Michael McMahon, MSP
Convenor
Welfare Reform Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Thank you for your letter of 19 September inviting me to appear before your Committee to discuss the Welfare Reform Act.

I do not think it would be appropriate for a DWP Minister to give evidence to the Scottish Parliament Committee in this instance. As you are aware Social Security is a reserved matter, therefore Ministers are accountable first and foremost to the UK Parliament.

Furthermore, the Work and Pensions Select Committee is the body responsible for scrutiny of my department’s expenditure, administration and policy across the UK. It is important that their scrutiny role is not undermined and that the boundaries are respected in terms of the devolution settlement.

I am, however, committed to engagement with Scottish Government on matters which impact on devolved responsibilities and my Ministers and I have met with Scottish Ministers on several occasions over the last 18 months. My officials also maintain regular bi-lateral contact with Scottish Government officials on a range of matters of joint interest.

Nevertheless I do understand your important role in scrutinising the Scottish Government’s policy. As Lord Freud explained when he met you informally in the summer, the Department for Work and Pensions will seek to support the work of the Committee where that work pertains to scrutiny of the devolved administration and the exercise of its functions in response to our reforms. Therefore I would be very happy to meet with you informally. Also if it would assist I am prepared to arrange for one of my senior officials to attend the Committee at a timing of your convenience.

I am copying this letter to Michael Moore, Secretary of State for Scotland.

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS