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Key skills communication Level 4 - Working parents

Tuesday 16 November 2004

Source Booklet

- This booklet contains source material for the level 4 communication test, November 2004
- The test questions will be based on this material
- You must hand in this source booklet at the end of the test, along with your question paper and answer booklet

The level 4 communication test will assess your ability to:

- evaluate and synthesise information from different sources
- communicate relevant information with accuracy, effectively using a form, structure and style that suits your purpose
- organise and clearly present relevant information, illustrating what you say in ways that suit your purpose, subject and audience
- vary your use of vocabulary and grammatical expression to convey particular effects, enable fine distinctions to be made, achieve emphasis and engage the audience

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Working mothers 'find more child time'



More women work but the hours are shorter.

Working mothers in developed countries around the world are spending more time with their children than was the case in the 1960s, according to new research.

The study shows that although more women are now working than at any time in the last 100 years, they spend an average of 135 minutes a day playing with their children under the age of six, reading to them or caring for them. This compares with 53 minutes in 1961.

For women who do not work the average is 189 minutes a day while 39 years ago the figure was 95 minutes.

The research also found working mothers are spending less time at their jobs. They are employed an average of 233 minutes per day, compared to 325 minutes in 1961.

But part-time female employees are spending more time at work. They spend an average of 201 minutes a day working compared to 164 minutes in the early 1960s.

The study was conducted by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, a department of Essex University, and was based on data

"The amount of time people are working each week is decreasing"

Professor Jonathan Gershuny

gathered by large “time-diary” studies from countries including the UK, America, Australia, Canada and Israel.

The Institute’s director, Professor Jonathan Gershuny said: “The way we spend our time is changing. Although many people say their lives are more congested with work than they used to be, in fact it seems that, overall, the amount of time people are working each week is decreasing.

“Parents appear to spend more time involved in childcare than 40 years ago, despite the fact that more mothers are now in the work-force.”

But the survey found that family meal times were one area which had suffered over the last 39 years.

The time mothers who are not in paid employment spend eating with their children has fallen from an average of 114 minutes a day in 1961 to 61 minutes.

Source: BBC News website, 27 October 2000

Extracts from the Bain Report on Flexible Working

Benefits of Flexible Working

- 2.4** Employers who adopt new flexible working patterns generally report benefits to their business. They find that:
- staff morale improves and absenteeism decreases;
 - skilled staff are retained and better returns are gained from training;
 - staff turnover decreases;
 - staff are easier to attract and recruitment costs are less.
- 2.5** For individuals the opportunity to work flexible hours can greatly improve their ability to balance home and work responsibilities. A father whose employer allows him to adapt his working pattern to give him greater time to take his child to a carer is likely to arrive less stressed, feeling less exhausted and more motivated, than one who knows he must be at work at 8:45am because that is when the employer insists work must start.

Working Parents

- 2.8** The opportunity to work flexibly enables working parents to balance their responsibilities at work with those of raising children. Acknowledging this, the Government states in its Green Paper that it “wants to make it easier for parents who choose to work to do so.” It recognises that we all effectively benefit from the contribution working parents make to our prosperity. When we are older we will be dependent on our children’s support and they will be shaping our world. We have therefore looked at how parents currently fit in to the workforce and their demands for flexible working.
- 2.9** In today’s labour market, parents with children under the age of 19 currently account for about 43 per cent of all employees. As shown in Table 2.1, there are significant differences between the employment rates of parents living together and those of lone parents.

Table 2.1: Employment Rates of Mothers and Fathers with Dependent Children by Family Type

Family Type	Percentage Employed 1997
Couples family:	
Mothers	67
Fathers	87
Single parent family:	
Lone mothers	45
Lone fathers	64

