REVIEW

from Professor Vaska Stancheva-Popkostadinova, South West University "Neofit Rilski" of the materials submitted for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, in the professional field 3.4. Social Activities, specialty "Counseling and Competence for Social Work"

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva is participating as a candidate in the competition for the position of Associate Professor—announced in the State Gazette, Issue 53 of June 9, 2026, and on the website of the Technical University of Gabrovo—for the Department of Social and Economic Sciences within the Faculty of Economics.

1. Brief biographical data

Zhaneta Tsoneva was born on June 1, 1983. She earned a Bachelor's degree (2006) and a Master's degree (2007) in Social Activities from the Technical University of Gabrovo. She defended her dissertation, titled "A Model of Social Work with Drug-Dependent Individuals" at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (in the field of Pedagogy, specialty in the Foundations of Social Work).

Since 2010, she has held the position of Assistant, and since 2014, she has served as a Chief Assistant in the Department of Social and Economic Sciences at the Technical University of Gabrovo.

She has participated in 11 courses and specialized training programs aimed at enhancing her professional skills and qualifications, for which she has provided certificates.

She is a member of the Bulgarian Association for Social Work Education, having served as a member of its Governing Board during the 2019–2023 period.

She is proficient in English.

2. Общо описание на представените материали

The materials submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva for participation in the competition meet the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.4 Social Work, in accordance with the Annex to Article 1a, paragraph 1 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, as well as the additional requirements of the Technical University of Gabrovo.For participation in the competition, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has submitted publications categorized as follows:

- Habilitation thesis (monograph) – 1 (2019).
- Articles and papers published in publications refereed and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases – 1.
- Studies published in scientific publications refereed and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases – 1.
- Articles and papers published in non-refereed, peer-reviewed scientific journals and in edited collective volumes – 17.
- Studies published in non-refereed, peer-reviewed scientific journals and in edited collective volumes – 1.

Of the submitted publications, 17 are single-authored and 3 are co-authored; they are written in Bulgarian (15) and English (5).

Distribution of points by indicator groups in relation to the minimum national requirements:

- Group A (Dissertation for the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor") – 50 points.
- Group B (Habilitation thesis) – 100 points.
- Group G (Scientific publications in refereed and non-refereed editions) – 245 points.
- Group D (Citations in scientific publications) – 70 points.

The candidate's total score amounts to 465 points, against a required minimum of 400 points for the academic position of "Associate Professor."

The table below presents the fulfillment of the additional requirements set by TU-Gabrovo for the academic position of "Associate Professor."

Indicator	Additional requirements set by TU-Gabrovo	Presented by the candidate
Total number of publications (articles and reports):	15	20
- of which independent	4	17
- of which with IF (WoS) or	1	-
- of which with SJR (Scopus)	1	1
Number of known citations by other authors	5	14
Published textbooks/books on topics related to the announced competition	1	1
Published educational materials on topics related to the announced competition	1	2
Total	28	55

Even regarding the additional requirements, the candidate exceeds what is necessary.

3.Impact of the candidate's scientific publications within the scientific community (known citations)

A record is presented of 14 citations of 7 publications—with which the candidate is participating in the competition—appearing in non-indexed, peer-reviewed scientific journals and in edited collective volumes.

4.Overview of the content and results in the submitted works

The submitted works outline the professional interests of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva and the focus of her research endeavors.

The habilitation thesis (monograph), „Counseling in the Helping Professions", adopts a theoretical and applied approach.

Based on an extensive literature review, the work provides a conceptual overview of counseling within the helping professions—including social work—enriched by the author's own perspective and recommendations.

The author's objective is to propose a comprehensive model for understanding counseling as a core component of the helping professions, including social work.

An analytical overview is presented regarding the primary theories and models of counseling, as well as the specificities of its application across various fields.

The structure and characteristics of the individual stages of the counseling process are described.

The key characteristics of various types of counseling are outlined, along with the roles and functions of the counselor across different professional domains within the helping professions. Emphasis is placed on the dynamics of the client-counselor relationship, as well as the specific nuances inherent to different types of counseling.

The necessary competencies and counseling techniques are substantiated with clear rationale, with a particular focus on the counselor's cultural competence and emotional intelligence throughout the counseling process. Special attention is also given to motivational counseling as a significant factor in effectiveness.

Ethical aspects are also discussed, with a focus on confidentiality and informed consent—key elements found within codes of ethics.

In addition to the habilitation thesis, counseling is also addressed in other publications. The role and necessity of integrating counseling into therapeutic modalities for cases of parental alienation (6) and for couples with reproductive issues (8) are substantiated, based on the conceptualization of the relevant constructs.

In a series of publications, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva further develops the topic of competencies.

Based on a theoretical overview, the key aspects of social, emotional, and intercultural competencies are analyzed, with an emphasis on the role and significance of the interconnections between them for the effectiveness of social work (1, 3). The necessity of incorporating these competencies into the curricula for the Social Activities major is discussed, as this serves as an important prerequisite for effective social integration and readiness to work in a multicultural environment (10, U1). The development of social competencies is presented as a key factor for personal, educational, and professional functioning within the context of social work education (U1), including the specificities involved in social work with at-risk children (U3). The theoretical section is supported by practical examples, tasks, and tests. Furthermore, the role of social media in the development of intercultural competence among social work students is examined (10).

Concepts and models of emotional resilience are presented, with an exploration of its nature and significance within social work (5, 14). Key skills for developing resilience are analyzed, alongside the role of supervision in this process (14). Emphasis is placed on the importance of the resilience-based approach in social work with families who have experienced severe life events, and key competencies for building resilience are identified (5).

Another part of the publications is dedicated to the application of innovations and new technologies in social work.

An overview of the definitions, role, and application of social innovations in social work is provided (4). It is noted that social innovations in work with children and families serve as a strategic tool for change. Emphasis is placed on the need for innovations to encompass all levels of social work with children and families—the systemic level, the service level, and the level of interaction between the client and the professional—which requires improvements in the planning, organization, and delivery of services.

Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has dedicated a number of publications to the application of artificial intelligence in education and practice. Based on a theoretical analysis and research findings, the significance of artificial intelligence for enriching educational technologies and enhancing the quality of instruction is highlighted. It is demonstrated that the integration of artificial intelligence leads to increased motivation and greater learning effectiveness (2).

The contribution of artificial intelligence to improving social work with at-risk children is also discussed, based on an experimental study involving practitioners (9). An overview of technological innovations for working with individuals with visual impairments

is presented, and their application is justified, with an emphasis on the need for ongoing training for the professionals who work with this group (17).

The application of modern, innovative technologies and approaches in social work within the field of addictions—as well as the significance of integrating them into the operations of recovery centers—has also been examined (19).

Beyond the primary focus areas of the publications, a comparative analysis of social work models for children and families is also of interest (7). Various models are presented and analyzed, structural differences are identified, and best practices in social work are substantiated. Furthermore, a contemporary issue concerning new forms of aggression among children and youth—specifically those occurring in specific local settings—is explored, highlighting the need for integrated socio-educational approaches to prevent and address this problem (16). The key role of social workers within the preschool and school education system is also highlighted; they serve as a vital link between the community, families, and the school or kindergarten, ensuring the provision of necessary support (13).

The presented scientific works focus on important aspects of social work and are in line with the subject matter of the announced competition.

5. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

5.1.Teaching and pedagogical activity (work with students and doctoral candidates)

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has an extensive and diverse teaching background.

Her teaching activities encompass lectures and practical sessions for key courses within the Social Work curriculum—at both the Bachelor’s and Master’s degree levels—including: social work with at-risk children, social work with individuals exhibiting deviant behavior, social work with people struggling with addictions, social competencies, family counseling and family therapy, social pedagogy, teamwork, social competencies in an intercultural environment, as well as innovations and macro-level practices in social work with children, youth, and families.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva is the author of a textbook and a study guide for the course "Social Competencies."Годишната й аудиторна натовареност е по-голяма от изискуемата.

Against a mandatory teaching workload of 728.1 hours for the 2025/2026 academic year, the candidate has 865.1 hours; for the 2026/2027 academic year, against a mandatory workload of 681.1 hours, the candidate has 761.1 hours.

She serves as the head of three Master’s degree programs: "Social Activities," "Social Work and European Policies," and "Social Innovations and Social Policies."

Under her supervision, 22 students from Bachelor’s and Master’s programs in Social Activities have successfully defended their theses. She has also served as the academic supervisor for 26 students preparing papers for the Student Scientific Session between 2010 and 2026.

She has acted as a reviewer for 21 scientific papers presented at the UNITECH International Scientific Conference, as well as for 13 theses.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva is actively involved in committees responsible for preparing reports for accreditation and post-accreditation monitoring, conducting state examinations, and managing student admissions for Master’s degree programs.

5.2. Scientific and Applied Scientific Activity

Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva has participated as a team member in 10 internal university research projects. Her research focus concerns the investigation of current issues within the field of social work education and practice, including: the application of a competency-based model in the training of social work professionals; problem-oriented learning; supervision and ongoing training for helping professionals; integrated approaches to supporting individuals with mental disabilities; social services focused on early childhood development; and social work within educational institutions.

She also participated in a project under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth"—titled "Innovative Education in the Humanities and Social Sciences through Digital Transformation and Curriculum Modernization"—involving St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," South-West University "Neofit Rilski," and the Technical University of Gabrovo, in partnership with universities from Greece, Poland, and Romania. In this capacity, she served as an instructor, developing a lecture course and digital resources for the subject "Intellectual Property in the Social Sphere."

6. Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied, applied).

The contributions are of a scientific-applied nature.

- Based on a conceptual overview and critical analysis of key theoretical approaches, models, and types of counseling, the roles and functions of the consultant—as well as the specificities of professional interaction across various fields—are outlined.
- Drawing on theoretical analysis and research findings, key competencies and techniques for effective counseling are identified, along with their significance for the training and practice of professionals in the helping professions, including social work.
- The multidimensional nature of social innovations is presented, and their application within various areas of social work is substantiated.
- A competency framework based on the "resilience approach" has been developed for application in social work with families of at-risk children.
- Through a comparative analysis of social work models for at-risk children in European Union countries, best practices regarding prevention, family-oriented support, and the integration of social services have been identified; recommendations for their implementation in Bulgaria are also formulated.
- Proposals are substantiated for improving and modernizing social work education through the adoption of a competency-based approach and the integration of new technologies.
- The textbook *Social Competencies* and the handbook *Developing Social Competencies in Social Work with At-Risk Children* combine theoretical overviews and analyses with practical tasks and tests designed for training in the development of social competencies. These resources serve as a valuable guide for the foundational training of social work students, as well as for the continuing professional development of social workers.

7. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution..

The scientific and applied scientific contributions are indisputably the personal work of the candidate.

Of the submitted scientific publications, only 3 are co-authored, while the candidate is the sole author of the rest.

An analysis of the research, applied scientific, and teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsoneva reveals coherence and consistency.

Through her comprehensive and multifaceted teaching and research work, she makes a significant contribution to the development of the "Social Activities" field of study at the Technical University of Gabrovo.

8. Critical remarks and recommendations препоръки

I recommend that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Tsenova continue and deepen her research on the application of high technologies in education and practice within the field of social work, to expand its participation in national and international scientific projects and publish the results in specialized scientific journals that are peer-reviewed and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases.

9. Personal impressions

I do not know the candidate personally; however, I would like to emphasize that the set of documents and materials submitted for the competition has been prepared with great precision—both in terms of technical aspects and content—which demonstrates professionalism, responsibility, and a serious approach toward the competition.

10. Conclusion:

Following an analysis of the materials and scientific works submitted for the competition—based on their significance, the scientific and applied contributions outlined therein, and the candidate’s overall teaching and pedagogical activities, I confirm that the requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (ZRASRB), its Regulations for Application, and the Regulations for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Technical University of Gabrovo have been met, qualifying the candidate for the academic position of "Associate Professor" in Professional Field 3.4: Social Activities.

In view of the above, I propose that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Zhaneta Nikolaeva Tsoneva be elected to the academic rank of "Associate Professor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, in the professional field 3.4. Social Activities, specialty: "Counseling and Competence for Social Work."

28.10. 2026
Blagoevgrad

Reviewer:
Professor Vaska Stancheva-Popkostadinova, MD, PhD
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