

## **OPINION**

**by Elena Petrova Somova, PhD**

**Professor at University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski"**

of the materials submitted for participation in the procedure for occupation  
of the academic position "Associate Professor" of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski"  
in: Field of Higher Education                      1. Pedagogical Sciences  
Professional Field                      1.2. Pedagogy (Special Pedagogy – Assistive Technologies)

In the procedure for "Associate Professor", announced in the State Gazette, No. 92 of 18.11.2022 and on the website of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the "Pedagogy and Education Management" department at the Faculty of Pedagogy, as a candidate participates chief assistant professor Dr. Vanya Angelova Sivakova from the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU).

### **1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate**

The presented by chief assist. prof. Vanya Angelova Sivakova, PhD set of materials on paper is in accordance with the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of the PU.

The only candidate, Vanya Sivakova, graduated with a bachelor's and master's degree in Computer Science at the Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics at the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski". In 2007, she entered the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU, where she was successively a part-time assistant professor, assistant professor and chief assistant professor. In 2011, she defended her PhD thesis on "Virtual diagnosis and counseling of children with stuttering". She perfectly balances her competencies in two different professional areas, having interests and significant achievements in the following fields during her career: Inclusive Education, Special Pedagogy, Assistive Technologies, Informatics, Information Technologies and Statistics.

I have known Vanya Sivakova since she was a student at the FMI of PU, where she was distinguished by her knowledge and desire for scientific work. Even as a student, she taught as a part-time assistant professor and was involved in the department's project activities, and it is from this joint activity that I have wonderful impressions of her responsibility and hard work. Her bachelor and master theses were serious research in the field of computational linguistics, and in particular text-to-speech.

## **2. General characteristics of the applicant's activity**

### *Assessment of educational and pedagogical activity*

Vanya Sivakova has taught 9 bachelor's and 6 master's courses at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU in the field of special education, inclusive education, teaching methods for special educational needs, the use of IT in education and statistics. She has developed a number of study programs – 8 bachelor's, 14 master's and 1 qualification course. The candidate has also developed 3 qualification courses for pedagogical specialists. She has participated in the development of 2 university textbooks.

V. Sivakova presented a list of 19 graduates under her supervision.

As the candidate's key activities that make a great contribution to the faculty where she works, the following can be noted: coordinator of the "Special Pedagogy" specialty since 2022, basic and institutional provision and organization of the practical training of students of the "Special Pedagogy" specialty, member of a working group for the preparation and presentation of documentation for the implementation of an internal audit by professional field 1.2. Pedagogy, member of a working committee for the preparation of a self-assessment report for the accreditation of doctoral programs "Special Pedagogy" and "Inclusive Education", conducting initial and periodic instructions for doctoral students from 2021 and participation in 2 faculty and 1 university committees.

She has developed and conducted 5 lecture courses to support the creative development of doctoral students, post-doctoral students and young scientists in the field of computer science and 1 lecture course to increase the competences of university teachers.

### *Evaluation of the candidate's scientific and scientific-applied activity*

The candidate submitted a total of 22 works – 14 scientific papers, 2 studies, 4 monographs and 2 textbooks and teaching aids. 21 of the proposed works are accepted for review, and publication No. 8 is rejected because it almost coincides in content with publication No. 6.

The candidate has submitted 1 monograph as the main habilitation thesis, 3 more independent monographs and 2 chapters of collective monographs (which in one list are presented as textbooks), as well as 2 co-authored studies. The theoretical developments in the monographs have practical applicability, and a large part of them are directly oriented to the teaching work.

Scientific articles are divided by the applicant into 2 categories: articles indexed in the world scientific databases (4 items) and articles not indexed in the world scientific databases (10 items).

After a check in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, it was found that the candidate has only one indexed publication – No. 6. Of the presented scientific papers, 1 is published in an international journal, 2 – in proceedings of international conferences, 4 – in Bulgarian journals, 2 – in national conference proceedings and 4 – in university editions.

Most of the scientific publications are in Bulgarian (16 items) and only 5 are in English. The considerable volume of independent publications is impressive. The candidate has submitted 11 independent publications, with one co-author – 2, with two co-authors – 6 and with three or more co-authors – 2.

The candidate has a rich project activity – 12 research and educational projects are presented, of which 8 national and 4 international projects. Moreover, the candidate is the coordinator of one of these projects – "Social well-being, inclusive education and social integration – modern aspects of the quality of education" at the "Scientific Research" Fund.

*Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied, applied) and citations*

The candidate's contributions from the presented scientific publications are in the following areas: assistive and informational educational technologies and special pedagogy; language and speech disorders; inclusive education (including inclusive classroom); correlational and regression data analysis in the behavioral and social sciences; automated generation of test items for diagnosis, assessment and development of cognitive skills and language knowledge; social, internet and personal identity in children with intellectual disabilities; and well-being, social integration and gender equality in an academic environment.

A total of 21 citations of the candidate's publications are presented, of which 8 are in the world scientific databases, 11 – in monographs and peer-reviewed collective volumes, and 2 – in non-refereed editions. After checking the world scientific databases, only 2 of the presented citations are found - No. 8 and No. 9. Most of the citations are made by Bulgarian authors (19 citations) and only 2 are by foreign authors. A large part of the citations are made by close colleagues (16 citations).

The submitted and accepted scientific publications meet the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position "Associate Professor", as well as the additional requirements of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the PU, even exceeding these minimum requirements.

I have no doubt about the candidate's personal contribution to the scientific publications submitted for review.

### **3. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I have no critical remarks. The following recommendations can be made to the candidate in order to achieve wider dissemination and visibility of the scientific results: to increase the publication in editions that are indexed in the world scientific databases and to present the scientific results mainly in English.

### **CONCLUSION**

The documents and materials presented by chief assistant professor Vanya Sivakova, PhD, meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski".

The candidate in the competition has submitted a sufficient number of scientific publications published after the materials used in the defense of the PhD degree and the procedure for chief assistant professor. Dr. Sivakova's scientific and teaching qualifications are unquestionable.

The results achieved by Vanya Sivakova in the educational and scientific research activities fully correspond to the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty of Pedagogy, adopted in connection with the Rules of the PU for the application of the LDASRB.

After getting acquainted with the materials and scientific publications presented in the procedure, analyzing their significance and the scientific, scientific-applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy for the election of the chief assistant professor Vanya Sivakova, PhD at the academic position "associate professor" at University of Plovdiv "Paisiy Hilendarski" in: field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Pedagogy - Assistive Technologies).

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Prepared the opinion: .....

(Prof. Elena Somova, PhD)