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The creation of a new teaching system, including shorter courses and making English language studies a requisite for obtaining a university degree, will be among the principal changes proposed to begin with the 2016-2017 school year, the state dailies Granma and Juventud Rebelde said.

Higher Education Minister Rodolfo Alarcon said “this new system, to be submitted for government approval,” will guarantee that teaching provides a wide educational background, followed later by specialization, and finally by the individual self-improvement of every professional “according to the position he or she occupies,” a standard that up to now has applied only to medical sciences.

A future category of “Non-University Higher Education” is also awaiting approval, as a way to “deal with the insufficient use made of qualified members of the workforce.”

The Cuban minister also said courses will be cut from five years to four in the “immense majority” of specialties starting with the next school year, though it will be a “gradual process, with the introduction of new programs, studies and strictness.”

He said that learning English will be an “indispensable” requisite” for obtaining a university degree, but noted that the measure won’t become generalized for a few years, “because the conditions must be created for its application.”

Another of the transformations to be applied in the next school year will be the possibility to take, without an entrance exam, “Courses by Meetings,” which will not require continuous attendance at classes, as well as “Education at a Distance.”

Universal free education is one of the banner achievements of the Cuban Revolution, though for several years the shortage of teachers and the low quality of classes have been causes for concern on the island.

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