

Republic of the Philippines
House of Representatives
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **9220**

Introduced by Hon. Florabel Co Yatco



EXPLANATORY NOTE

ABOT-KAYANG PANGARAP BILL

As a NANAY, the undersigned believes that education should never be a privilege only for those who can afford to stop working. For many Filipino families, learning and earning happen at the same time.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the country's labor force participation rate was recorded at 64.9% as of October 2023, reflecting millions of Filipinos who are part of the workforce, many of whom are young workers striving to upgrade their skills while employed.¹ Meanwhile, the 2022 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) reported that 18.9 million Filipinos aged 10 to 64 are functionally illiterate, demonstrating significant gaps in lifelong learning and skills development.²

On the global front, the World Economic Forum estimates that 44% of workers' core skills are expected to change within five (5) years, highlighting the urgent need for accessible reskilling and upskilling mechanisms.³ These realities call for a more flexible, quality-assured, and work-aligned education system that allows Filipinos to learn without sacrificing income and employment.

The proposed "*Abot-Kayang Pangarap Act*" institutionalizes the recognition, quality assurance, stackability, and portability of microcredentials and short courses. It strengthens workforce development while remaining consistent with Republic Act No. 7722, otherwise known as the "Higher Education Act of 1994," and other pertinent education and labor laws.

This measure ensures that education remains within reach.. So that a working Nanay, a breadwinner, or an employed student does not have to choose between feeding the family today and building a better future tomorrow. By recognizing microcredentials as legitimate components of our national education and training system, we empower Filipinos to pursue their pangarap step by step, skill by skill.

Para sa bawat Nanay, tatay, ate, kuya, o ang mgra breadwinner na kumakayod para sa kanilay pamilya, kasabay ang pag-abot ng kanilang pangarap na makatapos ng pag-aaral, In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this measure is earnestly sought.


HON. FLORABEL CO YATCO
Representative
NANAY Partylist

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority, *Labor Force Survey: October 2023*, released December 2023.

² Philippine Statistics Authority, *2022 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS)*, released 2023.

³ World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs Report 2023* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2023).

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
H.B. No. **9220**

Introduced by Hon. Florabel Co Yatco

AN ACT INSTITUTIONALIZING THE RECOGNITION, QUALITY ASSURANCE, STACKABILITY, AND PORTABILITY OF MICROCREDENTIALS AND SHORT COURSES, STRENGTHENING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDING FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROTECTION FOR EMPLOYED STUDENTS, AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. Title. — This Act shall be known as the “Abot-Kayang Pangarap Act.”

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. — It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote lifelong learning, inclusive human capital development, and workforce resilience in response to technological change, evolving labor market demands, and national development priorities.

The State recognizes that education and employment increasingly occur simultaneously and that many learners are employed, self-employed, or engaged in livelihood activities. Education policy must therefore enable access to quality learning that is practical, flexible, and financially attainable, without requiring withdrawal from employment, loss of income, or undue economic burden.

Toward this end, the State shall recognize microcredentials and short courses as legitimate components of the national education and training system, ensure their quality, stackability, and portability, and align them with workforce development strategies, employment policies, and inclusive economic growth, so that opportunities for learning and skills development remain within reach and accessible for all.

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. — For purposes of this Act, the following terms are hereby defined:

- (a) Microcredentials refer to competency-based, outcomes-focused certifications of learning attesting to specific, measurable, and verifiable competencies acquired over a short duration and assessed against defined academic, professional, or industry standards;
- (b) Short Courses refer to structured learning programs of limited duration which may be modular, stackable, or standalone, delivered through face-to-face, online, blended, hybrid, or work-based modalities;
- (c) Employed Students refer to learners engaged in wage employment, contractual work, freelance work, self-employment, informal work, or livelihood activities while enrolled in education or training;
- (d) Stackability refers to the structured accumulation and sequencing of microcredentials or short courses toward academic credit, diplomas, degrees, or national qualifications;

- (e) Portability refers to the recognition and transferability of microcredentials across institutions, sectors, employers, and jurisdictions;
- (f) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the formal assessment and recognition of competencies acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning, including work experience, industry practice, or community-based learning;
- (g) Credit Equivalency refers to the conversion of demonstrated learning outcomes into academic or training credits under an outcomes-based framework;
- (h) Accredited Provider refers to an institution, organization, or entity duly authorized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), or the Department of Education (DepEd) to offer microcredentials or short courses under this Act;
- (i) Learning Outcomes refer to clear, measurable, and verifiable statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand, and be able to demonstrate upon completion of a microcredential, short course, or academic unit, expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, values, or competencies, and assessed through appropriate and valid evaluation methods. They shall serve as the primary basis for curriculum design, instructional delivery, assessment, credit equivalency, Recognition of Prior Learning, and quality assurance under this Act, regardless of mode of learning or duration;
- (j) Competency Standards refer to formally established benchmarks that define the knowledge, skills, abilities, and professional attributes required to perform effectively in a specific occupation, discipline, or functional area, including the criteria for acceptable performance and the context in which such performance is expected to be demonstrated;
- (k) Notional Learning Hours refer to the estimated total amount of time that an average learner is expected to spend to achieve the defined learning outcomes of a microcredential, short course, or academic unit, including but not limited to time spent on direct instruction, guided learning activities, independent study, practical or work-based learning, assessment, and completion of required outputs, regardless of mode of delivery; and
- (l) Outcomes-Based Credit Framework refers to a system for assigning, recognizing, and transferring academic or training credits based primarily on demonstrated learning outcomes and verified competencies achieved by a learner, rather than on instructional contact hours or physical seat time alone.

SEC 4. Legal Recognition of Microcredentials and Short Courses. — Microcredentials and short courses are hereby recognized as lawful, legitimate, and integral components of the Philippine education and training ecosystem. Such credentials shall complement, and not replace, formal undergraduate, graduate, diploma, and certification programs and shall serve as flexible entry points, exit points, or progression pathways within the education system.

No educational institution, employer, or government agency shall deny consideration of duly accredited microcredentials solely on the basis of delivery mode or duration, subject to compliance with quality assurance standards under this Act.

SEC. 5. National Quality Assurance and Credential Framework. — There is hereby established a National Microcredential and Short Course Quality Assurance and Credential Framework to ensure credibility, comparability, integrity, and public trust in microcredentials and short courses.

The Framework shall govern accreditation standards, learning outcomes formulation, assessment methodologies, instructional design, faculty or trainer qualifications, learner support mechanisms, and articulation across education and training sectors. CHED, TESDA, and DepEd shall exercise regulatory authority within their respective mandates and harmonize standards and procedures consistent with the inter-agency coordination mechanism established under this Act.

SEC. 6. Stackability and Portability to Formal Education Programs. — Accredited microcredentials and short courses may be stacked and credited toward formal education programs, subject to the standards and rules promulgated by CHED under this Act. Higher education institutions shall publish transparent policies on credit conversion, accumulation limits, validity periods, and assessment requirements applicable to undergraduate and graduate programs.

No learner shall be required to repeat learning already demonstrated through accredited microcredentials or recognized prior learning, except where justified by licensure requirements, public safety considerations, or substantial academic grounds.

SEC. 7. Authority of CHED to Establish Credit Equivalency Rules. — The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is hereby authorized and mandated to promulgate rules, standards, and guidelines governing the credit equivalency, articulation, and academic recognition of microcredentials and short courses toward undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Such authority shall be exercised pursuant to Republic Act No. 7722, otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994 and guided by transparency, outcomes-based assessment, academic integrity, public interest, and international best practices.

Institutional autonomy shall be respected, provided that no institutional policy shall be inconsistent with minimum national standards issued by CHED.

SEC. 8. Credit Equivalency and Recognition of Prior Learning. — CHED shall establish an integrated framework for credit equivalency and Recognition of Prior Learning, covering microcredentials earned through academic, industry-based, work-based, or community-based learning. Industry-recognized credentials may be considered for academic credit only upon compliance with CHED standards and alignment with program learning outcomes. Industry recognition alone shall not automatically confer academic credit.

Assessment methods, credit valuation, validity periods, and documentation requirements shall be standardized and verifiable through official records and national systems.

