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This background note has been prepared by the Swedish representatives for the Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on the Inclusion of Qualifications from Outside Formal Education and Training in NQFs Referenced to the EQF

Background Note: Inclusion of Non-Formal Qualifications in the Swedish Qualifications Framework (SeQF)

1. Introduction

The SeQF is a comprehensive framework, including all qualifications in the formal education system that have learning outcomes specified in their regulation. Linking qualifications that does not have learning outcomes regulated by national legislation and are awarded outside formal education and training to the SeQF is seen as crucial for increasing the overall transparency of qualifications in Sweden.

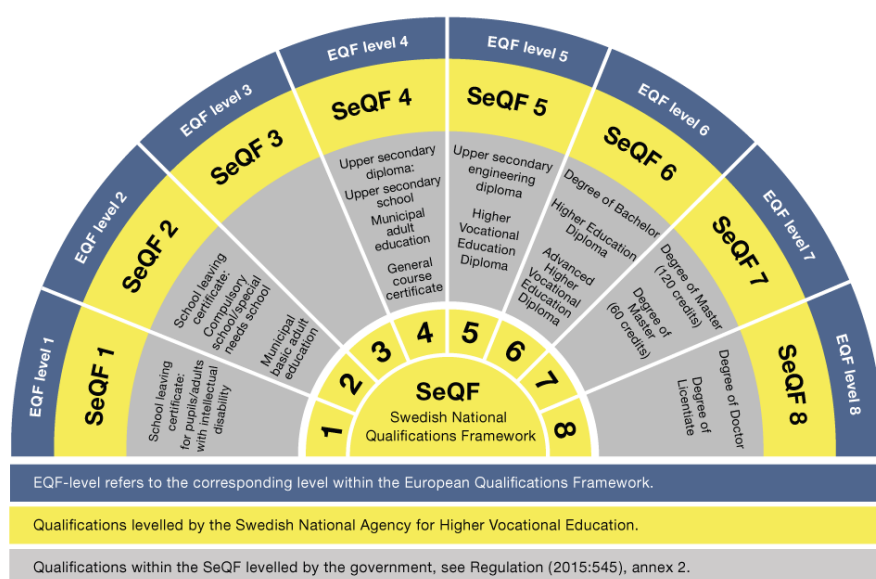


Figure 1. Structure of the SeQF

Alongside formal education, social partners provide substantial training and qualifications directed towards the labour market. The number of regulated professions is low in Sweden, there are no national occupational standards and education may be provided by many different actors. This is one of the reasons the SeQF has been designed from the start as a tool for including qualifications awarded outside the formal education system, to strive towards an open and inclusive framework. As such the SeQF also comprises

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qualifications awarded outside formal education and training, for example qualifications from among others sector/professional bodies, providers of liberal adult education, and private education providers. Their number is continuously growing; as of April 2025, 120 such qualifications have been levelled to the SeQF (see more statistics in section 3.2).

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Vocational Education (NAHVE)/MYH is the National Coordination Point (NCP) for EQF.¹ MYH is responsible for levelling non-formal qualifications to the SeQF and giving support to different actors who are developing qualifications as well as providing information about the SeQF, including development of the national qualifications database.

In 2023 a new validation ordinance came into force, effectively linking validation with the qualifications framework. The aim is to further support the uptake of validation, in both formal education and towards non-formal qualifications. Clear and transparent skills requirements and qualifications are the foundation for validation.

This note provides an overview of the context, processes, benefits and challenges related to including non-formal qualifications in the SeQF. It highlights the legislative background, an overview of the levelling procedure, some statistics, and ongoing efforts to ensure that the non-formal qualifications meet quality standards and are of high relevance for their intended use.

2. Legislative Background and Main Principles

2.1 The legislation of the Swedish Qualifications Framework

Law (2015:478)

The law (2015:478) with the authority to issue regulations on the fee for the application for the levelling decision relating to the qualifications for lifelong learning came into force on October 1, 2015.²

Ordinance (2015:545) of the Framework of Qualifications for Lifelong Learning

The Ordinance (2015:545)³ on a qualifications framework for lifelong learning entered into force on October 1, 2015, and contains provisions on the national framework for qualifications for lifelong learning. The regulation defines what constitutes a qualification, the framework with its levels and level descriptors, and a list of the formal qualifications levelled by the government, in two annexes. Furthermore, the regulation contains provisions on how non-formal qualifications can be included through an application procedure. The regulation also contains provisions on the follow-up and audit of such qualifications, information and notification obligations of the provider, how an amendment of a decision shall be managed and the fee for the application.

