



Not a 'seat-warmer' . . . Simon Crean being sworn in by the Governor-General yesterday.

Photo: AAP

Crean's skills put to the test

Education

Marcus Priest and Steven Scott

New Education and Workplace Relations Minister Simon Crean has flagged a focus on skills training, but his own skills will be tested in coming months in the key portfolio.

The taskforce set up to investigate claims of waste in the government's school construction is due to deliver its first report next month.

Questions also linger about whether the portfolio previously held by Julia Gillard is too big.

The Prime Minister said yesterday Mr Crean was "a very safe pair of hands for portfolios which are very, very close to my heart."

"Simon Crean comes to this task having served an earlier Labor government as minister for employment, education and

training," Ms Gillard said. "He also comes to this task having been a president of ACTU and I think, when he served in that capacity, being recognised as one of the people who assisted in the modernisation of Australia's union movement."

Mr Crean denied he would be a "seat warmer" until the election.

"The big challenge is how you improve opportunity for education and training for people, it's how you get a better connect between the skill supply and demand," he said. "The more you prepare the groundwork so that you are matching skills demanded with skills available, the less you have to rely on your immigration program."

In the Keating government, Mr Crean helped develop the Working Nation jobs and training strategy, and as opposition leader he championed "lifelong learning".

TAFE Directors Australia chief executive Martin Riordan said Mr Crean was a good choice. He said Mr Crean had been supportive of vocational education and training in his role as trade minister.

"He's been particularly active helping TAFEs with exporting education and we think it's a very positive appointment," Mr Riordan said.

The executive director of the Australian Technology Network of universities, Vicki Thomson, said Mr Crean was a "natural fit" as education minister given his former role and the importance of international education in the Australian economy.

"Certainly as a group of universities closely linked to industry, and given his background in trade, I think it's a positive appointment," Ms Thomson said.

with Rachel Leblhan and Joanna Mather