

\$500M Olympics University Opens in Sochi

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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SOCHI — The Russian International Olympic University, or RIOU, opened with great fanfare on Monday in Sochi, the host city for next year's Winter Games.

It is the first university established in conjunction with the International Olympic Committee and aims to provide former athletes with education to help them build a career after their competitive days are over. Rector Lev Belousov has lofty ambitions, comparing the new institution to Harvard and Chicago universities.

"We had a very tough task. We wanted to go straight into the leading positions," he said. "It doesn't mean immediately becoming Harvard, but we have every chance to become like Harvard."

RIOU is especially focused on helping ex-athletes move into jobs running world sports, a particular goal of the Russian government. Degrees are joint diplomas with Britain's

Coventry University, whose sports management courses are ranked among the world's best.

"Our main goal is to become not only more professional but also to help the whole preparation of sportsmen and athletes in the Russian Federation," double Olympic swimming champion and RIOU student Denis Pankratov said.

The institution was built at a cost of \$500 million by Interros, a private investment company chaired by metals tycoon Vladimir Potanin which is also providing scholarships for individual students. Interros also built other Olympic facilities including the Rosa Khutor ski resort that will be used for competition next February.

The campus opened with a show of modern dance, patriotic pop music and Cuban dance anthems in its courtyard, despite pouring rain.

Some of the first intake of 27 students was also introduced, including ex-athletes and staff of national Olympic committees.

The university has students from 14 countries, announcers at the ceremony said, including Rwanda, South Korea and Brazil. Many will be studying for a so-called MSA, a master's degree in sports administration that costs \$15,000 per year. It is housed in a new campus building that ranks among the highest in the city, but is still unfinished in places.

President Vladimir Putin is expected to attend festivities later.

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