

OPINION

on the materials submitted for participation in the competition for the academic position of **Associate Professor** in the field of higher education 4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics, Professional Field 4.4. Earth Sciences, Scientific Specialty "Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation," in the discipline "Protected Natural Areas"

In the competition for Associate Professor, announced in the *State Gazette*, No. 36/29.04.2025, and on the website of the University of Forestry under procedure code ELA-As P-0425-165, for the needs of the Department of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration at the Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, the candidate participating is **Assistant Professor Dr. Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska**, Faculty of Ecology and Landscape Architecture, Department of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration.

Prepared the opinion by:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetla Bratanova-Doncheva – IBER-BAS

4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics, Professional Field 4.3. Biological Sciences, Scientific Specialty "Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation"

Appointed as a member of the scientific jury by **Order ZPS-321/30.05.2025**

Candidate for participation in the competition:

Assistant Professor Dr. Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska

1. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Assistant Professor **Dr. Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska** was born in 1985. She completed her secondary education at the Spanish Language High School "Miguel de Cervantes" in 2004. From October 2004 to May 2005, she studied at Trier University, Germany, obtaining a DSH 3 Certificate in German. She completed her higher education in 2009 at University of Forestry -Sofia with a Bachelor's degree in Forestry Engineering, specializing in Ecology and Environmental Protection.

Between 2009 and 2010, she completed a Master's program at the University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy (Bulgaria), D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics (Bulgaria), Queen's University Belfast (UK), Flemish Institute for Technological Research (Belgium), and UNESCO International Technological University (France) in Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, obtaining the Master's degree in Ecology.

Between August 2012 and December 2012, she was a specialist-scholar at Leuphana University, Lüneburg, Germany, on "Education for Sustainable Development." She pursued her PhD at University of Forestry -Sofia between 2012 and 2017, with a dissertation entitled

"Contemporary Approaches in Organizing Educational Activities in Protected Areas", earning the degree of Doctor.

Her professional career began as a project associate and project coordinator at the EcoCommunity Foundation and the Association "VeloEvolution." Later, she worked as an intern at Makmetal Holding AD. Between 2013 and 2017, she served as a project manager for ecological projects at EcoCentric Foundation. From 2015, she has worked as a teacher at Meridian22 Private High School as part of the International Baccalaureate program in ecological projects.

From 2017–2018, she was a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," and in 2018–2019, she served as Head of Pedagogical Practice at University of Forestry. From January 2017, she was appointed Assistant at the Department of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Restoration (EEPR), University of Forestry, conducting exercises in courses such as Soil Erosion Protection and Protected Natural Areas in Bulgaria. Since September 2018, she has been serving as Assistant Professor at the Department of EEPR, University of Forestry.

She speaks German, Spanish, and English, and has working knowledge of Portuguese. According to her CV, between 2008–2012 she received six awards and distinctions and two scholarships.

The review of Dr. Bancheva-Preslavska's professional career highlights her consistent motivation and systematic experience development in ecology and environmental protection.

As a scholar, she has published 1 monograph, 1 book, 1 study, and 24 scientific articles (6 with impact factor, 12 in peer-reviewed journals), and 5 scientific-popular articles. She has managed 2 projects and participated in 6 national and 3 international scientific projects.

2. Correspondence of the submitted documents and materials of the applicant according to the Rules of the Development of academic staff at the University of Forestry.

All necessary materials and documents required for participation in this competition have been submitted in accordance with the *National Act* and the *Regulations for Academic Staff Development at UF*, 2018 – Section IV, Articles 59, 60(4). The candidate has professionally presented the materials for the Associate Professor position.

The total points earned from publication and research activity by Dr. Hristina Bancheva are 677, exceeding the minimum requirement of 400 points.

