* issues relating to Assembly electoral areas, in particular co-terminosity with Westminster constituencies;
* the minimum voting age for Assembly elections; and
* the capacity and size of the Assembly, and the appropriate electoral system by which Members should be elected.
1. The minimum voting age for Assembly elections should be set at 18. To change the voting age is a huge decision. Once it is changed, it is very difficult to change back. Calls of ‘give it a go’ make political decisions sound much easier than they actually are. To change the voting age should require a wealth of evidence in support of it, and such evidence in this instance is generally lacking.
2. A feature of arguments for lowering the voting age is that 18 is no longer the age associated with most other signs of ‘becoming an adult’. One can marry at 16; one can join the army at 16; one can pay income tax at 16, and so on, so the arguments go. However, there are many problems with these assertions. In Wales one can marry at 16, but only with parents or guardians’ permission. One can join the army at 16, but again only with the same permission, and they cannot serve in combat until 18. Indeed, this rule is in relation to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. 16-17 year olds can pay income tax. But most do not. And why is income tax a cherished rule? Children under the age of 16 likely pay VAT on purchases. The UK Government’s taxation changes since 2010 have meant that fewer people pay income tax. Should they be denied the right to vote as a consequence?
3. My submission is not to suggest that 16 and 17 year olds are cognitively incapable of exercising a right to vote. In fact, a fair response to somebody calling for votes at 16 would be to ask, “what do you have against 15 year olds”? It is to suggest that you have to set an arbitrary age, and at the moment most legal, political and social thresholds define adulthood as 18. I see no sufficient reason why the voting age should be any different.
4. Given the increased powers and financial responsibilities of the devolved administration in Wales, there is a case to increase the number of AMs. Having too few members runs the risk of a small number of people being overburdened. Given that the executive emerges from the legislature, there is a danger that the capacity of the legislature to scrutinise the executive is weakened. This needs to be done with due care and attention given the increased expenditure that would arise from such a decision.