

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 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.		
1–4	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 outsourcing by transnational corporations (TNCs) has affected different places. [12]

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

Transnational corporations (TNCs) are businesses with operations in multiple countries. The largest TNCs have established supply chains crossing the entire planet, connecting many different places within their networks of production and consumption (markets). **Outsourcing** is an important strategy for TNCs in different sectors including manufacturing and service industries, for example animation studios. It involves contracting an external company (“third party”) to carry out work or a service. Complex outsourcing relationships lead to complicated supply chains.

Place is a key geographic concept that can be applied at a range of geographical scales. Responses may focus on national-scale outsourcing (e.g. “to China”), wherein “place” becomes a synonym for “country”. Better answers may additionally focus on specific named local places or regions, for example specific free trade or export-processing zones.

An analysis of how places are **affected** by outsourcing might be structured into positive, negative, social, environmental, economic, short term or long-term effects. The analysis may explore how the countries where TNCs are headquartered (and where profits return) are affected by these flows (e.g. loss of “blue-collar” jobs in the US), along with the growth of interconnectivity or interdependence between countries. A good analysis may show that effects are rarely wholly positive or negative.

Likely themes for analysis include:

- Case studies of transnational corporations and their outsourcing networks
- Global networks and flows of foreign direct investment (FDI)
- Political, economic and physical risks created by outsourcing / global supply chains
- Re-shoring of economic activity by TNCs to lessen dependence on outsourcing for strategic or political reasons
- Anti-globalization movements and protests linked with the loss of domestic employment overseas (due to outsourcing)
- Place-specific examples of the effects of outsourcing on societies and / or environments.

Answers that do not differentiate clearly between outsourcing and other forms of foreign investment (branch plants) should be marked positively, especially when there is good use of other geographical concepts and ideas.

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 systematic analysis of different types of **possible** effect that goes beyond basic positive/negative coding, by showing a more complex pattern of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ eg unemployment in ‘rich’ countries that have outsourced work). Good answers are likely to demonstrate understanding of the geographical concept of **place** and may explore more **local**, and not simply national, contexts. They may also analyse the growth of international **connectivity** / **interdependence** as effects of outsourcing.

For 4–6 marks, expect some weakly evidenced outlining of examples of outsourcing/foreign business operations/countries.

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

- either a range of positive and/or negative impacts of outsourcing on TNC countries of origin and/or countries where outsourcing happens
- or uneven, complex or interconnected impacts of outsourcing for places affected by outsourcing, eg rising unemployment in the same countries that TNC profits are returned to

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

(b) Evaluate the role that governments have played in global cultural change. [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.

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 traits, such as diet/food or identity politics, can form the basis for an evaluation. The idea of a truly **global** culture is distinct from that of national cultures. Good answers may reflect on what role different governments have played in creating a truly “global” culture (that is arguably dominated by European languages and American media). National **governments** may promote their own culture at a worldwide scale by supporting media and other institutions - or they may isolate themselves to an extent. Some governments (superpower states) have greater power to do this. Historically, governments have colonized other countries and been responsible for cultural imperialism (e.g. enforcement of a language or religion on other societies). Other relevant government actions could include migration policies, or the protection / promotion of national languages. At a global scale, organizations such as the United Nations play a role shaping cultural norms, e.g. sustainable development goals (SDGs). The emphasis on **change** invites consideration of past government actions and not just during the present day. Empire-building by Western states during the colonial era transformed culture at global, continental and national scales. 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 cultural influence of superpower states, e.g. United States, European empires [Guide 4.1]
- Cultural imperialism and the enforced diffusion/adoption of cultural traits, e.g. European languages and religion [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 (TNCs), e.g. how glocalization brings complexity through cultural hybridity [Guide 5.2]
- The indirect role of governments in supporting the growth of TNCs and the development of new technologies [Guide 4.3]
- Government or civil society resistance to globalization / global cultural changes [Guide 5.3]

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 governments as one of several **processes** of cultural change (eg media, technology, TNCs). A different valid might be to systematically evaluate the **power** of different governments over global culture. Another approach might be to critically evaluate the changing contribution of government actions/policies/attitudes over different **time scales**, eg 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 transboundary pollution. [12]

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

Environmental challenges are hard-to-solve issues/problems arising at varying scales. Possible examples include threats to water quality, air quality, oceans, ecosystems, soils and global climate. Higher-scoring answers (10-12 band and upper end of 7-9 band) are more likely to use located evidence and to explain challenges and processes. Lower-scoring answers may state impacts but without development or exemplification (“oil spills destroy ecosystems”).

