

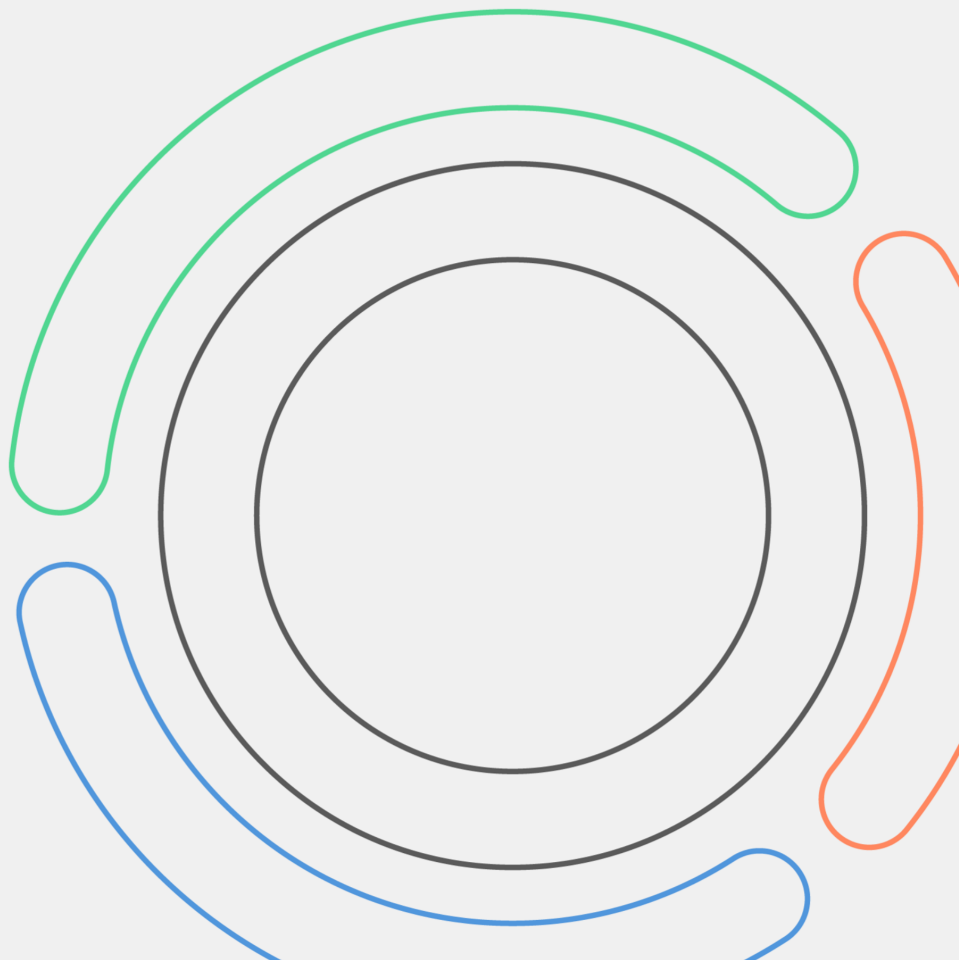
Z 9

Quality Assurance, Dialogue and Acknowledgements

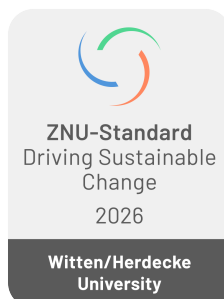
ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change 2026

Christian Geßner, Axel Kölle,
Kesta Ludemann

As of 20/03/2026 | Rev. 3.0



The ZNU - Centre for Sustainable Leadership is the standard provider / programme owner of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change.



This document is to be used together with the current versions of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change (in short: ZNU-Standard) Z 1 to Z 8. The German version serves as the original reference document. The documents including all their parts are protected by copyright. Any use or dissemination is not permitted without the consent of the standard issuer – the ZNU – Centre for Sustainable Leadership at the University Witten/Herdecke. This applies in particular to reproductions, translations and microfilming.

The ZNU strives to use gender-appropriate language in order to avoid discrimination and exclusion. Where possible, we use gender-neutral terms. However, in technically related cases, gender-specific forms may occur. Nevertheless, we would like to emphasise that we include and recognise all genders.

ZNU – Centre for Sustainable Leadership
Witten/Herdecke University
Alfred-Herrhausen-Straße 50
D-58448 Witten

Phone: +49 2302 926-545,
E-Mail: znu@uni-wh.de,
Website: www.znu-standard.com

Publication: 20/03/2026

Z 9-1

Quality Assurance and Dialogue

After intensive stakeholder dialogues, scientific work and practical tests, we are now pleased to present the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change.

The ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change is a joint effort. Since 2010, science, business, politics and certification bodies have been working together to develop a well-founded sustainability standard that can be applied in practice regardless of company size and industry, ties in with existing systems and aims to promote the liveliness of the topic of sustainability in companies.

Stakeholders of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change

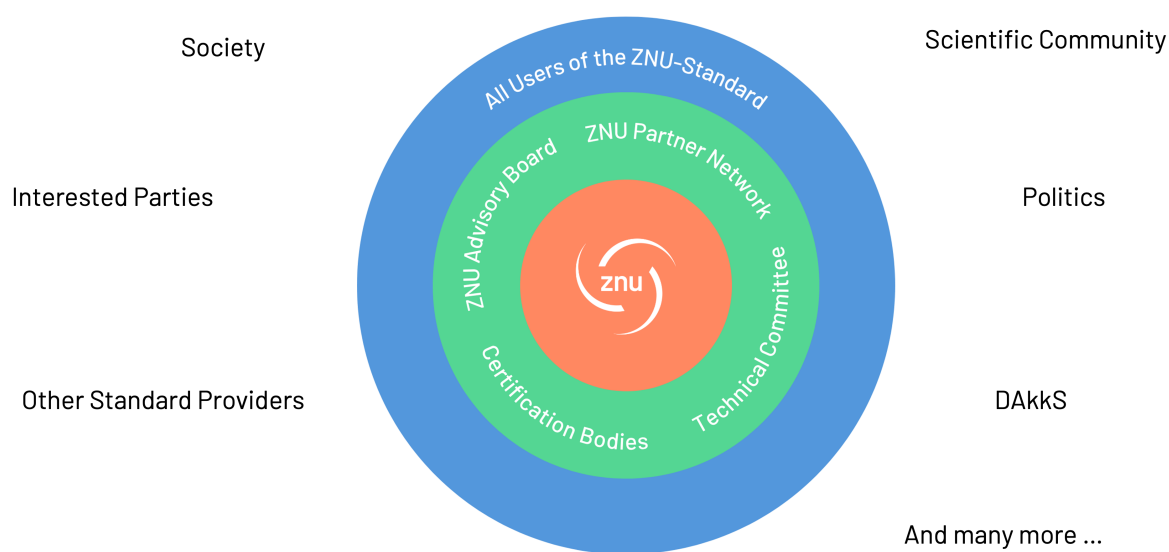


Figure 1: Stakeholders of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change, own figure

The standard is issued by the ZNU - Centre for Sustainable Leadership at Witten/Herdecke University, an application-oriented research institute of the Faculty of Business and Society. ZNU has developed the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change, which can be certified by independent third parties, from scientifically based self-assessment tools. Both a high-ranking advisory board and a technical committee staffed with experienced experts, as well as a large network from industry and science, provide continuous professional and practice-relevant impulses. There is also close cooperation with the certification bodies. In particular, the assessors are regularly trained and calibrated by the ZNU.

The ZNU has the ongoing task of systematically developing the content and quality of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change, in particular by early identification and consideration of new policy frameworks (e.g. UN SDGs, EU Green Deal), new or updated private sector standards (e.g. ISO standards) and new scientific findings on the design, implementation and effectiveness of sustainability standards. It is the task of the ZNU to collect, evaluate and discuss all experiences of the parties involved in the assessment process (companies, certification bodies, assessors, and further stakeholders) about the requirements of the certification process and to develop changes if necessary.

This applies to the ZNU-Standard itself as well as to the certification process, the assessment documents, the assessment report incl. checklists, the certificate, and its possible use in communication. For the purposes of quality assurance, the ZNU notably also receives the assessment results and the assessment reports of the companies from the certification bodies for evaluation. In addition, the ZNU accompanies assessments as required, in order to monitor and improve the work of the assessors.

In principle, it is important that the standard-setting process – which lies with the ZNU – is strictly separated from the work of the approved certification bodies; the latter assess the extent to which the ZNU-Standard requirements are met by the company to be certified and, in the positive case, issue its certificate. This means that the certification process itself is not carried out by the ZNU, but by the respective certification body with their approved assessors to guarantee the necessary independence (third-party assessment).

To maintain trust in the ZNU-Standard and in the integrity of the certification system, ethical and moral conduct such as the disclosure of conflicts of interest, no corruption or discrimination, as well as the appropriate communication and protection of confidential data apply to all participants. To this end, the ZNU has concluded a cooperation agreement with the approved certification bodies and conducts regular office assessments. In addition to the general aspects of the processes, the focus here is primarily on the communication with and about the ZNU-Standard as well as the competence management of the certification body.

