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Higher School of Economics Encouraging Students to Join Army With Misleading Offers, Lawyers Say

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An ROTC class at the Higher School of Economics. **Dmitry Serebryakov / TASS**

The Higher School of Economics, one of Russia's leading universities, confirmed reports that it is encouraging students to enlist in the military, even as legal experts warned that the recruitment campaign relies on deceptive tactics.

The academic news outlet T-Invariant reported last month that students at several Russian universities were promised enlistment bonuses of 5.2 million rubles ($68,600) for unique one-year military contracts with newly formed drone units that operate away from the front lines in Ukraine.

However, Artyom Klyga, a lawyer at the Movement for Conscientious Objectors, an NGO helping Russians legally avoid military service, said Friday that the head of HSE's military registration office had informed him that students are being offered service under "standard military contracts."

Klyga said that all military contracts are technically indefinite under President Vladimir Putin's September 2022 "partial" mobilization decree, which remains in effect despite authorities earlier suggesting that the mobilization campaign had ended after around 300,000 reservists were called to duty.

He called HSE's claim that students who enlist would be placed specifically in drone units for just one year of service "false."

"In reality, you could find yourself on the front lines, including as a member of an assault unit," Klyga wrote in a post on Telegram. "HSE would not be able to help you in that case."

T-Invariant reported that similarly misleading recruitment campaigns were launched at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, the Siberian Federal University and the Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University.

Once praised for its high levels of academic freedom, HSE has come under increasing Kremlin control in recent years. The university has stifled dissent, allocated thousands of state-subsidized places to the children of war veterans and raised money for military drones.

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