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## Digital Platforms in Russian Higher Education

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**Abstract.** The processes of active digitalization of various sectors of the Russian economy have influenced the field of higher education. The existence of many digital educational platforms for hosting online courses is a reality. Although it seems obvious, the institution of a digital educational platform has not yet been properly clarified. There is no full-fledged concept of a “digital educational platform” from the standpoint of a legal assessment of its nature. Is the platform a set of services or something else? Does the platform provide services? Is the platform responsible for user access and content? Different types of such platforms created “from above” and “from below” have not yet been systematically considered in legal science. The representative of the first model is “Open education”, in the emergence and existence of which a public subject is interested. Private platforms such as “SberUniversity” or “Lectorium”, which have several directions of interaction with users and claim their place in the higher education system, can be classified as those created “from below”. The coexistence of educational platforms is not limited to competition between them. Platforms are changing the education system: secondary, higher, additional. Therefore, the risks of further penetration of platform reality into higher education need to be predicted. The existence of educational platforms has had an impact on the previous education system. Subjects of education are the first to undergo such a transformation: universities, teachers. Russian universities are actively working to expand the offer of digital analogs of classical academic disciplines. Also, the universities are constructing courses for the formation of competencies in demand today. This is becoming a new educational area for universities. Thanks to the legal regulation of the credit of online courses, universities are differentiated into those offering educational content and using such content. Professors are now competing in an open space where any classic academic discipline can be replaced by an online course. In conclusion, the prospects for the transition of higher education from formalized to informal are noted.

**Keywords:** digitalization of education, educational platforms, educational services, educational resources, online courses, additional programs, university competition, academic mobility.

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## Цифровые платформы в российском высшем образовании

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**Аннотация.** Процессы активной цифровизации разных отраслей российской экономики повлияли на сферу высшего образования. Существование многих цифровых образовательных платформ для размещения онлайн-курсов является реальностью. При кажущейся очевидности институт цифровой образовательной платформы пока не исследован должным образом. Не существует полноценного понятия «цифровая образовательная платформа» с позиции юридической оценки ее природы. Платформа – набор сервисов или что-либо иное? Оказывает ли платформа услуги? Несет ли платформа ответственность за доступ пользователей и содержание? Системно в юридической науке пока не были рассмотрены разные виды таких платформ, создаваемых «сверху» и «снизу». Представителем первой модели является «Открытое образование», в появлении и существовании которого имеет интерес публичный субъект. К создаваемым «снизу» могут быть отнесены частные платформы, такие как «СберУниверситет» и «Лекториум», имеющие несколько направлений взаимодействия с пользователями и претендующие на свое место в системе высшего образования. Сосуществование образовательных платформ не исчерпывается конкуренцией между ними. Платформы меняют систему образования: среднего, высшего, дополнительного. Поэтому нуждаются в прогнозировании риски дальнейшего проникновения платформенной реальности в высшее образование. Существование образовательных платформ оказывает влияние на прежнюю систему образования. Первыми подвержены такой трансформации субъекты образования: университеты, преподаватели. Российские университеты активно работают над расширением предложения цифровых аналогов классических учебных дисциплин, а также курсов для формирования востребованных сегодня компетенций. Это становится новым образовательным направлением для вузов. Благодаря нормативному праву зачета онлайн-курсов происходит дифференциация университетов на предлагающих учебный контент и пользующихся таким контентом. Преподаватели теперь конкурируют в открытом пространстве, когда любая классическая учебная дисциплина может быть заменена онлайн-курсом. В завершение отмечены перспективы перехода высшего образования от формализованного к учитывающему неформальные составляющие.

**Ключевые слова:** цифровизация образования, образовательные платформы, образовательные сервисы, образовательные ресурсы, онлайн-курсы, дополнительные программы, конкуренция университетов, академическая мобильность.

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## Introduction

The rethinking of the value of distance learning technologies and e-learning that has taken place in recent years in the Russian educational system is largely due to the development of digital platforms for online courses. The platforms have no formally restrictions on the level of education and allow endlessly individualizing the process of obtaining new competencies. A catalyst for the growth processes of educational product offers on platforms should be sought not so much in a pandemic and the forced transfer to the “distance” learning processes, but in the broad horizon of the concept of “education” laid down by the legislator, directly or indirectly, representing “... attitudes, experience, and competence of a certain volume and complexity” (Art. 1 Federal Statute of December 29, 2012 No. 273-FZ “On Education in the Russian Federation”). At the same time, the formalized higher education remains on the agenda of state policy, and its framework (educational standards and relevant curricula, as well as programs of courses or practices) currently demonstrate only limited flexibility for the implementation of the content of any digital platforms in the learning process. We can say that the process of “digitizing” various educational courses has now continued, with new argumentation: from online courses as the equivalent of academic disciplines in higher education programs to any material claimed to be useful in the educational process. The discussion about the content of education has been developing between the three interested parties involved: a public subject, an employer and a student. Each of them has its ranking of expected results in higher education. For the state, the standardization of higher education through the system of “standards-curricula-work programs”

