



How to develop contacts with sister unions around the world

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## Introduction

UNISON is committed to developing our international work through practical solidarity links with trade unions and trade unionists in other countries. By exchanging information and experiences, developing mutual support, improving awareness, and stimulating practical action by trade unionists, in the social, political and industrial areas of their lives, we can better understand each other and offer and receive support where necessary.

One way of achieving this is through twinning with a union at branch, regional or national level with a comparable union in another country. Currently UNISON branches and regions are twinned with unions in South Africa and Cuba and we are working to extend this to Colombia, Nicaragua and other areas. We should also consider developing twinning arrangements with unions in such areas as the new and existing members of the EU, as well as the rest of the world.

Twinning can operate in different ways depending on what both parties hope to achieve through the relationship. The twinning may be initiated as a strategic alliance between workers in different countries working for the same employer for example, or it may be to give solidarity and support to a union struggling against such things as human rights violations, poverty and discrimination.



## Why should your branch establish a Twinning?

The process of twinning allows for:

- The development of a long term relationship
- The building up of knowledge and understanding based on a two way relationship
- The development of long term projects that will have a lasting benefit
- Solidarity and other activity is based on what our partners want, rather than what we “think they want.”
- UNISON members to develop an understanding of solidarity, as opposed to simple charity - which we believe to be inappropriate to our relations with other unions.
- The building of links with unions around the world so we are better informed and enabling us to act speedily when needed.

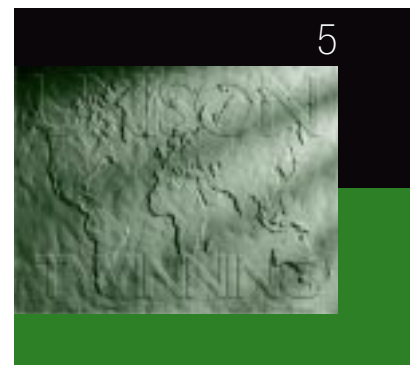
Helping other unions develop is in everyone’s interest. Building a civil society based on dignity, respect for others and democracy is one way to ensure a more just world for everyone.

## What does twinning involve?

A twinning at any level of UNISON must coincide with the overall objectives and priorities of UNISON. This could either reflect political or policy concerns, such as GATS, privatisation, transnational corporations as employers or reflect UNISON’s geographical priorities, bolstering our work with unions in countries that are in need of direct support and solidarity.

Either way branches and regions can work with UNISON’s partner unions to explore areas of common interest or concern that might include:

- Fighting privatisation - exchanging information on Government policy, strategies for resisting it, possible alternatives etc.
- Sharing experiences on recruitment and retention of members.
- Joint support for policy initiatives in such areas as equal pay, work life balance, labour rights.
- Exchanging information on companies and their subsidiaries with employees in other countries.
- Use of Information Technology - union membership systems, making use of networks and the internet etc.
- Exchange of news, information, materials etc, to assist us in our common struggles.
- Joint educational activities, seminars, joint visits and joint policy development on common issues.
- Developing ‘people to people’ contacts. Creating links that people can follow up through official delegations or for example, if a UNISON member goes on holiday abroad, they may be able to meet up with a trade unionist and taken to a workplace, township etc.



British trade unions have access to the finance and resources that our partner unions in other countries very often do not. One thing that twinnings can do is to provide material assistance to sister unions. This could be in the form of:

- Office equipment, computers, desks etc.
- Expertise in the form of education and training officers, course materials.
- Obtaining financial support from official sources for project work.
- Supporting visitors to the UK for educational purposes.
- Ambulances and medical goods

Twinned sister unions have been able to provide UNISON with:

- Information on trade union organisation, current campaigns, disputes.
- Ideas and enthusiasm, in the face of odds we can't even contemplate.
- Ways of doing things within limited resources, and ways of overcoming obstacles that we can learn from.
- Speakers to branches, regional committees, regional councils' etc, to raise our understanding of International issues, and in particular, the North/South debate.
- Insight into the impact of British Government policy and the policy of other western countries, banks and financial institutions.

