

UNISON/Verdi Memorandum Of understanding

UNISON and Ver.di, respectively Britain and Germany's biggest unions, today announced that they will co-ordinate key aspects of their work.

The two unions have been working together for a number of months through a series of joint meetings. Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON, and Frank Bsirske, President of Ver.di, have met on various occasions in order to discuss means and areas of co-operation. These meetings have been backed up by meetings of other officers. In addition to joint working at the European Public Service Union (EPSU) and at Public Services International (PSI) the two unions have organised a joint seminar at this weekend's European Social Forum. A further joint seminar – on the Future of Public Services – is planned for early next year. The intention is to develop these contacts into a more formal relationship.

The two unions, whose members are largely recruited from the public service providers, believe that they have a great deal in common and that by working more closely together they can considerably enhance the conditions of workers in both the private and public sector. The two unions will also work more closely on a range of policy issues, particularly at the European level. And they intend to undertake joint action in a number of transnational companies engaged in the provision of public services where the two unions have members.

While one element of the future co-operative working will be around developing common policies for public services there will also be a number of practical elements. These will include joint recruitment activity, joint negotiating and bargaining and joint campaigning. Other points of the Memorandum of Understanding include:

- Pursuing joint strategies to engage with private companies, especially through European Works Councils where both unions are represented. These include Sodexho, ISS, Veolia(Vivendi) Severn Trent RWE/Thames and Innogy;
- Working jointly to set up EWCs in companies that don't yet have them;
- In transnationals where UNISON and Ver.di have members, working together on compiling comparative data around pay and conditions between British and German staff, pursuing joint collective bargaining strategies using the above and undertaking joint recruitment campaigns;
- Co-ordinated lobbying of respective national governments and European institutions on matters of common interest;
- Examining the possibilities and potential benefits of reciprocal membership arrangements and allowing members to automatically transfer their union membership if they take a job in another country;
- Extending twinning arrangements between the unions at local and regional level. (A twinning agreement between UNISON's Greater London Region and Ver.di's Berlin/Brandenburg region has recently been initiated)
- Regular meetings between senior UNISON and Ver.di officers both to review progress of the Memorandum and to examine ways in which it can be extended.