is still an indisputable axiom. Accordingly, each product of the digital platform, positioning itself as “educational”, must be designed into a normatively defined format. It is quite obvious that in this approach developers of massive online courses can and will only be universities – organizations that realize their higher education programs based on state standards, or university standards and curricula. However, educational organizations are crossing the former corporate boundaries of programs, entering the competitive environment of online courses on a digital platform, and offering various opportunities for offsetting the result within the framework of classical learning process. The reasons for such innovations are different, we will discuss them separately. At the same time, we see it quite logical if a student is confident that upon receiving a diploma, he or she will be able to integrate into the economy without the need for retraining. Employers, who determine the structures of the labor market influence through several factors, including by offering their vision for the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities of a graduate with a higher education diploma. The digital educational platforms we are considering as the institutional solution for companies to promote their needs in competencies and ways to satisfy them.

## Theoretical Framework

Today, the attention is drawn to the emergence of domestic digital educational platforms created as a result of the collaboration of universities (for example, the National Platform “Open Education”), as well as business projects of organizations that are not related to the academic sphere (for example, “SberUniversity”). The multiplication of the number of plat-

forms is an expression of the basic economic postulate of demand, which generates supply. The popularity of online education even before the pandemic made it possible to introduce various materials to the virtual educational “market” from personal self-development to analogs of academic courses of higher education programs. Educational platforms have given for such content a structure, a quality standard, as well as their vision of applicability and usefulness for various social tasks. The super competitive environment for the existence of educational platforms is permanently complicated by several factors. Firstly, the presence of “balanced” representatives (“Open Education” and “SberUniversity”). Secondly, different strategies for preparing online courses exist (academic courses and courses from practitioners). Thirdly, the variability of service offerings (online courses and additional programs). Fourthly, using different approaches to the concept of quality (presumption of the quality of university courses and positioning the significance of the results of development in practice-oriented courses). The first to come to our educational space “Coursera” today concurs with the other digital educational platforms, retaining as a visible advantage the possibility of expanding the audience of consumers – placing online courses in English and other foreign languages.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The processes of digitalization of higher education create a new educational reality for all subjects involved (the platform itself, creators of materials, content users), which one sociologists today call “platform” today. In such a reality, the social component is using the potential of different communities and managing the interaction between them on the platform to achieve maximum efficiency. The difficulty in understanding the latter lies in the lack of understanding of consumer motivation on digital educational platforms. The variety of content allows you to individualize your education, but is there a necessary, scientifically defined limit for such a process? Are consumers of online content themselves aware of the learning goals and how to achieve them? Do clients of educational platforms differentiate between the pur-

pose of higher education courses and e-courses from other organizations? Only professionals understand that university courses are the part of the systemic education, they work for a long term. Educational products of other participants in the educational market solve specific problems at a particular moment in time, provide the acquisition of competencies that are urgently needed at a given moment in time. Both those and other courses are necessary for the student, but their ratio and volume depend on the needs of the individual student.

It is also impossible to get away from the question of whether the educational organizations themselves are the very moderators of higher education? Do universities understand the optimal content of the training program for each direction, determining the necessary and secondary online courses and other materials presented on educational platforms (Sheveleva, Vasiliev, 2021: 53–68)? Should they submit to the dictates of the consumer in education, who speculatively chooses the material necessary for his professional viability? Finally, how does the digital educational platform affect higher education in terms of determining its content, albeit in a virtual plane? Are there risks of the elimination of universities due to the variety of platforms, created without the participation of the academic community?

The fate of classical universities in the new reality does not look like a linear development, various options are possible. The first one is a partnership with companies offering educational products as a way to increase competitiveness in the context of the dominance of educational platforms. The second option, educational organizations become regional research centers (ecosystems), and platforms are assigned the role of technological platforms for uniting interests. The creation and support of their digital systems require large financial resources; universities must seek support either from the state or from a business. How far the forecasts will become in Russian reality, will depend on the results of the implementation of the program of strategic academic leadership “Priority 2030”. The task of the authors of this article is to try to offer a meaningful understanding of terminological and institutional components of such

a phenomenon as a digital educational platform in the Russian educational system.

