



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Devolution (Further Powers) Committee

Rt. Hon Alistair Carmichael MP
Secretary of State for Scotland
The Scotland Office

By email

c/o Clerk to the Committee
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Dear Secretary of State,

Thank for you letter dated 12 February 2015 following up your appearance at our Committee on 4 December 2014 and our subsequent letter issued to you on 10 December 2014.

I have discussed your letter with the Committee and the responses that you have provided to the questions posed in our original letter with the Committee. Whilst we welcome the information that you have set out, especially in relation to tax devolution calculations, the Crown Estate and the extension of the Work Programme contracts, we note that you did not reply to all of the points we raised with you on a cross-party basis.

Of particular priority to us is a reply on the issue of top-up benefits and whether there is potential for any claimant of Universal Credit in Scotland receiving any of the reserved benefits where these had been increased by the Scottish Parliament to see a pound-for-pound reduction in their Universal Credit award. Your letter does not mention this issue even though it was one of the key questions we posed to you. We seek your assurances and that of the DWP that this will not be the case.

Secondly, we note your comments on the UK Government's proposals for the permanency of the Scottish Parliament. However, your letter does not provide the UK Government's position on whether it would be appropriate to require a 'super majority' in both Houses of the UK Parliament and in the Scottish Parliament for any changes in the status of the Scottish Parliament. Your letter also does not address whether there would be any legal (rather than political) impediment that would prevent a future UK Parliament from repealing the Scotland Act 1998 which established the Scottish Parliament.

Finally, we are grateful for your note that issues such as student visas and the Health and Safety Executive are on-going and that you will be writing to party leaders on these matters. Whilst welcome, I am sure you will agree with me that it would also be helpful for the UK Government to keep the Scottish Parliament and this Committee informed and we would welcome your assurances on this matter as this will assist the ability of the Scottish Parliament to conduct its proper scrutiny of these matters.

I understand that our respective offices are in discussions about a date for your forthcoming appearance before the Committee, likely to be the last before a UK General Election. I would be grateful, therefore, for a response to this follow-up letter in advance of your appearance as dissolution of the UK Parliament is imminent.

Kind regards,

Bruce Crawford MSP
Convener