Whether the certification body itself applies the ZNU-Standard correctly and whether professional competence, reliability, independence and integrity are present is regularly assessed and monitored by the German Accreditation Body (Deutsche Akkreditierungsstelle, DAkkS for short). This ensures that the confirmation of the technical competence of a certification body to carry out certain activities – which is reserved exclusively for the state – is in place (in this case: the ZNU-Standard requirements are fulfilled and a certification under the ZNU-Standard may be conducted in accordance with the ZNU's regulatory framework); in short, a review of the reviewers takes place. All certification bodies that have concluded a cooperation agreement with the ZNU and have submitted a corresponding application to the DAkkS undergo the DAkkS assessment and approval process. The final authorisation for certification under the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change 2026 is thus granted by the state supervisory body DAkkS.

This procedure creates confidence in the statement of a certification in accordance with the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change:

„The company has integrated a holistic learning process , Driving Sustainable Change', is making measurable progress in its material sustainability issues at the site and along the value chains, and is thus making a committed, ongoing contribution to the sustainable transformation of the economy and society..“

In the interests of preventive quality assurance, all parties involved in the certification process and further stakeholders are requested to contact the standard setter or the certification body immediately as soon as there are indications of a complaint regarding the quality of the

standard. Complaints regarding a specific certification process are to be addressed directly to the responsible certification body, as the respective certification body alone is responsible for this (cf. Z 4-3.4). The ZNU as standard setter has furthermore implemented a contact and complaints management system that is accessible to all stakeholders, for example via the website www.znu-standard.com or via the email address hinweis-znu@uni-wh.de. Our aim as standard setter is to maintain an always open and solution-oriented dialogue with interested stakeholders and thereby ensure a consistently high quality of the ZNU-Standard.

Contact

If you have any questions or suggestions – feel free to contact us!

ZNU – Centre for Sustainable Leadership

University Witten/Herdecke

Alfred-Herrhausen-Str. 50, D-58448 Witten

www.uni-wh.de/znu | www.znu-standard.com

 +49 2302 926-545  znu@uni-wh.de

Z 9-2

Acknowledgements

Our first thanks go to the experts in the ZNU-Standard core team: We would like to begin by extending our sincere gratitude to Kesta Ludemann, whose comprehensive specialist expertise, structured working approach and passionate commitment have also significantly shaped the quality of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change 2026 and guided it through to accreditation. Our further great thanks go to Maike Dilly, who with her specialist know-how and her precise and structured working approach has made a significant contribution to shaping the quality of the content and processes surrounding the ZNU-Standard. With regard to dynamic discussions on, among other things, the new thematic structure of the standard as well as the internationalisation of the standard, our special thanks go to Dr. Matthias Hauser, who has anchored the standard in the database www.standardsmap.org of the ITC of the WTO and thereby made it internationally comparable. We would also like to extend our warm thanks to Melina Heinze and Lena Marie Krebs from the standard team for their valuable support and committed discussions surrounding the revision. We would furthermore like to extend our sincere thanks to Jona Nelson, who also made a significant contribution through his substantive and structural input at the interface with practice. With regard to all communication-related questions surrounding the standard and substantive sparring, our special thanks go to Patricia Kief; for the completely new visual identity of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change 2026, our great thanks also go to Rosa Rausch. For the digital communication and the new website, our warm thanks go to Senta Otto, and for the layout work, our best thanks to Paul Pointke. Finally, our thanks go to Dr. Verena Timmer, Dr. Ulrike Eberle, Dr. Charlott Hübel, Alicia Seifer, Mirjam Alo, Jan Krapf and Leon Halfmann for their specialist expertise and their support with communication and organisational matters.

