

STANDPOINT

By Prof. Galin Tsokov, PhD, member of the scientific jury at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

On the documentation submitted for participation in a competition for conferral of the academic title of **Professor of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”** in the higher educational area 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education). The sole candidate who entered the competition for professorship promulgated in State Gazette 57/26.06.2020, and on the webpage of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” for the purposes of the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management at Plovdiv University was **Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc** from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

By order of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” I was elected a member of the scientific jury for a competition for conferring the academic title of Professor of PU in the higher educational area 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field of 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education). The sole candidate who entered the competition for professorship promulgated in State Gazette 57/26.06.2020, and on the webpage of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” for the purposes of the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management at Plovdiv University was **Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc** from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”.

The set of paper materials presented by Assoc. Prof. Yankova complies with the Statute for the development of the academic staff of PU. The candidate has submitted a total of **50 research works**, respectively: **three monographs** (one of which is a habilitation work), **one study**, **38 research articles**, of which 30 in Bulgarian and eight in a foreign language, **seven textbooks** and manuals for students and **one manual** for pupils. The documentation also contains proof for 54 citations of the candidate.

Brief biographical background of the candidate

The sole candidate in the competition for professorship, Assoc. Prof. Yankova, graduated the Semi-higher Institute for Elementary and Pre-secondary Teachers “Lyuben Karavelov” in the town of Kardzhali, and in 1987 acquired her higher education at PU “Paisii Hilendarski” in biology and chemistry. In 1979-1994 Assoc. Prof. Atanasova was a teacher and later assistant director at the Special Educational School “Lyuben Karavelov”, Stara Zagora (1994-1996). In the following years (1996-2007), she was a senior

expert on integrated learning in special schools at the Regional Inspectorate of Education, Stara Zagora. In 2004 Yankova developed and successfully defended a PhD thesis in the scientific field of Special Education named *Environmental education and upbringing in the elective courses of special schools for 5-7 grades*. From 2007 to 2011 Ms. Atanasova worked as an associate professor at the Department for Information and In-service Teacher Training, Trakia University – Stara Zagora. In 2011 Ms Yankova became an associate professor of special education at the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, and in 2016 she was conferred the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences in Special Education pursuant to a defended doctoral thesis on *Assistive tools and technologies for teaching children and pupils with special educational needs in the professional training of resource teachers*.

2. General characteristics of the activity of the candidate

Evaluation of the teaching activity and training of the candidate.

Zhana Atanasova has a considerable teaching experience at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”. Her annual auditory hours amount to over 500, whereas the minimal threshold is 360. As a university lecturer, Assoc. Prof. Atanasova has delivered the following lecture courses: *Introduction to the profession, Resource assistance for SEN children and pupils, Assistive tools and technologies for people with disabilities and special educational needs, Additional support for SEN students, Inclusive education, etc.* Ms. Yankova has been the advisor of over 30 successful graduates in the educational and qualification degrees of bachelor and master.

The following facts attest for the high quality of the teaching activity of the candidate:

- Coordinator of the specialty Special Education at bachelor level and director of the master’s programme in Special Pedagogy – Resource Teacher.
- Academic advisor of six PhD students, three of whom successfully defended their dissertations, and one who completed the PhD course being granted the right to a defense.
- Developer of curricula for academic courses in bachelor and master’s programmes at the Faculty of Pedagogy
- Member of the editorial board of the annual publications of the Association of the Professors from Slavic Countries in 2015-2020
- Participant in eight research projects, one of which she led as a project manager

I believe that the academic experience of the candidate meets the criteria for acquiring the academic title of professor agreed by Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” and the Faculty of Pedagogy.

Evaluation of the research and applied research activity of the candidate

For the purposes of the announced competition Assoc. Prof. Atanasova has applied with a total of 50 research works, among which three monographs (including a habilitation work), one study, 38 research articles, of which 30 in Bulgarian and eight in a foreign language, seven textbooks and manuals for students and one manual for pupils.

