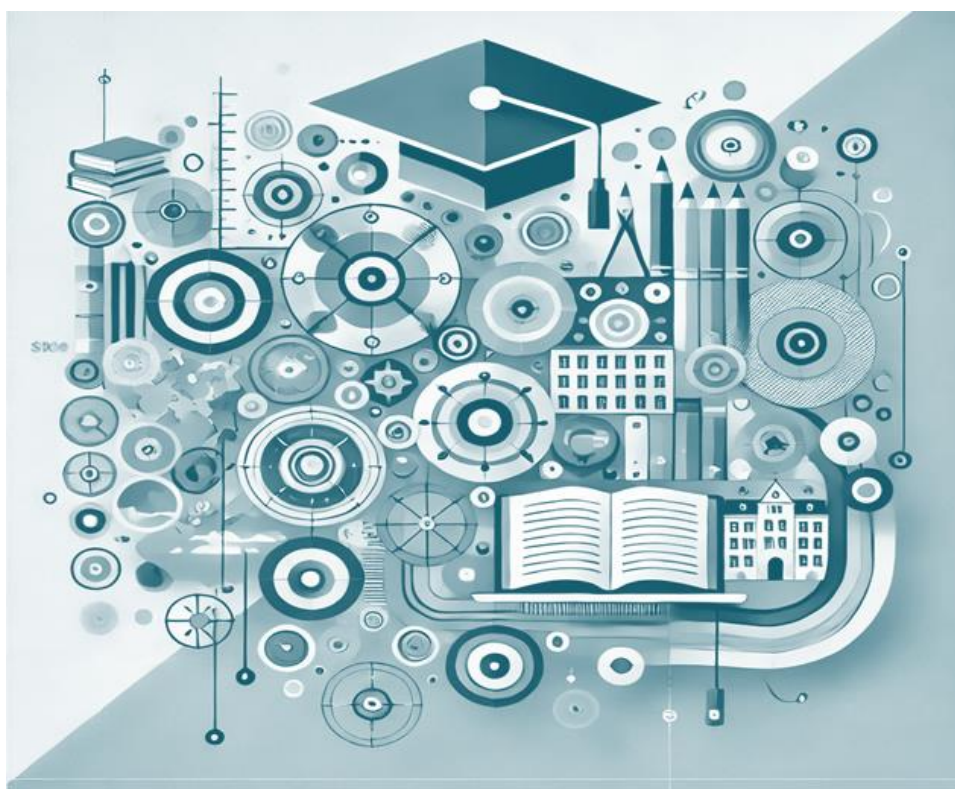




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Micro-Credentials in Skåne

Feasibility Study on Conditions,
Needs and Potential for an Improved
Skills Supply - Short Version



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A feasibility study on Micro-credentials

Skåne's regional development strategy *Öppna Skåne 2030* (Open Skåne 2030) emphasises the importance of effective skills provision and lifelong learning, ensuring that companies and organisations can develop and grow. Region Skåne has been granted funding from the European Social Fund to carry out a feasibility study of micro-credentials in Skåne - MIMIS. This feasibility study is part of Region Skåne's work with MIMIS. It has been carried out by Oxford Research in collaboration with Policy in Practice and Antrop.

The purpose of the feasibility study has been to create a clearer understanding of micro-credentials and their potential for strengthening skills provision, skills development, and lifelong learning. Based on the respondents in the project's answers, the purpose has simultaneously been to identify the needs, opportunities and conditions of various actors to develop micro-credentials in Skåne. Seventeen collaborative actors participated in the feasibility study - from the business sector, trade unions, municipalities, the non-profit sector, adult education and higher education. They participated by answering a survey, partaking in interviews, and contributing to a verification seminar where the preliminary results were verified. The respondents also participated in a workshop where we in a co-creative process designed four user cases, and how micro-credentials can contribute to their development. This document is a short version of the final report.