Our further thanks go to the ZNU partner companies, who make the ongoing development of the ZNU-Standard possible, as well as to the Technical Committee (Georg Hoffmann, Dr. Stefan Kauß, Dr. Thorsten Strissel, Manuela Mewes, Manuela Koch, Gerhard Habinger), all further committed external experts, in particular Oliver Brendle and Timothy Vincent, and our ZNU Advisory Board for its advice on strategic decisions. Special thanks go to the companies that are using the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change in autumn 2025, in alphabetical order: 1. FC Köln GmbH & Co. KGaA, 4safety, Agrarfrost GmbH & Co. KG, Alfred Ritter GmbH & Co. KG, anona GmbH, apetito AG, aprojekt GmbH, Aroma Snacks GmbH, Aunde Group SE, ISRINGHAUSEN GmbH & Co. KG, AVO-Werke August Beisse GmbH, Babette Miller Consulting GmbH, Berief Food GmbH, Bitburger Braugruppe GmbH, Bösch Boden Spies GmbH & Co. KG, Borussia VfL 1900 Mönchengladbach GmbH, Brandt Zwieback-Schokoladen GmbH & Co. KG, Byodo Naturkost GmbH, Centravo Holding AG, Collectors Wine World GmbH, CORVIS Services GmbH & Co. KG, Develey Senf & Feinkost GmbH, Eisbär Eis GmbH, Elsdorfer Molkerei und Feinkost GmbH, Engel & Zimmermann AG, Erlenbacher Backwaren GmbH, Erzeugergroßmarkt Langförden-Oldenburg eG, E. Zoller GmbH & Co. KG, Farüchoc Schokoladenfabrik GmbH & Co. KG, fjol GmbH, Frauenrath Beteiligungs GmbH, Gartenbauzentrale e.G., Gelato Classico - Die Eismanufaktur GmbH, Gemüsering, Göbber GmbH, Große-Vehne Management GmbH, Gusto Mundial Balearides S.L., Heidemark GmbH, Heinrich Kühlmann GmbH, Hengstenberg GmbH & Co. KG, Holle baby food AG, Houdek Arzberg GmbH, Immergut GmbH & Co. KG, Institut Kirchhoff Berlin GmbH, Käfer AG, KAMAT GmbH & Co. KG, Katjes Fassin GmbH & Co. KG, Klüh Service Management GmbH, Korrell GmbH, Kuchenmeister GmbH, Lebkuchen-Schmidt GmbH & Co., Leiber GmbH, M Food Group GmbH, Maintal Konfitüren GmbH, Mählmann Gemüsebau GmbH & Co. KG, MERA Tiernahrung GmbH, Molkerei Söbbeke GmbH, Ornua Deutschland GmbH, Planemos GmbH, Popp Feinkost

GmbH, Pracht Holding GmbH, Privatmolkerei Bauer GmbH & Co. KG, Rabe Moden GmbH, Rebional GmbH, Rücker GmbH, SALOMON FoodWorld GmbH, Sander GmbH, Schaebens A.Moras & Comp. GmbH & Co. KG, Schne-frost GmbH & Co. KG, Schnitzer Produktions GmbH, Schwarzwaldmilch GmbH, SMMP Servicedienste GmbH, Sparkasse Osnabrück, Steinbildhauerei Vincent, Thermottraffic GmbH, Töpfer GmbH, trinkkontor GmbH, Turn- und Sportverein Nassau 1920 Beilstein e.V., University of Witten/Herdecke, VAN HEES GmbH, vitfrisch Gemüse-Vertrieb eG, VOK DAMS Gesellschaft für Kommunikation mbH, Wernsing Feinkost GmbH, Windel GmbH & Co. KG, Wolf Essgenuss GmbH. Your valuable feedback has enabled us to take important development steps and ensures the applicability of the standard from the small artisan business through medium-sized organic companies to the conventional corporation.

We would also like to thank TÜV Rheinland Cert and the other certification bodies currently approved by the ZNU – DEKRA, Eurofins ARS PROBATA, IFTA, LACON, TÜV Süd, TÜV Thüringen, QAL Umweltgutachter und Zertifizierung Bau for the committed, constructive and continuous collaboration.

Within the framework of the two public stakeholder dialogues conducted in accordance with the ISEAL Standard Setting Code, we received many good ideas, suggestions for improvement and comments from academia, business and politics, which have been incorporated into the revised version and for which we would also like to extend our sincere thanks at this point.

With the publication of the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change 2026, we look forward to continuing to establish it nationally and internationally together with trusted and new partners.

We warmly invite you to implement the ZNU-Standard Driving Sustainable Change in your company and to participate in its further development. We look forward to your feedback!

Witten, 19 March 2026

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'CG'.

Dr. Christian Geßner

- Centre Director -

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. Kölle'.

Dr. Axel Kölle

- Centre Director -



Contact

If you have any questions or suggestions –
feel free to get in touch with us!

ZNU – Centre for Sustainable Leadership
Witten/Herdecke University
Alfred-Herrhausen-Str. 50
D-58448 Witten

Web: www.uni-wh.de/znu
www.znu-standard.com

Tel.: + 49 2302 926-545

Mail: znu@uni-wh.de

Copyright

All ideas, recommendations, suggestions, sub-concepts, names, communication suggestions, etc. listed in this concept are the intellectual property of the ZNU of Witten/Herdecke University and are protected by copyright. Any use is only permitted with the written authorisation of the ZNU