3. Assessment of the candidate's educational and pedagogical activities (work with students and PhD students)

From the beginning of her professional development, Dr. Bancheva-Preslavska has focused on education and training in the field of environment and ecology. Alongside her work as a secondary school teacher, she has been active in higher education:

September 2017 – June 2018:

Part-time lecturer, Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University, teaching “Foundations of Non-Formal Education”

February 2018 – March 2019:

Head of Pedagogical Practice, University of Forestry

- Supervised pedagogical practice
- Participated in final state exam commissions for pedagogical practice
- Co-supervised and reviewed student theses

From January 2017 to September 2018:

Assistant, Department of EEPR, University of Forestry

- Conducted exercises in Soil Erosion Protection and Protected Natural Areas

From September 2018 to present:

Assistant Professor, Department of EEPR, University of Forestry

- Conducts lectures and exercises in courses such as Protected Natural Areas, Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism
- Supervises, advises, and reviews student theses
- Organizes student and school events, guest lectures, etc.

Dr. Bancheva-Preslavska is the first author in teams developing educational manuals and handbooks, such as:

- *Methodological Guide for the Application of the “Youth Volunteers Train Youth” Method for Environmental Protection*, EcoCentric Foundation, 2017
- *ConsUmucăi – Urban Educational Tours for Responsible Consumption*, EcoCentric Foundation, 2016
- *Methodological Toolbox with 96 Methods and Techniques for Conducting Educational Activities*, EcoCentric Foundation, 2013
- *Manual for Conducting Educational Activities in Vratsa Balkan Nature Park*, EcoCentric Foundation, 2013

She has served as reviewer of 5 theses and scientific advisor for 4 theses at UF, and as reviewer for 3 defended theses at UF Continuing Education Center, participating in 15 state exam commissions for teacher qualification.

Her active participation in UF activities demonstrates the trust of colleagues in her professional competence.

4. Assessment of candidate's scientific, scientific-applied and publishing activities General Overview of Submitted Materials:

Dr. Bancheva-Prešlavskva submitted 27 publications: 24 articles (6 with impact factor, 12 peer-reviewed), 1 monograph, 1 study, 1 book. She submitted a list of 11 projects – leader in 2 and participant in 9. 33 citations were noted. Materials meet and exceed the national minimum requirements for Associate Professor.

- Monographs: 1
- Books: 1 + 1 studia
- Publications: 27 total; 24 scientific articles
- Citations: 33 (17 peer-reviewed in Web of Science indexed journals, 16 in non-indexed journals)
- Projects: 11

According to scientometric indicators, the candidate exceeds the minimum criteria. She participated with 24 publications in Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus indexed journals, 4 popular science articles, and 1 book chapter. Points by criteria:

- Dissertation work: 50 points
- Criterion B: 100 points (required 100)
- Scientific production: 241 points (required 240)
- Citations: 85 points (required 50) + 41p.
- Project participation: 160 points (required 75)

In 11 of publications the Candidate is single author, and 15 of them - in foreign languages.

The submitted materials also include 5 popular science articles, as well as 1 chapter from a collective monograph in Bulgarian. During the period 2013–2017, the candidate co-authored 4 methodological manuals and guides related to educational activities in the field of ecology and environmental protection.

The citations refer to 13 articles, amounting to a total of 17 citations, in indexed journals, corresponding to 85 points. She found another 16 citations in non-indexed journals – so, total -126 points.

The materials presented by Dr. Hristina Bancheva are sufficient according to the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) and the Regulations of the University of Forestry, covering both the national and the specific minimum requirements for the academic position of "Associate Professor."

4.1 Participation in scientific, applied, and educational projects

Between 2011–2024, Dr Bancheva participated in 11 projects, leading 2 (2016–2021) and contributing as expert/researcher in 9 projects (6 national, 3 international). Her work with NGOs and companies enhanced her research, organizational, and communication skills.

4.2 Characterization of published scientific results

Main research directions:

1. Contemporary status and management of protected areas
2. Assessment and development of ecotourism approaches in protected areas
3. Approaches in ecological and environmental education

In the **first** research direction, the following monograph was developed:

Bancheva-Preslavska, H. *Contemporary Approaches to the Organization of Educational Activities in Protected Areas*. Publisher: "Ecocentric" Foundation. ISBN 978-619-90127-6-5 (print), eISBN 978-619-90127-5-8, 150 pp.

