



General Certificate of Education
Advanced Level Examination
June 2014

Critical Thinking

CRIT4/PM

Unit 4 Reasoning and Decision Making

Pre-release Case Study Source Material

To be opened and issued to candidates on or after 1 April 2014

- The material consists of nine sources (**Documents A to I**) on the subject of **homework**. These documents are being given to you in advance of the Unit 4 examination to enable you to study the content and approach of each extract and to consider issues which they raise in preparation for the questions based on this material in the examination.
- One further source (**Document J**) will be provided as an insert within the examination paper.
- Your teachers **are** permitted to discuss the material with you before the examination.
- You may write notes in this copy of the Source Material, but you will **not** be allowed to bring this copy, or any other notes you may have made, into the examination room. You will be provided with a clean copy of the Source Material at the start of the Unit 4 examination.
- This may be a controversial subject and feelings on many aspects of it can run high. The examination questions will ask you to *critically consider* various claims and arguments and to make a *reasoned decision* of your own.
- You are not required to carry out any further study of the material than is necessary for you to gain an understanding of the detail that it contains and to consider the issues that are raised. It is suggested that at least three hours' detailed study is required for this purpose.

Document A

Supportive parents do more than good schools to boost children's exam results, a study suggests.



- 1 Parents who help with homework and attend school events can outweigh the effect of weak schools, according to researchers in America. The team analysed data on more than 10 000 teenagers across the US.
- 2 Co-author Dr Toby Parcel, of North Carolina State University, said: “Our study shows that parents need to be aware of how important they are.” Dr Parcel, a professor of sociology, said parents “should invest time in their children, checking homework, attending school events and letting kids know school is important. That’s where the payoff is.”
- 3 The researchers found that pupils whose families were supportive of their education and involved in school life but attended weaker schools performed better academically than students who attended effective schools but whose families were disengaged. “In other words, while both school and family involvement are important, the role of family involvement is stronger when it comes to academic success,” explained Dr Parcel.
- 4 The researchers say that children gain benefits – social capital – from both school and their family relationships. They set out to define which was more important in boosting children’s exam results, analysing data on 10 585 teenagers from 1000 randomly selected secondary schools collated by the US National Longitudinal Educational Study. The data includes information on schools’ achievement scores, parents’ involvement in homework and school events and students’ exam results.

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- 5 The researchers defined the most important factors in the relationship between parents and children as trust, good communication and active engagement in a child's academic life. They also defined effective schools as those with the ability to serve as a positive environment for learning, involving students in extra-curricular activities, strong teacher morale and the ability of teachers to address the needs of individual students.
- 6 The researchers say their findings suggest that government social policy should focus on improving parenting skills rather than focusing solely on 'fixing schools'. "Although investment in school social capital may be beneficial, our results suggest that investment in family social capital would reap greater returns."
- 7 As well as urging parents to become more involved in their children's development they suggest the wider introduction of flexible working patterns. "One possibility is expansion of supportive workplace policies, such as flexitime, that would allow parents to attend school meetings and participate in extra-curricular activities with their children without adversely affecting their jobs."
- 8 The authors suggest more support for good parenting practices would help shrink social divides. They cite previous research which has argued that middle class and working class or poor children experienced 'unequal childhoods'. "Middle class parents use concerted cultivation, creating a full schedule of activities for their children to encourage academic development. In contrast, working class and poor parents schedule far fewer activities and instead view child development as an accomplishment of natural growth. They are less likely to actively play with their children, leaving offspring more time to spend in free play. They also talk with their children less."

Source: article by Judith Burns, Education Reporter, © BBC News, October 2012
Photograph © 2013 Thinkstock

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Document B**Parenting dilemma: France's president wants to ban homework. Should we?**

As UK parents prepare to cajole their children into completing their homework over the Christmas break, a parent wonders: should we follow the French example and consider a ban on homework in primary schools?

