. - Key geographical terms are defined briefly. Terminology used is both relevant and irrelevant to the question.	- No synthesis or evaluation is expected at this level. - The link(s) between the response and the guide focus on one topic; other potential links are listed. - A valid but limited opinion or perspective on the issue is formulated.	- Paragraphs do not reflect grouping of information that addresses a specific element of the question. - If present, the conclusion is one-sided, addressing only part of the question.

9–12	The response addresses most parts of the question with developed links to the guide and outlines an analysis supported by relevant evidence but may lack clear links between paragraphs. • The question is broken down into parts and most parts of the question are addressed in the response, with supporting evidence for each aspect of the question. The response meets the requirements of the command term. • Relevant evidence (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) is described, focused on the question and mostly correct. Links with the question are described. • The analysis outlines a two-sided argument briefly (if appropriate) and is mostly descriptive, using examples as explanation. • Correct definitions are given, and relevant and irrelevant specialist geographical terms are used with occasional errors; or everyday language is used.
13–16	The response addresses all aspects of the question; the analysis is explained and evaluated using evidence integrated in the paragraphs, and it is well structured. • All aspects of the question are addressed and the response meets the requirements of the command term. • Detailed evidence (that is, facts, statistics, examples or theories) are integrated in sentences and paragraphs, and links made between evidence and the question are explained and relevant. • The response explains how the two sides of the argument (if appropriate) are supported by detailed evidence that is integrated in sentences. • Clear, correct definitions and use of geographical language is integrated in the sentences and throughout the response.

1. (a) Analyse ways in which international lending and aid have affected different places. **[12]**

Marks should be allocated according to the markbands on pages 3–4.

International lending and aid are important global financial flows that connect countries in different contexts both regionally and economically. In theory, aid is gifted while loans must be repaid. The line is blurred by debt relief or types of aid that place obligations on the recipient. There are different types of aid including long term and emergency donations of commodities, skilled staff and finance; loans are provided by stakeholders at scales ranging from international organizations (World Bank, IMF) and national governments (China) to small charities/ individuals.

Place is a key geographic concept that can be applied at a range of geographical scales. Responses may focus on national-scale aid and lending, wherein “place” becomes a synonym for “country”. Answers may additionally focus on specific named local places or regions, for example rural areas adversely affected by natural disasters.

An analysis of how places are **affected** by aid and lending flows can be structured into positive, negative, short term and long-term effects. Extended analysis may explore how countries are affected growth of interconnectivity or interdependence (between donor / recipient) – viewed as a consequence of financial flows within global systems.

Likely themes for analysis include:

- Global lending institutions, including the World Bank and IMF, and the associated issues and perspectives (poverty reduction, indebtedness, dependency).
- Loans issued within and by groups such as the European Union or other international organizations, and linked issues.
- International microfinance lending.
- Examples of national-scale government aid and lending, and their contexts.
- The geopolitical issue of lending by superpower states (US, China).
- Wider contexts and issues linked with aid and loans (colonialism and neo-colonialism; soft power, influence and geopolitics).
- The work of non-state stakeholders including charities, civil society organizations, including disaster responses to specific places/people.
- The growth of crowdfunding / online donations / digital philanthropy.
- Place-specific examples of effects of aid and/or lending on societies and/or environments.

Answers that do not differentiate clearly between aid/ lending should be marked positively, especially when there is good use of geographical concepts such as place / connectivity. Other category errors should also be marked positively, e.g. no clear differentiation between Chinese government infrastructure loans and foreign direct investment by Chinese businesses.

Good answers may **apply** (AO2) a **wider range** of knowledge and understanding (AO1) in a **well-structured** way (AO4). One approach might be to provide a structured systematic analysis of different types of **possible** effects that goes beyond basic positive/negative coding by showing more complex or localised patterns of social/economic/environmental effects or short-term/long-term. Good answers are likely to demonstrate understanding of the geographical concept of **place**, including the growth of international **connectivity** as effects of aid/lending.

For 4–6 marks, expect some weakly evidenced outlining of examples of aid/ lending/ countries.

For 7–9 marks, expect a structured, evidenced analysis of:

- either a range of positive and/or negative effects or impacts of aid/lending on specific recipient and/or donor countries/places.
- or interconnected, complex or uneven effects of aid/lending for donors and/or recipient places e.g. dependency, debt traps, change over time.

For 10–12 marks, expect both of these traits.

1. (b) “Migration, more than any other factor, has contributed to global cultural change.”
To what extent do you agree with this statement?

[16]

Credit all content in line with the markbands. Marks should be allocated according to the markbands on pages 5–6. Credit unexpected approaches wherever relevant.

