Vocational Schools as Centers of Vocational Excellence—Why We at BBNE Must Be Among the Leaders in Europe

A short speech by Jan Henner Putzier, Member of the State Parliament, Uelzen Constituency

As a member of the state parliament representing Uelzen, I represent a predominantly rural region. There, the importance of vocational education is evident every day: a skilled-trades business has been searching for months for a journeyman, a farm needs skilled workers, and the hospital is looking for nursing staff. Ultimately, all these needs lead back to our vocational schools.

Vocational education and training is therefore not a secondary issue in education policy. It will determine whether Lower Saxony succeeds in making the transition to a climate-neutral, digital economy. I would like to start by delivering a clear message: No single level of government can create excellent vocational schools on its own. Municipalities, the state, the federal government, and the European Union share responsibility for this, and success is only possible if all of them step up.

Skilled Workers for an Economy in Transit

Lower Saxony is a strong economic hub: from wind energy to industry and logistics, and on to agriculture, the food industry, and skilled trades. These sectors are particularly characteristic of regions like Uelzen. Almost all industries are now complaining about a shortage of skilled workers.

High-performing vocational schools are the most effective response to this challenge. They provide training in future-oriented fields such as hydrogen, the circular economy, and digital production. For companies considering setting up operations here, the availability of qualified skilled workers is one of the very first questions they ask.

Vocational education and training for sustainable development (BBNE) is not an optional extra, but a foundation. Lower Saxony has set itself the goal of becoming climate-neutral by

2040. This goal is adopted by the state legislature,but it will be achieved in companies and workshops by people who have acquired the necessary skills through their vocational training.

****Opportunities for Young People****

Dual vocational training is a success story. To ensure it remains attractive to young people, it must be modern, digital, and practical, and open to everyone, regardless of origin or social background.

In rural areas, there are additional issues that are often overlooked in the debate. Even the best training program is of little use if the vocational school is barely accessible by bus or if trainees cannot find affordable housing. Mobility and housing for trainees are not peripheral issues. They play a decisive role in whether a training program is started and completed. Here, too, local, state, and federal governments must work together.