

STANDPOINT

by Prof. Snezhana Hristova Nikolova, PhD, Konstantin Preslavski University of Shumen
on the materials submitted for participation in the competition for conferral of the academic title of
Professor of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”
in the higher educational area of Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special
Education)

The sole candidate for the competition for professorship promulgated in the 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, the Faculty of Pedagogy is **Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc.**

General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

With respect to the execution of Decree №P33-4118/24.08.2020 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” I therefore deliver my standpoint on the announced competition for conferral of the academic title of Professor in the higher educational area of Pedagogical Sciences, professional field of 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education). The competition has been announced and conducted in compliance with all clauses of the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Statute for its application. This empowers the scientific jury to perform the evaluation of the candidate according to LDASRB, the Statute for its application and the Statute for the development of the academic staff at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”. The submitted set of documentation and research works is relevant to the competition.

Assoc. Prof. Atanasova is a renowned researcher and lecturer in the area of special education. She is respected as a scholar with excellent reputation in the academic community. Her whole activity is based on serious scholarship and solid continuous career development.

In 1979 she graduated the Semi-higher Institute for Elementary and Pre-secondary Teachers “Lyuben Karavelov” in the town of Kardzhali, and in 1987 she acquired her higher education at PU “Paisii Hilendarski” specializing in biology and chemistry. She has the following qualifications and diplomas for completed education: biologist, teacher in biology with a minor in chemistry (PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, 1987), additional qualification in oligophrenopedagogy (SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” – CIITMT, 1985), second and first class qualification in biology (PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, 1995; SU “St.

Kliment Ohridski” – CITT, 1996), second class qualification in oligophrenopedagogy (SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”, CIITMT, 1986) and first class qualification in special education (TU-IITT, Stara Zagora, 1998).

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc started her professional development as a teacher (1979-1994), and assistant director at the Special Educational School “Lyuben Karavelov”, Stara Zagora (1994-1996). She became a Senior Expert in integrated learning, special schools and homes for raising and educating children deprived of parental care at the Regional Inspectorate on Education – Stara Zagora (1996-2007). Her teaching and research career began in 2005 as an honorary lecturer at Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Faculty of Pedagogy, Medical Faculty, Faculty of Agriculture, Department of Information and In-service Teacher Training, Trakia University – Stara Zagora. Since 2007 she has been an associate professor in special education at the Department for Information and In-service Teacher Training, Trakia University – Stara Zagora. In 2004 she received a diploma for the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in Special Education with a thesis on *Ecological education and upbringing through elective courses in 5-7 grades at special educational schools*. In 2016 she was awarded the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences in Special Education for the defended dissertation work of *Assistive tools and technologies for teaching children and pupils with special educational needs in the professional training of resource teachers*.

General characteristics of the activity and research production of the candidate

Teaching and pedagogical activity

Since 2011 Assoc. Prof. Atanasova has been an associate professor in special education at the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management, Faculty of Pedagogy, PU “Paisii Hilendarski”. She teaches students in special education, social pedagogy, pre-school and elementary school pedagogy and social work. She also delivers lectures in Introduction to the profession, Resource support for SEN children and pupils, Assistive tools and technologies for people with disabilities and SEN, Additional support for SEN pupils, Inclusive education, etc. that are related to the issues of including SEN children and pupils in the integrated environment of kindergartens and schools, the creative approaches and methods for inclusive activities for education. She is a coordinator of the specialty Social Education at bachelor level, and Special Education-Resource Teacher at master level. She actively participates in the development of new academic plans and curricula for the pedagogical specialties at the Faculty of Pedagogy of PU “Paisii Hilendarski”. She has been an advisor of six PhD students, three of whom have successfully defended their theses, and one who completed the PhD course with a right to defend her

thesis. She has served as an advisor of over 30 successful graduates of bachelor and master programmes. She has managed specializations for post-graduate qualification in special education. She is a member of the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria and the Association of Professors from Slavic Countries. She is an active member of the editorial board of the works published by the Association of Professors from Slavic Countries in 2015-2020. The listed facts are a sufficient proof that the current academic growth is logical for the professional development of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova. She is a recognizable scholar with impeccable academic reputation among the community.

Scientific and applied science activity

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc participates in the competition for professorship with 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 8 in a foreign language, seven textbooks and manuals for students and one manual for pupils. All research publications match the scientific area for this competition and have been published after the conferral of the academic title of associate professor. The topics reviewed are important and pertinent to the current special education science. The scientometric indicators of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova significantly exceed the minimal national requirements for research and teaching activity, set for the conferral of the academic title of professor (a total of 1875.13 points vs minimal 550). This is an attestation for a serious and intense research work.

The submitted appendix 14.2. submitted by the candidate shows a total of 54 citations in monographs and research works part of which are referenced and indexed in scientific databases. According to the certificate issued by the Research and Project Work Office at PU "Paisii Hilendarski" in 2014-2020 Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc has participated in eight research projects and acted as a project manager in one of them. She has been an academic tutor for a Student Traineeships Project – stage 1 and 2 and as a member of research teams in a number of national and educational projects.