SEC 9. Industry Co-Design and Workforce Alignment. — Microcredentials and short courses shall be aligned with national, regional, and sectoral workforce development strategies and labor market priorities. Industry participation shall be institutionalized in identifying skills needs, defining competency standards, validating learning outcomes, and periodically reviewing credentials for labor-market relevance, without diminishing academic authority.

Government workforce development, employment facilitation, reskilling, and upskilling programs shall recognize accredited microcredentials as valid training and employability credentials.

SEC. 10. Rights and Protections of Employed Students. — Employed students enrolled in accredited microcredentials or short courses shall be afforded reasonable protection, flexibility, and support in recognition of the dual demands of work and study.

No employed student shall be denied enrollment, continued participation, academic progression, or completion solely by reason of employment status or work schedule, provided academic requirements are met.

No employed student shall be dismissed, discriminated against, or otherwise prejudiced in employment solely by reason of enrollment, absent willful neglect of employment duties or violation of lawful company policies.

SEC. 11. Duties of Educational Institutions. — Educational institutions offering microcredentials and short courses shall adopt learner-centered and work-sensitive policies, including flexible pacing, asynchronous or blended delivery, reasonable assessment schedules, alternative assessment modes where appropriate, and access to academic advising and learner support services.

Such measures shall be implemented without compromising academic standards, learning outcomes, or credential integrity and shall be applied in a fair, transparent, and non-arbitrary manner.

SEC 12. Employer Accommodation and Labor Law Alignment. — Employers are encouraged to provide reasonable accommodation to employed students consistent with the Labor Code of the Philippines and related labor laws. Such accommodation may include flexible work arrangements, adjusted schedules, or training leave, subject to operational requirements and management prerogative exercised in good faith.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to diminish existing labor rights, employer prerogatives, or collective bargaining agreements.

SEC. 13. Complaints and Redress Mechanisms for Employed Students. — An employed student who believes that rights under this Act have been violated may file a complaint with the appropriate regulatory agency. Complaints involving educational institutions shall be filed with CHED or TESDA, as applicable; complaints involving employers shall be filed with the Department of Labor and Employment, without prejudice to remedies available under existing laws.

No employed student shall be subjected to retaliation, intimidation, or adverse action for filing a complaint or participating in proceedings under this Act.

SEC. 14. Incentives and Financial Assistance. — The State may provide scholarships, training vouchers, learning credits, grants, or targeted subsidies to support participation in accredited microcredentials and short courses, particularly for employed students and priority sectors.

Employers supporting employee upskilling through accredited microcredentials may be eligible for incentives, subject to existing tax, labor, and fiscal laws.

SEC. 15. Digital Credential Registry. — A centralized, secure, and interoperable Digital Credential Registry is hereby established to record all accredited microcredentials and short courses issued under this Act.

The Registry shall serve as the official national repository for credential verification, learner mobility, portability, transparency, and protection against credential fraud.

Only credentials duly recorded in the Registry shall be recognized for academic credit, employment, promotion, professional development, or workforce certification.

SEC. 16. Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism. — CHED, TESDA, DepEd, and the Department of Labor and Employment shall coordinate to ensure coherent implementation of this Act, harmonized standards, and alignment with workforce and

employment strategies. The agencies may issue joint circulars, advisories, or guidelines as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this Act.

SEC. 17. Appropriations. — The amounts necessary for the initial implementation of this Act shall be charged against the current appropriations of the Commission on Higher Education, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, the Department of Education, and the Department of Labor and Employment, as may be applicable.

Thereafter, such sums as may be necessary for the continued implementation of this Act shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act.

SEC 18. Implementing Rules and Regulations. — Within ninety (90) days from the effectivity of this Act, CHED, TESDA, DepEd, and the Department of Labor and Employment shall jointly promulgate the implementing rules and regulations.

SEC 19. Separability Clause .— If any provision of this Act is declared unconstitutional or invalid, the remaining provisions not affected thereby shall remain in full force and effect.

SEC 20. Repealing Clause. — All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed or modified accordingly.

SEC. 21. Effectively. – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette or in a newspaper of general circulation.