

I am writing this column mere moments after finishing my tax return. Lord only knows why I have to do a tax return in the first place. Unfortunately I do because although Members of Parliament are on PAYE some of the benefits and expenses incurred in office are taxable. Even if this is irrelevant (as it is for me) we still have to fill out the forms, and for some reason we cannot do it online. It has taken me hours. In fact two days. The ridiculous thing is that I hardly had to fill in any boxes so it shouldn't have taken very long at all. And yet I sat at my desk constantly hunting the calculator as I flipped pieces of paper backwards and forwards trying to work out what box A59 plus A105 minus whatever came next times by x percent was.

What have I learned from all this? Firstly never ever let me anywhere near the Treasury. Cut out this column and keep it safe: if I ever become a Treasury Minister you have my permission to leave the country. Secondly accountants are amazing. Thirdly I wish I had paid more attention to maths at school. Actually scrap that last one as I actually did quite well at maths. What I wish I'd had at school was a proper financial education; one that makes learning numbers relevant to everyday life.

I signed up to the campaign for financial education in schools quite early. It was a campaign designed to help young people avoid debt in the future by gaining a better understanding of money, taxes, interest rates etc i.e. more than just multiplication and Pythagoras. From last September it is now compulsory for 11-16 year olds. This was a huge victory for common sense in the fight for better financial planning and understanding. I wonder if they have tax returns on their curriculum...now that really would be helpful!