- 1 The French president, François Hollande, in a recent speech at the Sorbonne, called for abolishing homework for primary school students as part of a broader set of education reforms.
- 2 *Les devoirs* should not be a duty for pre-teens, argued François Hollande, because homework is largely a waste of time (among his proposed reforms is more instruction time). Mr Hollande is not alone; Kirstie Allsopp, the television presenter, has campaigned against homework in primary schools.
- 3 What is interesting about Mr Hollande's suggestion of abolishing homework is that it's not to give children time to run freely in fields, or avoid dull, repetitious work but, rather, a way to level the socio-economic playing field. Poor children, the French president argued, are less likely to get help from parents with their homework, so they're set up to fail.
- 4 Mr Hollande's assumptions on homework are controversial. Dylan Matthews, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, points out that many studies suggest that homework is a positive educational tool, and that the real divide in terms of who is helping their children with their homework is around the size of a family – ie how much support there is at home; married parents are more likely to supervise homework than single parents. Otherwise, poor parents are putting in just as much time policing homework as their wealthier peers.
- 5 Mr Matthews concludes that the achievement gap could more fairly be blamed on summer holidays: rich parents spend more time providing their children with educational opportunities over the summer than poor parents.

Source: article by Sally Peck, The Telegraph, December 2012
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Document C

Michael Gove scraps homework rules

Schools have been given the go-ahead to reduce the amount of homework they set for pupils after complaints from parents that studies are 'cutting' in to family time.

1 Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, has scrapped national guidelines which set out how much time children should spend doing homework each night. Instead, head teachers will decide how much extra study, if any, their pupils require. Officials said that the aim was to cut bureaucracy, and insisted that homework would remain an important part of education.

2 However, the move was welcomed by parents who have called for less homework to be handed out. Kirstie Allsopp, the television presenter who has campaigned against homework in primary schools, last night welcomed Mr Gove's move and said: "Getting rid of the guidelines might free up teachers to think a bit more creatively about it."

3 Under the old guidelines, introduced by Labour in 1998, primary schools were told to set an hour of homework a week for children aged 5 to 7, rising to half an hour a night for those aged 7 to 11. Secondary schools were told to set three quarters of an hour to one and a half hours a night for pupils aged 11 to 14, and one and a half to two and a half hours a night for those aged 14 to 16. While the rules were not statutory, teachers came under pressure to follow them as they were said to give "a clear idea of what is reasonable to expect at different ages". They also allowed parents to challenge teachers who set more, or less, than the recommended level. Many schools reproduced the guidelines in their own homework policies.

4 Supporters of homework warned scrapping the guidelines could lead to some schools abandoning it altogether, to spare teachers the trouble of extra marking.

5 Opposition has grown towards the guidelines, fuelled by an anti-homework movement in the United States and research questioning the efficacy of such assignments, particularly in primary schools.

6 Teachers complain about chasing up missing work and argue that it causes upset among the youngest pupils, while parents have claimed that too much study is making children anxious and reducing the time available for sports and play.



Conservative MP Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education.