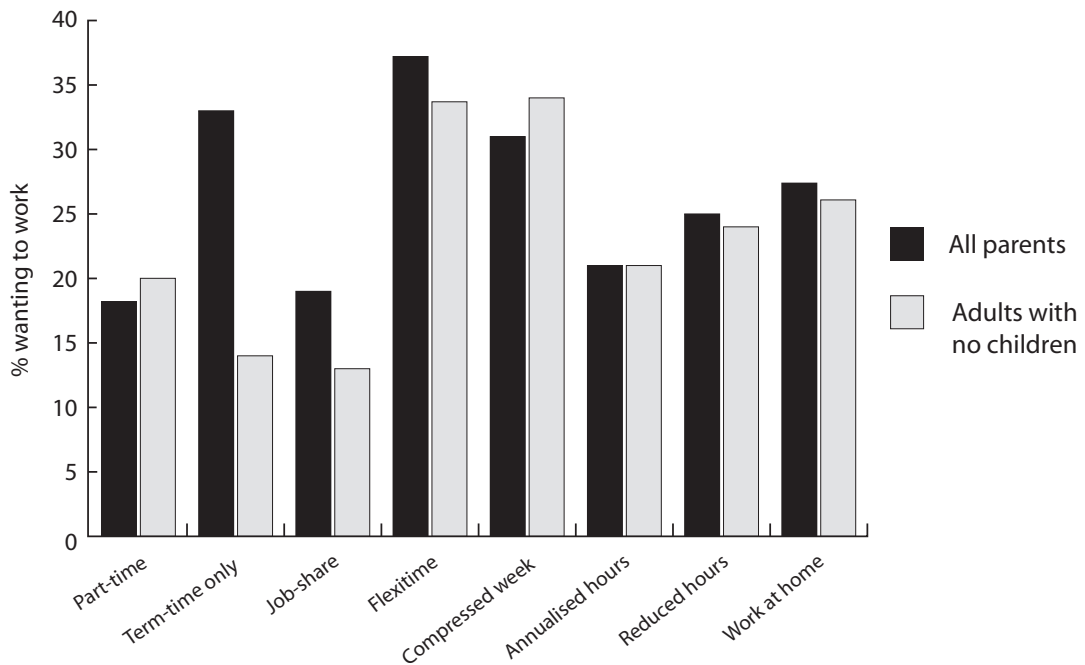
Source: Labour Force Survey data reported in Moss *et al.* (1999)

Cultural Barriers

2.13 Given the potential benefits of flexible working and the apparent demand for it, the question arises why greater use is not made of it (see Fig 2.2). Our consultation found that the most significant barriers are attitudinal and cultural, but some aspects of existing legislation were also identified as obstacles.

2.14 There are still many employers who are not aware of the different types of flexible working and their potential benefits. Although they can often see the benefits to the individual, it is less obvious to them how their business can benefit. It is not enough for employers to give a commitment to flexible working practices; they also need to explain to managers why they are offering such practices and how they should handle requests. The front-line manager, who is under pressure to deliver in the short-term, may well balk at the concept of changing a long-standing work pattern that has proven to be effective in the past.

Fig 2.2: Apparent Demand for Working by Parental Status, 2000



Source: Work-Life Balance 2000 data reported in Hogarth *et al.* (2000)

- 2.15** Prejudices against part-time staff are not uncommon. Part-time workers are more likely to be overlooked for promotion and perceived as not being committed to their jobs. The view exists in many organisations in the UK that to be a committed employee you have to work full-time and, indeed, put in extra hours. The Work-Life Balance Baseline Survey (DfEE, 2000) shows that most organisations have staff working in excess of their standard hours. It is not surprising, therefore, that over 20 per cent of working fathers with children under five indicate that they wish to work reduced hours.
- 2.16** The same fears and prejudices that contribute to excessive hours are also likely to be barriers to flexible working. The Small Business Council and the Better Regulation Task Force, in their written submissions, indicate that a key barrier is parents' fears of being discriminated against should they make a request for flexible working.
- 2.17** Employers and individuals also fear that treating working parents of young children as a priority is likely to cause resentment within an organisation. But none of the employers who made this point to us want the duty to consider requests for flexible working to be extended to others. Hence, while we acknowledge this concern, we recognize the reasons why the Government has chosen to give priority to working parents with young children. The Work-Life Balance Campaign will continue to market to employers the benefits of voluntarily extending flexible working to all their employees. We consider that this is the right way forward and that continuing efforts should be put into the Campaign. The good practice we built on in designing this duty to consider can be voluntarily extended to others if the employer wishes.