### Methods

The implementation of platform solutions in several sectors of the economy, in the social sphere, in the public administration, and in the provision of services had been being a public policy priority over the past three years (The Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 07.05.2018 No. 204 “On national goals and strategic objectives of the development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024”). However, attempts to define the generic concept of “digital platform” are still being undertaken by researchers from various fields of scientific knowledge. For example, philosophers consider a technological platform as a way of dynamically self-describing systems, reaching the level of describing self-descriptions, providing for a regular review of a portfolio of priority projects (Lichutin, 2012: 164–169). Sociologists, referring to foreign researchers, agree with the understanding of a digital platform as a virtual platform that ensures the interaction of two or more parties (user groups) according to certain rules (Shevchuk, 2020: 30–54). For representatives of the exact sciences, a digital platform is a set of technologies based on processes and applications, which represent a mechanism for combining the efforts of all interested parties, used to solve specific problems and having a certain set of properties (Ryazanova, 2020: 26–36). In management, it is proposed to call a platform an enterprise that ensures mutually beneficial interactions between the parties of the producer and the consumer, creates an open infrastructure for participants and sets the rules (Alstin, Parker, Sangeet, 2017: 18). A digital platform is understood as a business module with technology support that facilitates the exchange of information between users of information and its consumers, who do not necessarily know each other, thereby achieving a certain confidentiality (Zaramenskikh, 2018: 105–112). In Russia, platform solutions first appeared in business, later spreading to the education sector. At first glance, the reasons for turning to digital transformation are quite simple and universal for

a platform in any area. In the context of digital technologies the uniqueness of a product, which is difficult to maintain for any length of time even with modern legal protection methods, is replaced by the uniqueness of consumer services in the form of customization of the product and the introduction of an ecosystem of accompanying services. As a result, digital platforms act as platforms for the placement of services demanded by consumers, at the same time “creating conditions for the emergence of a new business environment” (Zaramenskikh, 2018: 111). The concept of a digital platform correlates with the above definitions, can be found in the strategic agenda of the Eurasian Economic Union: a system that supports the use of digital processes, resources, and services by a significant number of subjects of the digital ecosystem and provides the possibility of their seamless interaction (The Decision of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council of October 11, 2017 No. 12 “On the Main Directions for the Implementation of the Digital Agenda of the Eurasian Economic Union until 2025”).

In the field of education, the position of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education is important, so in article 3 of the Regulations on the state information system “Modern digital educational environment” educational platforms received a legal definition: “Information platforms in the information and telecommunications network Internet, on which educational organizations host online courses, the development of which is carried out by students through the usage of distance educational technologies and e-learning” (The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of November 16, 2020 N 1836 “On the state information system ”Modern digital educational environment” (together with the “Regulations on the state information system “Modern digital educational environment”). We could see that the key feature of a digital educational platform is online courses, the free development of which should be platforms understood as technology.

The researchers have noted other essential aspects of the platform, including its purpose – the provision of services (online services). Conceptually, one can agree with the position presented in science that educational platforms are

built around software as a service, thereby ensuring that educational content meets the needs of listeners, as well as, in some cases, including built-in analytics (Ryazanova, 2020: 30). Highlighting the service goal in the digital platforms means raising the issue of compensation or gratuitousness of services provided to users, the first of which is access to online courses.

Summarizing the above definitions and elements of the concept, we propose the following vision of a digital educational platform – a software product on the Internet for providing users with services for educational products (implemented in electronic form or using distance educational technologies of educational programs, online courses) and support of the processes of obtaining related information by users.

### Discussion

The formation of digital educational platforms can be carried out on an initiative basis “from above” or “from below”. Some researchers have been called the first case a “state model” since platforms are created for the implementation of public policy in a certain area (Veredinsky, Makarov, Slutsky, 2021: 108). The “commercial model” provides for the implementation of the business model chosen by the organizers of the platform project (Veredinsky, Makarov, Slutsky, 2021: 108). The above classification seems to be quite universal for different platforms. However, we will make a few clarifications regarding the initiative as a criterion for classifying the ways of platform implementation. “State” does not mean the creation of an educational platform directly by a public entity and funding from the budget of the corresponding level. The key is to formulate the goals of the platform in the context of the multidimensional mission of education in the Russian legal system. This missions are social (investment in human capital, which means priority-free development of educational products and their availability to any person on the Internet), reputational (proposing their approaches to the structure and the content of the educational product, as well as its possible uniqueness), competitive (the choice among thematically similar educational offers of different universities), the attraction of commensurate resources (the provision of paid relat-

