

OPINION STATEMENT**Regarding the Competition for the Academic Position of “Associate Professor”****Field of Higher Education: 1. Educational Sciences****Professional Field: 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education)****Associate Professor Candidate: Kaloyan Ivanov Damyanov****Author of the Opinion Statement: Prof. Katerina Karadzhova PhD**

By order of the Rector of the “Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov” University – Burgas, No. 447 of 27.12.2024, I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury in connection with the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor”, announced in the “State Gazette”, Issue 91/29.10.2024.

The only candidate participating in the competition is Assistant Professor Kaloyan Ivanov Damyanov PhD.

1. Description of the Competition Procedure

Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD has produced rich and interesting scientific output. For participation in the Associate Professor competition, 33 scientific works (monographs, publications, textbooks, and reports at scientific forums) have been presented and participation in 4 scientific research and applied projects, two of which are international and two are at the national level, have been indicated.

The scientific works include:

- Three independent monographs;
- The PhD thesis for awarding the academic degree “Doctor”, published in a book;
- Two independent chapters in a collective monograph;
- 25 publications (studies, articles, reports), 22 of which are sololy written and 3 are co-authored;
- Two university textbooks/guides, one of which is sololy written and the other is co-authored.

Structurally, the scientific production of Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD consists of three main areas:

1. Research focused on the development of inclusive education;
2. Research aimed at educational approaches and therapeutic support for children and students with Special Educational Needs (SEN);

3. Research examining socio-pedagogical and intercultural interaction in the educational environment.

The main focus in his publications (first area) is placed on the development of inclusive education. This applies not only to his monographs, but also to the published studies, articles, and reports.

I will focus on some of the more important publications relevant to the specifics of the announced competition and to Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD's scientific and educational qualities.

The monograph: "Functional assessment and intensity of support in inclusive education" discusses issues related to functional assessment and its role in determining the intensity of additional support. This is a significant issue related to educational policy and changes in the legislative framework regulating the right to equal access to quality education for children with Special Educational Needs (CSEN). The discussed monograph's focal points are, on the one hand, the concept of inclusive education, which is thoroughly analysed, and on the other hand, the idea of the intensity of additional support needed by children at risk, children with chronic illnesses, and those with special talents. From this perspective, the monograph presented by Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD is timely, original, and unconventional.

The author professionally presents the design of his experimental study and justifies the reliability of the research methods used. A positive aspect of the work is the presentation and analysis of the Functional Assessment Map, its structure, and its application in the educational context.

The results of the conducted study are competently and thoroughly analysed, justifying the effectiveness of intensive support on the academic performance of students with SEN. A significant point in the discussed monograph is the recommendations made in view of future research compatible with the policy of inclusive education. The presented monograph is discussed as a habilitation work.

The monograph: "Inclusive Education and Organisation of the Supportive Environment" is based on the dissertation work. Through it, the author promotes the creation of strategies to optimise the supportive general educational environment. The monograph describes the advantages of inclusive education, presents the terms and key components that assist in the education of CSEN, and justifies the need for teamwork and for legislative initiatives. The author's interest and willingness to propose new models of education that comply with international standards deserve praise. This aligns with modern trends to optimise

the inclusive educational environment, overcome stigmatisation, and regulate legislative changes that stimulate the creation of an adequate supportive environment.

Other publications in this area. Overall, in these publications, Kaloyan Damyanov PhD presents the paradigm of inclusive education for CSEN, emphasising the role of the resource teacher, the need to adapt the teaching material and to build strong partnerships between specialists for the successful application of co-teaching.

A significant place in the publications of Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD is given to issues related to the professional qualification of those working with inclusive-education children, the presentation of quality practices, and the regulation of general and additional support.

In the second section: *“Research Aimed at Educational Approaches and Therapeutic Support for Children and Students with Special Educational Needs”*, the monograph *“Educational and Social Inclusion of Students with Mental Retardation and Multiple Impairments”* is presented. It substantiates the capabilities of students with mental retardation and multiple impairments for learning and development, launching the concept of their social and emotional inclusion.

Other publications in this direction put forward ideas for incorporating occupational therapy into individual curricula so as to improve cognitive, motor, and sensory skills of students. According to the author, the connection between different institutions is a prerequisite for ensuring educational institutions' equality and accessibility.

In the third section: *“Research Examining Socio-Pedagogical and Intercultural Interaction in the Educational Environment”*, the monograph *“Socio-Pedagogical Support and Prevention of School Dropout”* is included. The monograph examines a current issue related to school dropout and its prevention. The fact that this research involves 25 educational institutions from 10 regions demonstrates the seriousness of the problem and the need for its solving. The most important aspect is that the author proposes new practices facilitating the fight against school dropout.

The other publications in this section follow the same context, with an emphasis placed on intercultural communication in the process of inclusive education. These publications highlight the need for creating a national model for socio-pedagogical support.

The fact that most of the scientific-theoretical work created by Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD has been tested and implemented in the real pedagogical process deserves respect.

I would also remark upon the large-scale project activity, reflected in participation in various national and international forums.

All of this is a serious testament to the merit of the candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor".

2. Scientometric Indicators

The minimum national requirements for awarding points on the basis of scientific production are included in Article 25 of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. Following the prescribed indicators (A-50, B-100, C-625, D-160, E-180), the total number of points the author has accumulated is 1115 points. The minimum required number of points according to the National Requirements for acquisition of the position of "Associate Professor" is 400. This means that Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD exceeds those multiple times.

3. Main Areas in the Associate Professor Candidate's Research Work and Most Important Scientific Contributions

Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD's entire publication activity covers three main areas. When presenting his publication activity in Bulgaria and abroad, these areas have been analysed. The author succinctly describes the key contributory points of his works. I accept the existence of these contributions.

I would also add that with his entire scientific activity and active position as a researcher, theorist, and practitioner, Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD popularises the achievements of Special Education both in Bulgaria and abroad. With his copious written works, monographs, textbooks, teaching aids, and his activities as an educator and lecturer, he contributes greatly for inclusive education's optimisation. In this context, I will also refer to the extremely large volume of issues subject to analysis by the author. The candidate has produced in-depth, comprehensive, and professionally made interpretations, which substantiate the need to seek and subsequently determine innovative approaches in organising and structuring the inclusive educational environment.

Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD has 13 noted citations. This number is more than sufficient for the academic position he is applying for.

The number and quality of the reviewed publications, scientific contributions, and originality of the conducted research fully meet the minimum scientific requirements for acquiring the academic position of "Associate Professor".

4. Critical Notes, Recommendations, Questions

I have no critical remarks.

Question: What are the chances for CSEN who have completed the first level of high-school education to find employment? My recommendation follows this direction, specifically, to research and present foreign experience to the responsible institutions in order to create more job opportunities for students with SEN.

5. Conclusion

I believe that the reviewed scientific production meets all the requirements for the academic position for which Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD is applying.

Drawing from what I have written above, I can confidently state that Chief Assitant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD has the potential to continue his scientific research endeavors, thereby contributing to the implementation of innovations in the field of science focused on the inclusion of students with special educational needs.

Based on everything positive described and asserted in my Opinion Statement, and considering the qualities and capabilities of Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD, I propose that the ESTEEMED SCIENTIFIC JURY should vote positively for the appointment of Chief Assistant Professor Kaloyan Damyanov PhD to the academic position of "Associate Professor".

Date: 19.02.2025

Member of the Scientific Jury:

Prof. K. Karadzhova PhD