Legislative and Institutional Barriers

- 2.20** There are concerns from some employers about the difficulties that can arise through flexible working in meeting health and safety obligations. In circumstances where adopting a flexible working practice would put the safety of others at risk, it should not be pursued.
- 2.24** A particular concern raised by a number of individuals is the lack of affordable and available childcare. Without such childcare at least one parent will never be able to participate fully in the labour market. We welcome the steps the Government is taking through the National Childcare Strategy and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to address this issue. We are also encouraged that the Government has set a target to create 900,000 new childcare places for 1.6 million children; 900 new neighbourhood nurseries in disadvantaged areas; and, to have 100 Early Excellence Centres by March 2004. But we remain concerned that many who responded to our invitation to comment on the issues said they are not seeing the improvements for themselves. We note that a review of childcare is currently being carried out by the Government.

2.25 But there may be times when there are equally good business reasons to turn down the request. Not being able to employ someone suitable to cover is an obvious one. All the representatives we received recognised that employers must have the right to turn down requests where there are business reasons to do so. Two main points emerged: whether it is possible to give employers and parents certainty by setting out clear business grounds on which requests can be rejected, and the degree to which the business case should be tested if a case is taken to tribunal. We address the first point here.

2.26 We consider that, on balance, the business reasons for rejecting requests should be set out in the legislation. These should be kept under review to see if, with experience, those that we now think are valid prove not to be in practice or, where there is a consensus, we should add new reasons. From our consultations we think the list of reasons should include:

- burden of additional costs to the business
- inability to meet customer demands
- inability to organise work within available staffing
- detrimental impact on quality
- detrimental impact on performance
- inability to find extra staff; and
- other reasons that the employer will need to specify.

But none of these reasons should be settled upon by employers before the discussion with the parent.

Source: Extracts from *About Time: Flexible Working*, the report of the Work and Parents Taskforce, chaired by Sir George Bain, Department of Trade and Industry, 20 November 2001

The three lives of women

Jeanette Winterson

A break from work, the kids, the supermarket and the washing-up. All we need is a break.

What do working mothers want? The simple answer is – to be happy. Why do working mothers want to be happy? Because, it seems, they are not.

A Bupa-commissioned survey of 5,000 women found that nine out of 10 feel permanently stressed, and eight out of 10 would not be in full-time careers if they had the choice. The reason? Sheer exhaustion.

Women who work are finding that they have three lives – the office, the children and the housework. The school run, followed by the dash to the desk, has no moment of welcome relief at the end of the day. Instead of nipping down to the pub on the way home – like so many of their male colleagues – women are fighting their way around the supermarket, throwing a few fish fingers at the kids, helping with homework, cleaning up, oh, and making themselves sexy for bedtime.

The trouble is, bedtime is never sexy when you are exhausted, and six hours' sleep is no relaxation and not enough rest.

Some women have help,

many don't. According to the survey, 77% of working women still do all of the housework.

Women are saying loud and clear that they can't cope with the way things are, but is anybody listening? Perhaps. The employment bill, currently going through parliament and due to become law early next year, says that working mothers and fathers with children under the age of six will have the legal right to ask for changes to their working hours. They will also be able to submit a proposal for working from home. Time to breathe is what women want. Time is what women want. Happiness is not about possessions; happiness is about freedom – freedom to be yourself and to enjoy your life. Freedom to love others, and take some pleasure in each day.

The government is trying, but it can only do so much. Our culture is still anti-family and anti-women. For all the speeches about the importance of family life and equal opportunity, the reality for women is that they are paid less while they work more. Men are not expected to run a house, bring up children and make a success in the world. When women campaigned for careers, did we imagine that we would have to do everything else as well?

I don't want to blame men. Blaming doesn't help anyone. We are living with inherited structures and habits of mind

that take years to change. Unless we change the way we think, we can't change the world we live in. Men and women are different, but the rules for men and women should be the same. We all need to be able to make something of ourselves in the world, and we all need to take responsibility for the home. Private arrangements between individuals are fine – what is not fine is a culture that still favours men as the go-getters, with every right to rest and relaxation, while women must be prepared for a life of drudgery.

Some men may protest that that is not the true situation – in which case, the 5,000 women who responded to the survey are either lying, whingeing or mad.

If women are unhappy, we have to take it seriously. Of course, some women will always be unhappy, but this survey seems not to be about individual reality, or about that percentage of the population which is statistically unhappy. We are looking at a major fissure in the way we live. Women are working, but their lives are not.

This sort of information is usually hijacked by the right to persuade women back into the home. The great thing about the home is that once there, women are invisible again. There are no unions, surveys, or pressure groups for change. Every woman becomes an island; the pattern is obscured.

Source: Jeanette Winterson, *The Guardian*, 12 July 2002

More Secrets of Happy Children**Steve Biddulph**

We are a society that worships 'freedom', including freedom from the inconvenience of children. At the extreme end of the spectrum, there are sections of British society where children have become little more than a fashion accessory – window-dressing – wheeled out for a photo opportunity and then shuffled off to be attended to by others. It's fashionable to 'have' kids, but not necessarily to be encumbered by them.

While the growth of this 'arm's length' parenting is a worry, the vast majority of parents are not like this. Most parents do want to raise their own children, do want the best for them, and are willing to sacrifice career aspirations and recreational or social goals to a high degree to achieve these aims. Increasingly men – even those in public life – are making decisions that favour parenthood over career.

Sadly, many parents feel forced by economic need to return to work when their children are young. They do so with immense regret. Others are confused, wanting to provide a nice home, toys, school fees, but not wanting to miss out on time with their children either. Whatever the reason, we need to know the real cost before making a decision.

I have strong concerns about childcare as it is used by many parents today, and believe that the damage it sometimes does to young children is of a hidden and long-term kind.

I am not alone. Professor Jay Belsky, probably the foremost academic in the field, argues that the evidence of damage is subtle; but it is enough that in 1986 he reversed his long-standing support for childcare for children under three. In early 1994, the world's foremost parenting author, Dr Penelope Leach, created a storm of concern by saying similar things in her book *Children First*.

In short, my belief is that, except in those cases of parents who are seriously impaired or genuinely incapable of raising their own children, young children are always better off being cared for by someone who loves them. Professionalism of staff and richness of surroundings, while important, don't touch on the question of love. Young children's bodies can be kept safe and their minds occupied, but their deeper, more subtle needs cannot be met except by someone with a fierce, long-term commitment to them. This is not something you can buy.

Stability and consistency, the underpinnings of a young child's world, seem impossible to attain in childcare. Even 'quality' care still means your child gets looked after by dozens of different individuals in the course of the four or so years before starting school. In reality, we cannot even organize the same location – a recent study found that some families had to access up to four different kinds of care in an average week to cover the hours they needed. Another study found great inconsistencies between centres, which children had to deal with in the round of a normal day.

Research evidence, along with a revival of plain common sense, is leading to a reversal of the idea that a crèche childhood is a good childhood. I predict that there will be a definite move towards the use of childcare to augment parenting (rather than, as it is sometimes used today, as a virtual replacement for it). I also predict (and hope) that the use of childcare for babies and toddlers will be drastically reduced as parents realise the psychological and other costs.

In a penetrating and careful article, 'Infant Day Care, a Cause for Concern', Jay Belsky analysed the entire body of research, collected from hundreds of studies from around the world in all imaginable conditions.

He found that there were suggestions of specific and recurrent damaging effects which emerged in many studies which, if not proven, were strongly indicated, especially when the research picture was looked at as a whole. In particular, he found four outcomes that were of concern in children who had entered childcare before the age of one:

- A pattern of withdrawal from and avoidance of the mother figure – babies and toddlers who did not approach their mothers, or see their mothers as sources of reassurance. The childcare experience seemed to make these little ones angry at their mothers, so that they did not turn to her for comfort. Their attachment was either displaced elsewhere, or they did not form strong attachments.
- Heightened aggressiveness – a tendency in the present, as well as later in school life, to use aggression, hitting, swearing, fighting, rather than talking through, walking away, staying calm.
- Non-compliance – ignoring or defying adults' requests or commands, doing the opposite, being rebellious.
- Social withdrawal – walking away, avoiding adult company, keeping to themselves.

The two full-time income family is now very common, and often a necessity. But it is not a happy situation. In every street of every city and town in Britain, families are cracking up under the strain of both working and raising kids. You can see this amongst your friends, your neighbours, perhaps in your own house. Two-income families tell of horrendously stressed lifestyles, rushing to childcare each day, commuting across town, trying to snatch sleep each night, barely earning enough to offset the costs of childminding, transport and so on, then guiltily spending the money on making it up to the kids for not being there for them. Marriages are breaking down needlessly through sheer lack of time to build relationships. Health is being damaged through overwork, kids are being neglected and mistreated, and many teenagers are left to their own devices far too much. Serious problems, such as drug abuse, crime and early pregnancy, have all been found in studies to correlate with one reliable factor – lack of parental time and involvement.

