1. I believe the pressures to increase the number of AMs are likely to result in an increase sooner or later, and that the arguments for increasing the number are strong.

2. I am concerned, however, that simply increasing the number of AMs, without making corresponding changes to the processes of the Assembly, will not significantly enhance its efficiency and effectiveness, and could even be counter-productive.

3. One of the principal pressures on the Assembly at present is to service a sufficient number of Committees with the present number of AMs. The obvious answer to that is to increase the number of AMs, each of whom will have to serve on fewer committees. But the reality may not be quite as simple. At present, AMs find it difficult to give the necessary time to preparation and attendance at Committees and to follow-up work: but by and large they rise to the challenge in a manner which appears impressive and effective from the perspective of outside observers. If as a result of an increase in numbers an AM only has to serve on one or two Committees, is it really likely that he or she will immediately become free to give more time to preparation or follow-up work on that Committee? The reality is that the constituency demands, party demands and media-presence demands tend to fill the vacuum of whatever time is available for each AM, after they have performed their obligatory functions in plenary and on Committees. I fear that this reality will operate in the same way whether an AM is serving on one committee or three.

4. The danger of the increase of AMs actually being counter-productive to the effectiveness of the work of the Assembly, particularly in Committee, arises from the fact that if the number of AMs were doubled, for example, it is most unlikely that the number of support staff within the Commission (including research officers, Clerks, professional development support staff and others) would similarly be doubled. In practice it is likely that roughly the existing number of staff would therefore be having to support, train and brief twice the number of AMs. And, indeed, there is likely to become pressure to increase the number of Committees if the number of AMs is increased, and the creation of new Committees would come with a significant increased burden for support staff, who are again unlikely to be augmented at the same rate as the number of AMs, for entirely proper reasons of public economy.

5. I therefore hope that if the Panel is considering recommending an increase in the number of AMs it will similarly consider making corresponding recommendations for changes in the existing processes of the Assembly, particularly in relation to Committees. In particular, if one of the purposes of expanding the number of AMs is to reduce the individual burden of serving on Committees, the opportunity should be taken at the same time to ensure that reducing the number of committees on which each AM serves will enable them to give more time and attention to each Committee, and that the time liberated will not simply be absorbed by other matters. This could be achieved in part by formalising work in preparation for and in connection with Committee membership, building on existing relationships between AM’s offices and Commission staff. Identifying an expanded formal work stream for Committee papers, for example, could ring-fence time and attention both of AMs and, crucially, their support staff.

6. This note is just a first thought that came into my mind when reading the Panel’s terms of reference. I would be happy to expand if helpful.