ed services, starting with the payment of a certificate of successful course completion). Such a model can be implemented indirectly, through state universities as ready-made centers for generating the main educational product of digital platforms today – online courses. The “commercial” creation of an educational platform is distinguished by a change in the ranking of goals: the development of corporate human capital comes to the fore (providing the company’s employees with an appropriate level of competence); transformation of the business landscape (forced changes in the sphere or several areas of the economy according to the ideas of the creator of the platform); making a profit (selling educational products that are currently in demand at the moment). The digital educational platforms that have appeared with the listed goal-setting are to some extent complementary in comparison with the “state” ones since they will be forced to offer innovative and atypical educational products-services that meet a wide range of consumer needs, both in terms of subject matter and content, execution. Therefore, it is quite predictable that the organizers of the “commercial” educational platform are business entities. At the same time, collaboration with universities is a far from obvious solution to achieving a massive offer of educational services on such a platform. Maybe, it is so due to the main target audience – the companies’ staff, and only secondarily – the other consumers. Corporate orientation may lead to attention to the “fashionable” (for various reasons, not only because of the effectiveness of the methods and the product being created) creators of educational products that exist outside the academic community. It is enough to see who are the main speakers on the formation of so-called soft skills, digital skills, hard skills: Nathan Fehr – professor of strategy at INSEAD business school, Jörg Missing – professor of INSEAD, lecturer of the discipline “Creating a unique client experience”, Simon Seibrands – consultant Leadership Development, Coach of the Kets de Vries Institute (KDVI), Evgeny Dotsenko – Director of R&D of the Training Institute – ARB Pro Group. As a result, “commercial” digital educational platforms imply the offer of products from those who know in what form, based

on what educational technologies (the so-called “EduTech”), and with a focus on what result it is necessary to interact with persons involved in specific business processes.

The right to receive an education is recognized in Russia as a constitutional value, defining the social mission of the state as creating conditions for the accessibility of education. We believe that it is the “state” model that is preferable in the domestic educational system. However, at the moment, only the platform “Open Education” created by the Association “National Platform for Open Education” could be called “state model” in the field of higher education. The educational platform was initiated by a leading university: Moscow State University. M. V. Lomonosov, SPbPU, SPbSU, NUST MISIS, NRU HSE, MIPT, UrFU, and ITMO University. The public entity is not the direct creator of the platform but realized his interest in its appearance in the “support” format (this is how the background of the platform is determined in the methodological recommendations on the use of online courses hosted on “Open Education”), as well as through state universities, the founder of which is (Methodical recommendations: 3). The goal of “Open Education” is the emergence of “a new element of the higher education system in Russia, which will help increase the availability and quality of education”. This mission correlates with the principles of state policy in the field of education, presented in paras. 2, 7, 8 art. 3 of the Federal Statute of December 29, 2012, No. 273-FZ “On Education in the Russian Federation” (hereinafter – the Statute on Education): “2) ensuring the right of every person to education, the inadmissibility of discrimination in the field of education; 7) the freedom to choose education according to the inclinations and needs of a person, creating conditions for the self-realization of each person, the free development of his abilities; 8) ensuring the right to education per the needs of the individual, the adaptability of the education system to the level of training, developmental characteristics, abilities and interests of a person”.

The effective achievement of public education goals cannot be achieved directive “in manual mode”, the Ministry of Science and

Higher Education cannot require the founders of the platform and other state universities to systematically prepare a certain number of on-line courses at a specific time. A different way of encouraging universities to develop courses specifically for this platform is needed. Open Education declares three unified principles for the online courses presented at it: the best-specialized courses of the best professors; quality standards; organization of assessment procedures. However, the positions presented are bonuses only for consumers who could choose online courses in a competitive environment of several educational platforms. In this situation, if the online course is equal to the academic course of the corresponding curriculum, then it has an advantage.

The national platform “Open Education” is characterized by the functioning of interconnected platform services: (a) the ability to search for courses on topics with a filter for a specific university (selection of proposals from the best), (b) a well-thought-out structure of courses (combining videos with presentations, materials for self-study, current issues and final certification as a guarantee of high-quality development), (c) a system of identification of the applicant (guarantees of the fairness of obtaining a certificate). As noted on the platform’s website, in comparison with courses on other online learning platforms (1) all courses are developed under the requirements of federal state educational standards; (2) all courses meet the requirements for learning outcomes of educational programs implemented in universities; (3) emphasis is placed on the effectiveness and quality of online courses, as well as procedures for assessing learning outcomes. Of the above, the first two features stand out – compliance with educational standards and requirements for learning outcomes for higher education programs. This correlation can stimulate universities to develop online courses since their use makes it possible to reallocate their resources and increase the efficiency of their activities. A multi-effect arises – the achievement of several tasks using the created courses: the use of our online courses instead of classical disciplines or as an addition to them, as well as the external transfer of knowledge for universities that

do not have a sufficient base of courses, but strive to optimize the processes of implementing their programs. Some of the parameters of such optimization are given in the material “Analysis of the needs of universities and experience in the inclusion of open online courses in curricula” which is presented on the “Open Education”: (a) reduction of financial costs for teaching; (b) filling the shortage of teachers in narrow-profile disciplines; (c) mastering and applying new teaching methods.

