My earlier EP02 addressed the electoral arrangements but not the number of AMs. I believe that the latter is something that only the AMs can address, having regard to their workloads and their perception of the efficiency of the National Assembly committees.

My primary reason for writing was to demonstrate that these two issues need not be linked and/or thought interdependent. I did not think I needed to dwell on the merits of STV as this topic was fully considered by the Richard Commission and they made a unanimous conclusion in its favour.

Having now read all the submissions currently (12th May 2017) on the Panel’s website, I decided that I should make these supplementary comments on “gender equality”:

1. My submission (EP02) argued that the choices for the election system and the number of AMs need not and should not be linked. I showed that it was possible to legislate for STV constituencies to return varying numbers of AMs with comparable AM/electorate ratios – thus allowing the National Assembly to decide, if need be, to vary the number of AMs for each election without any obligation to review the election system each time.
2. As an illustration, I showed how this could work within the range 75-95 AMs (maybe wider) if the STV constituencies were based on the Local Authority boundaries. The procedure before each election would be for the National Assembly to decide how many AMs were to be elected overall and then, using the latest electorate statistics, to compute the number of AMs for each constituency needed to achieve comparable voter/AM ratios.
3. I argued that this could not be done using the Westminster boundaries and also that the nature of the workload of AMs made the Westminster boundaries inappropriate. Several other submissions made to the panel support this contention – albeit for different reasons.
4. My supplementary comments that now follow relate to “gender equality” – a topic that was aired in my oral evidence to the Richard Commission but I did not think to include earlier. I argued then that ***“there is no evidence that the electorate (as a whole), if given a choice, prefer men over women– the problem exists solely because all political parties invariably select more men than women as their candidates”.***
5. For multi-member constituencies the solution is glaringly obvious - gender equality could be achieved at a stroke simply by legislating that ***“all registered political parties must adopt an equal number of male and female candidates for every constituency”.***
6. The sole objection I have heard to this proposal is that this would not allow parties to field the exact number of candidates in 3, 5, 7-member constituencies. But, why should they?
7. To elect all the AMs from a 3-member constituency, the party would need to win 75% of the votes (even more for the larger constituencies). There is nowhere that this could occur. The rational number of candidates that any party should nominate is the maximum number that it believes it has a realistic possibility of winning.
8. This is a one-line addition to the legislation needed for National Assembly elections to use STV and, although gender equality is not mentioned as an objective, I do hope that this is included in your recommendations.