## Developing the Links – Making it Happen

A lot of experience has already been gained in UNISON in developing twinning arrangements, and this can be shared with any region or branch planning to establish links. The International Unit will be able to offer advice where it is needed. Initially there is a need to:

- Decide on the region or country that you want to establish a twinning with. If you do not have a particular union or region in mind the International Unit can give you some ideas according to what you want the twinning to achieve.
- Think about what language resources exist within your branch when deciding upon the region you wish to twin with. Language can be a barrier to the success of a twinning. Communication and contact are essential elements of any twinning arrangement.
- Define a clear set of objectives for what you hope the twinning will achieve.
- Establish contact with the appropriate region. Once the partner union is identified there should be an initial exchange of letters, faxes and emails, with assistance from the International Unit should there be any problems.
- The development of profiles so that the two regions or branches can develop an understanding of their structures, who they organise, what problems they face, etc.
- Develop an Agreement between the two unions outlining the objectives of the twinning, which should be signed by both unions. (An example of an Agreement is attached as Appendix 1.)
- A speaker to a Regional or Branch Committee meeting. This does not have to be a specially paid for visit, as there are often trade unionists in Britain who can speak and help develop some interest and enthusiasm.



- Identify some practical actions that can be developed over a period of time. This might include the production of a newsletter, or basic information exchange systems, or it could be development of education and training initiatives. Consider sending letters of support to colleagues involved in disputes, greetings messages to Regional Conferences – things that require very little effort, but are very well received.

## Visits to twinned unions

It is most likely that at some stage a twinning will involve a visit, or international exchange, to the region that the UNISON branch or region has twinned with. In order to ensure that this is rewarding for both unions, UNISON has produced the following guidelines for any members considering organising an international exchange.

### (A) PLANNING AND SETTING UP OBJECTIVES

Clear and realistic objectives should be set for any international exchange. Before deciding on an exchange, branches and regions should consider whether this is the best way of meeting their objectives.

Specific objectives will of course vary according to the interest of the branch or region. All exchanges, however should be guided by the following principles:

- i) That it should be a two-way process, of mutual benefit to UNISON and the sister union abroad;
- ii) That the exchange should promote involvement not only at Executive but also at grass roots level. The exchange should, therefore, be publicised as widely as possible within the branch or region and in the case of an ongoing exchange, participants should vary from one visit to the next unless this conflicts with the objectives of the exchange.

### (B) PREPARING THE PROGRAMME

Aside from making person to person contact, the exchange of information is usually the basis for international visits. Topics to be discussed should be decided on with the trade union partner well before the visit takes place.

When drawing up a programme for a visit from a sister union, a number of factors need to be taken into account:

- Do not overdo the programme in terms of either the number of issues covered or the number of meetings in any one day;
- Allow for travelling time in between meetings;
- Allow for interpretation: it usually takes twice as long to communicate through an interpreter than it does to speak directly in English; also interpreters need breaks (an informal session or meal break for the participants is not necessarily a break for the interpreter).

### (C) WHO TO SEND AND WHO TO INVOLVE

The composition of the UNISON group should reflect UNISON's equal opportunities policies. If possible, more than one person should be made responsible for organising the visit. The more individual members that are involved, the greater the level of interest will be in the union. Responsibilities that could be assigned to different individuals include:

- Liaison with the trade union partner and programme arrangements;



- Obtaining basic information on the relevant country, its trade union movement, current political situation etc;
- Equipping delegation members with some basic phrases in the language of the country;
- Preparation of an information sheet on the branch or region, its activities and the problems it faces.

#### **(D) PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS**

**Accommodation:** Hotel accommodation is not always necessary, indeed, staying in members' homes should be encouraged where possible.

