



## The long road to sustainability

► Do you also find that you are coming across the term sustainability on an ever more frequent basis? What, however, does it mean? And to what extent does it affect our living and working environment? Sustainability has often been misused as a political slogan and has been thoughtlessly popularised to refer to such areas as the sustainable development of share prices. All of which has dulled the meaning of the term sustainability, or to be more precise sustainable development, to the point that it has become far removed from its original significance.

Sustainable development is a protracted, complex and self-contradictory process, not easy to comprehend or structure in light of the difficulty of juggling such divergent interests as cost-effectiveness and social or ecological objectives. Nevertheless, endeavours need to be undertaken to accord sustainable development the significance it is due.

The aim of sustainable development is to satisfy the basic requirements of all people without exceeding the viability of the planet. It should serve as a vehicle for preserving, protecting and regenerating the earth's ecological system and for ensuring that future generations will also be able to have their needs met.

The fulfilment of such high requirements requires complete specialist, practical and emotional commitment to the development and expansion of global, national, societal and individual implementation strategies. (Vocational) training has an important part to play within this process, and this was the reason behind the declaration made by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2002 that the period between 2005 and 2014 would be the UN World Decade of "Education for Sustainable Development". The

aim was to anchor the principles of sustainable development in national education systems across the world. 2006 also saw the European Union accord particular significance to sustainable development in education in the form of the Revised EU Strategy for Sustainable Development. The objective here is for education to play a part in creating equality of opportunity for everyone, to foster the knowledge society and to strengthen the competitiveness of the European Union.

Strategies for the implementation of "sustainable" objectives have been enshrined within the National Plan of Action for Germany. The extent to which these objectives have been realised is scrutinised via an ongoing monitoring process and recorded in progress reports published on a biannual basis. The Federal Statistical Office was also commissioned by the Federal Government to present the Indicators Report for 2006 documenting the progression and status of sustainable development in Germany. The Council for Sustainable Development also provides the Federal Government with advice on all issues relating to sustainable development.

What, however, is the current state of affairs in vocational education and training? Sustainability in vocational education and training is capable of interpretation in two ways. The first of these is in respect of the sustainable effectiveness of vocational training measures, particularly in terms of the successful transfer of innovations and the permanent efficacy of vocational teaching and learning processes. The second aspect of sustainability is as an overall concept to integrate the requirements of sustainable development into vocational education and training.

The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BiBB) acted on this matter as early as 2001 by instigating the "Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Development" action programme (known by its German abbreviation of BBNE) to act as a mission statement for the development, piloting and transfer of innovative research and development projects. A range of activities has been undertaken since this time in pursuit of the objec-



**MANFRED KREMER**  
*President of the BiBB*

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tive of implementing Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Development into vocational education and training. These have included specialist conferences and congresses ("Sustainability in Vocational Education and Training and work", 2005, "University Conference on Vocational Education and Training", 2004 and 2006, forums at the Didacta "Transparent Specialist Conference", 2006, "Sustainable Forestry", 2007 and the BIBB Congress forum "Sustainable Development in Vocational Education and Training", 2007) as well as a series of pilot projects focusing on "sustainability", some of which are presented in the present issue of BWP. Within the scope of the "Sustainable Forestry" research programme, BIBB is conducting a cross-sectional project to determine training requirements along the length of the value-added chain in the forestry and woodworking sector. Measures undertaken have included the establishment of the Berlin Forest and Woodworking pilot region to map vocational education and training for sustainable development in forestry and woodworking on an exemplary basis and at a regional level. The Federal Institute is also involved in a range of working groups and committees connected to the UN Decade (National Committee, Round Table and the Federal Working Group on Initial and Continuing Vocational Education and Training chaired by BIBB). A German language Internet portal provides ongoing information on the status of the sustainability projects ([www.bibb.de/nachhaltigkeit](http://www.bibb.de/nachhaltigkeit)), and BIBB's Good Practice Agency (GPA) reports on successful practical examples of the implementation of sustainable vocational education and training.

Within the scope of its statutory duties and acting in the interests of strengthening the idea of sustainability within vocational education and training, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training has also funded a pilot project in Cottbus to plan and set up an inter-company vocational training centre constructed and established along ecological lines. The feasibility of such projects has now been shown, and it has further become evident that energy efficient construction is not only economically viable but also, in terms of operating costs, more cost effective in the long term. In addition to this, this demonstration object acts in accordance with the principle of building object = teaching object in serving the purpose of establishing and strengthening the idea of sustainability

within inter-company training and in-company continuing training.

Not the least of the tasks the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training has set itself is the integration of overarching and occupationally specific aspects and requirements related to sustainable business in the development and modernisation of training occupations and the instigation of these as elements of a modern VET system.

The activities of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training are not, however, restricted to the major endeavours it is undertaking to integrate the principle of sustainable development in vocational education and training. We are also demonstrating sustainability within the confines of our own organisation via BIBB's participation in the "ECOPROFIT BONN 2007" Project operated by the City of Bonn. This is a cooperative project funded by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia for the development of an in-company, cost-saving environmental management system in which 17 Bonn-based government departments and companies are taking part. BIBB will also seek certification in accordance with the EU EMAS Standard (ECO Management and Audit Scheme). More than half of the steps required for EMAS certification have been fulfilled by taking part in ECOPROFIT BONN 2007.

Sustainability is something which affects us all, whether we are individuals, pressure groups, companies and government bodies or whether we are involved in research, academia or vocational education and training. Sustainable development can only be comprehensively secured once cooperation and participation from the various levels and venues are in place. Fundamental understanding of and basic behaviour towards sustainable development should be practised in pre-school and primary school in order to provide a later point of reference for vocational education and training.

Making sustainable development a self-evident component of the imparting of employability skills within initial and continuing training processes will not, however, be enough to ensure that the mission statement for Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Development does not merely remain a vision. Permanently sustainable behaviour within occupations and beyond can only be attained when sustainability becomes a genuine reality within the working processes of companies and government bodies and thus also becomes a component of vocational socialisation. ■