At the same time, for the intensity of the transfer of online courses, an important nuance is the payment, based on a standard network agreement concluded between two universities: a developer and a consumer. The digital platform provides incentives for universities to prepare online courses hosted on the platform – income directly depends on the array of in-demand online courses. The founding universities of the national platform, defending their commercial interest, decided that the university can implement an online course in its educational program by concluding a network agreement with the university that developed the course. We know that in a pandemic, the Open Education platform provided online courses free of charge, and this decision was made jointly with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Press Release “Leading universities have opened free access to online courses for students”). The use of the network contract model makes one think about the correspondence of the decision to the understanding of the network form of the implementation of educational programs and the current legal regulations (See: the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia N 882 of May 8, 2020 “On the organization and implementation of educational activities in the network form of implementation of educational programs” (together with the “Procedure for the organization and implementation of educational activities in the network form of implementation of educational programs”, art. 15. Participating organizations are not entitled to charge students for the implementation of a part of the network educational program and (or) the provision of resources for its implementation). We believe that the financial interest

of a university-developer of an online course should be protected within the framework of simpler structures – a contract for the provision of services for a fee, and the use of a network contract needs additional justification.

The current content of the Open Education convincingly demonstrates the process of singling out a group of universities (which were its founders), systematically replenishing the base of online courses. The digital educational platform is becoming a catalyst for the processes of complication of the national structure of higher education organizations, according to which some universities are “suppliers” of high-quality educational products that other universities implement in their educational programs. In parallel, there is a branch of the selected vector of development – virtual academic mobility of students who choose an online course from a leading university instead of the disciplines of their educational program, followed by the result of development. This trend is another incentive given by the public subject of interest of universities in the creation of online courses within the framework of “Open Education” – competition for the reputation obtained as a result of replacing courses in other programs, as well as for possible funding within the framework of federal projects.

On the one hand, it seems that the use of online courses presented on the “Open Education” platform fits into the content of the concept of education in the sense that is enshrined in the provisions of art. 2 of the Statute on Education: “a single purposeful process of upbringing and education, which is a socially significant benefit and carried out in the interests of the individual, family, society and the state, as well as a set of acquired knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience and competence of a certain volume and complexity for intellectual, spiritual, moral, creative, physical and (or) professional development of a person, to meet his educational needs and interests”. On the other hand, higher education is realized at the levels presented in the provisions of art. 10 of the Statute on Education (bachelor, master, specialty), this means that online courses should also be “tied” to the corresponding level of higher education, they should support the formation of relevant com-



petencies. We can assume the possibility of the existence of “free” online courses, suitable for any educational programs of higher education, however, this requires deep methodological study. Therefore, the value of online courses can be recognized to a greater or lesser extent in the acquisition of higher education, provided that the results of such courses are read in a specific program. Nevertheless, the content of education is doomed to go beyond the strict limits of educational programs, with a competence-oriented setting of higher education, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities can be carried out using a wider range of educational products (so-called “non-formal education”) that meet the needs of the labor market. As a consequence, the emergence of “Open Education” is seen as a timely element of public education policy, not limited only to higher education programs at universities (which thereby stimulate the development of local procedures for recognizing online courses as academic disciplines), but also to include an interest in recruiting and the development of competencies outside the framework of educational programs. This educational platform also offers anyone who wants an initial acquaintance with the professions of the present and the near future (career guidance). But having made the first step, the public subject sooner or later must decide on an “educational reformation” to revise the rigid system “standard-curriculum-program of discipline, practice”. The variability of academic disciplines allowed in the current educational standards, which implies the student’s right to choose educational courses, is insufficient. A simple expansion of variability is threatening to develop into a system of a free set of academic disciplines, which fundamentally contradicts our domestic educational system, built on the principle of consistency and the teaching method “from a common to the private”. Weighted decisions are needed about the admissibility of replacement, compliance criteria, the amount of variability, and some others. Educational platforms will be needed as tools for the implementation of ready-made methodological solutions.

