

## Topic: Making economic decisions

<b>Lesson: MPs' expenses</b>	<b>KS or Year Group: Year 8</b>
<p><b>Resources:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Resource 1 – Reminder worksheet</li> <li>2. Resource 2 – What should MPs receive in terms of expenses?</li> <li>3. Resource 3 – Questions</li> <li>4. Resource 4 – Categories</li> <li>5. Resource 5 – Sky news clip 'MP expenses inquiry brought forward'</li> </ol>	<p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can express their opinions about MPs' expenses as a way of considering issues of fairness and public spending.</li> <li>• Students can question other students' opinions about the issue.</li> </ul>

### National Curriculum

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Key Concepts: 1.1b, 1.1d

Key Processes: 2.1a, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.2c

Range and Content: 3h

Curriculum Opportunities: 4a, 4b, 4c, 4g

### Lesson overview

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Students discuss the kind of expenses that MPs have claimed for in the past. They compare differing viewpoints about MPs' expenses and also explain their own views about the issue. By doing so they consider issues of fairness, justice and what constitutes appropriate public spending.

### Starter

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- Share the lesson objectives with the students.
- Ask a volunteer to read out the 'reminder' section of **Resource 1 – Reminder worksheet**.
- Invite students to clarify any vocabulary about which they are unsure.
- Explain that there has been lots of information within the media about the way in which MPs spend money. Remind students that taxpayers' money is used to pay for MPs' work.

## MPs' expenses

- Show students some or all of **Resource 5 – Sky news clip ‘MP expenses inquiry brought forward’** as background/stimulus. It explains what expenses are, how they are claimed and some elements of the controversy.
- Invite students to comment upon what they might have recently heard about MPs' expenses. Also ask why the public takes an interest in MPs' expenses.
- Some examples of good responses:
  - ‘I’ve heard that some MPs have been using their expenses to get things that they probably don’t need for their homes.’
  - ‘Lots of people have been talking about MPs’ expenses on TV and on the radio. I think it’s because of the credit crunch. Families are finding it harder to pay their bills, and so they’re starting to wonder whether their taxes are being spent fairly.’

## Main activity

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### Activity 1:

- Ask students to get into small groups and to fill in the activity at the bottom of **Resource 1 – Reminder worksheet**. Prompt questions might include:
  - Do you think that it’s realistic for an MP to travel to London and back to their home in a day?
  - If an MP sleeps in London overnight, where do you think that (s)he might stay?
  - When an MP meets colleagues and constituents during the working week, how do you think (s)he travels around?
  - Where do you think an MP might eat while (s)he is away from home?
- Invite a few students to feed back their ideas. Examples of good answers are:
  - ‘MPs who live far away from London probably spend a lot of money on train fares or on petrol during a typical month.’
  - ‘We thought that an MP might have to do a bit more shopping than the average citizen. For instance, if you have a house in London and another house in your constituency, you probably buy two boxes of washing powder, two sofas, two toasters, etc.’
  - ‘MPs have to pay bills, just like everyone else pays bills. However, their bills might be quite expensive. For example, they might pay to have the internet at their London homes, even if they only spend a few days there every week.’
- Praise students who shared ideas orally.

## MPs' expenses

### Activity 2:

- Ask students to get into pairs and to read through **Resource 2 – What should MPs receive in terms of expenses?**
- Put the following questions on the board (you could use **Resource 3 – Questions**) and ask students to discuss them with their partners:
  1. Which of the characters' opinions do you find the most interesting? Explain why.
  2. Summarise the opinions of the students in your group about MPs' expenses.
  3. Did the characters' comments remind you of anything that you've heard in the news or at home recently?
  4. What surprised you the most about what you read on the worksheet? Explain.
  5. Do you think that MPs should be entitled to any expenses? Justify your answer.
- Ask students to form a circle and remind them of circletime rules (one person is allowed to talk at a time, everyone faces the person who is talking, students respect each other's opinions, etc.).
- Ask volunteers to share their responses to the questions. Examples of good answers are:
  1. 'I really liked what character 5 said. I'd love to work for an MP when I'm older, so I'd feel really sad if my local MP's daughter got the job automatically.'
  2. 'They seem to have quite varied opinions. Some of them think that it's OK for MPs to claim for items such as patio heaters. Others think that MPs have been taking advantage of the expenses system.'
  3. 'Last night, my dad was talking about MPs who've claimed for taps. Character 7 talked about taps too. My parents have been reading newspaper articles on the internet to find out what MPs have been claiming for.'
  4. 'The thing that surprised me the most was that MPs have to work in London for some of the year even if they don't live there. I thought that only MPs living near London had to visit the Houses of Parliament.'
  5. 'I think that MPs should be entitled to some expenses. If they weren't, then only really rich people would be able to work as MPs. This wouldn't be a very good idea because MPs are supposed to be from different backgrounds.'
- Praise students who shared ideas orally.

### Plenary

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- Ask students to get into small groups.
- Ask them to imagine that a group of MPs has been interviewed about what they spend money on. Refer them to the MPs' answers at the top of **Resource 4 – Categories**.