The ordinance was amended in 2022, and the changes came into force on January 1, 2023. The amended ordinance states that it is the body who is responsible for determining the intended learning outcomes for the specific qualification that can apply instead of the provider. The other change was of the name of the level descriptor category “competence” to “responsibility and autonomy”.

¹ [Startsida - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan](#)

² [Lag \(2015:478\) med bemyndigande att meddela föreskrifter om avgift för ansökan om att få beslut som avser kvalifikationer för livslångt lärande](#)

³ [Förordning \(2015:545\) om referensram för kvalifikationer för livslångt lärande](#)

Ordinance amending the ordinance (2007:991) which instructions for The Higher Education Appeals Board

The ordinance entered into force on January 1, 2016.⁴ According to the SeQF ordinance, a decision and amendment of a decision on the level of a qualification may be subject of an appeal to the Higher Education Appeals Board.

2.2 Structure of the SeQF

The SeQF is structured with eight levels and level descriptors in three categories: knowledge; skills; and autonomy and responsibility. To achieve the overall aim of the SeQF, the level descriptors are designed to create equal conditions for including qualifications in different areas and from different stakeholders.⁵

The SeQF is built on the principle of learning outcomes and that all qualifications levelled in the framework, formal as well as non-formal, should be quality assured and under quality audit. When levelling qualifications, the level decision should adhere to the “best fit” principle and the level decision is for the full qualification.

2.3 Linking the SeQF with validation

In January 2023, a new ordinance for validation came into force.⁶ The ordinance provides a common framework for validation by linking validation to the SeQF. The ordinance encompasses provisions for validation towards all qualifications, or parts of qualification, that is levelled to the SeQF, or to gain access to an education programme that can lead to such a qualification. The ordinance provides a common definition of validation and states that a validation process should include an in-depth mapping of prior learning and an assessment to determine if the individual has achieved the intended learning outcomes of the qualification in question.

Since 2020, there is a government grant aimed at supporting validation of vocational skills carried out by sector industry organisations/professional bodies.⁷ This grant is available for social partners who, in collaboration, want to develop new or adapt existing qualifications and sector industry validation models. Annually the grant is approx. 10 million SEK and since 2020 MYH has approved 53 development projects.

3. Process of Including Non-Formal Qualifications in the SeQF

3.1 The levelling procedure

The procedure of levelling non-formal qualifications is regulated in the SeQF-ordinance. Organisations responsible for qualifications not levelled by the government (according to Annex II of the SeQF-ordinance) may apply to MYH to get a decision on what level the qualification corresponds to according to the SeQF. A prerequisite for a qualification to be considered for a levelling decision is that the responsible organisation (the applicant) has a quality management system in which quality assurance of the qualification is included. A level decision is valid for ten years. Figure 2 below details the different steps in the application procedure for a levelling decision.

⁴ [Förordning om ändring i förordningen \(2007:991\) med instruktion för Överklagandenämnden för högskolan \(SFS 2015:547\)](#)

⁵ See annex 2 in the Swedish EQF referencing report: [Referensrapport: Hur SeQF länkar till EQF - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan](#)

⁶ [Valideringsförordning \(2022:1549\)](#)

⁷ The grant is governed by an ordinance: [Förordning \(2020:268\) om statsbidrag för utveckling av branschvalidering](#)