The scientific-applied contributions of this monograph are presented and I accept them. The scientific contributions I accept only partially, specifically in the section Methodological approach with a set of criteria and indicators for effective management of National Parks. The proposed approach is well presented but could be more deep scientifically substantiated on the basis of contemporary ecological conceptual publications, as well as strategic documents concerning ecosystem services. In this direction, 17 articles and 1 study have been published, 6 trainings conducted, participation in 6 conferences and 1 round table, as well as 4 diploma theses reviewed or supervised by the candidate. As a scientific contribution, I recognize the proposed holistic approach to the sustainable management of wetlands. Here again, I would recommend paying more detailed attention to the concept of ecosystem services assessment, with a deeper understanding of ecosystem processes and their functions.

In the **second** research direction, 11 articles and 1 study were published:

Bancheva-Preslavska, H., Purvanova, D. 2025. *Integrated Approach in the Management of Protected Areas. Conservation through Environmental Education in the Shabla and Durankulak Lakes*. Ecocentric, Sofia. ISBN 978-619-93317-0-5, eISBN 978-619-90127-0-3, 44 pp.

In addition, the candidate has worked on 2 projects, participated in 3 trainings and 3 conferences, and 2 diploma theses have been developed. I generally accept the contributions presented here, but once again I find a lack of scientific depth in the materials.

In the **third** research direction, 6 articles were published, 4 projects carried out, 3 trainings, and 2 conferences attended. The candidate has been a supervisor of pedagogical practice and reviewer of 3 diploma theses at UF. I accept the contributions proposed in this direction – I believe that the candidate has sufficient experience in this field and has demonstrated focus and thoroughness since the beginning of her professional path. As applied contributions, I value the 4 co-authored methodological guides developed and published for education in ecology and environmental protection, designed to promote experiences with nature in protected areas for different target groups.

Key contributions:

- Monograph on educational activities in protected areas (accepted in part for methodological approaches)

- 17 articles, 1 study, 6 trainings, 6 conferences, 4 supervised theses
 - Publications on ecotourism and educational projects (accepted in general; depth could be improved)
 - Educational methods: 4 co-authored manuals
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4.3 Reflection of Candidate's Scientific Publications in Literature (known citations)

The observed citations amount to 33 across 16 publications since 2014, with the most recent citations from 2023. The accumulated points are 85.

33 citations across 16 publications after 2014:

- 17 in peer-reviewed journals (85 points),
- 9 in nonindexed journals
- 7 in manuals, monographs, dissertations.

Total points: 126.

In addition to her scientific output, Dr. Hristina Bancheva has significant activity as a lecturer, as well as serving as a reviewer and member of examination committees. Of particular note is her large number of participations in conferences, seminars, and trainings, which provide her with a broad perspective on the scientific and applied aspects of her chosen field, as well as opportunities to present her approaches and disseminate her results.

4.4 Contributions to the candidate's work (scientific, scientific-applied, applied)

Scientific-applied contributions are generally adequate; some should be classified as applied. My concern - Candidate should pursue further challenges and deepen research based on contemporary ecological studies.

5. Assessment of the applicant's personal candidate

From the presented scientific output, in the majority of publications Dr. Hristina Bancheva is the first or sole author. In the remaining articles, the approach is interdisciplinary, and therefore they have been developed by larger teams; however, the candidate has an equal and specific personal contribution. Her participation and leadership in numerous projects and teams demonstrate the recognition by various institutions of her expertise, as well as her organizational and communication skills. I value Dr. Hristina Bancheva's active scientific and applied work, her commitment to purposeful development in new directions, as well as her practical skills and knowledge in the field of applied ecology education..

6. Critical remarks

Candidate should focus more on research and deepen analyses to publish in higher-impact journals and increase citations.

7. Personal impressions

Though I do not know Dr. Bancheva personally, her CV, numerous trainings, project participation, and publications indicate an ambitious young researcher ready to develop her scientific field and educate future ecologists. Recommendation: advance her work based on contemporary ecological achievements and ecosystem management.

8. Conclusion

Based on the above, I propose that **Dr. Hristina Bancheva-Preslavska be elected for the position of Associate Professor** in Higher Education Field 4. Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Informatics, Professional Field 4.4. Earth Sciences, Scientific Specialty "Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation," in the discipline "Protected Natural Areas."

Prepared by:
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetla Doncheva)

Date submitted: _____

3.09.2025