

10th September, 2024

Dear policymakers,

In my role as Professor of European Youth Policy at the University of South Wales and a Trustee of the International Award Foundation, I have had the privilege of observing and analysing numerous youth policy and participation programmes in Europe. Social Service Time (MDT) in the Netherlands stands out as a particularly impactful initiative that deserves strong support and continued investment. MDT not only nurtures young people's personal development but also strengthens social cohesion in our communities.

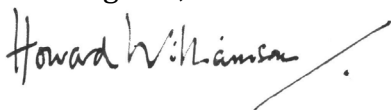
In my longstanding and wide-ranging research on youth policy (including the co-ordination of the Council of Europe youth policy reviews over 20 years), I have consistently found that structured civic engagement programmes, such as MDT, play a crucial role in developing young people's competencies and citizenship. The implementation of MDT programmes creates essential opportunities for young people to enhance their competencies and strengthen their sense of citizenship. These findings highlight the transformative potential of MDT in cultivating a generation of active, responsible and engaged citizens, as outlined in the publication *Supporting Young People in Europe: Lessons from the "second seven" Council of Europe international reviews of national youth policy*, the second of my three books on supporting young people in Europe.

Research summarised in the 2009 European Youth Strategy: Investing and Empowering shows that MDT programmes not only promote young people's individual growth, but also contribute to strengthening social cohesion by enabling them to work together towards common goals. This claim underlines the dual impact of MDT: it promotes both personal development and the building of stronger, more cohesive communities. By engaging young people in meaningful social projects, MDT helps bridge societal gaps and fosters a culture of mutual understanding and cooperation. The results of the International Award programme, which was established in the Netherlands 30 years ago and has been recognised as integral to the MDT vision by the Dutch government, are proof of this.

Thousands of young people in the Netherlands have already benefited from the programme, gaining valuable skills, increasing their self-confidence and developing a deeper connection with their communities. MDT provides an essential bridge between theoretical education and practical application, enabling young people to translate their academic knowledge into real-world impact.

As an advocate for youth development and social inclusion and cohesion, I urge Dutch policymakers to recognise the deep value of MDT and ensure its survival and growth. Investing in MDT is an investment in the future of the Netherlands. It provides young people with the tools and opportunities they need to become active, responsible members of society, laying the foundation for a more equitable, inclusive and dynamic society.

Kind regards,



Prof. Dr. Howard Williamson CVO CBE FRSA FHEA

Pontypridd, Cymru, CF37 1DL

F +44 (0)3455 76 01 01

G decymru.ac.uk

Pontypridd, Wales, CF37 1DL

T +44 (0)3455 76 01 01

W southwales.ac.uk