



Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment

Geography

Assessment Syllabus

Key Stage 4 (classes IX & X)

2026-2030

Contact Us

Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment
Kawajangsa, Thimphu
Post Box No. 156
Email: bcsea@bcsea.bt

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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.	
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1. Why Choose This syllabus?

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Key Concepts

Key concepts are the big ideas that underpin the study of Geography. 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.

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, policy-making, 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, scheme of assessment, assessment syllabus, specimen papers, and setter guides.
- Learning and revision tools: model answers, past papers, and exemplars to support students' inquiry skills, interpretation, and analytical writing.
- Results analysis and reporting: insights from assessments to inform teaching strategies, track progress, and improve student outcomes. a
- Professional Development in Assessment
- BCSEA as an awarding body, offers targeted professional development focused on Geography assessment. This ensures teachers and examiners:
 - understand assessment objectives and criteria specific to historical knowledge, interpretation, and evaluation.
 - can accurately interpret and apply mark 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 in Geography education.

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2. Syllabus overview

Aims

The aims are to enable students to:

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

Content Overview (Key Stage 4)

Strands	IX Topics	X Topics
1. Time and Space	1.1 Unique Earth 1.2 Time Zone 1.3 Topographical Map Interpretation	4.1 The Origin of the Earth 4.2 Map Reading and Interpretation
2. Physical Environment	2.1 Earth's interior structure 2.2 Climate change and weather pattern 2.3 Soil characteristics and types	5.1 Climate and Vegetation 5.2 Volcano and Earthquake 5.3 Karst topography/work of underground water 5.4 Climate change and policy conventions 5.5 Arid landforms
3. People and Environment	3.1 Population growth and measures 3.2 Disaster Management 3.3 Energy Resources 3.4 Types of Farming 3.5 Human impact on ecosystem	6.1 Trends of population 6.2 Migration 6.3 Spatial distribution of settlement 6.4 Industries 6.5 Sources of energy

Assessment Objectives

The assessment objectives (AOs) are:

AO1: Knowledge and Understanding

- show the understanding of Earth's unique features that support life.
- Recall and describe the similarities and differences between Earth and other planets,
- Explain and give examples of the relationship between longitudes and time zones, and show how these are used to determine time differences between places.
- identify physical features on topographic maps by using contour lines, symbols, scales, and elevation data.

AO2: Skills and Application

- Demonstrate the understanding of how Earth's physical and environmental characteristics relates with human life and activities.
- Apply knowledge of longitudes and time zones to solve practical problems such as calculating local and international times.
- Use topographic maps to explain spatial patterns, elevations, and landscape features in real-world contexts.

AO3: Analysis

- Interpret and analyze topographic maps and diagrams to extract relevant geographic information.
- Construct and use simple diagrams, sketches, or map-based data to represent geographic features.
- Use scales, symbols, and contour data accurately in problem-solving tasks.

AO4: Evaluation

- Compare and assess Earth's unique features with those of other planets to evaluate their significance for sustaining life.
- Judge the accuracy of time-related calculations and justify reasoning when applying longitude and time zone concepts.
- Evaluate the usefulness of topographic maps in understanding and representing physical landscapes.

Weighting for assessment objectives

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

Assessment objective	Weighting in Key Stage 4%
AO1 Knowledge and Understanding	34
AO2 Skills and Application	26
AO3 Analysis	24
AO4 Evaluation	16
Total	100

Assessment objectives as a percentage of each component

Key Stage 4

Assessment objective	Paper 1	Paper 2	Coursework
AO1 Knowledge and Understanding	40	40	10
AO2 Application	25	25	30
AO3 Analysis	20	20	40
AO4 Evaluation	15	15	20
Total	100	100	100

Assessment Overview

X

Paper 1

Time and Space
Compulsory written Paper
Marks: 50 marks
Section A: **Two** questions 30 marks (answer all questions)
Section B: **Four** optional questions (answer Two questions)
1 hour
Weighting 40%
Externally assessed
Questions are based on strand 1 of the subject content

Coursework

Coursework Assignment
40 marks
Assignment topics
Internally assessed and externally moderated
Weighting 20%
Assignment is based on strand 3 of the subject content

Paper 2

Physical Environment
Compulsory written paper
Marks: 50 marks
Section A: **Two** questions 30 marks (answer all questions)
Section B: **Four** optional questions (answer Two questions)
1 hour
Weighting 40%
Externally assessed
Questions are based on strand 2 of the subject content

3. Details of the assessment

Paper 1 Time and Space

Marks: 50 marks

Duration: 1 hour

Assessment Objectives

AO1: Knowledge and Understanding

AO2: Skills and Application

AO3: Analysis and

AO4: Evaluation

Strand I Focus:

The **Time and Space** strand topics studied in Class X

- The Origin of the Earth
- Map Reading and Interpretation

Paper 2 Physical Environment

Marks: 50 marks

Duration: 1 hour

Assessment Objectives

AO1: Knowledge and Understanding

AO2: Skills and Application

AO3: Analysis and

AO4: Evaluation

Strand II Focus:

The **Physical Environment** strand topics studied in Class X

- Climate and Vegetation
- Volcano and Earthquake
- Karst topography/work of underground water
- Climate change and policy conventions
- Arid landforms

Paper structure (applies to both Paper 1 and Paper 2)

Section A

Candidates answer **all** questions in Section A

- **Paper 1:** Multiple-choice and short-answer questions based on the **Time and Space** theme. **Section A, Question 2** will require the interpretation and analysis of a **toposheet**, assessing **AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding)** and **AO2 (Skills and Analysis)**.
- **Paper 2:** Multiple-choice and short-answer questions based on the **Physical Environment** theme, assessing **AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding)** and **AO2 (Skills and Analysis)**.
- Two of the questions will assess a different topic taken from Class IX topics. One question will assess a topic taken from Class X 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.

Section B

Candidates choose **TWO** questions from a choice of **FOUR**.

- Section B consists of extended response questions.
- Each question will assess a different topic taken from all the two strands.
- 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), Skills and Application (AO2), Analyse (AO3) and write an evaluative response (AO4), and conclusions should be supported with examples and evidence from study of the topic.

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

Marks Distribution Summary

- Section A: Question 1 (1x15) = 15marks
Question 2 =15 marks
- Section B: 2 × 10 = **20 marks**

Note: Teachers are required to follow the prescribed paper structure when setting School-Based Assessment tasks (class IX). This ensures uniformity in assessment design, comparability of results, and alignment with the BCSEA standards.

Levels based mark scheme for Section B, Components 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	Developed response that evaluates the question • Relevant and accurate knowledge and clear understanding that answers the question. • Developed reasoning with an assessment of alternative factors/viewpoints to reach a logical decision. • Relevant evidence/examples that are accurate and detailed and support the answer.	13–15
4	Developed response with relevant evaluation • Mostly relevant and accurate knowledge with secure understanding that answers the question. • Developed reasoning with discussion of alternative factors/viewpoints. • Relevant evidence/examples that are generally accurate with some detail that mostly support the answer.	10–12
3	Explanatory response with simple evaluation • Mostly relevant knowledge with some understanding that answers the question, but with some limitations in breadth and/or accuracy. • Reasoning lacks development and discussion of alternative factors/viewpoints may be limited; the answer is largely explanatory.	7–9

	Evidence/examples which are limited in some way (relevance, accuracy or detail) are used in the answer.	
2	Descriptive response related to the question - Some relevant knowledge with partial understanding linked to the question. - Limited reasoning: the answer is largely descriptive. - Some limited examples may be used in the answer.	4–6
1	Limited response related to the topic - Limited knowledge and understanding related to the topic which does not answer the question. - Examples may be absent or in name only.	1–3
0	No creditable response.	0

Component 3 – Coursework: Geographical Enquiry Assignment

Marks: 40 marks

Weighting: 20% of AS

Assessment Mode: Internally assessed and externally moderated.

Time expected: 2-3 weeks (approx. 10-15 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, AO3 and AO4. 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 700–1000 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.

Strand III Focus:

The **People and Environment** strand topics studied in Class X

- Trends of population
- Migration
- Spatial distribution of settlement
- Industries
- Sources of energy

Grade Descriptors

Grade descriptors are intended to illustrate the standards of achievement expected of candidates awarded particular grades. 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. **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
Assess	Make an informed judgement based on evidence.
Calculate	Work out a numerical answer. In general, working should be shown, especially where two or more steps are involved.
Compare	Identify/comment on similarities and/or differences. Two separate comments do not make a comparison.
Define	State the precise meaning of a term, idea or concept.
Describe	State in words the key characteristics and give factual details.
Discuss	Present points for and against, or present different viewpoints.
Evaluate	Make a judgement from available evidence.

Explain	set out purposes or reasons / make the relationships between things clear / say why and/or how and support with relevant evidence.
Give	Provide an answer from, or in relation to, a resource.
Identify	Name or select one or more characteristics.
Predict	Suggest what may happen based on the available information.
Justify	support a case with evidence/argument.
Label	Add specific names or details to a diagram, graph or map.
State	Give a concise answer expressed in clear terms.
Suggest	Apply knowledge and understanding to an unfamiliar situation where there is no single correct answer.
To what extent	Form and express a judgement after examining evidence.

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	Topographical Map, 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.

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

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.

Before you start

Previous study

Learners beginning this course are recommended to have completed prior study in geography or related subjects' equivalent subjects.

Guided learning hours

The course is designed to require approximately 120 guided learning hours for class IX and 120 guided learning hours for Class X.

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.

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 – G, with 'A' as highest and 'G' 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 G.
- 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–G) for the subject, derived from the combined performance in the coursework and Written Examination.

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