Micro credentials - a tool for lifelong learning

Micro-credentials are a tool to meet the needs of flexible skills development and lifelong learning, both at the individual and societal level. They help document competences that are often overlooked in formal education and training systems. Therefore, they can help employers match their skills requirements with the diverse competences of the workforce. Micro-credentials are a form of short training and quality assurance modules that are used for skills development, upskilling, and identifying skills gaps. Simultaneously, there are some challenges with micro-credentials. Most of them stem from the fact that micro-credentials are situated in the interface between the public and private spheres, and thus between informal and formal qualifications. It is important that the quality assurance processes for micro-credentials are fit for purpose and transparent.

Micro-credentials have received increased focus within the EU and national qualifications systems to promote comparability and recognition of qualifications. In 2022, the European Council adopted a European strategy on micro-credentials, and they are also included in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

Conditions for Micro-credentials in Skåne

The collaborative actors involved in the study have varying levels of knowledge about Micro-credentials. Most of the collaborative actors have no experience in developing or implementing micro-credentials. On one hand, a minority of them have goals or missions to work with micro-credentials. On the other hand, the actors work with related areas, but not in the realm of micro-credentials. For example, the actors work with quality assurance, skills development, digital training modules or similar.

The potential value of micro-credentials in making informal and non-formal competences visible and in increasing diversity and inclusion in the labour market is deemed to be high among the collaborative actors. However, whether the value of micro-credentials is realised depends on several factors, such as employers' commitment to implementing micro-credentials and micro-credentials becoming a credible and recognised system for quality assurance of informal and non-formal qualifications. While micro-credentials cannot solve broader societal problems such as gender inequality and gender-stereotyped career choices, they can be an important piece of the puzzle.

Micro-credentials potential in Skåne

There are major challenges in recruiting the right skills today and micro-credentials offer opportunities to meet different types of needs. It is clear from the collaborating actors that micro-credentials can potentially meet the needs of both individuals and employers by creating new opportunities for quality assurance of competences, flexible training and career development. For example, micro-credentials can contribute to increased employability and matching to labour market needs, making hidden skills and experiences visible, and contribute to skills development and preparedness for a changing labour market. Micro-credentials can also help employees to have their knowledge and experience documented and quality assured, in a more concrete way than through a traditional CV. Furthermore, micro-credentials can offer in-depth and targeted skills development, as well as the creation of scalable professional roles.

Ahead of a possible implementation project of micro-credentials in Skåne, most of the collaborative actors see that micro-credentials initially have the greatest potential in occupations with low formal education requirements, where skills can be easily defined and where there is a skills shortage. These include, for example, service occupations, health and social care occupations, industry and manufacturing, and technical and practical occupations.

At the same time, the actors recognise that there are some challenges and potential barriers to the implementation of micro-credentials. These include issues such as the legitimacy and quality assurance of micro-credentials, costs and financing, time, resources and other organisational barriers.

Future design of micro-credentials should consider the following factors:

- It is important that micro-credentials are adapted to different industries and services.
- It is important that a micro-credentials system is well designed and easy to navigate.
- It is important that micro-credentials are designed in collaboration between parties that will develop and use them in the future.
- It is important that micro-credentials complement formal education.
- It is important that micro credentials are quality assured.
- It is important that micro-credentials are designed in a way that allows for long-term national recognition.

Roles in a possible implementation project

There is interest in an implementation project for micro-credentials in Skåne. At the same time, further work is required to clarify and anchor the focus and roles, so that the collaborating actors can anchor and take a position on possible participation in the project. Based on the conditions and the interest expressed by the collaborating actors in the survey and interviews, we propose that Region Skåne asks the following actors to participate in a working group, with the aim of preparing an application for project funding for an implementation project:

- Kristianstad University.
- Medborgarskolan Syd.
- Region Skåne, Department for Regional Development.
- The Civil Society Network in Skåne (NÄTVERKET idéburen sektor Skåne).