The second model, “commercial” digital educational platforms, is created not by academic institutions of higher education (and, as

it seems to us, even with the principled position of not representing universities in such projects), but by companies from different sectors of the economy. The latter, as we noted earlier, considers the result for the consumer from at least three points of view: (1) the development of their human corporate capital, (2) the impact on the transformation of the professional field on a national scale according to their perception, and (3) as a way of making a profit. At the same time, the forms of functioning of educational platforms may differ. “SberUniversity” is one of the most successful examples. The platform was created by the corporate university of the same name, which has the status of an organization that implements additional professional educational programs (lifelong education) (ANO DPO “Sberbank Corporate University”). The educational partners of “SberUniversity” for several programs are an international business school, as well as companies from their eco-environment: “Access to lectures by teachers from INSEAD and SberUniversity 24/7 in combination with live communication with experts from companies in the Sberbank ecosystem. Remotely, at a convenient time for you” (program “Digital transformation is a new reality”). The flexibility of designing programs allows us to offer thematic diversity, combined for “open programs” (available to any audience, not excluding employees of the “Sberbank” ecosystem companies) by three filters: soft skills, digital skills, hard skills. These filters on the platform are not decrypted and their content remains undefined for users: at the moment the first two do not have fixed courses, hard skills include only “Strategic asset and liability management”, the rest of the programs are displayed when the “All” filter is selected. The distribution by filters seems to be expected in the future. We can assume that the use of filters on the platform has at least two goals. On the one hand, new “skills”, compliance with the modern agenda, the development of which will benefit the listener. For what are these “skills”, and what is the benefit of mastering the program – making decisions only for each consumer. True, it remains questionable whether the skills related to the triad of the result of higher education programs: knowledge and

competence. On the other hand, thanks to the “skills” filters, the “SberUniversity” influences the formation in the professional community (and, therefore, in different spheres of the economy) its vision of a newfangled phenomenon. Having indicated, for example, “hard skills” for the open program “Strategic management of assets and liabilities”, the consequence is to fill this type of “skills” with meaning. In comparison, “corporate programs” designed for employees of organizations on the platform are not marked with the listed filters, are purposefully focused on the development and education of the personnel of the ecosystem companies.

Online courses are deliberately not followed with the status of additional educational programs and are distributed according to two previous filters: soft skills, digital skills. The filling of both filters on the platform is uneven: seven courses for the first, two courses marked “digital”. For distance programs, as well as online courses, a separate service has been created to provide and support the learning process “Sberbank’s Virtual School”. The platform also presents a knowledge bank as a separate service, divided into the author’s short thematic business articles; materials for teaching about the professional skills of the future; the online store of selected business publications.

“SberUniversity”, in general, corresponds to our understanding of the digital platform as a set of services and processes associated with their use by consumers. Firstly, there is a set of services for the distance educational programs, support of full-time programs, mastering the presented online courses, and using the knowledge bank. Secondly, services are built on the direct and indirect interaction of subjects within the framework of the necessary processes. The presence of a digital platform for the activities of “SberUniversity” is secondary. The company was looking for the most convenient form for all involved subjects (at the beginning – its employees, later – any consumers) and a flexible form of offering educational products in conditions of objective territorial disunity. The result was quite predictable – a digital platform available 24/7/365 to any external customers, as well as to employees of their eco-environment, allows the user to constantly individualize the

educational trajectory (for self-development, lifelong education) with the help of additional professional education and online courses. The consumer demand we noted earlier for the flexibility of modern higher education means the use of not only courses with the “discipline of higher education” filter, which can later be credited in the learning process. Beyond the content rigor of higher education programs, there is sufficient space for educational products that a graduate will need. And here the omnipotence of “commercial” educational platforms, using the example of “SberUniversity”, is unlikely to be challenged by academic universities and there are several reasons for this, but the main two are financial resources and the absence of a dictate of educational standards.

“Lectorium”, like “SberUniversity”, represents a group of “commercial” educational platforms, but it has several significant differences. Firstly, the project includes several directions, only one of which is “an educational platform for hosting massive open online courses (MOOCs)”. Other main forms of activity: digital publishing (creating online courses for various educational platforms, including our own platform), media library (video archive of educational materials in Russian, more than 6,000 lectures have been published in the public domain), an educational center (training for producers and developers online courses), Eduardo (providing anyone with a platform to create and launch an online course). Thus, the “Lectorium” as an educational platform represents both an available online set of services, as well as offered offline services (digital publishing) or combining the first and second forms (educational center). Secondly, the strategy of placing online courses demonstrates a combination of approaches of other platforms to the repayment of content: they have paid access, similar to “SberUniversity”, or paid certification, as in “Open Education”. Thirdly, online courses are divided according to user filters “school-children”, “specialists”, “enrollees”, “parents”. The subject approach seems to be the correct solution when the understandable terminology “student”, “parent” is used. We have doubts about the other two filters used. The question remains, by what criteria should a user classify

himself as an “enrollee” or “specialist”. Having chosen the first, a list of courses is offered may be in interest to a wide range of people, without reference to the status of educational programs. After analyzing the set of courses for “specialists”, we could say that the platform understands them, first of all, as the audience of students in higher education programs. Some courses (for example, “Genius. Giftedness. Mediocrity”) could be considered as the development of any user of the very “skills” that we previously cited concerning “SberUniversity”. But then there is no formulated utilitarian result for persons with higher education – why this course is useful for a “specialist”, and who is this ‘specialist’ in need. Fourthly, the “advanced training” filter does not mean offering additional educational programs designed in the format of an online course. In this version, the platform presents content that seems to be a possible beginning (and only a starting point, no more) for acquiring additional specialization – the first knowledge, skill, or competence within the framework of a new profession.