International **migration** flows operate at varying scales. Much movement is regional and takes place between neighbouring countries whose cultures may already be similar in some respects. Other movements span greater physical and cultural distances, for example post-colonial migration flows from the global south to Europe. Migration is a powerful and contested process that strongly influences cultural change at different geographic scales.

The concept of **cultural change** invites discussion of a wide spectrum of dynamic cultural traits (including language, food, music, religion, identity and diversity), and the shared sense of belonging/community that is fostered. Any of these, such as diet/food or identity politics, can form the basis for an evaluation. Many answers are likely to focus primarily on national changes occurring because of migration. The idea of a changing **global** culture is distinct from that of national culture, and good answers may reflect on what role migration has played in creating a truly “global” culture that is arguably dominated by European languages and American media.

The question's emphasis on **change** invites consideration of migration driving cultural change at different moments in time and not just during the present day. The movement of people has been a driving force for cultural change throughout human history. The migration of Westerners during the colonial era transformed culture at global, continental and national scales. Perspectives may vary on whether the impacts are positive or negative. Changes can be viewed over the short- or long-term.

Possible **applied** themes (AO2) include **knowledge and understanding** (AO1) of:

- The spectrum of cultural diversity at varying scales [Guide 5.2]
- The impact of migration and diaspora growth [Guide 5.2]
- The role of shrinking world technology (and its role in cultural change) [Guide 4.3]
- The role of transnational Corporations (TNC) e.g. how glocalisation brings complexity through cultural hybridity [Guide 5.3]
- The cultural influence of superpower states over time e.g. US, European empires [Guide 4.1]
- Civil society resistance to global interactions, flows and changes [Guide 6.1 and 6.3]

Good answers may **synthesize** (AO3a) three or more of the above (or other) themes in a **well-structured** (AO4) way.

Good answers may additionally offer a **critical evaluation** (AO3b) of the statement that evaluates the contribution of migration as one of several processes/factors (e.g. TNC, globalization, media, technology including access to goods, tourism, colonization) responsible for cultural change in different located **places**. Another approach might be to critically explore varying **perspectives** on the **scale** of cultural change from different processes/factors, and whether a “global culture” actually exists. Another approach might be to critically evaluate the changing contribution of migration over time, e.g. colonial and postcolonial / modern times. A good evaluation may conclude with a substantiated final judgement on the overall degree to which the statement is true.

For 5–8 marks, expect weakly evidenced outlining of two or three relevant themes.

For 9–12 marks, expect:

- either a structured synthesis that links together several well-evidenced themes from the guide
- or a critical conclusion (or ongoing evaluation) informed by geographical concepts and/or perspectives.

For 13–16 marks, expect both of these traits.

2. (a) Analyse the varying scale of the environmental challenges caused by global agribusiness. **[12]**

Marks should be allocated according to the markbands on pages 3–4.

Environmental challenges include a range of hard-to-solve issues/problems arising at varying scales. Possible examples include threats to ecosystems, soils, water quality, air quality, oceans and global climate. Arguably, challenges that additionally threaten human well-being might be viewed as the greatest in severity / scale.

Global agribusiness refers to the large-scale production, processing, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products on a global scale by transnational corporations (TNCs) and their local suppliers. It encompasses the entire agricultural supply chain, from seed supply and fertilizer inputs to the packaging/distribution of food worldwide. Large food brands, e.g. McDonalds may be considered as agribusinesses that produce agricultural commodities for global markets.

The **varying scale** of the challenges could include *local* impacts on ecosystems (e.g. deforestation), *local* impacts on water resources (e.g. eutrophication), *regional* impacts such as transboundary air pollution (e.g. caused by deforestation for Indonesian palm oil monoculture), and the *global* “wicked problems” of climate change and plastic pollution (agribusiness plays a role in plastic pollution through its marketing and distribution of plastic-wrapped foods and drinks).

Likely themes for analysis include:

- Impacts of deforestation and/or monoculture farming on biodiversity – including a possible analysis of how local loss of indigenous species ultimately impacts on global biodiversity.
- Ways in which agribusiness contributes to global climate change, ranging from land use change and methane emissions (rice and cattle farming) to carbon emissions from vehicles transporting crops or processed foods to markets by land, air or ocean.
- Eutrophication due to fertilizer use by agriculture supplying crops for global markets.
- Agribusiness, supermarkets and global food production systems, and their use of plastic packaging resulting in the challenge of ocean pollution.
- Challenges for human health/ wellbeing stemming from environmental issues, such as smoke inhalation or the ingestion of microplastics.
- Power/wealth of large agribusinesses/TNCs (e.g. influence over Brazil/United States governments), and challenges this creates for environmental movements.