**Interpreters:** Professional interpreters are very expensive. Check the resources in the branch or region before turning to outside help.

**Gifts:** UNISON gifts can be bought from the Communications Department, but are not available from the International Unit. Alternatively, consider giving something local from your area.

**Insurance:** Make sure all participants have adequate health and travel insurance.

**Travel:** Ask your twinned union to organise a private mini bus or something similar for internal travel as relying on public transport will make the visit very complicated.

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## International Twinning – The Checklist

- Decide on country/union for twinning
- Develop objectives for the twinning
- Make contact with the proposed union
- Develop a profile of your branch/region to inform your twinned union
- Develop a contract of agreement with the union
- Invite a speaker to next branch/regional committee meeting
- Identify actions to take on within the branch/region
- Organise a visit to the twinned region
- Publicise achievements of the visit
- Follow up any actions agreed with twinned union

## How to finance an international visit

Aside from the normal fundraising activities that you could undertake in your branch or region, such as an appeal to other branches for donations or organising sponsored activities, you could also apply to the International Unit for a grant. These grants are allocated on a case by case basis but are there to help branches and regions develop their international work. The rules for making an application and an application form are attached as Appendix 2.

*Continued on page 13*

## UNISON International Department Branch Interchange Scheme

### **APPLICATION FOR FUNDING**

Name of Branch/Region \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Branch Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Counterpart Union \_\_\_\_\_

Country / Region of Counterpart Union \_\_\_\_\_

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### For International Department Use Only

Grant Approved

Grant Rejected

Amount Granted £ \_\_\_\_\_

# NATURE OF PROJECT

## **1. General Objectives of the Exchange**

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## **2. Specific areas of Interest for Discussion**

## DURATION OF PROJECT

### 3. Dates of Proposed Visit

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### 4. Provisional Date for Return Visit

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### 5. Proposed Programme

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## DETAILS OF PROJECT

Number of Participants from your Branch/Region \_\_\_\_\_

Names and Positions of Participants

Name	Position
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Name	Position
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Name	Position
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Name	Position
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Name	Position
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## Reporting and Publicity

An important element of the twinning will be to raise awareness of its existence within your region or branch. This can act as a stimulus to get other branch members more involved in international work generally or simply to raise awareness of the situation of other trade unionists around the world.

There are several ways to publicise your twinning that may include:

- A newsletter;
- A display board with photos, stories, reports etc
- An email list to discuss the twinning with other's in the branch or region;
- Organising meetings or events with guest speakers or videos;
- Inviting visitors from the twinned region or branch so that people can make face to face contact.

## Current UNISON Regional Twinning

### TWINNINGS WITH SOUTH AFRICA

#### UNISON REGION

Scotland  
 North West  
 Northern Ireland  
 Northern  
 East Midlands  
 Greater London  
 Southern  
 South West  
 West Midlands

#### NEHAWU REGION

Eastern Cape  
 Kwazulu Natal  
 Kwazulu Natal  
 Guateng  
 Mpumulanga  
 Freestate  
 Northern Province  
 Western Cape  
 North West

### TWINNINGS WITH CUBA

#### UNISON REGION

UNISON National  
 Greater London  
 South Eastern  
 Wales  
 East Midlands  
 North West  
 Northern  
 Scotland  
 Eastern

#### SNTS REGION

SNTS National  
 Piñar del Rio  
 Las Tunas  
 Guantanamo  
 Camaguey  
 Matanzas  
 Santiago de Cuba  
 Holguín  
 Provincia Habana

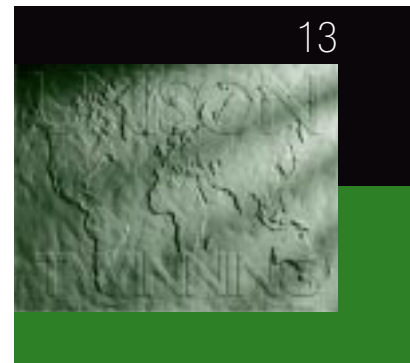
*Current UNISON Regional Twinning continued*

#### UNISON REGION

South East

#### SNTAP REGION

Las Tunas



Greater London

Piñar del Rio

East Midlands

Camaguey

South West

Granma

## Support and Contact from the International Unit

The International Unit is responsible for co-ordinating the development of twinnings within UNISON regions and branches. They can offer assistance with identifying who your branch or region should twin with, making first contact, what a twinning arrangement might comprise, how to maintain the relationship and how to arrange and finance a visit.