## MPs' expenses

- Ask students to cut out the answers and to sort them into the categories at the bottom of the worksheet.
- Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson. This spokesperson should feed back the main findings to the class. Some examples of good feedback are:
  - 'We think that train tickets should be paid for through taxes rather than expecting the MP to pay. However, we think that the tickets should be second class and that they should be bought in advance. This would save money. Buying a ticket two weeks before you travel is a lot cheaper than buying it at the station.'
  - 'We thought that items like new mattresses or new carpets were difficult to make a decision about. It depends upon why you're buying something new. If your old carpet has been damaged by a fire, and the fire wasn't your fault, it is OK to claim this on your expenses. However, if you want a new mattress just because you don't like the colour of your old one, then you shouldn't be able to claim for this.'
  - 'We all agreed that the taxpayer shouldn't have to pay for a gardener at an MP's house in his/her constituency. This would be unfair on all of the other people in the country who travel around for their job and who pay for their own gardeners.'
- Invite students to challenge each other's decisions, through the use of persuasive arguments.
- Praise students who shared ideas orally.

## Aim high

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- During the starter, high-achieving students should volunteer to act as spokesperson.
- During the main activity, high-achieving students should share information that they have acquired through the media.
- During the plenary, high-achieving students should explain whether there are any key themes within each category on Resource 3. For example, they might feel that all transport costs should appear in the 'should be paid for by the taxpayer' category.

## Assessment

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For homework, ask students to talk to an adult about whether (s)he receives any expenses for his/her job.

### Level 5:

- Students discuss what is fair and unfair to MPs/taxpayers in terms of MPs' expenses.
- Students communicate their arguments about MPs' expenses clearly, giving reasons for their opinions.

## MPs' expenses

### Level 6:

- Students are aware of the diversity of opinions about MPs' expenses.
- Students challenge other students' ideas about MPs' expenses.

### Level 7:

- Students represent the views of MPs even if they do not agree with them.
- Students evaluate the roles that constituents can play in terms of MPs' expenses.

### Level 8:

- Students make connections between what they have heard about MPs' expenses via the media, and what they have learnt in the lesson.
- Students make perceptive observations about why MPs' expenses are hitting the headlines.

## Check the web

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAspEPVQECE>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/7417017.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7417017.stm)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/politics/5201466/Snouts-in-troughs-accusations-over-MPs-expenses-proposals.html>

### Summary of key learning

- Students can express their opinions about MPs' expenses.
- Students can question other students' opinions about the issue.

## Resource 1 – Reminder worksheet

**Reminder:** An **MP** is also referred to as a **Member of Parliament**. (S)he is elected by people who live in a certain area in Britain. The MP then represents these people in parliament. MPs ask questions to key members of the **government**. They also **debate** relevant issues and get involved in creating **new laws**. MPs spend a lot of time in their **constituencies** finding out what local people need. They also spend lots of time in the Houses of Parliament in **London**.

Imagine that you are an MP. Your constituency is outside of London, and so you spend a lot of time travelling between there and London. What kind of things might you need to spend money on in a typical month?

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## Resource 2 – What should MPs receive in terms of expenses?

1. I heard that an MP claimed for a television in his London house. This seems reasonable to me. He probably spends a lot of time away from his family while working on behalf of his constituents. It must be lonely living alone in London, and a TV is one way of having some company.

2. We read about an MP who had a new kitchen fitted in her London home, and expected the taxpayer to pay for it. Why should she get a luxury kitchen in one house if she already has another home? My dad helps the country by working as a nurse. Is anyone going to offer to pay for us to get a new kitchen?

3. My sister told me about an MP who's been claiming 40p a mile every time she uses the car as part of her job. This seems fair to me. My uncle works as a salesman and he gets his mileage paid for by his company. Why should MPs be expected to pay for their own petrol if my uncle doesn't pay for his?

4. We saw on the news that one MP claimed the cost of window cleaners through expenses, even though it cost £94 a visit. When we're old enough to pay taxes we won't want to pay for MPs' window cleaners! Our taxes should be going to more important things such as new hospitals.

5. I don't feel comfortable about all the MPs who've been employing members of their families to work as their secretaries or personal assistants. It seems silly that British people's taxes can pay the wages of an MP's son. What if an MP's son isn't the best person to help the MP, or if he doesn't do enough work?

6. We found out about an MP who bought a patio heater for his second home in London. He claimed the money back through expenses, which we think is OK. The taxpayer should be proud to provide MPs with comfortable homes. If MPs are happy in their personal lives, then they are more likely to do a good job for us.

7. I can't decide how MPs' expenses should be organised. I can see why an MP from Newcastle, who's expected to work in London a lot of the time, would not want to pay for a second home. However, I don't think that MPs should take advantage of public money by buying unnecessary items. They shouldn't expect us to pay for posh taps, expensive curtains or other similar purchases.

## Resource 3 – Questions

1. Which of the characters' opinions do you find the most interesting?  
Explain why.
2. Summarise the opinions of the students in your group about MPs' expenses.
3. Did the characters' comments remind you of anything that you've heard in the news or at home recently?
4. What surprised you the most about what you read on the worksheet?  
Explain.
5. Do you think that MPs should be entitled to any expenses?  
Justify your answer.



## Resource 4 – Categories

The train tickets between my constituency and London	The hotel rooms that I stay in after business appointments	The secretary who plans my appointments with my constituents	The new mattress for my bed in my London home
The gardener who looks after my plants while I'm away in London	The petrol that I use when visiting my constituents	The job-related phone calls that I make from my mobile	The bike that I use to get to work in order to cut down my carbon footprint
The furniture that I require for my office	The taxi fares between my London flat and the supermarket	The stamps that I use when replying to constituents' letters	The laptop that I require for writing important documents
The cleaner who comes to my houses twice a week	The internet connection for my office in London	The new carpets in my house in London	The meals that I eat during meetings in restaurants with other MPs

**Should be paid for by the taxpayer:**

**Not sure:**

**Should not be paid for by the taxpayer:**