Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the number of Members the Assembly needs. I will not comment on the other matters in your terms of reference, as the relevance of these to my functions as Auditor General are somewhat tangential. However, given the relevance of the number of Assembly Members to ensuring effective stewardship of public money, I think it is appropriate to give views on that particular topic.

The Panel is no doubt well aware of the research by the Electoral Reform Society, *Size Matters: Making the National Assembly more effective,* and that of the Assembly Commission, *The Future of the Assembly: ensuring its capacity to deliver for Wales,* January 2015. That research makes clear that an Assembly with only 60 Members leaves only 40 or so Members not holding ministerial or key Assembly office. With just 40 or so Members available for committee work:

*“they cannot give every aspect of their work the priority it deserves. Reading time is a luxury, let alone the opportunity to reflect properly on research and evidence ahead of meetings. The inevitable result of this pressure is to reduce the quality of scrutiny….”*

*(page 11 of The Future of the Assembly)*

I find the reasoning set out in the research compelling, based as it is on both a careful consideration of the necessary roles in the Assembly as well as sensible comparison with other institutions, such as the Scottish Parliament. While I do not have a role of examining the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the Assembly, I have an interest in the Assembly being effective and providing good value for money overall. And while I am mindful of time-pressures and so endeavour to provide audit reports that are concise, it is worrying that resources spent on careful analysis by staff of the WAO may essentially come to be wasted by a lack of Members’ reading time.

I also find the research troubling, though not surprising, from the point of view of my position as an office-holder affected by Assembly legislation. In particular, I think it helps explain why problematic provisions contained in the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2013, such as the over-complex and counter-productive provisions regarding audit fees, were passed by the Assembly.

Since the research was done, the devolution of certain tax powers has increased the Assembly’s remit significantly. While the number of Members will not be the only determinant of successful exercise of those further powers, I consider that 60 Members is too low a number to ensure that there are sufficient Members with the time and interest to apply consistent close scrutiny to Ministers’ fiscal proposals. Fiscal proposals are fairly technical in nature, and consideration of their likely economic effects is not straightforward. They are therefore likely to be somewhat more challenging for Assembly Members to subject to effective scrutiny than legislation in general.

While I agree with Daniel Greenberg’s suggestions that simply increasing the number of AMs on its own may not significantly enhance efficiency and effectiveness (submission EP 01) – also that both greater pre-legislative and post-legislative scrutiny would be valuable (submission EP 01 (a)) – without a significant increase in the number of Members, as set out in the Assembly Commission’s analysis (page 11 of *The Future of the Assembly,)* I do not think it is likely that scrutiny of fiscal proposals, or indeed that of much policy and legislation in general, will be as thorough as it should be.