The Strategy for Digital Transformation of the Science Industry and Higher Education, promulgated by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, identifies two main problems of entering the market for “digital educational services” like “SberUniversity”. The first one is the difficulty for companies that are not part of this ecosystem and do not have access to the capital that develops and sells content. All speakers have already been “disassembled” and work for large digital platforms. It seems that in this case, “digital educational services” are hostage to their strategy to attract high-profile external speakers, not from the academic environment, whose market is objectively limited. The second problem is the lack of a standard for the provision of educational services on such digital platforms, as a result of which the content of the programs or courses of the same name may differ significantly.

The quality of education and educational services are the most difficult concepts in the field of higher education. Even the legislator did not dare to define quality, in the Statute on Education quality is understood as the fulfillment of a set of mandatory requirements for a

university and its educational program, determined by the criteria of state accreditation and licensing federal state educational standards. This does not help in assessing the quality of online courses of various “manufacturers”. How much an electronic product of one “commercial” platform is better than a thematically identical course of a similar platform, and how qualitatively both of these differ in one direction or another from the course of an academic organization on a “state” platform – the equation with many unknowns. Quality in the sense of usefulness concerning online courses and additional educational programs should be lapidary defined as the ability to immediately use what was lawfully heard in practice in one’s interest (professional, interpersonal, social).

Noteworthy is the use of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in the said Strategy concerning “SberUniversity” and similar projects at the same time by two terms as synonyms: “digital educational services” and “digital platforms”. According to GOST R 52653–2006 “Information and communication technologies in education”, an electronic educational resource (EER) is an educational resource presented in digital form and including a structure, subject content, and metadata about them (an electronic educational resource may include data, information, the software necessary for its use in the learning process). The standard was adopted in 2007 and could not operate in terms of a digital platform and digital educational service. However, the definition of an e-learning resource is similar to the content of an online course. The latter in para. 3 of the Decree on the state information system “Modern digital educational environment” is considered as a training course implemented using exclusively e-learning, distance educational technologies posted on the official websites of educational organizations, educational platforms, access to which is provided through information and telecommunications network Internet, and aimed at ensuring the achievement of certain learning outcomes by students. To unify terminology, an electronic educational resource should be recognized as identical to an online course and, therefore, is an educational service implemented on a digi-

tal educational platform in the interests of consumers (users).

The national project “Education” involves the implementation of such a federal project as “New Opportunities for Everyone”, which is the normative basis for the emergence of a digital platform for lifelong education, combining vocational training and additional education. According to the project passport, together with the platform, a set of services should be created that provide navigation and support to citizens when choosing educational programs and organizations that carry out educational activities, innovative forms of learning in offline and online formats. The main target audience of the platform is working citizens, however, the platform and its services can be used by any person (the Passport of the Federal Project “New Opportunities for Everyone”: 20). At the second stage of the implementation of the federal project (2021–2024), it is planned on an ongoing basis to stimulate universities to participate in the formation of the content of the educational platform through a system of grant support (the Passport of the Federal Project “New Opportunities for Everyone”: 21). This incentive method should allow a wide range of Russian universities to get involved in the process of creating digital educational products. In comparison with the emerging group of leading universities of “Open Education”, concerning lifelong education, other “players” may appear who previously implemented an array of demanded additional educational programs and (or) professional training programs offline (for example, corporate universities). The characteristics listed in the project passport speak of the concept of a digital platform close to “Open Education” – the placement of online courses of a certain educational policy, a unified structure, and a single quality standard.

