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## **Revaluation of Komvux (adult education)**

The main purpose of this project was to evaluate adult formal education at municipal education centres Komvux, an institution well established in Sweden, by using register data of participants from 1979 and onwards. More specifically, the aim of the project was to evaluate:

1. the effects of studies at the three different levels of education at Komvux, compulsory, upper secondary and supplementary training, and to separate the effects stemming from different directions of studies within the respective levels of education.
2. if the returns to adult education is dependent on age of completion.
3. if adult education has contributed to prolong working life, i.e. increase the age of retirement from the workforce.
4. the effects for foreign born of the different levels of education at Komvux.

During the course of the project, the evaluation referred to as No. 1 above turned out to be difficult to pursue. Foremost, the problem was that many individuals enrolled at several different levels of education, in ensuing years. If education then was followed by an increase in earnings, it was difficult to work out which of the different levels of education were at the origin of the positive effect on earnings.

Adult education has during the last decades become an increasingly important policy tool in most OECD-countries, and Sweden is in this respect a forerunner. Despite this, the economic effects of adult education have rarely been studied, primarily due to the lack of good data. Swedish data is probably of higher quality than anywhere else in the world, the activity at Komvux has been well documented since 1979, but is to a large extent unused. A comprehensive evaluation of Komvux has therefore the prerequisites to become an essential contribution to international research on policies regarding the public supply of education of adults.

The research conducted in this project has been successful, particularly in two aspects. The first is that two articles are already accepted for publication in highly rated international journals, one in Europe (Journal of Population Economics) and one in the US (Economics of Education Review). The second aspect is that the research has the potential to become very influential. Since the economic recession in 2007, the interest in policy-measures regarding adult education seems to have increased markedly. Just a few years ago, the agenda was primarily advocated by some large intergovernmental organizations, notably the OECD and the EU, but it has now changed to become a priority among governments across Europe which have actively pursued this issue. In the last year, we have also noted the emergence of a number of new research articles on adult education from the US, Canada, the UK, Switzerland, Portugal, Germany and Denmark.

The results from the project are an important part of a chapter in “OECD Skills Strategy” which is currently being written for OECD.

Three important results from the project include the following:

1. Adult education at Komvux is associated with positive effects on labour earnings, which increase on average by 4-5 percent for another year of schooling. This is a key result for adult education. If there were no earnings effects of adult education, it would have to be motivated on non-monetary grounds which are substantially more difficult to measure. For example, that the democratic functions improve, that there is less social tension in the society and/or less criminality. The fact that there seems to be a positive earnings effect is important as it increases tax-revenues in a society, which in turn is a fundament for the construction of a welfare state. The positive effect also concern individuals with low educations, and one may thereby assume that Komvux levels out earnings differences, something which may be an additional argument in favor of using public funds to finance adult education in a society.
2. The costs for adult education appear to be substantial in terms of foregone production value. To motivate the large investments in adult education in Sweden, it does not seem sufficient to point at the earnings effects from education as these do not cover the total costs of the society. It is necessary to point at side-effects of adult education, e.g. on the democratic functions, health effects or that there are “spill-over-effects” of the knowledge generated, on individuals in contact with those who were in education. This an important insight to bring to discussions concerning adult education, as it forces those who proffer adult education to also express which side-effects one believes that adult education brings.
3. Adult education at Komvux does not affect the timing of retirement from the workforce. This is a somewhat troubling result for those who believe in the positive effects of adult education on the number of hours worked in society. However, one should remember that this analysis concerned older in the workforce, who were aged 42-55 at the time they registered for the first time at Komvux, and that only a small share (7 percent) continued to higher education. It is possible that the effects on the timing of retirement from the workforce are different for those who enroll higher education, and/or for those who enrolled adult education at a younger age.