Transboundary pollution may be a short-lived event or more pervasive problem involving movements of polluted bodies of air or water across national boundaries. Other examples might include the spread of oil pollution along shipping routes across territorial waters, or polluted transboundary rivers and water bodies.

The geographic **scale** of the challenges could include relatively *localized* impacts on water resources in neighbouring countries (transboundary pollution or eutrophication), *regional* impacts such as transboundary air pollution (e.g. problems experienced throughout Southeast Asia by deforestation for palm oil monoculture in Indonesia), and the *global* “wicked problems” of climate change and plastic pollution in the oceans.

Likely themes for analysis include:

- Specific pollution events with truly global-scale impacts, e.g. Fukushima isotopes crossing the Pacific.
- Transboundary eutrophication or other transboundary water pollution issues.
- Carbon/methane emissions and climate change is a valid global-scale theme.
- Acid rain is a commonly occurring transboundary issue.
- Challenges for human health and wellbeing stemming from environmental issues, such as smoke inhalation or the ingestion of microplastics.
- The scale of any challenges is determined by the type of pollution and the character of the places affected – including the vulnerability of people/environments.

Candidates whose work leans heavily on climate change as a theme should be scored according to their ability to sustain a link throughout with transboundary pollution. Generic answers about carbon emissions from “world pollution” are more likely to be in the 4–6 or lower 7–9 markband.

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 environmental challenges (i.e. pollution of the air, water, soil, etc). Another approach might be to analyse different ways in which **places** and systems at increasing **scale** have been affected, for example from local/neighbour countries/regions to the global climate system.

Full marks may be obtained through use of a single case study provided there is sufficient analysis of the scale of the associated challenges.

For 4–6 marks, expect some weakly evidenced outlining of the impacts of (transboundary) pollution (processes/impacts named but not explained; little or no locational details)

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

- either detailed and located impacts/issues associated with transboundary pollution, for example air pollution and water pollution
- or the varying geographic scale/severity of different environmental challenges.

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

- (b) “Businesses now have greater global power than 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 power can be exerted in varied ways: soft power (culture, diplomacy), hard power (military, economic), smart power (the first two combined) and sharp power (e.g. manipulating geopolitical events using the internet). This framework/terminology is not required for the award of full marks, though some candidates will use it.

The most powerful/influential **businesses** are transnational corporations (TNCs) with operations in multiple countries. The largest TNCs exert enormous influence on the global economy and global culture. Increasingly, technology TNCs exert great influence (algorithms used by Meta/Facebook and X/Twitter may potentially influence national political elections, for example). In contrast, many businesses are small and locally-based – and so are without global power. Examples of powerful **countries** - or 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. Governments and TNCs have a complex relationship, e.g. due to the importance of foreign direct investment (FDI) for national economic growth.

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

- Case studies of transnational corporations and their operations [Guide 4.2]
- The reliance of some countries on foreign direct investment from TNCs; or of other countries on international lending and aid provided by other countries. [Guide 4.2]
- The role of TNCs in the development and use of shrinking world technology [Guide 4.3]
- The importance of TNCs in shaping national and global culture, e.g. glocalization [Guide 5.2]
- Powerful countries and superpowers [Guide 4.1]
- Powerful global organizations and groups [Guide 4.1]
- Resource nationalism (a source of possible tension between governments and TNCs) [Guide 5.3]

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 different **perspectives** on the types of influence that matter most, and the extent to which large TNCs or smaller businesses can exert each different form of **power**. Another approach might be to explore **processes** of change over time and/or different **possibilities** for the future, as the power and influence of leading TNCs and their billionaire owners continues to grow. 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.

