

Russian Education at the Threshold of a New Stage of Evolution

(Foreword to a set of publications)

In 2016, the Center for Strategic Development (CSD) embarked upon designing the Strategy for Socioeconomic Development of Russia up to 2024 with an outlook to 2035 under the auspices of Alexei Kudrin, as instructed by the President of the Russian Federation. The project involved setting up working parties on various domains including education. Yaroslav Kuzminov was assigned to supervise the CSD Council's Working Party on Education and Isak Froumin became its coordinator.

All of the working parties were asked to elaborate on how their sectors could contribute more to economic growth and social development instead of trying to solve routine internal problems.

This focus became a major challenge for the Working Party on Education. Strategic development in this domain has lately sought to solve the problems that have accumulated. The new formulation necessitated a serious discussion on the possible contribution that education can make to economic growth and social transformations and on the system development mechanisms.

The key areas of socioeconomic growth in which the contribution of education may become decisive include the following:

- Economic development through increasing labor productivity
- Technology modernization
- Social stability and improvement of living conditions
- The country's standing in global rankings

Without downplaying the importance of drawing from global best practices, we nevertheless believe that the specific Russian context requires finding unique solutions, in particular, concerning the question on how to “enrich” the contribution of education.

Indeed, Russia has a huge educational potential, mostly inherited from the Soviet Union. The achievements made in education development in 2000–2017 facilitate the use of this sector as a driver of economic growth. According to The Global Human Capital Report 2017 issued by the World Economic Forum in September 2017¹, Rus-

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-human-capital-report-2017>

sia is ranked 4th in the world on the human capital “capacity” sub-index (which is largely measured through formal education attainment rates). At the same time, the country ranks as low as 42nd on the human capital “know-how” sub-index (capturing real-life application of skills at workplace). Particularly illustrative is the ranking of 89th position on the “availability of skilled employees” indicator.

That is to say, the existing educational potential has not been capitalized on enough or involved fully in economic growth.

It must also be acknowledged that Russia, while boasting one of the highest proportions of engineering graduates, is not leading the way in technology or high-tech manufacturing.

While providing quite a high level of accessibility, the education system has not become an effective mechanism for social mobility, which creates risks not only for groups with low socioeconomic status but also for the social stability of society as a whole.

From the perspective of global standing and competition, the Russian education system is becoming less powerful, yet it could contribute much more to the spread of Russian culture and in attracting talent from the international field.

For this reason, the transition to the new role of education in the country’s development will require considerable changes to the existing education system, including in areas that appear to be quite well-off today. This is the only way to turn expenditure on education into high-yield investment in the future instead of just approaching it as a social obligation.

In order to analyze the education system’s potential for solving socioeconomic development problems, the CSD’s Working Party on Education explored existing trends as well as looking into possible effects of various development scenarios.

This issue of *Voprosy obrazovaniya / Educational Studies Moscow* launches a series of articles presenting the findings of this research, which form the basis for further discussion on the future of Russian education and strategic development in this field.

*The Center for Strategic
Development’s Working Party
on Education*