

This year's federal budget is one day away. A few weeks ago, we asked readers to send us their questions on the budget – we wanted to know what you're interested in to help inform our coverage. We thought we'd look at what we know so far about the questions asked and provide some context before tomorrow evening.

Tertiary education

On Twitter, @ThenJames wanted to know the following:

I'd like to know more about what's going to happen with tertiary education?

The Coalition is yet to release an updated proposal for its higher education reforms. But Conor King of La Trobe University published an article on [what policies to look out for from the government and Labor](#).

Here's what he had to say about the Coalition:

The Coalition's policy preference is clear:

- contain government expenditure over time;
- use flexible student charges to ensure universities have the needed resources;
- extend the system to all higher education providers aligning funding and quality regulation systems.

The federal budget "is expected to announce some of the government's revised position but likely not the whole policy."

Conor goes onto explain the five issues he believes will dominate discussion around tertiary education:

1. Who should go to university?
2. What should government and students contribute?
3. Should we fund education and research separately?
4. The impact of international student recruitment
5. Getting HELP student loans rights

We've run numerous articles addressing that last point. After all, chasing unpaid student loans [could save government \\$800m](#), according to Andrew Norton, Gwilym Croucher and Geoff Sharrock.

Gwilym has also looked at the fairness of [lowering the student loan repayment threshold](#), arguing that

the trick will be to ensure that any change does not undermine this great innovation for education, with a threshold amount that ensures HELP is both sustainable and fair.

Geoff Sharrock covered possible changes to HELP repayment, including a [super payment option](#), and Ross Guest has argued that the budget should give universities [more flexibility on student contributions](#).

We'll be covering the government's plans for tertiary education once the federal budget is released. Keep an eye out for our coverage tomorrow and during the week.

Renewable energy

On Facebook, Mithra Cox asked:

Where is the investment in innovative technologies to cope with climate change? Not coal and gas subsidies - actual investment in renewable energy.

Malcolm Turnbull has already announced

the creation of a A\$1 billion Clean Energy Innovation Fund, to be jointly managed by the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) and the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA).

ARENA is designed to research and develop new clean energy technologies, while the CEFC is meant to finance projects and earn a return on investment.

That happened back in March and Tony Wood covered [what it means for low-emission technology and its risks](#)

Australia's Renewable Energy Target (RET) was lowered in May last year, following a deal made by the government and opposition:

The deal will see the RET wound back to 33,000 gigawatt hours of renewable energy by 2020, down from its previous level of 41,000 GWh.

Craig Froome explained what the [reduced target could mean for investment](#), highlighting the importance of the CEFC and ARENA:

While the RET will be retained in its reduced form, without the support of the CEFC and ARENA the ability to help industry to move projects from concept to deployment will be significantly diminished.

This means that renewable energy in Australia will be based solely on using mature and proven technologies (such as solar and wind), at the expense of less established prospects such as geothermal or wave energy. The innovation that Australia has been known for internationally within this sector would become a distant memory.

Finally, Peter Christoff has provided a [six-point plan for getting climate policy back on track](#) , including the benefits of a carbon tax and funding for the states as part of a national climate policy.

We'll be covering announcements made about climate spending in this year's federal budget. Keep any eye out for reactions from our experts on Wednesday morning.

Taxation and the deficit

We received a few questions about taxation and spending. We'll be covering all the proposed changes in the budget but here are some highlights from our [coverage so far](#) .

First up, we covered [five budget myths that refuse to die](#) . Richard Holden explained that the federal budget is nothing like a household budget:

the idea that governments should aspire, as households often do, to have zero debt is deeply flawed and runs counter to how the most prosperous economies have done things for centuries.

And Ian McAuley covered the idea that any increase in tax will harm the economy:

If anything, there is a small positive correlation [between average taxes and economic growth], suggesting that perhaps high taxes and high economic growth go together, but it would be cheeky to draw such a conclusion, as the coefficient of correlation is very low.

Sarantis Tsiapilas explained what [the structural deficit is and how to best address it](#) . John Nevile argued that the “balancing the budget mantra” has [overlooked the benefits of infrastructure spending](#) . And Ian McAuley argued that [the obsession with the deficit is eroding the budget’s usefulness](#) :

The emphasis has shifted to explaining how the government will manage the budget surplus or deficit, and therefore government debt. Over the last few years what passes for an “economic debate” has tended to focus on the fiscal deficit, as if balancing the budget were the hallmark of sound economic management. Much of the detail about appropriations has been dropped.

Finally, Miranda Stewart provided [five ideas to help fix Australia’s tax system](#) . These include fixing GST and company tax, taxing savings and retirement income more fairly and sharing income tax and GST equally.

Will anything like them appear in the budget? Keep an eye on our coverage and find out.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/budget-2016-reader-questions-58717>