

# **STATEMENT**

**by Prof. Dr. Tatyana Neycheva Netseva-Porcheva**

**Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv**

**Scientific specialty "Marketing-Price Policy"**

Dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal sciences

Professional field: 3.8. Economics

Doctoral programme: Marketing

**Author:** Valeria Emilova Toncheva

**Subject:** INFLUENCE OF DUAL EDUCATION ON THE BRAND IMAGE OF  
VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

**Supervisor:** *Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teofana Dimitrova-Staneva*

By order № RD 22-1102 of May 22, 2025 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure for the defence of a dissertation on "Influence of dual education on the brand image of vocational high schools" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, Doctoral Program Marketing. The author of the dissertation is Valeriya Emilova Toncheva - a PhD student in full-time studies at the Department of Marketing and International Economic Relations, Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences (FESS), with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teofana Dimitrova-Staneva from Paisii Hilendarski University.

## **1. General description of the submitted material**

The set of paper materials submitted by Valeria Emilova Toncheva is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU) and includes the following documents: application to the Rector of PU for the opening of the dissertation defence procedure; CV in European format; protocol of the departmental council related to the reporting of the readiness for the opening of the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation; dissertation; abstract; list of scientific publications on

the subject of the dissertation; copies of scientific publications and declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents.

The PhD student has attached one paper from participation in a collective work and two papers from participation in international scientific conferences.

## **2. Short biographical data about the PhD student**

Valeriya Toncheva is studying at the International Economic Relations specialty of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, where in 2017 she obtained her Bachelor's degree and in 2019 - Master's degree, specialty Marketing. Since 2022 she is a full-time PhD student at the Department of Marketing and International Economic Relations, Doctoral Program in Marketing at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

Valeria Toncheva's professional career started in 2016 at Telus International, where she worked as a teleagent. In 2021 she took the position of translator at Euro-Alliance Ltd. Since 2017, Valeria Toncheva has been an expert in Business Development and European Policies at Municipality of Plovdiv.

Valeria Toncheva has a rich project activity. For the period 10.2018-03.2019 she is the local leader (coordinator) of an international project EUGUGLE, funded by the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission. In the period 07.2021-07.2023, she held the position of project coordinator in the project management team of the Project BG05M9OP001-2.056-0002 "Socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable groups in the Municipality of Plovdiv through improved access to education, employment and health", funded by the Operational Programme Human Resources Development and Operational Programme Science and Education for Smart Growth 2014-2021. In the period 04.2024-04.2025, she is the project manager of the Project BG16FFPR002-3.007-0015-C01 Technical assistance for investments in the zoo on the territory of the Municipality of Plovdiv, funded under the Environment Programme 2021-2027.

Valeriya Toncheva speaks English (C1 level) and Spanish (B2 level).

*Valeriya Toncheva's biographical data present her as a highly educated person in the field of marketing and international economic relations, as a well-rounded professional with eight years of work experience at Municipality of Plovdiv, as a project manager and coordinator at the municipality and as a promising young researcher with an enviable knowledge of English and Spanish languages, which she skillfully applies in practice.*

### 3. General characteristics of the dissertation

#### 3.1. Structure and volume

The dissertation is 132 pages and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography and an appendix. It is characterized by good structuring and logical consistency of the issues addressed.

*3.2. Assessment of: the topicality of the theme; the appropriateness of the set goals and tasks; the object; the subject and the main thesis of the dissertation*

The topic of the dissertation is undoubtedly **topical and significant** and this is justified by the doctoral candidate. The development of dual secondary education is one of the objectives of the European Union in the field of education and training and is one of the most important priorities of the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria. This is described in the "Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2030)" and "Strategic Vision for the Development of Dual Vocational Education and Training in Bulgaria - 2030".

**The aim** of this dissertation is to establish the relationship between dual training, and its various aspects, and the brand image of the vocational school, leading to a better understanding of the consumer-student response to the school's efforts to improve the educational service and to provide guidelines for improving the image that can be used by schools at the national level.

To achieve the aim, five **research tasks** are formulated precisely, clearly and correctly. In accordance with the aim and tasks, the object, subject, research **thesis** have been defined and four **research hypotheses** have been formulated.

#### 4. Research methodology

For the purposes of this dissertation, a two-phase research program was used. Phase one involved conducting qualitative research and phase two involved conducting quantitative research. The main methods used to collect the data for both phases of the research process were unstructured in-depth interview and in-person written survey conducted on-site respectively.