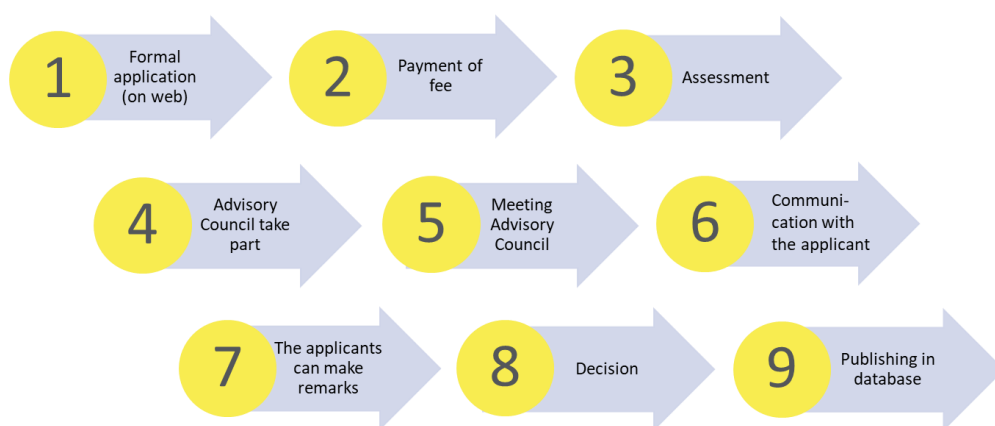


Figure 2. The process for levelling non-formal qualifications.

The application is made by filling out a digital form on the MYH webpage.⁸ The next step is to pay the fee of SEK 15.900 (approx. 1470 Euro in april 2025) to cover the costs of processing the application and for external audit of the qualification during its life cycle. The applicant body must be the one responsible for determining the content of the qualification in terms of intended learning outcomes and for the quality management system that encompasses the quality assurance of the qualification.

When applying, the applicant body must state in what professional or educational area the qualification is intended to be used according to SSYK (the Swedish version of ISCO). The applicant states which stakeholders contribute to the content and the relevance of the qualification and confirms that the quality assurance of the qualification is included in their quality management system. Lastly the applicant describes what methods are used for assessing that learners have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

The content of the qualification (the learning outcomes) should be described in three categories: knowledge; skills; and responsibility and autonomy. This enables a comparison to the level descriptors in the SeQF to be able to determine the best fit level. If it's a compound qualification the part-qualifications should also be described, including their learning outcomes and what methods will be used for assessing learners (but part-qualifications will not be given individual levels).

A proposal for level decision is presented to the Advisory Council of the SeQF, and the Council will give their recommendation for the levelling decision. The proposed decision will then be presented to the applicant body who is given the opportunity to comment on the levelling before the final decision is made by MYH.

3.2 Number of non-formal qualifications levelled

After a slow start when the possibility of applying for a levelling decision for non-formal qualifications opened in 2016, the number of level decision is now at 120 qualifications (119 active and one non-active). All the 120 qualifications are included in the Swedish national qualifications database, that can be found at myh.se/kvalifikationer. Figure 3 below shows the number of applications and level decision up until April 1, 2025. The total number of applications since 2016 is currently 220.

⁸ [Ansökan om beslut om nivå enligt SeQF | Portal](#)

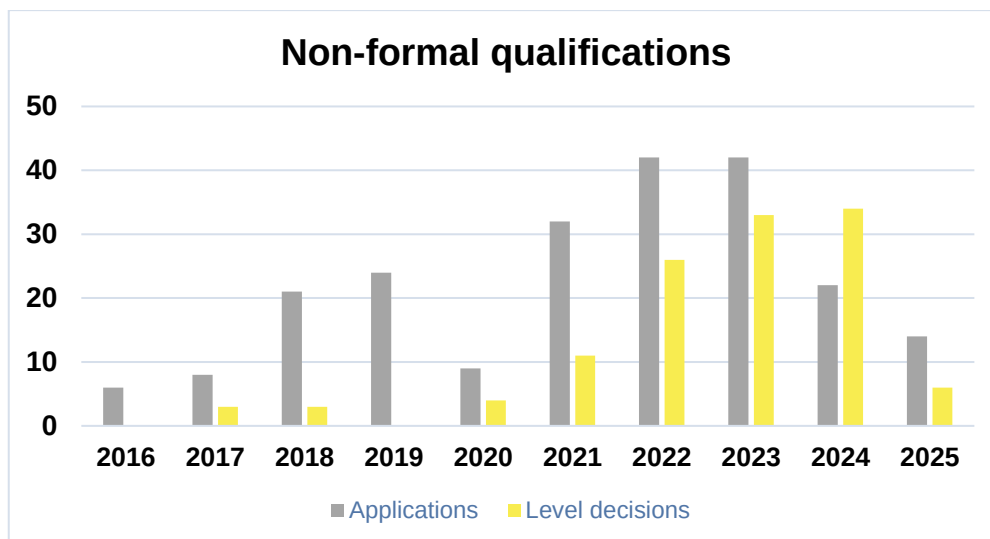


Figure 3. Number of levelling applications and decisions from 2016 to April 1, 2025.

