



# **Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment**

## **Geography Assessment Syllabus Key stage 5 (Classes XI & XII) 2026 – 2030**

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# 1. Why Choose This syllabus?

The geography syllabus is interdisciplinary in nature, focusing on understanding and interpreting issues that affect people, places, and environments, as well as changes across space and time. This qualification equips students with the knowledge and skills essential for successful university entry, while also fostering competencies valuable for life beyond academics.

## Key Concepts

Key concepts are the big ideas that underpin Geography. They enable students to connect topics across strands, think critically, and apply their knowledge. The key concepts for BCSEA Geography are:

- I. **Space:** the implications of spatial distributions and patterns of a range of physical and human geographical phenomena.
- II. **Scale:** the significance of spatial scale in interpreting environments, features and places from local to global, and time scale in interpreting change from the geological past to future scenarios.
- III. **Place:** the importance of physical and human characteristics which create distinctive places with different opportunities and challenges.
- IV. **Environment:** how the interactions between people and their environment create the need for environmental management and sustainability.
- V. **Interdependence:** how the complex nature of interacting physical systems, human systems and processes create links and interdependencies.
- VI. **Diversity:** the significance of the similarities and differences between places, environments and people.
- VII. **Change:** the importance of change and the dynamic nature of places, environments and systems.

## Recognition and Support

### National and International Recognition

BCSEA qualifications are designed to meet high academic standards and prepare learners for success both within Bhutan and globally. Our geography curriculum equips students with the knowledge, skills, and geographical awareness that are valued by universities, employers, and civic institutions worldwide.

Students who complete the geography syllabus can confidently pursue higher education locally or internationally, as our programmes align with global expectations for inquiry, analysis, interpretation, and ethical understanding. Graduates are well-prepared to continue studies in geography, sustainability, environmental, or cultural studies, and are equally equipped to contribute to civic life, policymaking, education, research, or any career that demands analytical thinking, adaptability, and a deep understanding of the physical environment, human society and resulting links and interdependencies.

### Supporting Teachers

Effective education depends on the alignment of curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment. BCSEA ensures that assessment practices are consistent with the intended learning outcomes of the geography curriculum. To support this, teachers are provided with clear assessment guidelines, exemplar materials, and professional development opportunities that help them design and administer valid, reliable, and fair assessments. This alignment strengthens the quality of learning and ensures that candidates are assessed on the geographical knowledge, skills, and conceptual understanding the curriculum intends to develop.

Teachers have access to:

- **planning and preparation resources:** National Student-learning Framework, Assessment syllabus, specimen papers, and setter guides.
- **learning and revision tools:** model answers, past papers, and exemplars to support students' understanding and performance.
- **results analysis and reporting:** insights from assessments to inform teaching strategies and improve student outcomes.

## Professional Development in Assessment

As an awarding body, BCSEA offers targeted professional development focused on assessment. This ensures teachers and examiners:

- understand assessment objectives and criteria specific to geographical knowledge, interpretation, and evaluation.
- can accurately interpret and apply marking schemes to both factual recall and analytical responses.
- are skilled in providing feedback that strengthens learners' critical thinking, source analysis, and historical writing.
- stay up to date with changes in assessment standards, practices, and curriculum developments.

Through this approach, BCSEA ensures high-quality assessment, fairness, and reliability, supporting both learners and educators in achieving excellence.

## 2. Syllabus overview

### Aims

**The aims for this syllabus are to enable students to:**

- demonstrate an understanding of space, place, and location through the interpretation and use of geographical data and maps.
- develop analytical skills through critical evaluation of the nature, reliability, value, and limitations of geographical data and evidence.
- develop an understanding of the key elements of physical and human geography and analyse the interrelationship and interdependence between natural environments and human activities.
- develop awareness of the relevance of geography to understanding and solving contemporary environmental problems.
- develop an appreciation for the natural environment.
- increase knowledge of, and ability to use and apply, geographical skills and techniques including practical and fieldwork.
- develop a concern for accuracy and objectivity in collecting, recording, processing, presenting, analysing and interpreting geographical data.

