

## Shorten's three major economic priorities: 'jobs, jobs and jobs'

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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Bill Shorten will put creating new jobs, sustaining existing ones, and training and retraining Australian jobseekers at the heart of his economic agenda in a major speech on Tuesday.

In what's seen as a formal opening to the political year, Shorten and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull will spell out their priorities in addresses to the National Press Club this week.

While both leaders will be in the spotlight, given Turnbull is on the back foot his Wednesday performance is the more politically important of the two. But Labor will be looking to Shorten's speech to reinforce the momentum that has seen the ALP ahead in the polls.

With jobs and employment security preoccupying many voters, Shorten will describe a good job carrying decent wages and conditions as "an anchor to society".

"It fulfils the promise of reward for effort – and it confers the dignity of work, the pride that comes from supporting yourself and others," Shorten says in an extract of his speech released ahead of delivery.

Warning that Australia cannot be allowed to become "an unskilled enclave in a modernising Asia" Shorten will say the next phase of Labor's plan for Australian jobs, after its attack on abuses in the work visa system, is about skills, training and apprenticeships. He will lay out "three fundamental principles".

"All Australians should have access to the skills and training they need for decent jobs that allow them to support their family – throughout their working life.

"All participants in the economy – government, business and unions – should share responsibility for designing a high quality and seamless tertiary and vocational education system, producing job-ready graduates and workers.

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"Every dollar of government funding should be directed to achieving the best student outcomes and the best employment opportunities – not wasting taxpayer money boosting private profits."

Shorten will accuse the government of treating vocational education and training as a "second-class sector". But TAFE "can be transformative for people who are doing it hard". This training can bring new skills to Indigenous communities, help close the gender gap, and empower mature-age workers with the chance to retrain rather than being thrown on the scrap heap.

Australia needs "a training system that works in partnership with our world-class universities", and "it should be easy for Australians to move between TAFE and university and vice versa", Shorten will say.

"Public TAFE has been neglected and disrespected for too long. In the past decade government spending on university students has increased by 45%. For TAFE, it's actually declined in real terms," he will say.

"A Labor government will work with the states to revitalise TAFEs as high-quality job centres for our cities, regions and suburbs."

Shorten will also reiterate Labor's commitment to work with states and major contractors to develop "apprenticeship and training plans" for major infrastructure projects that get federal funding – and to do something similar with defence contracts.

"I want one in every ten jobs, on every single priority infrastructure project, to go to an Australian apprentice. In the context of the last election, that meant at least 2,600 apprenticeship places."

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.*

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