For more information contact Nick Sigler, Head of International on 020 7551 1392 or by email [n.sigler@UNISON.co.uk](mailto:n.sigler@UNISON.co.uk) or Polly Jones on 020 7551 1214 or [p.jones@UNISON.co.uk](mailto:p.jones@UNISON.co.uk)



# Appendix 1

## **PROTOCOL OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN REGION / UNION AND REGION / UNISON**

This protocol serves to declare that ..... Region of ..... Union and .....Region UNISON has entered into a twinning relationship in the best interests of their respective memberships.

Whilst regional twinning activities will develop independently of national activities they will be co-ordinated and consistent with national activities, and the two Regions will keep their respective national offices informed.

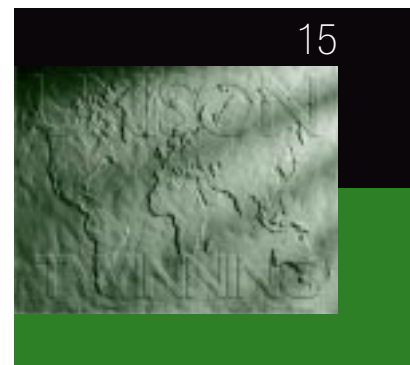
The Regional twinning will develop activities to build mutual awareness, friendship, support and solidarity between the two Regions, such as:

- exchanging and disseminating information and publicity about each Region, their policies, campaigns and struggles;
- expressing support in times of dispute and struggle consistent with the policy of the Region in dispute;
- providing educational material support (and financial support for specified items, funds to be transferred via National Offices);
- organising solidarity, educational and developmental visits and exchanges.

When carrying out activities within this twinning arrangement each Region undertakes to communicate only through the designated Regional Officers, and to respect the internal policies and procedures of the other Region.

This protocol shall not prejudice either party, and may be terminated by either party if they so desire.

Signed: by representatives of both unions



## Appendix 2

### **UNISON INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE**

#### **RULES**

- 1) Funds are for official exchanges between UNISON branches or regions and their counterparts in UNISON's sister unions abroad.
- 2) Individual UNISON members can also apply for funds when formally representing their branch or region on a visit abroad organised by the local trades council or regional TUC, where such visits involve contact with UNISON's sister unions.
- 3) National level funding for an international exchange will amount to no more than 50% of the total cost of any visit. The maximum grant will be £1000.
- 4) All applications for funding must be submitted on the attached form before the exchange takes place. Retrospective applications will not be considered.
- 5) A report must be submitted to the International Committee within 6 months of the date of the visit. The report should include reference to how the objectives were met, a copy of the programme and a final breakdown of monies spent. In case of an ongoing exchange, the report should explain how the objectives will be developed in the future.
- 6) Members , branches or regions that fail to produce a report within the timescale will not be eligible for future funding.
- 7) Applications must be approved by the Regional Council before they are submitted to the International Unit. The final decision on support for an application will rest with the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the International Committee in consultation with the appropriate officers.



# Notes



# Notes

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**For further information or to join UNISON,  
call UNISONdirect 0845 355 0845.**

**Text phone users call FREEPHONE UNISONdirect  
0800 0 967 968.**

**Line open from 6am - midnight, Monday to Friday  
and 9am to 4pm Saturday or log onto  
UNISON's website [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)**