The statistical analysis was implemented by means of descriptive statistics and the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method.

*The adopted methodology and the developed toolkit allow to verify the research hypotheses and to achieve the set objective.*

#### 5. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured in three chapters.

In the **first chapter**, brand image is examined in the context of the vocational school. Based on an in-depth literature review, factors influencing the brand image of the vocational school are highlighted: brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived quality of the educational service, brand relevance, learner satisfaction and attitudes towards dual vocational training. A comparative analysis of the dual training in the secondary education system in Germany, Austria (as countries whose practice is a good example of successful integration of practical training in the educational process) and Bulgaria is prepared. The specificities, positive aspects and challenges of dual training in Bulgaria are presented.

*Chapter 1 shows that the PhD student has an enviable theoretical knowledge in the field of brand image, which she skillfully interweaves through the prism of vocational school, and has the skills to prepare a comparative analysis (in this case a comparative analysis by country of the dual training in the secondary education system).*

**Chapter 2** provides a comprehensive review and systematisation of empirical research on brand image in the context of dual training. For each publication, the title, author/authors, year of publication, purpose of the study, sample size, data collection methods and statistical treatment of the data, and results of the study are provided.

The author has developed a methodology to study the impact of dual training on the brand image of secondary vocational schools. Four research hypotheses are formulated and tested. The necessity of applying a two-phase research program - qualitative and quantitative research is justified. The qualitative research was conducted among representatives of the administration of 9 educational institutions offering secondary dual vocational education and training in Plovdiv region. The sample size for the quantitative study was 608 students of XI and XII classes of dual vocational classes in the same educational institutions. The methods of data collection in both studies are unstructured in-depth interview and written on-site survey (through questionnaire) respectively. Instruments (in-depth interview guide and questionnaire) and a conceptual model for the quantitative study were developed. The first phase of the study was conducted between 15-20.04.2024 and the second phase between 21-30.04.2024.

*Chapter 2 reveals the doctoral student's skills to develop appropriate methodology and conduct independent empirical research.*

**Chapter 3** presents the results of the two studies.

Within the qualitative research, the main problem identified by school administrators was the difficulty in finding partner companies for internship programs. Another problem is the lack of a unified national instrument to assess the image of vocational education and student satisfaction.

The results of the quantitative study show that three of the four research hypotheses formulated by the dissertation researcher are fully confirmed. The thesis is confirmed that the factor "Attitudes towards dual education" has the strongest influence on the brand image of vocational school offering this type of education. Argued recommendations for enhancing the brand image of these schools are derived. In general, the author's recommendations boil down to: regularly surveying students' opinions on their satisfaction with the educational process, undertaking targeted marketing actions, more active cooperation with business, improving the learning and material environment, and investing in the qualification and motivation of teachers.

*The third chapter testifies to the doctoral student's ability to analyze data and systematize the results of a specific study, to formulate conclusions from the analysis, and on this basis to give justified recommendations.*

## **6. Assessment of publications and personal contribution of the PhD student**

The PhD candidate has three publications related to the topic of the dissertation – one article from participation in a collective work and two papers from participation in international scientific conferences. The publications reflect important aspects of the thesis.

The scientific contributions that can be derived from the dissertation are:

- The understanding of the brand image of educational institutions offering and conducting dual vocational education and training has been expanded and enriched.
- A methodological toolkit for qualitative and quantitative research of the factors influencing the brand image of vocational schools has been developed and validated.
- Recommendations for improving the image of the secondary vocational school in Bulgaria are formulated.

## **7. Abstract**

The abstract faithfully and accurately reflects the content and main points of the dissertation.

## **8. Recommendation to the doctoral candidate**

My recommendation is that the PhD student should publish a book based on the dissertation in order to make the development available to interested parties.

## **CONCLUSION**

The dissertation work **contains** scientific and applied results that represent a contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University.

The dissertation shows that the PhD student Valeria Emilova Toncheva **possesses** in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Marketing", demonstrating qualities and skills for independent scientific research.

Because of the above, I confidently give my **positive evaluation** of the dissertation, the abstract, the results and contributions, and I propose the honorable scientific jury **to award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Valeria Emilova Toncheva in the field of higher education. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.8. Economics, doctoral programme Marketing.**

Signed: .....

May 22, 2025/Plovdiv

Prof. Dr. Tatyana Netseva-Porcheva