



Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research



Sustainable action – in trade and commerce

Tips for (training) practice



Vocational education and training for sustainable development...

...conveys the know-how – already during initial and continuing vocational training – which executive personnel and employees can apply to take conscious responsibility for the environment and society as they pursue the economic interests of their businesses.

The areas of economy, environment, and social responsibility are on an equal footing and mutually dependent. Balancing these various aspects – practising sustainable commerce – is a skill which has to be learned and applied!

Companies and vocational schools, as well as intercompany training centres and others, play a key role in this regard. They can link these somewhat abstract principles of sustainable commerce with hands-on professional skills, shape them and pass them on to the skilled workers of future generations. Professional, ecological, social and personal competences add up to empowerment to take sustainable action, also outside of the workplace context – and that it is one of the key societal challenges of today and the future. In order to switch necessary processes into gear, the National Platform on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) adopted a National Action Plan on ESD on 20 June 2017, which identifies key fields of action and goals and issues recommendations for action, including for vocational education and training.



Everyone can take sustainable action at work and in their private lives to help ensure a livable society, also in the future. The aim of the funding instrument for skills development in vocational education and training for sustainable development by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research is to integrate sustainability in the training and education of young people.

Why is sustainability so important in the commercial occupations?



People in commercial occupations can adopt sustainable practices themselves but they can also influence the purchasing decisions of their customers and thereby nudge the entire product chain towards increased sustainability. This starts with the selection of product range and producers worldwide, concerns options for sustainable transport and warehousing, affects point-of-sale product display, and includes customer information about sustainable products. By offering additional repair services, for example, product life cycle can be extended, resources conserved, energy saved, and customer loyalty increased.

Apart from this, customers are becoming increasingly aware of their responsibility and are looking for ways to do their bit for sustainable development. They are scrutinizing the origin of products and whether production is ecological and socially just, if products are fair trade-certified, and also paying attention to packaging and sustainability certifications. Customers and employees are also increasingly concerned about corporate image. Sustainable business action is therefore a critical economic factor despite the conflicts of interest which arise.

“The honourable merchant”

“Trade and commerce are done by people. Making a commitment to sustainable development calls for personal conviction and approach – both of which are well-served by vocational education and training. The values and principles of the “honourable merchant” provide orientation for reconciling business interests and social responsibility in a highly specialized, globalized, and competitive working world. The “honourable merchant” is the guiding principle for responsible and sustainability-driven entrepreneurship.”

Markus Löttsch

CEO, Nuremberg Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Further information (available in German only):
www.ihk-nuernberg.de/ehrbarer-kaufmann

Tips from the trainers

What we teach our apprentices about sustainability:



Aurelia Wieczorek
REWE Markt GmbH
Expert HR-Kompetenzcenter West

Wholesale and foreign trade

“Sustainability is a very important topic for us here at Alnatura. When we recruit our wholesale and foreign trade apprentices we make sure the candidate is a perfect match for the training place and that the recruitment process is paperless to the extent possible. In addition to their regular training, our apprentices also attend a seminar on sustainability. In subsequent projects, they organize, for example, their own clothing swap campaign or draft an ecological strategy which calls upon the other staff members to handle resources such as water, electricity and food with greater care.”



Winfried Reimer
Klumpp + Müller GmbH + Co KG
Head of training

Retail trade

“Sustainability has got to be an attractive subject from the very start of training. You have to do more than just teach it – you have to act on what is taught. Just one example: All our apprentices are given a tablet computer at the beginning of their training period. They use a learning platform installed on the tablet to compile all of their knowledge and information about food retailing, regardless of where they are. How appropriate for the times we live in, and best of all, it saves a whole lot of paper.”

Janina Hofmann

Alnatura Produktions- und Handels GmbH
Trainer, Back office units

**Freight forwarding and logistics services**

“It is very important to show young people at an early stage that the way they carry out transport and other logistics projects can have a positive impact on the environment, staff and the work environment. The various aspects of sustainable development must be identified and implemented in all facets of their training. This includes technology (electric vehicles, autonomous driving, etc.), the workplace (part-time and flexi-time regulations, home office, greater responsibility, etc.), business structures (e.g. e-commerce, B2C), or political issues (BREXIT, low-emission zones, etc.)”



What skills are needed?

It takes competent staff to put sustainable business practices in place at your company systematically. So what exactly are the skills that people working in trade and commerce need in order to play a part in sustainable development? How can they contribute to preserving Earth's resources and ensuring socially just prospects of development worldwide?

According to the “Education for Sustainable Development” National Action Plan, adopted by the National Platform on Education for Sustainable Development on 20 June 2017, the answer to this question is through the development of sustainability skills. These skills refer to the knowledge, abilities and know-how which enable people in commercial occupations to:

➡ **observe and assess the interplay and contradictions of social, ecological and economic aspects.**

Personnel in procurement must be able to evaluate and take into account not only economic but, in particular, also the social and ecological factors involved. To make responsible decisions, they must determine what type of goods are procured (fair trade, energy label, organic farming or Oeko-Tex standard certification, other quality seals) and how they are marketed.

➡ **take into account the regional and global impact of their work.**

People in commercial occupations are active in regional markets with local customers, but they are also always part of the global competition. Sustainable action requires an awareness of the consequences which procurement decisions can have in faraway places around the world (e.g. environmental degradation, working conditions).

- ➔ **keep in mind the long-term consequences of sales activities.**
People in commercial occupations and the products they offer also influence consumption patterns. They must be mindful of what the long-term effects of this may be, for example if seasonal products such as strawberries and bananas are available year-round, or when the sale of certain electrical equipment speeds up the depletion of non-renewable resources or their energy consumption is damaging to the climate.
- ➔ **help conserve our natural resources.**
Trade and commerce put a strain on finite raw materials and energy sources. Trade and commerce professionals who act sustainably must therefore weigh the costs of the transport, warehousing, sale and consumption of goods against the actual necessity of their consumption, efficient utilization and compatibility with the environment.
- ➔ **take the entire supply chain and product life cycles into account, whenever possible. Businesspeople have a major influence on the production and distribution of goods in their capacity to determine product selection, marketing and provide customer information.**
Sustainable commerce should therefore not be restricted to in-store product management but must also extend to consideration of how goods are produced, utilized and disposed of.

More information and contacts for the funding programme for vocational education and training for sustainable development (BBNE 2015–2019)

Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training

Programme management “BBNE 2015 – 2019”

Mr Srbeny / Email: srbeny@bibb.de / www.bbne.de

Voices from the National Platform on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Marlehn Thieme, Chairwoman of the German Council for Sustainable Development (June 2017):

“Education for Sustainable Development teaches everyone the comprehensive performance and organizational skills with which they can make independent and responsible decisions, play an active role in societal processes, and understand global development.”

Prof. Verena Metzger, President of the German Commission for UNESCO (April 2017):

“To achieve sustainable development we must understand the impact of our actions on the world and learn how to cope with change and risks. We need knowledge and skills, attitudes and values which enable us to take responsible action.”

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In writing to
Publikationsversand der Bundesregierung
P.O. Box 48 10 09
18132 Rostock
Germany
E-mail: publikationen@bundesregierung.de
Internet: <http://www.bmbf.de>
or by
Phone.: +49 30 18 272 272 1
Fax: +49 30 18 10 272 272 1

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