Candidates whose work leans heavily on climate change should be scored according to their ability to sustain a link with global agribusiness, e.g. methane emissions from cattle. Generic responses that focus on emissions caused by transport are more likely to be in the 4–6 or lower part of 7–9 mark bands. Higher-scoring answers (10–12 and upper 7–9 band) are more likely to use located evidence and explain challenges and processes. Lower-scoring answers may state impacts without development or exemplification (“clearing land destroys ecosystems”).

Good answers may **apply** (AO2) a **wider range** of knowledge and understanding (AO1) in a **well-structured** way (AO4). One approach might be to provide a structured systematic analysis of different **processes** of environmental change (i.e. pollution of the air, water, soil etc). Another approach might be to analyse ways **places** and systems at varying **scales** have been affected, e.g. local ecosystems / global climate system. Another approach might be to analyse the **scale** and **power** of large global agribusinesses and their supply chains, and the specific challenges this creates for governments or civil societies who want greater environmental protection.

For 4–6 marks, expect some weakly evidenced outlining impacts of agriculture/ farming/ business on the environment.

For 7–9 marks, expect a structured, evidenced analysis of:

- either issues/impacts/threats associated with agriculture/agribusiness, for example deforestation/climate change and water pollution
- or the varying geographic scale/severity of different environmental challenges.

For 10–12 marks, expect both of these traits.

2. (b) “Global interactions are still dominated by a few powerful countries.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? [16]

Credit all content in line with the markbands. Marks should be allocated according to the markbands on pages 5–6. Credit unexpected approaches wherever relevant.

Global interactions and flows have multiple dimensions, including trade, lending, migration, information and cultural exchanges, intergovernmental cooperation and agreements.

Powerful countries exert influence in varied ways: hard power (military, economic), soft power (culture, diplomacy), smart power (the previous two combined) and sharp power (e.g. manipulating geopolitical events using the internet). This framework is not required for the award of full marks, though many candidates will use it. Examples of the associated concept of ‘superpower’ countries include the United States, Japan, China, India, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Qatar, major EU economies. Credit any reasonable suggestion of a “powerful” country that demonstrably has above average influence in a global or world region context.

In the past, a limited number of countries arguably **dominated** global interactions and geopolitics. During the Cold War, the US and USSR dominated a “bipolar” world order. In the colonial era, numerous European nation states carved out empires, dominating the global South. Today, power is arguably more evenly shared between older and rising powers, along with global organizations, large TNCs and influential billionaires. Another view is that the US is **still** a hegemonic though waning power.

Possible **applied** themes (AO2) include **knowledge and understanding** (AO1) of:

- Powerful countries and superpowers [Guide 4.1]
- Powerful global organizations and groups [Guide 4.1]
- Globalization indices [Guide 4.1]
- Global networks and the role of TNCs [Guide 4.2]
- The influence and importance of shrinking world technology [Guide 4.3]
- Cultural imperialism in the past and present [Guide 5.3]
- Geopolitical trends including renewed nationalism [Guide 6.1]

Good answers may **synthesize** (AO3a) three or more of the above (or other) themes in a **well-structured** (AO4) way.

Good answers may additionally offer a **critical evaluation** (AO3b) of the statement that discusses **patterns** of dominance/influence at **scales** other than countries (e.g. the power/importance of global organizations). Another approach might be to explore **processes** of change over time and/or different **possibilities** for the future (multipolar world ideas). Another approach might be to critically discuss underlying assumptions about what forms of **power** still matter most in a global context, and how **perspectives** may vary on this. A good evaluation may conclude with a substantiated final judgement on the overall degree to which the statement is true.

For 5–8 marks, expect weakly evidenced outlining of two or three relevant themes.

For 9–12 marks, expect:

- either a structured synthesis that links together several well-evidenced themes from the guide or case studies, e.g. USA or China
- or a critical conclusion (or ongoing evaluation) informed by geographical concepts and/or perspectives.

For 13–16 marks, expect both of these traits.

3. (a) Analyse ways in which the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) help to close the development gap. [12]

Marks should be allocated according to the markbands on pages 3–4.

The **Sustainable Development Goals** use 17 social, economic, environmental and political criteria, giving a multi-strand approach to understanding, monitoring, measuring and promoting the human development process. Created by the United Nations, the SDGs are globally respected and recognized. Answers may focus on progress towards specific individual goals – such as gender equality, sanitation, education, no poverty, climate action – or may write more broadly about the SDG initiative as a holistic vision; either approach is acceptable.

The concept of a **development gap** frames differences in development as a cause for concern that requires management. Development is a contested concept that views countries as parts of a continuum that can be ranked according to economic, social or other criteria, including gross national product and life expectancy. In addition to development gaps *between* countries, development gaps may be identified *within* a country, for example, disparities in wealth or wellbeing between different groups of people.

