

## **Make the study of economics more sexy : Chris Bowen**

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

---

Labor frontbencher Chris Bowen, who has previously been shadow treasurer and before that treasurer, wants the study of economics made “more sexy” to attract more students, especially women, to study it.

And he thinks young people’s concerns about climate change might be a way to encourage them into a discipline which has seen falling numbers.

In his Warren Hogan memorial lecture, Bowen highlights the rise of business courses and the decline of those in economics. The lecture, to be delivered on Wednesday night, has been released beforehand.

The number studying economics in their HSC or equivalent qualification has gone from about 40,000 in 1993, to about 11,000 today, Bowen points out.

Since the early 1990s, which is when the subject of business studies was added to the curriculum the study of economics in high schools has collapsed by 70% across Australia, and 75% here in NSW.

Economics is now taught in just one third of government schools and half of non-government schools.

And while the number of university undergraduates studying economics at university has remained static at around 10,000 over this time, this is of course against the background of a big increase in the numbers of university students in total, meaning economics has shrunk as a proportion of university study generally.

In fact between 2001 and 2016, the number of economics undergraduates fell slightly, while the numbers undertaking banking and finance, management and commerce and business studies degrees grew strongly.

## Make the study of economics more sexy : Chris Bowen

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

---

Bowen says that in the decade to 2016, the number of Australian universities offering economic degrees fell from 21 to 17.

---

**Read more:** [Women are dropping out of economics, which means men are running our economy](#)

---

Meanwhile the gender gap in economics students has been rising.

In the early 1990s when I was a young economics student at school, the breakdown of males and females in the economics classrooms of Australia was 50-50. ... The ratio of boys to girls is now two to one. That's worse than we do in the STEM subjects.

While saying he has nothing against business studies, Bowen says he is "concerned that the nation will lose out, our society will lose out, if fewer young people are trained in the fundamentals of good economic decision making and more and more are trained in the more commercial skills sets of banking and business studies".

Bowen says young people are passionate about big issues, notably climate change and inequality.

They want solutions. And if we want solutions that are effective, enduring and efficient, only economics can supply them.

A rigorous economic training can equip young people to challenge the issues of their age. And explaining the value of economic training to young people in dealing with things like climate change and inequality might just make it a more attractive option for study.

## Make the study of economics more sexy : Chris Bowen

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

---

Passion to tackle climate change might be one selling point for young people and the study of economics.

Bowen says the government should add climate change to the list of National Health Priority Areas.

Current areas are cancer control, cardiovascular health, injury prevention, mental health, diabetes mellitus, arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, obesity and dementia. The government recently proposed the addition of medicines safety.

Bowen says severe climate change, of the type the world is on track for, threatens health. Adding climate change to the priority list would raise awareness of the health challenge it presents “and set out a road map for dealing with it”.

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

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

**Read more** <http://theconversation.com/make-the-study-of-economics-more-sexy-chris-bowen-127360>