## Content Overview (Key Stage 5)

Strands	XI Topics	XII Topics
1. Time and Space	1.1 GPS technology and disaster response 1.2 GIS and remote sensing	4.1 Surveying techniques 4.2 GPS technology and daily life 4.3 Role of GIS in addressing geographical challenges 4.4 Using spatial data sets with GIS for mapping
2. Physical Environment	2.1 Air pressure and temperature 2.2 Global circulation/wind systems 2.3 Climatic zones 2.4 Drainage basin system 2.5 Drainage basin characteristics 2.6 Storm hydrographs 2.7 The Third Pole and Glacier retreat	5.1 Evidence for past climates 5.2 Causes of global warming and climate change 5.3 Evidence for recent global warming 5.4 Significance of enhanced greenhouse effect 5.5 Impacts of climate change on the Third Pole and management strategies
3. People and Environment	3.1 Urbanization 3.2 Population distribution/density and planning 3.3 Population structure and DTM 3.4 Causes and impacts of migration 3.5 Migration management strategies 3.6 Urban models 3.7 Role of service industries including tourism in socio-economic development	6.1 Sustainable urban management 6.2 Population change/natural increase 6.3 Global population growth trends 6.4 Employment and unemployment and role of creative industries in economic development 6.5 Role of creative industries in economic development

## Assessment Objectives

The assessment objectives (AOs) are:

### AO1: Knowledge and Understanding

Candidates should be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- relevant geographical terms, concepts and systems
- geographical principles, theories and models
- the complex and interactive nature of physical and human environments
- how physical and human factors and processes bring changes in systems, distributions and environments
- the importance of spatial scale and time scale in the study of Geography
- the similarities and differences between places, environments and people
- the location and character of places and environments.

## AO2: Skills and Analysis

Candidates should be able to:

- use geospatial data to address developmental and environmental issues.
- apply geographical knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar contexts
- analyse and interpret a variety of types of geographical data and sources and recognise their limitations
- use qualitative and quantitative geographical data to identify characteristics, patterns, trends and relationships
- use diagrams and sketch maps to communicate geographical features
- demonstrate skills of analysis and synthesis of geographical information
- communicate geographical evidence, ideas and arguments.

## AO3: Evaluation

Candidates should be able to:

- evaluate the importance of geographical factors, processes and change on different environments.
- evaluate the relative success or failure of initiatives and management strategies.
- evaluate the different options available to decision makers.
- evaluate the impact of different values and attitudes of different groups of people in the management of physical and human environments.
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of geographical principles, theories and models.
- present logical, structured, coherent and evidence-based arguments.

### Weighting for assessment objectives

The approximate weightings allocated to each of the assessment objectives (AOs) are summarised below.

Assessment objective	Weighting in Key Stage 5 %
AO1 Knowledge and Understanding	41
AO2 Skills and Analysis	37
AO3 Evaluation	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

## Assessment objectives as a percentage of each component

### Key Stage 5

Assessment objective	Weighting in Components %		
	Paper 1	Paper 2	Coursework
AO1 Knowledge and Understanding	52	52	20
AO2 Skills and Analysis	25	25	60
AO3 Evaluation	23	23	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### Assessment Overview

#### XII

##### Paper 1

Physical Environment

Section A: three questions 30 marks (answer all questions)

Section B: four optional questions (answer two questions) 30 marks

1 hour 45 minutes

60 marks (Minimum 30% of the content of XI will be included)

Externally assessed

Weighting 40%

Questions are based on strand 2 of the subject content

##### Coursework

Time and Space

Assignment

1. Knowledge and understanding
  2. Observation and collection of data
  3. Organisation and presentation of data
  4. Analysis and interpretation
  5. Conclusion: Evaluation and decision making
- each 12 Marks

Total: 60 marks

Geographical Enquiry Assignment

Internally assessed and externally moderated

Weighting 20%

Assignment is based on strand 1 of the subject content

##### Paper 2

People and Environment

Section A: three questions 30 marks (answer all questions)

Section B: four optional questions (answer two questions) 30 marks

1 hour 45 minutes

60 marks (Minimum 30% of the content of XI will be included)

Externally assessed

Weighting 40%

Questions are based on strand 3 of the subject content

### 3. Details of the assessment

#### Paper 1 – Physical Environment

**Marks:** 60 marks

**Duration:** 1 hour 45 minutes

#### Assessment Objectives

AO1: Knowledge and Understanding

AO2: Skills and Analysis

AO3: Evaluation

#### Strand II Focus:

The physical environment topics studied in Class XI:

- Air pressure and temperature
- Global circulation/wind Systems
- Climatic zones
- Drainage basin system
- Drainage basin characteristics
- Storm hydrographs
- The Third Pole and glacier retreat

and XII:

- Evidence for past climates
- Causes of global warming and climate change
- Evidence for recent global warming
- Significance of enhanced greenhouse effect
- Impacts of climate change on the Third Pole and management strategies

#### Paper structure

##### Section A

Candidates answer **all** questions in Section A

- Section A contains three questions. These consist of short-answer questions to assess knowledge and understanding (AO1) and skills and analysis (AO2).
- Two of the questions will assess a different topic taken from Class XI topics. One question will assess a topic taken from Class XII topics.
- Each question is divided into sub-parts. These sub-parts can be broken down further into smaller parts (e.g. (i) and (ii)). Candidates answer all parts of each question.
- Each question will require interpretation of geographical resources. There will be at least one accompanying resource used for each question, which will be in the question paper or an insert.

Each question will be worth **10 marks**.

## Section B

Candidates choose **two** questions from a choice of **four**.

- Section B consists of essay questions.
- Each question will assess a different topic taken from Class XII topics. These will be from different areas of the curriculum to the question in Section A.
- All questions require candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding (AO1) and write an evaluative response (AO3). Evaluation and conclusions should be supported with examples and evidence from study of the topic.

Each question will be worth **15 marks**.

### Marks Distribution Summary

- Section A:  $3 \times 10 = 30$  marks
- Section B:  $2 \times 15 = 30$  marks

### Content Focus:

- The assessment will include a minimum of 30% of the content of Class XI.
- Content coverage follows the National School Curriculum – Geography Curriculum Framework (Key Stage 5, 2026–2030).

**Weighting:** 40% of AS

**Assessment Mode:** Externally assessed

## Paper 2 – People and Environment

**Marks:** 60

**Duration:** 1 hour 45 minutes

### Assessment Objectives

- AO1: Knowledge and Understanding
- AO2: Skills and Analysis
- AO3: Evaluation

### Strand III Focus

The human environment topics studied in Class XI:

- Urbanisation
- Population distribution/density and planning
- Demographic Transition Model (DTM)
- Cause and Impacts of Migration
- Migration management
- Urban models and patterns
- Service Industries (tourism) and economic development

and XII:

- Sustainable urban management
- Population change/natural Increase
- Global population growth
- Employment and unemployment
- Creative Industries and economic development

## **Paper Structure**

### **Section A**

Candidates answer **all** questions in Section A

- Section A contains three questions. These consist of short-answer questions to assess knowledge and understanding and skills and analysis.
- Two of the questions will assess a different topic taken from Class XI topics. One question will assess a topic taken from Class XII topics.
- Each question is divided into sub-parts. These sub-parts can be broken down further into smaller parts (e.g. (i) and (ii)). Candidates answer all parts of each question.
- Each question will require interpretation of geographical resources. There will be at least one accompanying resource used for each question, which will be in the question paper or an insert.

Each question will be worth **10 marks**.

### **Section B**

Candidates choose **two** questions from a choice of **four**.

- Section B consists of essay questions.
- Each question will assess a different topic taken from Class XII topics. These will be from different areas of the curriculum to the questions in Section A.
- All questions require candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and write an evaluative response. Evaluation and conclusions should be supported with examples and evidence from study of the topic.

Each question will be worth **15 marks**.

### **Marks Distribution Summary**

- Section A:  $3 \times 10 = 30$  marks
- Section B:  $2 \times 15 = 30$  marks

**Content Focus:**

- The assessment will include a minimum of 30% of the content of Class XI.
- Content coverage follows the National School Curriculum – Geography Curriculum Framework (Key Stage 5, 2026–2030).

**Weighting:** 40% of AS**Assessment Mode:** Externally assessed**Levels based mark scheme for Section B, Components 1 and 2**

For both Component 1 and 2, Section B essays will be marked using levels. The level descriptors are taken from the AOs for Knowledge and Understanding (AO1) and Evaluation (AO3).