The monograph *Determinants in the access to education of children and pupils with special educational needs*, 284 pp. ISBN 978-619-202-513-7, 2019, Plovdiv, University Press “Paisii Hilendarski” (presented as a habilitation work) analyzes important problems related to educational policies and legislative changes in the recent years at a world, European and national level regarding the education of SEN pupils. Among the topics included are the origins and development of the access to education for SEN children and the possibility for access to education for various groups of SEN children. The contributions of the monograph are visible mainly in the research part, where Chapter three presents the research methodology, and Chapter four analyzes the data from a survey conducted with directors of schools and kindergartens from five regions.

Another monograph, *Assistive tools and technologies for children and pupils with special educational needs in inclusive education* 136 pp., ISBN 978-619-202-568-7, 2020, Plovdiv, University Press “Paisii Hilendarski” (published after the defended dissertation thesis for acquiring the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences) discusses the variety of assistive tools and technologies and the possibility to use them in teaching SEN pupils. The main objective of this research work is to justify the need for the individual application of assistive tools depending on the needs of each child.

The major research aspects in the other research works refer to the following thematic areas:

- Works related to *the access to education for SEN children and pupils*
- Studying the specifics of *educating SEN children and pupils*
- Works related to *resource assistance, inclusive education and personal development support for SEN children and pupils*.
- Works related to *assistive tools and technologies in teaching SEN children and pupils*
- Author of **seven textbooks** and manuals for students and **one manual** for pupils

Main research and applied research contributions

The contributions of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova may be grouped as follows:

A. Theoretical contributions

- The main components of the access to education in kindergartens and schools for SEN children and pupils have been explored theoretically. The historical development of special education, integrated learning and inclusive education have been interpreted.
- A complete study on the problem for assistive tools and technologies in teaching SEN children and pupils has been launched in theoretical and applied aspect.
- Technologies for alternative and complementary communication that offer additional support for SEN children and pupils in the process of their education have been described.
- IT technologies supporting SEN children and pupils in education (educational environment) have been studied.
- Theoretical and organizational issues on including children with intellectual disabilities in the process of providing educational and social services have been tackled.

B. Applied research contributions

- The assessment and recommendation of assistive tools and technologies to SEN children and pupils by personal development teams in kindergartens and schools have been studied experimentally.
- A model of the activities for realizing integrated learning in schools and kindergartens has been designed and proposed. Remedial development education for pupils with intellectual disabilities has been presented.
- Checklists for assessing the needs of the child or pupil for assistive tools and technologies in education have been created.
- A self-assessment questionnaire for directors of kindergartens and schools on the accessibility to education of SEN children and pupils has been developed. It may be used by the school administration as a model for evaluating the access to educational space in inclusive education.
- Ten original art therapy exercises for developing the individuality of children and pupils in various forms and stages of education have been created.

The attached inquiries show 54 citations of the publications of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

Several recommendations on the research and teaching activity of the candidate may be made:

In my opinion, the research production of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova has sufficient original ideas and achieved results that may be published in leading specialized and referenced scientific journals abroad.

CONCLUSION

The documentation and materials presented by **Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc** comply with all requirements of the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Statute for its application and the relevant Statute of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski". She has submitted a sufficient number of research works published after the acquisition of the academic title of associate professor. The works of the candidate contain original research and applied contributions. The theoretical works have a practical applicability, as many are directly oriented to teaching. The research and teaching qualification of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc is undoubted.

The candidate in the competition has covered the relevant minimal national criteria for the acquisition of the academic title of professor. I have no reason to suspect plagiarism in the research works submitted for review.

Having acquainted myself with the materials and research works submitted for this competition, and analyzed their value, research and applied research contributions, I grant my **positive evaluation** and recommend to the scientific jury to prepare a report-proposal to the faculty council at the Faculty of Pedagogy of PU to confer the academic title of Professor in the higher educational area of Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education) to **Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc**.

02.10.2020

Referee:

Prof. Galin Tsokov, PhD