The monograph *Determinants in the access to education for children and pupils with special educational needs* (284 pp., ISBN 978-619-202-513-7, 2019, Plovdiv, University Press "Paisii Hilendarski") attracts particular attention as a habilitation work. It presents a thorough study that competently reviews educational policies and changes in legislation in the recent years at a world, European and national scale with respect to SEN pupils. Moreover, the monograph directs the attention to the possibility of including SEN children and pupils in mainstream classrooms through incorporating

good practices and optimal organization of their access to education. The book comprises four chapters.

The first one focuses on the origin and development of the access to education for SEN children with a specific focus on the determinants of the access to education. The second chapter presents the opportunity for access to education of various groups of SEN children (with sensory impairment, physical or multiple disabilities, intellectual disabilities, speech and language disorders, specific learning disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders and emotional and behavioral disorders).

A merit of this monograph is its research section – in Chapter three the author justifies the research methodology, while in Chapter four she presents competently analyzed data from a conducted study with directors of schools and kindergartens from five regions (Stara Zagora, Pazardzhik, Haskovo, Kardzhali and Smolyan), as well as of experts who also participated in the study.

The publications of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova are remarkable for the precisely formulated scientific concepts, the author's skill for inferring consequences and recommendations, and unique writing style and manner. The 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") is relevant to this context. It was published pursuant to a defended dissertation work for conferral of the academic degree Doctor of Sciences. In it the author presents the diversity of assistive tools and technologies and the possibility for using them in the education of SEN children. Based on the classification of assistive tools and technologies in education, the need of their individual application has been addressed with respect to the needs of the individual child.

I approve of all publications of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc which may be grouped in several thematic areas. They decidedly have contributions for enriching the theoretical and applied aspects of special and inclusive education:

1) *Access to education of SEN children and pupils* (RW 1,5) – here the candidate studies the main components of the access to education, analyzes the policies and legislation in the area of education of SEN pupils, and proposes and analyzes a questionnaire for self-assessment of the directors of kindergartens and schools regarding the accessibility to education of SEN children and pupils.

2) *Assistive tools and technologies in teaching SEN children and pupils* (RW 3, 15, 19, 20, 23, 29, 38, 42) – the author launches a global study on the problem of assistive tools and technologies in teaching SEN children and pupils, specifies the categorical toolbox and the classification of assistive tools and technologies and studies the evaluation and recommendation of assistive tools and

technologies for SEN children and pupils by the teams for personal development in kindergartens and schools.

3) *Resource assistance, inclusive education and personal development support for SEN children and pupils* (RW 6, 7, 14, 16, 21, 26, 27, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 39) – the development of resource assistance in Bulgaria are presented in detail, and the competences of the resource teacher are objectivized. Essential issues of the new educational paradigm regarding SEN children – inclusive education are studied and developed. The relationship inclusive education – supportive environment is explained as a factor for the personal development of SEN children.

4) *Teaching SEN children and pupils* (RW 2, 9, 12, 24, 25, 30, 31, 33, 34, 41) – the concepts *remedial development education* and *rehabilitation education* are explained. An integrated theoretical study on the problem of teaching SEN children is implemented, and the importance of supportive environment for the realization of such training is emphasized.

5) *Professional training of students in the professional field of pedagogy and qualification of specialists working with SEN children and pupils* (RW 4, 8, 11, 13, 17, 18, 22, 28, 40) – the publications have commendable merits regarding the analysis of the professional training of students to work with children and pupils with special educational needs under the conditions of inclusive education. The main positions and requirements for continuing qualification of the resource teacher are outlined, and original proposals for its improvement are made.

6) *Textbooks and manuals for students and pupils* (RW 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50) – ideas for additional support to SEN children, the basic educational strategies, the models for working in inclusive environment are developed and argumentatively presented. Author's art therapy exercises for developing the individuality of pupils are presented, and the results from the approval of the e-manual *Man and Nature in the World of Geometry* for SEN pupils are described.

The contributions which Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova makes through research and publication activity are multiple. They are significant for science and practice and in particular, for some methods of special education. Her scientific interests are focused on educating SEN children and pupils. Innovative ideas with high social significance have been presented with expertise and professionalism.

Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no reason to make any critical remarks. I recommend to Assoc. Prof. Atanasova to continue analyzing in a consistent and thorough way the challenges of realizing inclusive education of SEN children and pupils and to prepare publications on current and important topics.

Personal impressions

I have known Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc for more than two decades. She is a fair and positive colleague, experienced researcher, erudite scholar and teacher.

CONCLUSION

The application of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc for Professor in the professional field of 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education) meets all requirements of the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Statute for its application and the respective Statute of PU "Paisii Hilendarski".

The analysis of the research, expert, and teaching activity of Assoc. Prof. Atanasova in the area of special education, as well as her professional activity has confirmed her status as a respected member of the academic community. On these grounds I may grant my positive evaluation and urge the honorable scientific jury to suggest to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy to vote in favour of conferring 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.

28.09.2020

Shumen

Referee:

Prof. Snezhana Nikolova, PhD