Level	Description	Marks
5	<b>Developed response that evaluates the question</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant and accurate knowledge and clear understanding that answers the question.</li> <li>• Developed reasoning with an assessment of alternative factors/viewpoints to reach a logical decision.</li> <li>• Relevant evidence/examples that are accurate and detailed and support the answer.</li> </ul>	13–15
4	<b>Developed response with relevant evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly relevant and accurate knowledge with secure understanding that answers the question.</li> <li>• Developed reasoning with discussion of alternative factors/viewpoints.</li> <li>• Relevant evidence/examples that are generally accurate with some detail that mostly support the answer.</li> </ul>	10–12
3	<b>Explanatory response with simple evaluation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly relevant knowledge with some understanding that answers the question, but with some limitations in breadth and/or accuracy.</li> <li>• Reasoning lacks development and discussion of alternative factors/ viewpoints may be limited; the answer is largely explanatory.</li> <li>• Evidence/examples which are limited in some way (relevance, accuracy or detail) are used in the answer.</li> </ul>	7–9
2	<b>Descriptive response related to the question</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some relevant knowledge with partial understanding linked to the question.</li> <li>• Limited reasoning: the answer is largely descriptive.</li> <li>• Some limited examples may be used in the answer.</li> </ul>	4–6
1	<b>Limited response related to the topic</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited knowledge and understanding related to the topic which does not answer the question.</li> <li>• Examples may be absent or in name only.</li> </ul>	1–3
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No creditable response.</li> </ul>	0

## Component 3 – Coursework: Geographical Enquiry Assignment

**Marks:** 60 marks

**Assessment Mode:** Internally assessed and externally moderated.

**Time expected:** Approximately four weeks (20-25 hours)

**Weightage:** 20% of total assessment

BCSEA coursework assignment follows the 'route to geographical enquiry' and is designed to encourage students to use and apply their geographical knowledge and understanding to a real-world situation.

It will test assessment objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3 including the GPS, GIS and remote sensing skills developed in Strand I: Time and Space. Candidates will use contexts drawn from one or more subject topics studied in the physical environment, people and environment, or their interaction.

Candidates will submit a single coursework assignment of 1200–1500 words.

The focus of assignments can be common to all candidates at a centre, but do not have to be. It is expected that candidates will mostly use secondary data, however, primary data collection is not precluded/excluded. There should be enough variety and differentiation of tasks, and opportunity for individual initiative in all assignments.

Further details about the focus of assignments, structure - the 'route to geographical enquiry', examples of suitable coursework tasks, mark schemes and guidance around the administration of coursework will be provided before the first year of assessment.

### Grade Descriptors

Grade descriptions describe the level of performance typically demonstrated by candidates achieving the different grades awarded for a qualification. They provide a general indication of the performance required at Grades A, C and E. The descriptors are not mark schemes and should be interpreted in relation to the content of this syllabus, the assessment objectives, and the contexts in which tasks are set. They are designed to help teachers and examiners understand the level of performance typical of each grade, and to support benchmarking of candidate work

Grade descriptions are produced with a wide range of audiences in mind. For teachers, they support lesson planning and curriculum development, while students may gain useful insights into what is required to achieve a high grade and what candidate performance at lower grades typically looks like. For university admissions staff and employers, they paint a picture of typical performance at different grades.

Further details on the geography specific grade descriptors will be provided before the first year of assessment.

## Resource Types

The following table shows the types of source materials that candidates should be confident in handling and that might be used in the assessment tasks.

Resource type	Detail
Maps	Survey map extracts, distribution maps, GIS maps, thematic maps, distribution maps (flow line, isoline, desire line, dot, proportional symbols and choropleth), and sketch maps.
Photographs	Colour photographs, black and white photographs, aerial photographs, terrestrial photographs, and satellite images.
Diagrams and graphs	Bar graphs, divided bar graphs, line graphs, scatter graphs (including line of best fit), radar graphs, log-log and log-normal graphs, pie charts, proportional circles, dispersion graphs, triangular graphs, climate graphs, age/sex structure diagrams (population pyramid), 2D and 3D diagrams, flow diagrams, Venn diagrams, cartoons, pictograms, infographics, and diagrams with and without annotation.
Written	Extracts from newspapers, articles, and advertisements.
Numeric	Data tables.