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- 7 Some primaries have already abandoned traditional homework. Since September, Frittenden Church of England Primary, in Kent, has replaced it with an optional weekly 45-minute homework club. Elizabeth Bradshaw, the head teacher, said: “We had feedback from parents, or notes to the teachers, saying ‘my child is very worried that they haven’t completed it on time’, or the child would come in to the classroom in tears because they had left it in the car. We simply wanted to remove that stress and focus on the learning for that week in a homework club where it is done, marked, and informs the learning of the next week.”
- 8 Ryde School, a primary in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, regards activities such as a walk in the countryside, playing board games and cooking as ‘homework’. Its policy states: “Children are not little adults and therefore cannot be expected to study at home as adults do. Children spend six hours a day at school and are usually tired or ‘filled’ with school learning by the end of the day. Homework must be kept to a minimum and be of a light, relaxed nature.” The Department for Education said yesterday that the shake-up formed part of the Government’s plan to give more autonomy to schools.
- 9 Allsopp, who has two children and two stepchildren, said: “If you have three children, what happens to the other children while the parent is settled in the corner helping each one with their half an hour of homework? Eating a pizza alone. It ends up separating families at that key time. Learning at home should be about people doing things together as a family – reading a book, eating, watching an interesting documentary, attending an exhibition that ties in with what the child has been doing at school. These things are incredibly important. What I am ‘anti’ is the silly task set by a teacher to tick a box.”
- 10 But Chris McGovern, a former head teacher and chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, warned that scrapping the guidelines could send the ‘wrong message’ to schools. He said: “The danger is that schools will use this as an excuse to dilute the amount of homework. Middle class children will do their homework anyway. Guidance for children who are coming from more deprived backgrounds is probably more important.”
- 11 A Department for Education spokesman said: “Homework is part and parcel of a good education, along with high quality teaching and strong discipline. We trust head teachers to set the homework policy for their school. They know their pupils best and should be free to make these decisions without having to adhere to unnecessary bureaucratic guidance.”
- 12 The shake-up comes as a new study by London’s Institute of Education reveals that homework, even in small amounts, boosts the academic attainment and social skills of secondary school pupils. The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education project showed that homework was linked to improvements in 14 year olds’ academic prowess and social skills as well as reductions in levels of aggression and impulsiveness.
- 13 Lisa Trotman, a mother of two, from Bristol, said homework could cause friction at home but helped prepare children for the workload of secondary school. Her son Cameron, 11, who is in his final year at primary school, is set homework on Friday evening which must be handed in by Wednesday. “If I can catch him when he’s still in school mode, we get it done quite smoothly,” said Mrs Trotman. “Otherwise it’s prodding and pushing, cajoling and encouraging over the weekend. I think it has been useful as a preparation for big school.” Cameron also attends an Explore Learning Centre, where he receives private tuition in maths and English twice a week.

Source: article by Juile Henry, Education Correspondent, The Telegraph, March 2012
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Michael Gove photograph © Roderick Smith/Alamy

Document D

Two hours' homework a night linked to better school results

Any time spent on homework shows benefits, according to study.

1 Spending more than two hours a night doing homework is linked to achieving better results in English, maths and science, according to a major study which has tracked the progress of 3000 children over the past 15 years.



2 Spending any time doing homework showed benefits, but the effects were greater for students who put in two to three hours a night, according to the study published by the Department for Education. The academics involved in the latest research say their study emphasises what students actually do, rather than how much work the school has set.

3 Pam Sammons, a professor of education at Oxford University, said that time spent on homework reflected the influence of the school – whether pupils were expected to do homework – as well as children's enjoyment of their subjects. Sammons said: "That's one of the reasons Indian and Chinese children do better. They tend to put more time in. It's to do with your effort as well as your ability."

4 "What we're not saying is that everyone should do large amounts, but if we could shift some of those who spend no time or half an hour into [doing] one to two hours – one of the reasons private schools' results are better is that there's more expectation of homework."

5 The study controlled for social class, and whether pupils had a quiet place in which to do their homework, but still found a benefit, Sammons said.

6 It also finds that students who reported that they enjoyed school got better results. Schools could ensure children had a better experience by improving the 'behavioural climate', making schoolwork interesting and making children feel supported by teachers, Sammons said.

7 The research shows that working-class parents can help their children succeed 'against the odds' by having high aspirations for them. Children who did well from disadvantaged backgrounds were backed by parents who valued learning and encouraged extra-curricular activities. "Parents' own resilience in the face of hardship provided a role model for their children's efforts," the research says.

8 The study underlines the importance of a good primary school. Children who attended an 'academically effective' primary school did better at maths and science in later life. The study did not find a link with performance in English.