We believe that there may be interest in three pilots aimed at testing micro-credentials on a small scale in a few selected industries in Skåne. These could also lay the foundation for a possible implementation project. These pilots could advantageously have the following focuses:

1. People outside the labour market.
2. Health and social care.
3. Small businesses in different sectors.

In all cases, however, the focus and purpose of any implementation project needs to be clarified to enable the collaborative actors to decide whether to participate.

System map for Micro-credentials

To get an overall picture of how the system works, a system map has been developed. It visualises the main actors and their roles in a future ecosystem for micro-credentials. The system map is a tool to understand and analyse the interactions between the actors and identify areas for improvement to ensure that micro-credentials create value for both individuals and the labour market. The figure below describes the different actors and their contributions.

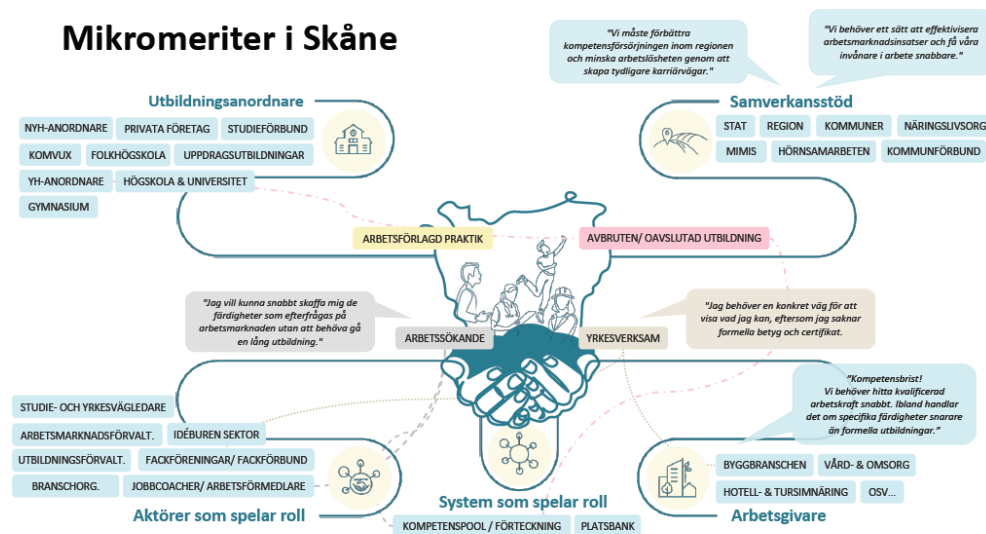


Figure 1: System map of micro-credentials in Skåne, produced by Antrop

Conclusions and recommendations

The feasibility study recognises that micro-credentials have the potential to meet the needs of both individuals and employers by creating new opportunities for skills validation, training and career development. While there are opportunities and hopes for micro-credentials, there are several structural and operational challenges that, according to the collaborative actors, need to be addressed. In short, we drew the following conclusions from the feasibility study:

- Micro-credentials can improve skills supply and broaden recruitment in Skåne.
- It is important that the quality assurance process is credible and eventually nationally recognised.
- Initially, in Skåne, micro-credentials have the greatest potential in sectors with low formal education requirements and skills shortages.

- There are some difficult to reconcile expectations for the work with micro-credentials, in that the collaborative actors ask for a flexible and simple system on the one hand, and a system with high legitimacy and credibility on the other.
- There is good potential for an implementation project in Skåne. The collaborative actors show a good consensus on needs and challenges and several actors have expressed willingness to contribute. But more clarity is needed on objectives, focus and division of roles.

Based on the conclusions of the feasibility study, we made several recommendations for a possible implementation project of micro-credentials in Skåne. These include clarifying and creating consensus on goals and roles, considering and addressing the challenges and risks identified in the feasibility study, and testing solutions in smaller pilot projects. We also recommend building on previous experiences and utilising methods and working methods developed in previous projects.