The 120 non-formal qualifications with a level decision are concentrated at level 4 and 5 but are in total distributed from level 2 to level 6, see figure 4.

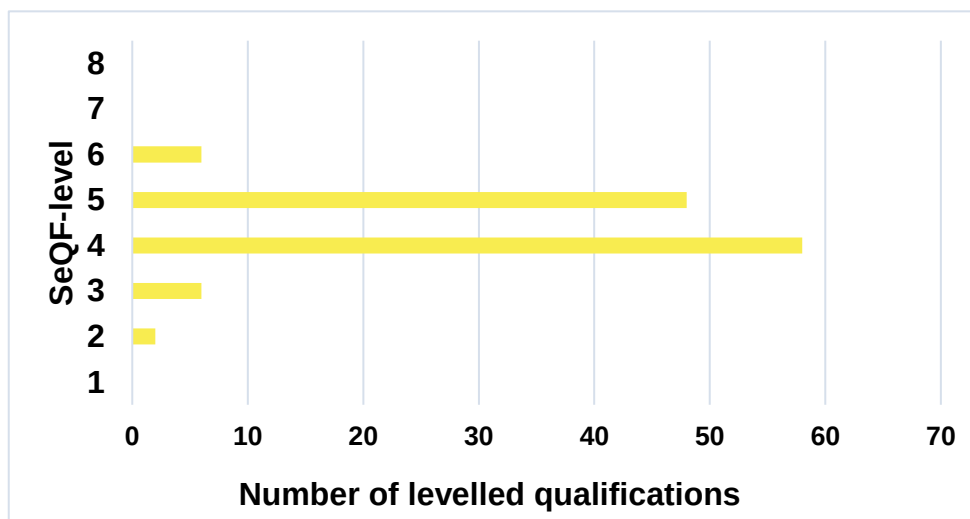


Figure 4. Distribution of levels for non-formal qualifications with a level decision

There is not yet any sub-categories for the non-formal qualifications, as they are still few and there is no need to classify them yet. To get some idea as to what kind of qualifications that has been levelled to the SeQF up till today, we have clustered them according to “type of owner”. The majority of both owners and number of qualifications per owner, are sector industry organisations/professional bodies. These different bodies are all in some way involving social partners or is set up by the social partners in collaboration. Such qualifications therefore are highly relevant for the labour market as well as improving employability for individuals.

In table 1 and figure 5 and 6 you can see the number of owners and the number of qualifications per owner.

Table 1. Number of levelled non-formal qualifications per type of owner.

Type of owner	Number of owners	Number of qualifications
Sector/Professional bodies*	20	78
Private Education Providers	5	26
Folk High Schools	5	5
National Authorities	2	4
Higher Education Institutions	1	1
Study Associations	2	2
Others	3	3