Ways that **help to close** development gaps range from top-down to bottom-up projects managed by international organizations/governments and civil society groups respectively. Initiatives may target a particular aspect of wealth and wellbeing, for example disparities in access to education between men and women within a particular country.

Likely themes for analysis include:

- The Sustainable Development Goals criteria, and their purposes and application.
- Linked stakeholders that act to promote development, e.g. governments, civil society organizations, businesses, Fairtrade and other alternative trading networks, microfinance organizations.
- Views and perspectives on the concept of development.
- Different development indicators and indices including the human development index.
- Financial and non-financial disparities between different countries and world regions e.g. global North and global South, or high, middle and low income countries.
- Disparities in development within countries for example between men and women or minority groups, or between rural and urban areas.

Candidates who provide partially inaccurate details of the SDGs should still be positively marked if there is a good emphasis on, and understanding of, the development gap concept.

Good answers may **apply** (AO2) a **wider range** of knowledge and understanding (AO1) in a **well-structured** way (AO4). One approach might be to provide a structured systematic analysis of how the SDGs have been developed and used, for example as benchmarks / goals / **possibilities** that will prompt other stakeholders to act (governments, businesses, charities), thereby reducing different development gaps. As part of their answer, candidates might also systematically analyse different development gaps between **places** or groups of people (e.g. gaps in education, health, equality, etc).

For 4–6 marks, expect some weakly evidenced outlining of the SDGs and/or the idea of development (gap).

For 7–9 marks, expect a structured, evidenced analysis of:

- either ways in which the SDGs are used to help promote development (e.g. monitoring, setting targets, identifying goals, or priorities for other stakeholders e.g. civil societies or NGOs)
- or the different types of development gap that need closing (e.g. between and within countries).

For 10–12 marks, expect both of these traits.

3. (b) “Being interconnected brings more risks than benefits for businesses.” To what extent do you agree with this statement? [16]

Credit all content in line with the markbands. Marks should be allocated according to the markbands on pages 5–6. Credit unexpected approaches wherever relevant.

Being interconnected means the varied ways in which places, societies and environments are increasingly linked together by global (or smaller-scale) flows of money, goods, people and ideas. A sense of connectivity also derives in part from shared exposure to planetary-scale risks including climate change and pandemics. Notably, social media and the internet have connected people together at a personal and institutional level, giving the hyperconnected perception of a shrinking world. Businesses and their supply chains link very large numbers of places and environments together in interconnected and interdependent ways.

Different risks may include, among others, geopolitical, economic, technological or environmental threats and challenges for businesses. Different risks are transferred and may multiply within global networks. E.g. when a natural hazard disrupts economic activity in one place, a larger-scale supply chain may be disrupted. A firm’s reputation will be harmed if its supply chain is found to be exploiting workers or damaging the environment. Such costs must be weighed against the economic **benefits** that supply chains and global interactions bring for some players, e.g. the use of cheap labour, supply chain growth, low tax production sites. Migration for employment may be analysed as risk for countries and governments as well as a benefit for businesses.

The world’s largest **businesses** are transnational corporations (TNCs), some of which generate annual profits that exceed the annual income of countries. The largest TNCs have established supply chains crossing the entire planet, connecting many different places within their networks of production and consumption (markets). These supply chains also include many smaller businesses that are equally exposed to risks and benefits.

Possible **applied** themes (AO2) include **knowledge and understanding** (AO1) of:

- Global networks and flows including global trade [Guide 4.2]
- Case studies of transnational corporations, their networks and markets [Guide 4.2]
- Business opportunities created through the use of glocalization [Guide 5.2]
- Campaigns/ local resistance to globalization against large businesses [Guide 5.3 and 6.3]
- Protectionism and resource nationalism [Guide 5.3]
- Political, economic and physical risks to global supply chain flows [Guide 6.1]
- Re-shoring of economic activity by TNCs and other resilience strategies [Guide 6.3]

Good answers may **synthesize** (AO3a) three or more of the above (or other) themes in a **well-structured** (AO4) way.

Good answers may additionally offer a **critical evaluation** (AO3b) of the statement that discusses **perspectives** on the balance of risks, costs and benefits associated with being interconnected / globalization. Another approach might be to critically discuss whether mitigation of the risks from being interconnected is **possible**, e.g. exploring the **power** of TNCs and/or governments to reshore businesses operations. Another approach might be to critically discuss uneven **patterns** of risks / benefits created by the global economy for businesses in different **places**. A good evaluation may conclude with a substantiated final judgement on the overall degree to which the statement is true.

For 5–8 marks, expect weakly evidenced outlining of two or three relevant themes.

For 9–12 marks, expect:

- either a structured synthesis that links together several well-evidenced themes from the guide
- or a critical conclusion (or ongoing evaluation) informed by geographical concepts and/or perspectives.

For 13–16 marks, expect both of these traits.