The economic view of life that governments seem to have taken – whether New Labour or Old Conservative – is that we are here in this life to earn and spend. If you are not in a job, you are not a full member of society. Making Spice Girl dolls on a production line is seen as a valuable economic activity, but raising a child with care and skill is not.

Women and men have an equal right to work. But what about the right of mothers or fathers of young children NOT to work?

Source: Edited extract from *More Secrets of Happy Children* by Steve Biddulph, Thorsons, 1999

Response from the National Family Parenting Institute (NFPI) to the DTI Consultation (edited version)

Setting the scene

Working patterns have changed radically in the last 30 or so years. Women continue to enter the work-force in increasing numbers and 67 per cent of mothers in two-parent families with children under 18 now work. A recent Green Paper draws on research and interviews with parents to find out what their concerns and needs are with respect to managing work and family life.

The NFPI has also conducted research with parents. We began our work of listening to families by surveying parents about family and parenting in October 1999 – that survey showed that one in three people thought Britain was unfriendly to children. For our report *Is Britain Family-Friendly?* (October 2000), we asked parents to tell us what were the obstacles they faced in their lives, and what they thought would make Britain more family-friendly.

Work was the most important issue on which parents in this survey judged whether Britain is helpful to families. For parents with small babies through to those with teenage children, employment, work/life balance and money were top of parents' concerns. Hardly surprising since they grapple with these financial dilemmas and problems every day. Some of the themes which emerged in the discussion groups were:

- parents should not be forced back to work because of financial pressure
- it was the parent's (usually mother's) right to stay with her children when they were very young, and it was better for the baby
- there are pressures on parents to return to work as soon as possible
- parents felt that employers were becoming more used to considering flexible working, and that a change in the working culture was beginning
- however, many parents' own experience showed there was a long way to go, with many cases cited of a rigid and unhelpful attitude shown by employers.

Is Britain Family-Friendly? showed that this country lagged behind Europe in giving parents practical and financial support. Provisions for maternity pay and leave, paternity pay, and parental leave were worse than in other European countries. Those factors, combined with a long-hours culture and the lack of good quality and affordable formal childcare (and lack of support for informal childcare arrangements) meant that British parents have struggled to cope.

The proposals in the Green Paper will go some way to alleviating the problems parents face. A strong lead from Government will be necessary to tackle the problem and help to bring about the culture change required for any lasting benefits to be felt. Yet public opinion is pointing the way. A recent poll conducted by the NFPI showed 90 per cent support for the proposal that businesses and government should do more for working parents.

Maternity pay and leave

Maternity leave is currently too short; maternity pay too little. Maternity pay should be increased. In most other European countries, maternity pay as a percentage of earnings is paid for much longer than our six weeks. The NFPI would support the extension of the earnings-related portion of maternity pay to 26 weeks, as long as the flat rate payment is increased. £60.20 a week is too great a cut in family income at a time when there are many more demands on the family purse. Any increase in maternity pay has to be more than notional; it has to enable parents to have a real choice.

The NFPI is particularly concerned to ensure that parents do not suffer financially from choices they make in the first year of a child's life. Research shows that strong and secure attachments between parents and infants result in confident and happy children, and there is a body of opinion which believes that parents and babies

need unhurried, relaxing time together to develop communication, bonding, understanding and love. Pressure to return to work can put unhelpful stresses on the developing bonds of families.

The extension of the period of unpaid maternity leave is likely to benefit far fewer women; however, it is an important right to have, particularly if the parents can agree, in negotiations with employers, to split the time between them. Fathers would also appreciate having some time to spend with their infant, although many would not be able to take advantage of it if the leave were unpaid.

Flexible working

The Green Paper identifies flexible working as the issue of greatest concern to parents. The NFPI agrees that mothers and fathers should have the right to work reduced hours until the end of the maternity leave period.

Parents should also be able to work reduced or flexible hours when maternity leave is over. The NFPI would also urge the Government to consider extending the right of parents to work reduced hours until the child is eight. To offer the option of reduced hours only if it immediately follows on from return from maternity leave is a narrow choice. Parents may wish to cut their hours at other times, for example, combining work with playgroup or nursery, or being able to pick children up from school. Schemes recently put in place in Germany and the Netherlands give rights to part-time work with no reference to the age of the child.

Source: Edited extract from NFPI response to DTI consultation, February 2001