A systematic approach to the digital transformation of education should undoubtedly take into account the platform solutions that have taken place as tools that create new models of interaction between subjects of educational activity. However, public policy has radically changed with the adoption and implementation of the national projects “Education” and “Digital Economy” in the direction of expanding

the actors of digital online services and their audience. A significant milestone is the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of November 16, 2020, No. 1836 “On the state information system ”Modern digital educational environment”, aimed at creating a state information resource that accumulates both information (data) and processing technologies for use by interested subjects in the field of education. This portal is not positioned as a digital educational platform either institutionally or at the regulatory level – it is a management solution for the consolidation of online courses of various platforms into a single register and access to them on a “one-stop” basis. To some extent, this can also be called the consolidation of public resources of state universities (Belov, Linskaya, Kropachev, 2020: 151–163; Vasiliev, Diveeva, Dmitrikova, Kashaeva, Sheveleva, 2020: 877–902). Along with this, the emergence of the project will mark an attempt to “socialize” the accumulated results to increase their general availability and develop a new quality standard. For example, an automated psychometric analytics service has been launched on the “Modern Digital Educational Environment” portal. The service analyzes the online course in four main areas: content difficulties, changes in student readiness, student interaction with content, analysis of evaluation tools; the analytical report that the course developer receives includes recommendations for its modernization to improve the quality of the online course. Separate services are employers’ access, with the consent of the student of the online course, to the information of his digital individual portfolio and the assessment of the online course. The portal does not offer its online courses or, moreover, educational programs implemented in the form of e-learning or using distance learning technologies. Nevertheless, new, in comparison with “Open Education”, services have been introduced to improve practice orientation, including automatically generated analytics to enhance the interaction of platform subjects. Such decisions act as new incentives on the part of a public entity to involve digital educational platforms and universities-rightsholders in the functioning of the portal. How effective they will be – it will

be possible to say in a few years, when the feedback of the operation of the new structure from the “suppliers” of educational content appears.

Another vector of modern platform reality and a factor that will influence future competition in digital education is the creation of their educational platforms by leading universities. For example, the “Online Education Platform of St. Petersburg State University” or “Online Education Platform at the Higher School of Economics”. The strategies of universities for placing online courses on such platforms are, in principle, identical. On the one hand, providing its students with content that meets state standards: direction or areas of training, learning outcomes (competencies, according to the standard), determination of labor intensity in credit units. This approach to course design is similar to “Open Education”, where an online course is viewed as the equivalent of a discipline in the curriculum. Whether the course will be implemented as part of the curriculum of the educational program or chosen by the student for credit. Another mission of the course may exist, but it will be secondary to the filling of the educational process with formalized elements. On the other hand, the emergence of their digital educational platforms is a natural desire of universities to exclude an intermediary in the face of an external platform (calling itself an operator in the case of “Open Education”), which, moreover, assumes the only technical responsibility in terms of content and does not bear any responsibility for the content (art. 6.2 the Open Education User Agreement). The emergence of an additional source of extra-budgetary funds through the issuance of certificates for online courses is also an important incentive for the universities. However, this raises two main problems. Firstly, if the online course is included in the curriculum of the university, then payment for the certificate of development can be provided only for educational programs for which only places with payment of tuition fees are provided. Accordingly, the obligation to pay will be included in the contract for educational services as a student’s obligation. For students of a budgetary form, such a requirement would

be a violation of the constitutional principle of obtaining free higher education on a competitive basis. Secondly, university online course platforms need to go beyond the corporate offering by offering content for any learner. In addition, there is a regulatory guarantee – educational institutions of higher education, following the existing regulations, are required to provide procedures for offsetting the results of mastering external online courses (see the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia of August 23, 2017 No. 816 “On approval of the Procedure for the use of e-learning, distance learning technologies by organizations carrying out educational activities in the implementation of educational programs”). Consequently, universities that have (1) a reputation (academic rating and the demand for a diploma in the labor market), (2) selection of personnel (academic professors and leading practitioners), (3) resources for non-trivial topics and course content (unique issues, interdisciplinary teams), as well as (4) those who can provide a systematic production of courses, can receive additional income.

### Conclusion

Digital educational platforms present in the educational environment are identified as a set of online courses and services to support their development. Digital platforms are a relatively new information educational technology, which is associated with development prospects in the field of education, including in matters of individualization of educational trajectories; continuity of education; the availability of the best educational products. Further development of digital platforms in education follows from the tasks set in the national projects “Education” and “Digital Economy”. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation of November 16, 2020, No. 1836 “On the state information system ”Modern digital educational environment” without removing the questions that have arisen gives rise to the problem of the relationship between digital educational platforms and the state information portal, including the distribution of functions and responsibilities of participants in educational relations.

An analysis of the legal regulation of existing digital educational platforms indicates the absence of special regulation and the “introduction” of new technologies into the current educational legislation. Nevertheless, the differences between the conditionally “state” and “commercial” digital platforms are evidently. Presumably, their coexistence becomes competitive in the field of additional education, in which the “commercial” digital platforms have a significant advantage.

The expansion of the scope of digital platforms will inevitably affect the development of classical higher education (bachelor, master, specialty), including the stratification of universities into “producers” and “consumers” of online courses, which in turn will require changes in state policy in the field standardization of higher education and increasing the independence of universities in the formation of a model of the educational process.

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