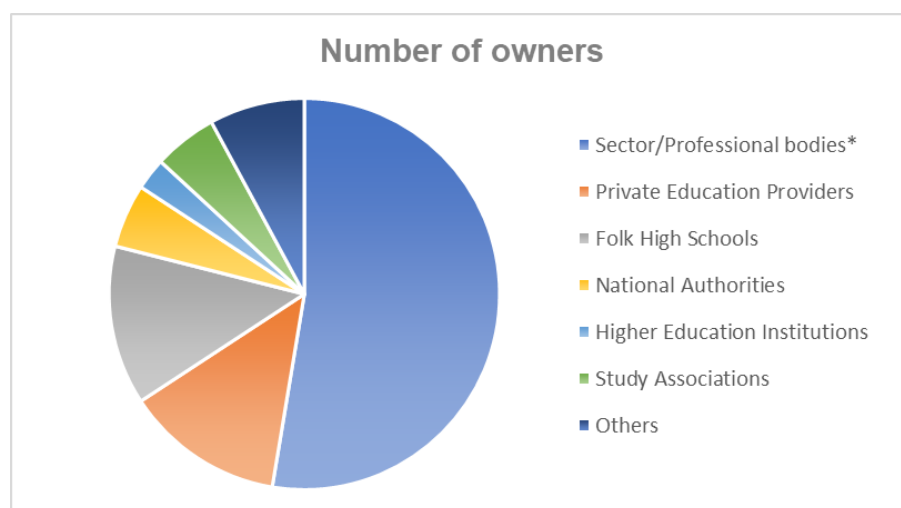


Figure 5. Different owners of non-formal qualifications

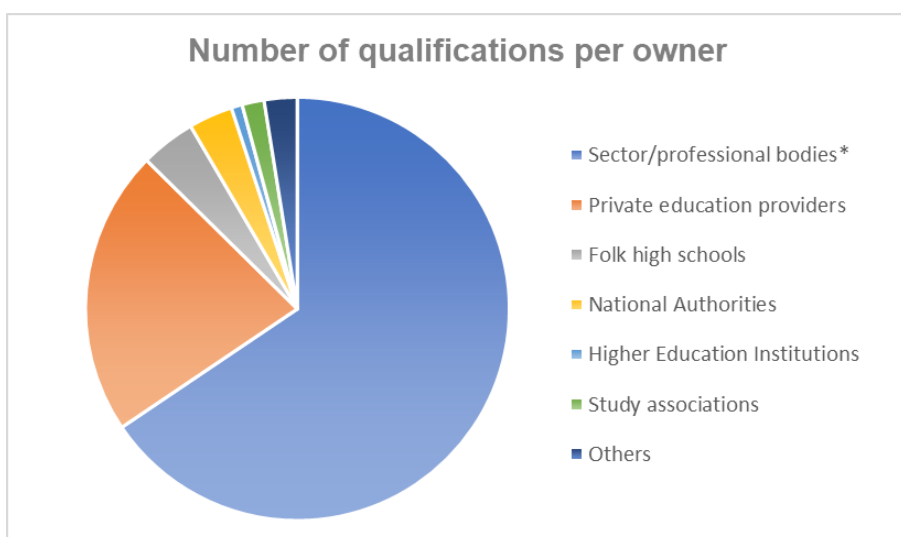


Figure 6. Number of qualifications per owner category

4. Quality assurance and audit of non-formal qualifications

All formal qualifications levelled by the government are under external quality audit and are subjected to internal quality assurance measures. To ensure that also non-formal qualifications that are levelled to the SeQF meet corresponding requirements, the SeQF ordinance states that it is a prerequisite for a level decision that the qualification is quality assured and covered by a quality management system. The ordinance also states that the qualifications should be audited at least once during the validity period of the decision

and when warranted. This is to ensure equivalence for all qualifications linked to the SeQF.

The levelling decision for non-formal qualifications is valid for ten years, during which time at least one external audit should be conducted. The audit is carried out by MYH and will commence with a request for information about the number of awarded qualifications, how the level is kept accurate according to the levelling decision, and if the requirements for a quality management system that encompasses the quality assurance of the qualification is maintained. Interviews with the responsible body is carried out before making an audit decision.

According to the SeQF ordinance, MYH can revise a levelling decision if the qualification no longer complies to the level decision or if the requirements for a quality management system and quality assurance are no longer fulfilled. In the case that MYH receive signals that the issuer, or the qualification, does not meet the requirements which was a prerequisite for the decision on levelling of the qualification, MYH can conduct an audit when warranted and make a possible reconsideration of the decision. There is also a possibility for the applicant body to appeal a decision to the Higher Education Appeals Board.⁹

5. Examples of benefits and challenges

5.1 Benefits

Enhancing skills supply and provision

The interest in levelling non-formal qualification to the SeQF has increased among stakeholders since the implementation of the application processes in 2016. SeQF is more publicly known today, and the levelling decisions give an advantage to the qualifications concerned, compared to other qualifications in terms of comparability, transparency, and skills supply.