Source: article by Jeevan Vasagar, Education Editor, The Guardian, March 2012
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Document E**Too much homework ‘may lead to poor grades’**

- 1 Pupils who spend hours every night doing their homework may not necessarily increase their chances of good exam grades, a report said today.
- 2 Youngsters who spend too much time studying after school were likely to underachieve in the same way as those who do very little, the report by the National Foundation for Educational Research said. The best exam and coursework results come from pupils who work a sensible and ‘moderate’ amount, the Ofsted-commissioned report claimed.
- 3 The report, *Homework: A Review of Recent Research*, said that pupils with a positive attitude to out-of-school study are most likely to achieve. The report’s principal researcher, Caroline Sharp, said: “This major review shows that pupils and parents consider homework to be an important part of school life. The results suggest that spending time on homework is associated with higher academic achievement at secondary level. At primary level there is no conclusive evidence that homework boosts achievement.”
- 4 Having considered research published between the Education Reform Act in 1998 and 2001, it emerged that time spent on homework and academic achievement may be curvilinear – pupils either doing very little or a great deal tend to perform less well than those doing moderate amounts.
- 5 Evidence also showed that there is a positive relationship between time spent on homework and achievement at secondary school.
- 6 It was difficult to determine whether parental influence improved pupils’ school achievement or whether it hampered their work.
- 7 Research done in the United States showed girls and Asian pupils tended to spend most time on homework.

Source: article from *Mail Online*, Daily Mail, November 2012
published by © Associated Newspapers Ltd

Document F**Mum bans her children from doing homework**

- 1 A mother has banned her three children from doing homework because she claims it is putting too much pressure on them. Sarah Billing's three sons Aaron, aged 9, Kaeden, aged 8, and Ronnie, aged 7, all attend Sankey Valley St James' Primary School, Dorchester Road, Great Sankey. She believes they are being given too much homework which is causing stress and disruption at home. The 35 year old has now stopped all three from doing any. "They are not doing it, it's as simple as that," said Mrs Billing.
- 2 "I'm not against homework for older children but they are too young. The boys are screaming because they don't want to go to school. Research shows that with primary school children it doesn't make a difference. It's taking them away from family life and it needs to stop."
- 3 Pupils at the Church of England school are expected to do around twenty minutes of homework each night. It includes times tables, spelling practice and reading. Children who do not complete their homework do so for 15 minutes at lunchtime during a period called 'reflection'.
- 4 Vivienne Formby, head teacher at Sankey Valley St James, said the workload is reasonable but Mrs Billing disagrees and calls 'reflection' a punishment. "They should not be punished for not doing it," she said. "What about when children are supposed to play out with their friends? I want parents to be aware that homework is not compulsory. You do not have to sign the agreement."
- 5 Mrs Formby said: "We seek to do the very best for all the children in our care and we are fortunate that parents are supportive and understand. We have a well established homework policy which is part of the daily life of our school and clearly states that the children should not take more than 15 to 20 minutes per day to complete, as we value not only the importance of family time but also feel that it is important for parents to have an understanding of what the children are learning in school."

Source: article published in the Warrington Guardian, October 2012
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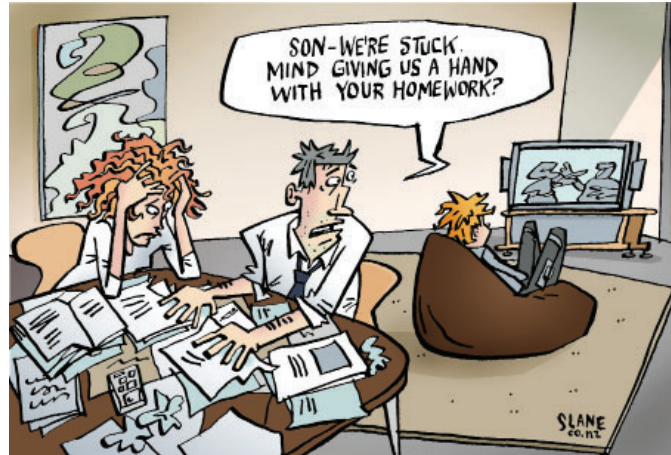
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Document G

Parents ‘struggling with primary school maths homework’

Parents are struggling to understand their children’s mathematics homework because of confusion over new teaching methods used in the classroom, according to research.