3. (a) Analyse ways in which alternative trading networks and microfinance organizations are closing the development gap. [12]

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

Microfinance organizations and alternative trading networks can support community development. Microfinance organizations provide small loans (microloans) to individuals, often women, for example, in India. Fairtrade is a well-known alternative trading network.

The concept of a **development gap** frames differences in development as a 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. The human development index (HDI) is a widely used measurement. In addition to development gaps *between* countries, development gaps may be identified *within* a country, for example, disparities between different groups of people.

Closing the development gap can be achieved in different **ways** by alternative trading and microfinance. Initiatives may target a particular aspect of wealth and wellbeing, for example income disparities between men and women within a particular country.

Likely themes for analysis include:

- Detailed examples of alternative trading networks and/or microfinance organizations.
- How financial resources are transferred to those needing them most – and how small investments may be sufficient to allow substantial improvements in agriculture.
- How family incomes may rise / become more reliable / not rely on child labour. As a result, children can attend regular schooling; education of girls helps tackle gender inequality.
- Other benefits, for example health provision; access to technology; political participation.
- Disparities in development within countries, for example between men and women, minority groups, or between rural and urban areas.
- 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.

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 the different strands of the human development **process** that microfinance organizations and alternative trading networks are supporting. Another approach might be to critically analyse similarities and differences in the **power** of microfinance organizations and alternative trading networks to bring positive change. Candidates might systematically analyse different key development gaps between **places** or people (e.g. gaps in education, health, equality, etc).

Candidates may score highly in the 7–9 markband with a detailed account of either microfinance organizations or alternative trading networks. A very detailed account of one may compensate for absence of the other. Both should feature in a 10–12 band answer, however. The shortcomings of alternative trading networks or microfinance should not be over-credited; this is not asked for. Nor should alternative ways of promoting development e.g. TNC investment.

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

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

- either ways in which microfinance organizations and/or alternative trading networks are used to promote development
- 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.

- (b) “Being interconnected has exposed societies to risks they can’t control.” 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/culture. 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 large numbers of places and environments in interconnected and interdependent ways – including global crime cartels. Different **risks** may include, among others, geopolitical, economic, social/cultural, technological or environmental (including biological) threats and challenges. Risks are transferred within global networks. For example, when a natural hazard disrupts economic activity in one part of the world, a larger-scale supply chain may be disrupted, with implications for societies. Individuals are increasingly exposed to technological risks (identity theft, hacking) and the Covid-19 pandemic showed how disease can spread in a connected world. The global financial crisis (2008-09) showed how economic risk spreads. Some people view cultural change / migration as a risk. **Societies** – at national or subnational scales – are comprised of individuals with varied exposure to, and vulnerability to, these risks. Societies vary in their capacity to manage or mitigate risks using different measures of **control** - ranging from laws (and sanctions and tariffs) to technological innovation. Also, some people and societies are more resilient than others, thanks to their wealth/privileges/insurance policies.

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

- Global networks flows eg migration and global trade as sources of risk [Guide 4.2]
- Anti-globalization campaigns and the preservation of culture [Guide 5.3 and 6.3]
- Climate change (linked with global development) and its many risks [Guide 2]
- Hacking and identity theft affecting individuals and societies [Guide 6.1]
- Exposure of Global South communities to pollution and environmental degradation due to the global shift of industry/activity eg electronic waste processing [Guide 6.1]
- Protectionism and resource nationalism by governments (to protect society) [Guide 5.3]
- Use of new technologies to manage risks, and other resilience strategies [Guide 6.3]
- Re-shoring of industries – framed as a way of mitigating the risk of job losses [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 whether mitigation of the risks attached to being interconnected is **possible**, for example exploring the **power** of societies (or their governments) to mitigate different risks eg using technology. Another approach might be to critically discuss the uneven **pattern** of risks created by the global economy for societies and **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.