



STATEMENT

by Prof. Vasil Stoimenov Nikolov, PhD, Department of Animal Sciences,
Agricultural University – Plovdiv, scientific specialty “Animal Breeding,
Biology and Biotechnology of Reproduction”, Professional Field 6.3 “Animal
Science”

Regarding: competition for appointment to the academic position of “Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 6. Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, professional field 6.3. Animal Science, scientific specialty “Horse Breeding and Other Equine Sciences”, announced in the State Gazette, issue No. 41 of 05.05.2026.

Basis for preparing the statement: Order No. RD 16-811/29.06.2026 of the Rector of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv.

Candidate in the competition: Chief Assistant Professor Maya Georgieva Popova, PhD, Department of Animal Sciences, Agricultural University – Plovdiv.

Chief Assistant Professor Maya Popova, PhD, was born on 27 November 1985. In 2008, she obtained a Bachelor’s degree with the professional qualification of Zooengineer from the Agricultural University – Plovdiv. In 2010, she completed a Master’s degree in Equestrian Sport at Trakia University – Stara Zagora. In 2017, she obtained the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” (PhD) in the scientific specialty “Animal Breeding, Biology and Biotechnology of Reproduction”. During the period from November 2024 to November 2025, she also obtained the professional qualification “Teacher of Vocational Training” at the Centre for Continuing Education of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv.

Her professional activity has been entirely related to horse breeding. From November 2008 to March 2010, she worked as a zooengineer in breeding activities in the Horse Breeding Department of the State Enterprise “Kabiyuk” – Shumen, and from March 2010 to January 2013 she worked as a Junior Expert in control and coordination in horse breeding at the Executive Agency for Selection and Reproduction in Animal Breeding. In February 2013, she was appointed as an Assistant Professor at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, and since November 2017 she has held the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor in the Department of Animal Sciences. From March 2014 to May 2022, she was a member of the Management Board, and since May 2022 she has served as President of the “East Bulgarian Horse” Association.

Scientific Output

Chief Assistant Professor Popova, PhD, has submitted a list of 25 scientific publications. Twenty-two articles, which are not related to the dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” (PhD), are subject to review. All submitted publications fall within the scope of the competition and have been published in journals refereed and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases – Web of Science and/or Scopus. Seven of the

articles have been published in journals with an SJR indicator and an assigned quartile. Four articles were published in the Bulgarian Journal of Agricultural Science, three of which are in Q3, while one, published in 2022, has an SJR of 0.22 and is also classified in Q3. One publication appeared in the Italian Journal of Animal Science, with an impact factor of 1.805 and Q2 ranking. One article was published in the Journal of Central European Agriculture, with an SJR of 0.2 and Q4 ranking, and one in the Bulgarian Journal of Veterinary Medicine, with an SJR of 0.18 and Q3 ranking. The remaining scientific papers were published in the journals Animal Science, Agricultural Science and Technology, Scientific Papers. Series D. Animal Science, Agricultural Sciences, and Scientific Works of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, which are refereed and indexed in Web of Science.

Chief Assistant Professor Popova, PhD, is the sole author of three of the scientific publications submitted for the competition, first author of 13, second author of four, and third author of two. This demonstrates the candidate's leading contribution to the formulation and development of the research problems addressed. In addition to the scientific articles, she is a co-author of two breeding programmes – for the East Bulgarian and Karakachan horse breeds – as well as of the Handbook on the Application of Reproductive Biotechnologies in Equids.

Teaching Activity

Dr. Popova has more than 13 years of teaching experience at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, as an Assistant Professor and Chief Assistant Professor. She has delivered lectures and practical classes in courses directly related to the scientific specialty of the competition: Equine Science, Biological Basis of Equine Science, and Equine Production Technology at Bachelor's degree level, as well as Fundamentals of Horse Breeding, Breeding Programs in Horse Breeding, Management of Genetic Resources in Horse Breeding, and Biotechnologies of Reproduction in Horse Breeding at Master's degree level. Her teaching activity also includes the elective courses Ethology, Horse Breeding and Equestrian Sport, and Equestrian Tourism, Recreational and Therapeutic Riding, intended both for students in Professional Field 6.3 Animal Science and for students from other professional fields at the University. The fact that these courses are selected by students every year is indicative of the candidate's professionalism and the high quality of her teaching. Dr. Popova also teaches the compulsory course Animal Husbandry to students in the Agricultural Tourism programme.

Dr. Popova is the author of 11 course syllabi for the courses listed above that she teaches.

Over the last five academic years, the candidate's teaching workload has averaged 703.6 hours per year, including 256 hours of lectures. She has supervised 25 successfully defended diploma theses, including 19 at Bachelor's degree level and 6 at Master's degree level. Her total teaching workload for the period 2021/2022–2025/2026 amounts to 3,517.9 hours. According to the University regulations governing the payment of additional teaching hours, undertaking extra responsibilities for teaching elective courses and supervising diploma students is, in practice, largely voluntary. This, together with the supervision of courses and practical placements, participation in student admission campaigns, and other activities, demonstrates not only Dr. Maya Popova's extensive teaching experience, but also her strong commitment and sense of responsibility towards the educational process and the training of students.