1 A study of more than 2000 mothers and fathers found that more than half lacked the confidence to help children with simple sums in the home. Just one-in-20 could correctly answer a full list of questions suitable for pupils aged 11 and under, it was revealed. According to researchers, maths is rated as the hardest subject for parents to help their children with after French.



2 The findings – in a study by the publisher Pearson – come amid growing concerns over standards of numeracy in the UK. Research last year found that almost half of adults – 17 million – have poor maths skills, leaving them struggling to manage family finances, calculate change and use transport timetables.

3 A recent study by US academics found that parental support was key in driving up standards among children, with mothers and fathers having a greater impact than schools themselves. But the latest report by Pearson found that 30 per cent of parents “don’t feel confident enough in their own maths skills to help their children with their primary school maths homework”. Some 53 per cent insisted they struggled to understand the new maths teaching methods used in modern classrooms.

4 Commenting on the study, Carol Vorderman, the TV presenter who has carried out a review for the Conservatives into maths teaching, said: “Studies have shown that if parents help their children with homework they are more likely to succeed at school. It is therefore worrying that so many parents lack confidence in their own maths skills. It’s imperative that children are given the opportunity to learn maths in a way that is fun, accessible and engaging, both at home and in the classroom.”

5 Researchers surveyed 2005 parents of school-age children on their attitudes towards maths. They were also presented with a list of 10 questions suitable for pupils in the final three years of primary school – and the first year of secondary education. Only five per cent could answer all 10 questions correctly, it was revealed. Some 15 per cent of parents even struggled with a simple fractions question aimed at eight and nine-year-olds. They were presented with a list of fractions – including: $\frac{2}{8}$, $\frac{10}{40}$, $\frac{4}{8}$ and $\frac{5}{20}$ and asked which one was not equivalent to a quarter. In all, a quarter of parents correctly answered just four out of 10 questions or less.

Source: article by Graeme Paton, Education Editor, The Telegraph, January 2013
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 Cartoon © Chris Slane

Document H**Parents feel excluded by children**

- 1 Many parents feel 'excluded' by their children's reluctance to tell them anything about their time spent at school, suggests a survey. The survey from the government's educational technology agency, Becta, suggests children do not like to be 'hassled' by parental inquiries. It found that 82% of parents wished they had more information about their children's school life. Only 16% of children volunteered information about their day at school.
- 2 The involvement of parents has been highlighted as an important element of children's achievement at school. But the survey suggests that parents struggle to find out how they might be able to help.
- 3 The technology agency asked television psychologist and government adviser Tanya Byron to investigate this communication gap. "Many parents anxiously question their kids at the end of the school day and this creates tension, conflict and a lack of essential communication," said Professor Byron. She suggests that there should be better links between schools, parents and children.
- 4 The survey of 1000 children aged 11 to 14 and their parents found that youngsters were reluctant to share their experiences with their families. More than a third of young people said they found it difficult to speak to their parents about school – and more than two in five parents found it hard to 'extract information' about school from their children.
- 5 As a technology agency, Becta suggests that school websites and online resources for homework can help to make parents "feel much more a part of their child's learning". It says that when parents are able to see what their children are learning they are more confident in talking about school work – both with the children and teachers. Parents can also use email to keep in touch with teachers, says the technology agency, and schools can alert parents of any attendance problems.

Source: © BBC News, March 2009.

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This item has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions. It is an interview discussing how homework is hurting kids, published in Maclean's magazine in September 2006. The interview was conducted by Kenneth Whyte.

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