Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The host has already introduced me briefly – I am the regional chair of the Lower Saxony Vocational School Teachers' Association.

I am very grateful to Stefan Nowatschin for his great commitment to driving forward the issue of 'sustainable development'. Around seven years ago, the issues of 'environmental protection' and 'sustainable development' reached their peak in the public consciousness. At that time, the importance attached to the vital questions associated with these issues was very high within society. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the political upheavals of the following years have shifted people's perspective. The multiple crises of our time have meant that people have lost their focus and other issues have come to the fore. Added to this is the fact that, in the past, it was thought that the internet and the associated opportunities to access information would strengthen democracy and that the truly important issues humanity has to face could be tackled more effectively through digital education, as well-informed people would actively campaign for their resolution. Unfortunately, we must now acknowledge that the opposite is the case. Whilst we are inundated with information on social media, what is now often being spread there is fake news or, worse still, rage-baits – and young people in particular often find it very difficult to distinguish between truth and lies online. So how do we reach young people? In schools, of course! For young people entering the world of work, vocational schools provide a stable anchor in these uncertain times. This is particularly true of vocational schools committed to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). In these schools, ESD is taken very seriously indeed. Here, these topics are not merely taught in theory; they are put into practice. Here, the problems associated with our wasteful lifestyle are tackled proactively and practically, and solutions are demonstrated in practice. Here, pupils learn how craft-based and industrial development can be shaped in a sustainable way. That is what we mean by excellent vocational education and training. If the focus of this conference is the use of hydrogen – then this is a topic through which young people in vocational education and training learn that it is entirely possible to break free from the use of fossil fuels, a form of energy use that threatens their very future. In the process, they learn – free from any interest-driven influence online – that technical solutions for alternatives exist and that the use of hydrogen as a modern fuel is both possible and sensible. This is just one example – but a striking one – of why modern vocational schools adopting the BBNE approach are particularly valuable. I would therefore like to express my sincere thanks to our host, the Head of the Network of Excellence for Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Development, Mr Stefan Nowatschin, for championing this issue so vigorously, and, on behalf of the BLVN, I assure him of our full support for his efforts.