Qualifications as a basis for defining skills requirements by industry sector organisations

Sector industry organisations and social partners see a clear benefit using the SeQF as a basis for determining and defining skills requirements for the vocations they are responsible for. The use of learning outcomes as a common way to make such requirements visible and transparent is, in their view, the main benefit of the SeQF. This should of course be interpreted in the light of the fact that Sweden do not utilise occupational standards and to the fact of the “Swedish model” for the governance of the labour market. It is in the Swedish context up to the social partners to agree upon skills requirement for the sectors.¹⁰

Enhanced opportunities for validation

In the beginning of 2023, a new ordinance for validation of prior learning was introduced. The ordinance links validation to the SeQF and provides an overarching framework for validation of qualifications provided by different actors (formal and non-formal). The regulation contains provisions for validation towards a full, or part of, qualification, levelled in the SeQF or for validation to become eligible for training towards a qualification levelled in the SeQF. This will probably accelerate the interest in applying for levelling decisions. In theory the SeQF is open to level smaller qualifications (micro-credentials), as there is no lower limit regarding the “size” of qualifications that can be levelled. During 2023 approximately 3000 individuals had their prior learning assessed towards levelled non-formal qualifications.

⁹ [Startpage - Higher Education Appeals Board](#)

¹⁰ [Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. \(2025\). Branschvalidering - nuläge och framtid.](#)

Streamlining the process of levelling

The application and assessment process have been mainstreamed since its introduction and the time to process applications has been reduced significantly. Together with the developed support and the possibility to apply for national funding for developing new vocational qualifications and sector specific validation models, there are good prospects of further implementation.

5.2 Challenges

Capacity building for organisations responsible for non-formal qualifications

Capacity building and support for stakeholders and bodies responsible for non-formal qualifications has been crucial for the number and quality of applications. The possibility to apply for national funding (state grant mentioned above) is a good starting point for the sector industry organisations together with social partner to develop relevant and high-quality qualifications. MYHs work with capacity building and support, often financed through ESF-funds, aimed at sector industry organisations and the social partners, is by the receiving organisations seen as a key for their work developing qualifications and validation models.¹¹ It is a challenge to respond to all needs for support measures.

Awareness raising

Awareness among the public is most likely still relatively low and reaching relevant stakeholders and end-users proposes a challenge. Including SeQF-levels on certificates and diplomas will hopefully increase awareness and contribute to both skills supply and lifelong learning.

Internal capacity and funding for the level assessment

- The funding of the system in terms of application fees sets a limit to how much resources MYH can allocate for assessing applications and the auditing of levelled qualifications.
- An increase in applications for levelling decisions poses a risk of prolonged assessment time and delayed decisions. This could erode interest as well as trust in the SeQF as a tool for skills supply and lifelong learning.
- If applications surge, the lack of in-house assessment expertise will likely extend processing times.

Quality of levelled non-formal qualifications

One of the critical points is the legitimacy and relevance of qualifications in the context of the free European market for labour and lifelong learning. The SeQF as an open and inclusive framework encompasses qualifications of very different status, from very different types of owners. This may make it difficult for individuals and employers to distinguish the value of specific qualifications which long-term could threaten the legitimacy of and trust in the SeQF.

“Size” of qualifications

There is also a need for a way to communicate the relative size of levelled qualifications, not for size to factor in when deciding level but to create a way for end-users to better understand and be able to compare different qualifications. Describing size of non-formal qualifications will also increase transparency, comparability, and portability of qualifications, which in the long run will enhance the impact of the SeQF.

¹¹ See for example the BOSS-project: [ESF-projektet BOSS - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan](#)

6. Ongoing developments

A number of activities are currently underway to strengthen the development of the SeQF, and the trust in SeQF as a system, including:

- An internal review on how the application process for non-formal qualifications can be strengthened to enhance quality
- An external evaluation of the first 10 years of the framework to provide evidence for continued use and development
- Continued development of the qualifications database to increase transparency and comparability of both formal and non-formal qualifications
- Continue to raise awareness of SeQF by, among other things, disseminating good examples of use and benefits for end-users, see one example here (in Swedish): [Truck- och maskinförare i hamn: Robert fick ett kvitto på tusentals arbetstimmar - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan](#)

More information

You will find more information on SeQF following these links:

General information (in Swedish): [SeQF – Sveriges referensram för kvalifikationer - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\)](#)

Qualifications database: [Sök kvalifikationer i vår databas - Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan \(myh.se\)](#)