

## TENURE REVIEW

By Prof. Dr Vassya Krumova Delibaltova,

Member of the academic jury in a tenure review procedure for the academic position of “Associate Professor” in the professional field of 1.2. Education /ICT in education, electronic learning for students with special educational needs /,

Opened by Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”

Tenure review procedure:

The tenure review procedure for the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field of 1.2. Education /ICT in education, electronic learning for students with special educational needs / was announced by Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski” in SG, Issue 57 of 26 June 2020. The only candidate – Chief Assistant Prof. Blagovesna Yovkova, PhD has submitted all necessary documents in compliance with the requirements.

Candidate’s professional development:

In the life and professional experience of Chief Assistant Prof. Blagovesna Yovkova, PhD, two focal points can be noted which, on the one hand, determine her preparedness to work in the chosen field, and on the other, her intellectual and emotional relatedness both to the University, and to the issues central in her work as a researcher. The first of these focal points is the candidate’s relatedness with Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski”. Here, she completes her master’s degree in Bulgarian Language and Literature, her Specialization in Special Education and her doctoral degree in 1.2. Education. Her doctoral studies at the Faculty of Education as well as the qualities she exhibited in her study help her complete three doctoral specialization programmes – two at the Doctoral School, the Institute of Education, London University and one at Sofia University “St Kliment Ohridski” which have certainly broadened her horizons and helped her enter into the renowned community of experts in the area of ICT in education. The second focal point, worth noting, is her work, first, as a teacher /hearing and speech rehabilitator/ and later, as a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Education in disciplines related to ICT in education. The experience acquired at

different levels is an excellent prerequisite for conducting scientific research sensitive to the topical issues of the educational reality.

It is also worth mentioning that Chief Assistant Prof. Blagovesna Yovkova, PhD has been a full-time lecturer at the Faculty of Education at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” since 2013. The majority of the disciplines she teaches are within the profile of the tenure procedure: ICT in Education, Teaching Children with Learning Disabilities, Distance Learning for Adults, Evaluation and Selection of Educational Software, Theory and Methodology of Electronic Learning, Pedagogical Design of Electronic Learning, Educational Multimedia Creation, Educational Opportunities of Social Media, ICT in Education and Working in a Digital Environment, ICT and Educational Management, ICT in the Education of Children with Special Educational Needs.

Her participation in project activities is remarkable as well, which is probably the way she formed her taste for team research evidenced by her publication work.

#### Publication Work Analysis:

In the current tenure review procedure Chief Assistant Prof. Blagovesna Yovkova, PhD participates with a total of 23 publications – 2 monographies and 21 papers, out of which 17 in co-authorship. 14 publications are in English. All publications submitted for the tenure review procedure are published after the award of her doctoral degree and form only part of the author’s extensive production – 38 monographies, research papers, textbooks and teaching guides. Noteworthy is also the fact that a considerable number of her publications, submitted for the review procedure and part of her citations are published in Web of Science and Scopus referenced and indexed editions.

The main monography – „Електронното обучение-възможности за разширяване на достъпа до висше образование за студенти със специални образователни потребности чрез електронно обучение“ (TN: “E-Learning – opportunities for increased access to higher education for students with special educational needs by means of electronic learning”), definitely meets the two fields of the announced tenure review procedure. This is the first piece of research known to me in Bulgaria dedicated to the often neglected, increasingly important issues related with ensuring full access and training for SEN persons for higher education institutions. In her motivation for choosing this research problem Chief Assistant Prof. Blagovesna Yovkova, PhD convincingly substantiates the need for its development in the light of the realities of an increased SEN students’ attendance and the educational

challenges in providing a sufficiently adequate environment and facilitation for their learning. Hence, the author construes the main research question: “Are Bulgarian universities accessible for students with different types of disabilities?” /p.15/. One of the promising approaches for ensuring accessibility for these students, according to the author, is by expanding and making use of the opportunities e-learning provides. Such is the premise which forms the basis of an interesting and modern research both in terms of its design and the way of thinking as well as the nature of the main points formulated as a result of the purposeful pursuits of the author. Thus, Yovkova simultaneously continues and deepens her long-ago declared interest in the education of SEN persons, though places it and looks into it in a new light, undoubtedly promising on its own part, but also rather problematic from the perspective of our knowledge about the effectiveness of certain educational decisions.

