

# Handelsfachwirt/-in

- A Short Guide to a German Degree -

In Germany the *Handelsfachwirt/-in* is one of the most popular und widely recognized certificates of vocational training for career advancement.

## Legislative Framework

The field of adult and professional education is generally covered at federal level by a set of legal acts, especially

- Vocational Training Act  
(Berufsbildungsgesetz)
- Career Advancement Training Promotion Act (Aufstiegsfortbildungsförderungsges.)
- Federal Training Assistance Act  
(Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz)
- Distance-Learning Protection Act  
(Fernunterrichtsschutzgesetz)

Apart from these, particular regulations also come within the limits of state (*Länder*) legislative.

## Administration and Organization

Professional education is marked by the cooperation of different partners - private and municipal, non-profit and profit making, business and public training institutions and services. They work together by necessity but also side by side as competitors in the education market.

The *Handelsfachwirt/-in* (IHK) certificate belongs to the legally regulated part of vocational training. It is awarded by the German Association of Industry and Commerce (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelskammertag, DIHK*), one of the self-governed organizations in the German business community. This federal organization is assigned to design the curriculum framework of the course, while

the local chambers of industry and commerce (Industrie- und Handelskammer, IHK) are in charge of examining the students and issuing their certificates. The training organizations are different providers, chambers, unions and private sellers.

## Target Group

The course is targeted to people who are ambitious of a career advancement in the trading or service industry market. Aspiring to a higher position within their company they want training in middle management areas of operation. A number of participants are also planning to go into business for themselves.

Once they are *Handelsfachwirte* they typically work in the following positions:

- head of department
- store or branch manager
- middle management jobs in various departments such as accounting, human resources, logistics or marketing

## Admission Requirements

Admission to the course requires a certificate from an initial vocational training program. It is acquired within the German dual system of vocational education. Most students are trained retail or wholesale and export traders. Their initial vocational training extends over about three years spent partly in a company as well as attending classes at a vocational school.

In addition, students have to bring along vocational experience in a trading company of at least two or three years after finishing their initial training.

In Bavaria, a modification of these prerequisites enables those students with a higher education entrance qualification (*Abitur*, equivalent to A-Levels or high school diploma; *Fachabitur*, vocational baccalaureat diploma) to attend initial and further vocational training at the same time (“sandwich course”). This integrated course allows students to complete their vocational education within about three years. It is called *Duales Studium Handelsfachwirt/-in*.

## Contents

- working and learning methods (time management, research strategies, presentation skills, internal communication)
- (trade) business operations
- controlling
- company organization
- financing
- information/data organization
- company legislation (as part of trade and commerce legislation)
- accounting
- cost and results accounting
- company statistics
- taxation
- human resources management
- leadership (personnel)
- labor legislation
- purchasing, warehousing, logistics
- sales contract legislation
- marketing
- competition regulations
- (basic) economics

## Training

The course takes about 15 months, i. e. 470 lessons. Participants usually attend classes parallel to their job. Lessons are held twice a week in the evening or on Saturdays.

The course can also be taken en block. This full time training lasts about four months.

The majority of participants make use of an additional training module called “training the trainer” (*Ausbildung der Ausbilder*). It is regulated by the Instructor Aptitude Ordinance (*Ausbildereignungsverordnung*).

Covering about 100 lessons this module enables and certifies participants to organize and perform apprentice training.

## Training Methods

Training at the Akademie Handel means dialog oriented training. Our students benefit from their teachers’ practical experience (as executives, lawyers or consultants) as well as their varying teaching methods and instruments.

We also offer the course in form of distance instruction.

## Akademie Handel

Akademie Handel is subordinated to the following three organizing bodies, being the Bavarian trade associations:

- state association of the Bavarian retail trade, regis. association (*Landesverband des Bayerischen Einzelhandels e.V., LBE*)
- state association of wholesale and foreign trade, distribution and services, regis. association (*Landesverband Groß- und Außenhandel, Vertrieb und Dienstleistungen e.V., LGAD*)
- Bavarian trade association for trade procurement and distribution, regis. association (*Bayerischer Wirtschaftsverband für Handelsvermittlung und Vertrieb e. V., CDH*)

Akademie Handel has been offering the course *Handelsfachwirt/-in (IHK)* since 1972 in order to prepare young entrepreneurs und junior staff for the changing conditions of commercial markets. We are the largest German training institution for this kind of course with about 20,000 *Handelsfachwirt/-in* diplomas.

By now a rather popular degree the *Handelsfachwirt/-in* is the (trade/commerce) equivalent to the master craftsman (*Handwerkermeister*) or the qualified foreman (*Industriemeister*).