Research Activity

From the publications submitted for review and the extended habilitation report, it is evident that Chief Assistant Professor Maya Popova, PhD, works in four main research areas. 1. Study of the genealogical, population, and breeding structure of Bulgarian horse breeds – the Danubian Horse and the East Bulgarian Horse (B2, B5, B6, G4, G9). Data have been obtained on the family and line structure, the dynamics of breed development, and the possibilities for preserving genetic diversity. 2. Study of conformation, growth, development, and economically important traits in horses (B1, B3, B4, B10, G1, G2, G8, G12). Body measurements, quality of movement and free-jumping ability, as well as the influence of sex, family affiliation, and line affiliation on these traits in East Bulgarian and Karakachan horses have been investigated. 3. Physiological, biochemical, and reproductive characteristics of mares (B7, B8, B9, G3, G5, G7). The effects of breed, age, season, and nutrition on hematological, biochemical, and reproductive parameters have been studied. Dr. Popova has also continued her research in the field of her doctoral dissertation, related to the duration of estrus, the estrous cycle, and gestation in mares. 4. Sustainable use of autochthonous breeds and application of modern technologies for monitoring free-ranging horses (G6, G10, G11). Within this research area, the behavior and distribution range of free-ranging Karakachan horses have been studied, with GPS devices and camera traps being used for the first time in Bulgaria. The role of the Karakachan horse in the management of pasture ecosystems and the conservation of natural biodiversity has also been investigated.

The scientific activity of Chief Assistant Professor Popova has been widely disseminated. Five of the research works – one oral presentation and four posters – were presented at three conferences abroad, while eight oral presentations and five posters were presented at eight conferences in Bulgaria.

Citations

Four citations of four scientific publications have been submitted for the competition. All citations are in scientific journals refereed and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases: Veterinary Sciences, Q1, SJR 0.524; Reproduction, Fertility and Development, Q2, SJR 0.47; Comparative Clinical Pathology, Q3, SJR 0.224; and Bulgarian Journal of Veterinary Medicine, Q4, SJR 0.157.

Research Projects

Dr. Popova has participated in three projects funded by the Research Centre of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv and in one national scientific programme, “Reproductive Biotechnologies in Animal Husbandry in Bulgaria”, Work Package 3 “Reproductive Biotechnologies in Equids.” She has served as scientific leader of two of the projects: “Opportunities for Studying the Behaviour of Horses under Free, Unregulated Rearing Conditions Using Modern Monitoring Technologies” and “Study of the Relationships between Conformation and Performance in East Bulgarian Horses in Relation to the Development of a Linear Scoring Scheme”.

Scientometric Indicators for the Acquisition of a Scientific Degree and Appointment to the Academic Position of “Associate Professor” in the Announced Competition

Group	Indicators	Minimum Requirements	Submitted in the Competition
A	Dissertation for the Award of the Educational and Scientific Degree “Doctor” (PhD) and Related Publications	50	50+65
B	Habilitation Work – Scientific Publications (not fewer than 10) in Journals Refereed and Indexed in Internationally Recognized Scientific Databases	100	10/180
G	Articles and Conference Papers Published in Scientific Journals Refereed and Indexed in Internationally Recognized Scientific Databases	200	207,5
D	Citations or Reviews in Scientific Journals Refereed and Indexed in Internationally Recognized Scientific Databases	50	60

Personal Impressions

I have known Dr. Maya Popova since her student years, and later as her doctoral supervisor and as head of the state institution where she worked as a specialist. She is proactive and highly responsible in carrying out the tasks assigned to her. She approaches new initiatives with enthusiasm, actively seeks to acquire new knowledge, and strives to apply the latest research methods in the demanding field of horse breeding. Managing a horse breeding organization is also far from an easy task. I would also like to emphasize the good presentation and systematic organization of the materials submitted for the competition. This reflects the diligence and sense of responsibility that Chief Assistant Professor Maya Popova, PhD, demonstrates in the preparation and implementation of her teaching, scientific, and organizational activities.

Conclusion

Chief Assistant Professor Maya Popova, PhD, meets the requirements of Article 24(1) of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, and the Regulations of the Agricultural University for appointment to the academic position of “Associate Professor.” I give a POSITIVE evaluation of the candidate’s overall teaching, research, and practical activities and, with full conviction, propose that the respected Scientific Jury vote in favor and that the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Agronomy at the Agricultural University – Plovdiv elect **Chief Assistant Professor Maya Georgieva Popova, PhD**, to the academic position of “Associate Professor” in the field of higher education 6. Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, professional field 6.3. Animal Science, scientific specialty “Horse Breeding and Other Equine Sciences.”

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Statement prepared by:
(Prof. Vasil Nikolov, PhD)