



RiR 2018:28

# Long-term effects of extended choices for upper secondary school

– from proximity principle to grading principle

## Summary

In recent decades, the school system in Sweden has undergone a series of far-reaching changes with several reforms that have given pupils greater opportunities to choose their education and school. Qualified pupils can now apply freely to any upper secondary school and education, in principle throughout the entire country. Some research suggests that this opportunity may have had negative effects on equivalence, while other research shows that the freedom to choose has had a positive impact on pupils' attainment of their goals.

The purpose of this audit is to investigate whether there is any permanent correlation between these extended choices and the subsequent success of pupils in the labour market and in their educational careers. The audit also examines whether the extended choices have had different effects depending on the pupils' backgrounds, which may affect equivalence at upper secondary school.

### The results of the audit

The overall results do not show that the extended choices have affected the probability of pupils having an income, having been unemployed or having completed higher education studies ten year after completing upper secondary school. The audit does, however, find general effects on income. Those pupils who have had extended choices have slightly higher wages than comparable pupils. The Swedish National Audit Office therefore considers that the government's intentions – that the reforms shall result in better study results and increased

motivation – appear to have been met to a certain extent. Better study results and increased motivation can be expected to have an impact on the labour market and educational careers of individuals, as is indicated by the higher income levels.

The results of the audit also show effects that may have a positive impact on equality at upper secondary school. The opportunity to choose an upper secondary school seems to reduce the importance of the parents' level of education for income and the transition to higher education. Pupils who have parents with a low level of education and who have been able to choose a municipal upper secondary school have higher incomes and have to a greater extent completed post upper secondary studies than comparable pupils who have not had the same opportunity.

At the same time, there are effects that may have an adverse impact on equality. The opportunity to choose an upper secondary school has affected the outcome for pupils differently, depending on whether or not the pupil has a foreign background. The opportunity to choose has not had any effects on educational careers for pupils with an foreign background, while it has had positive effects for pupils who were born in Sweden and whose parents were also born in Sweden. This may mean that equivalence decreases in this respect, that the difference in transition to higher education increases between pupils born abroad and those born in Sweden.

These increased disparities may be the result of an information advantage among pupils who have spent longer in the country than those who were not born here. Pupils born in Sweden have better knowledge of the system and what options are available and can therefore make more informed choices.

### The Swedish National Audit Office's observations

On the basis of this audit, the Swedish National Audit Office is not issuing any recommendations. We would, however, like to draw particular attention to the fact that the positive effects of the extended opportunities to choose an upper secondary school do not appear to have benefited all pupils. In order to combat any negative trend in equivalence at upper secondary school, it is therefore important to continue work to make sure that all schools are of high quality, and also to make sure that all pupils receive the support and information they need to make the best possible choice of upper secondary school based on their conditions.