The beginnings of this interest are largely reflected in the monograph published on the basis of Chief Assistant Prof. Blagovesna Yovkova’s doctoral thesis research – „Интерактивна образователна мултимедия в обучението по устна реч на деца със слухов дефицит“ (TN: “Interactive educational multimedia in the oral speech education of children with a hearing deficit.”) According to the author’s fair opinion, what is sought for here is the answer to “an essential question in deaf pedagogy: what does it actually mean to effectively integrate/blend multimedia technology in the process of hearing and speech rehabilitation of children with a hearing deficit?” It is worth noting that the monograph once again presents an innovative approach. This is one of the first pieces of research in the field of education in our country whose design and realization rely on a cross analysis of the findings from the tests on knowledge, observation and reflection of the students taking part in the research. The model of educational and correctional design elaborated on the basis of the research findings exhibits a clear practical and applied value in terms of educational quality improvement for children with the specified deficit.

Judging by the number and the character of the publications, Blagovesna Yovkova’s main research interest can be delineated by the mutual intersection of several problem areas – ICT in secondary and higher education – SEN learners’ specifics – teacher preparation by means of ICT and for the implementation of ICT in various contexts. Thus, a particular aspect in the first area – implementation of ICT in secondary and higher education is research in terms of the essence, specifics and features of electronic resources and e-assessment – e.g. G6 – 4, 5, 7, 8. A large part of the theses supported in these publications are innovative and directed at the topical in the past years pursuits related to the necessity of designing reliable tools for

ensuring quality distance learning unthinkable without the provision of correct assessment. This interest continues to grow in considering these issues through the prism of the specifics of SEN learners and their education – G6-1,2,3,6,9 and G7-2,3,4, etc. These research findings are projected onto the problems related to teacher education and form a starting point for new pursuits and solutions – e.g. G6 - 2, 11; G7 - 1, 6, 7, 8, 9. Probably the struggle to include the various factors influencing the solution of a certain problem; to look for its dimensions in different contexts, to outline the viewpoints of all persons involved in the educational process represents one of the vital specifics of Chief Assistant Prof. PhD Blagovesna Yovkova's research. She is tempted by problems she knows, which she is prepared to explore and which trigger real practical challenges. Moreover, it is vital to say that the approach is invariably innovative demonstrating knowledge of the world trends in educational research.

#### Merits and contributions of the work

I support the candidate's opinion that the main scientific contributions of her work can be projected into two levels – 1) theoretical and empirical, 2) practical and applied, and into three main fields:

- I. Integration of information and communication technologies in education.
- II. Electronic learning of students with special educational needs.
- III. Electronic distance learning and electronic evaluation.

Indisputable is also her contribution regarding the designed and conducted for the first time in our country multi-strategy research, a result both of her personal qualities and the opportunities for specialisation during the time of her doctoral studies. Dr. Yovkova possesses perfect team working skills and modern thinking fostering her along the way in the planning and realization of serious, meaningful and multi-scope empirical research - from funding provision through excellent organization and realization to a competent analysis of the findings.

The presented documents clearly demonstrate that the author's entire scientific production and recognizability meet the minimal national requirements for holding the relevant academic position.

#### Recommendations

With the awareness that a large part of the research is multi-faceted and multi-layered, which predetermines the necessity for the involvement of large teams with international participation, in view of the candidate's assessment in the current and later procedures, it is advisable that the predominant part of the publications be separate or their contribution be clearly outlined.

#### Question

On the basis of your research is it possible to state that the accessibility of universities for students with different types of disabilities can be considered in a way as to ensure opportunities for equitable learning experience?

#### CONCLUSION

The whole activity and the presented scientific production of Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Blagovesna Yovkova is impressive and more than convincing in terms of evidence regarding her professional and personal qualities. This reinforces my conviction to propose and uphold the award of the academic position of Associate Professor in the professional field of 1.2. Education /ICT in education, electronic learning for students with special educational needs/ to Chief Assistant Prof. Dr. Blagovesna Yovkova.

Reviewer:

(Prof. Dr. Vasya Delibaltova)