The majority of resources will be embedded within the question paper, while selected materials may be provided separately as inserts.

## Command Words

Command words are the words in assessment tasks that tell candidates what they need to do. Understanding these words is essential, as they guide the depth, detail, and type of response expected. BCSEA uses command words consistently across its syllabuses and assessments to ensure clarity and fairness.

Command word	What it means
<b>Assess</b>	Make an informed judgement based on evidence.
<b>Calculate</b>	Work out a numerical answer. In general, working should be shown, especially where two or more steps are involved.
<b>Compare</b>	Identify/comment on similarities and/or differences. Two separate comments do not make a comparison.
<b>Define</b>	State the precise meaning of a term, idea or concept.
<b>Describe</b>	State in words the key characteristics and give factual details.
<b>Discuss</b>	Present points for and against, or present different viewpoints.
<b>Evaluate</b>	Make a judgement from available evidence.
<b>Explain</b>	set out purposes or reasons / make the relationships between things clear / say why and/or how and support with relevant evidence.
<b>Give</b>	Provide an answer from, or in relation to, a resource.
<b>Identify</b>	Name or select one or more characteristics.
<b>Justify</b>	support a case with evidence/argument.
<b>Label</b>	Add specific names or details to a diagram, graph or map.
<b>State</b>	Give a concise answer expressed in clear terms.
<b>Suggest</b>	Apply knowledge and understanding to an unfamiliar situation where there is no single correct answer.
<b>To what extent</b>	Form and express a judgement after examining evidence.

## 4. What else you need to know

This section provides key information about the syllabus and administrative processes. It is intended to help teachers, candidates, and schools understand how to manage entries, assessments, and access arrangements effectively. More information is available on the BCSEA portal ([www.bcsea.bt](http://www.bcsea.bt)) and through official guidance documents.

### Before You Start

#### Previous study

Learners beginning this course are recommended to have completed prior study in Social Studies, Geography, or related subjects equivalent to the Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE).

#### Guided learning hours

The course is designed to require approximately 140 guided learning hours for class XI and 140 guided learning hours for Class XII.

#### Combining with other syllabuses

Candidates may take this syllabus alongside other Key stage 5 assessment syllabuses, except where syllabuses have the same title and level.

### Making Entries

Schools are responsible for submitting candidate entries. Schools should ensure candidates are entered for the correct syllabus components. Entry instructions are available in the Operation Guidelines for Examination and Assessment (OGEA) available at [www.bcsea.bt](http://www.bcsea.bt).

#### Retakes

Candidates may retake any component of the Geography Assessment Syllabus (Paper 1, Paper 2, or Coursework) as required.

#### Language

This syllabus and all assessment materials are available in English only.

## Accessibility and Equality

### Syllabus and assessment design

- BCSEA aims to avoid discrimination and maximise inclusivity for all candidates, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEN), religion, gender, or other protected characteristics.
- Materials are designed to be accessible, using clear language and design principles.

### Reasonable adjustments

- BCSEA provides reasonable adjustments to minimise barriers for candidates with SEN, disability, temporary illness/injury.
- Adjustments should reflect a candidate's normal way of working. Approval must ensure that adjustments are reasonable, cost-effective, and do not compromise assessment integrity.
- For modified papers, the questions are not made easier; instead, the modifications make sure the content is accessible to candidates with specific needs without altering the standard or level of difficulty of the paper.
- Candidates unable to access all components may receive an award based on completed components.

## After The Exam

### Grading and reporting

- Grades A – E, with 'A' as highest and 'E' as lowest.
- A candidate is considered to have met the minimum passing standard if they achieve at least the level of performance consistent with Grade E.
- Ungraded: Candidates not meeting the lowest grade standard are reported as Ungraded (U).
- Grades are awarded based on set grade thresholds, which are established each year to maintain consistent standards of performance across examination sessions.
- Each candidate receives a Statement of Results and Pass Certificate issued by BCSEA in collaboration with Cambridge.
- The Statement of Results reports a single overall grade (A–E) for the subject, derived from the combined performance in the coursework and Written Examination.